To Professor Emeritus of English,

Dr. Tom Curley,

for your enthusiastic support, and, as faculty advisor of Wings, The Bridge’s predecessor; for your blueprint for success
special features

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mission statement

The Bridge is produced and managed entirely by students. Our charge is to serve, as we are dedicated to showcasing the artistic talents of the student body while providing internships in both editing and graphic design. Our goal is to excel, as we wish to pay a debt to our alumni, keep a promise to ourselves, and set an example for our successors.

staff

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introduction

The Golden Ratio is a mathematical proportion that has been held for centuries to be the pinnacle of aesthetic perfection. It was used to dictate the ideal form of The Parthenon, Dalí’s The Sacrament of the Last Supper, and most famously, DaVinci’s Vitruvian Man. It has been observed in nature as well: the spiral of the nautilus shell, the curve of a ram’s horn, even in the proportions of the human body. It can also be observed in this journal. We used the Golden Ratio’s proportion in our page size, column measure, and overall design, and we used the concept of aesthetic perfection—that unattainable goal to which all serious artists aspire—as our guide as we selected the works within these pages.

Cynthia Heslam certainly aspired to this goal. Her brilliant memoir, Ginny: The Final Act, chronicles her struggle to better understand her mother—whom the world sees as glaringly imperfect—and to view her as a faithful personality, worthy of more love than society is inclined to provide. Crafted with wisdom, insight, and palpable love, Ginny compelled us to share this extraordinarily engaging narrative in its entirety, and so we’ve included each chapter of the memoir within our pages. Likewise, Reiko Kawahara creates such astonishing works of art that it was necessary to highlight her pieces in a unique portfolio. Her colored-pencil series, Delights of the Four Seasons, demonstrates an unparalleled desire for the perfection of detail. As a whole, her contributions to this journal exhibit impressive talent and mastery of her craft.

We are also pleased to include an interview with Mr. Larry Doherty, founder and president of the highly successful Fine Arts Enterprises. Mr. Doherty pioneered the field of art transportation for large traveling exhibitions and, while working with the State Department in Communist Russia, aided many impoverished Jewish artists, even helping one woman escape to Jerusalem. We are grateful for the opportunity to share his stories.

In bringing all these pieces together and creating this journal, we use no distinct job divisions; we work as one in collecting submissions, designing the book, organizing the layout, and editing the works to be published. Using a blind selection process, we’ve chosen the most excellent student and alumni submissions, including
among others an account of the complicated sentiments surrounding a birth, a provoking sculpture assembled from found cigarette butts, and a clever, seductive poem about coffee. Truly impressive prints were in abundance among our submissions this year, and our journal bears evidence of the upswing in the production of these expertly crafted and ornate pieces. Altogether, we received a range of exemplary works of art and literature to choose from.

However, out of necessity, we were forced to turn down many outstanding pieces, which is why we have decided to include an honorable mentions section this year, to give deserved recognition to the students whose works were considered as finalists for publication.

We must pay tribute as well to all those who have made this volume possible. For their inestimable support, we are grateful to the Bridgewater State College Foundation, the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, and all the faculty and staff at Bridgewater State College. For their advice and assistance, we thank our alumni consultants, Ms. Rosann Kozlowski and Ms. Linda Hall. And for granting us this phenomenal opportunity, for their guidance in much more than the production of a journal we hold dear, we owe a vast debt to our faculty advisors, Professor Mary Dondero and Dr. Jerald Walker.

Most importantly, we must thank our gifted artists and writers, whose contributions are the substance necessary to our goal of perfection; their dedication is paramount.

The Editors
April 2010
untitled

lauren hall

woodcut 12” x 10”
The center of the road was the closest I could bring myself to the tree. I shifted my weight from foot to foot, and then paced a few steps up the road, and then a few steps back, my eyes fixed firmly on the thick trunk of the maple. Like a wild animal reluctant to approach an unknown object, I waited to see if it would somehow behave in a way to legitimize my apprehension. It did not. It was simply a tree.

Where the trunk divided into branches, a teddy bear was stuck. He had taken up residence there within a few days of the crash. His original color of dark brown had paled and his fur was matted. The folded note addressed to my son that had been placed between his paws was gone. The ribbon around his neck had dulled and drooped. The ends were frayed. The remains of balloons, long deflated and so faded you couldn’t discern their original color, were hanging from the tree branches. There were other ribbons that had been tied around the tree trunk, and now they clung to the bark, blanched and shredded. I remember coming here a day or so after the crash. The tree had been surrounded by flowers with little messages tucked between the blooms.

When I visited around the first anniversary, there were a few bouquets of flowers. I thought it was nice someone remembered. Now, at the three-year mark,
I noticed some notes wedged in next to the bear. They looked recent. The paper wasn’t discolored or worn. The leaving of notes at sites where an untimely death had occurred has always perplexed me. They’re a nice gesture, but what purpose do they serve? Are people under the impression that the dead stop by to pick up their mail?

I decided to forgive the tree. It hadn’t thrown itself into the path of the car in which my son was a passenger. It was also a victim. Though three years had passed, nearly to the day, the gouge was still visible if you knew where to look.

I found myself standing in front of it and reaching to put my fingers into the scar. I felt like Doubting Thomas, who would not believe in the resurrected Jesus until he put his hands into His wounds. The mark was smooth and had turned nearly the color of the surrounding bark. I was hoping something magical would happen when I ran my hand along the crease, that there would be some epiphany, a miraculous healing to my spirit, or that I would find some relief or reconciliation, but none came. The tree was simply a tree, a weathered old tree shading a country road, halfway up a New Hampshire mountain.

“It’s not unusual,” my new therapist, John, began, “for these panic attacks to occur in supermarkets or shopping malls. In fact, the word agoraphobia literally means ‘fear of the marketplace.’”

“Huh, interesting,” I said. Though I really couldn’t have given a damn about that piece of information. Not that I wasn’t pleased as Punch to get a lesson in Greek along with ever-increasing doses of Paxil. It was just that this was therapy under duress. The insurance company that provided my short-term disability required it. If I was too crazy to go to work, I’d better be medicated and having my head shrunk.

“So …” he said, checking his notes, “you are out of work on leave. Did you have panic attacks there, too?”

“No, I just left one day and I couldn’t go back. I went to see my primary care physician and he thought I should take a little time off. Stress-related. He started me on the Paxil.”

John asked me about my job.

“Well, my husband had been out of work, and his new job didn’t provide benefits right away. I took the job because the pay was all right and there were benefits. It’s a terrible job—part
telemarketing, part debt collection. The pressure to collect is tremendous, and the supervisors are Nazi Brownshirts. Everyone is squeezed close together; there’s no air, no light.”

John nodded. I looked around his office. There was artwork, leafy plants, and in one corner, a fountain that circulated water over stones. It made a faint tinkling noise. I know the theory is that running water is soothing, but it just reminded me that I didn’t visit the bathroom before this session started.

His office window overlooked the parking lot, and beyond that was a copse of trees. It was just after Labor Day, and though the leaves were still holding on to their green, the color was dull.

He reviewed my medical history and asked me a battery of questions about family, work, and where I’d lived, and if I had any hobbies. Before I left, he gave me an assignment for the next week. Every day, I was to go into some store and spend five to ten minutes walking around. He gave me calming and breathing techniques to use if I became anxious.

For the next two appointments, we talked about my trips to stores and about my life, and what could be the root cause of my panic attacks. We reviewed my relationships, from my mother and husband to my daughters and siblings. I was running out of people to throw under the bus in order to explain my craziness.

When I settled into my chair for our fourth session, John didn’t ask me about my trips to the store.

“I’ve been reviewing notes from our talks,” he began. “There is something that you’re not telling me.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Well,” he said, “you mentioned you had four children. Yet you only talk about three daughters.”

Unable to look him in the eye, I glanced around the room and then looked out the window to the trees across the parking lot. Clumps of autumnal colors were appearing among the green. When I didn’t answer, he spoke again.

“Did I make a mistake?”

I kept looking out the window, squinting against the light. My legs were crossed, and I began jiggling my foot, which caused the chair to emit a faint, high squeak. As if in response to my fidgeting, John began to click the top of his ballpoint pen. I glanced over to see its tip appearing and receding at a rapid clip. For
a moment the only things that could be heard were the squeaking and clicking, along with the tinkling of the tranquility fountain. It was a neurotic symphony.

Neither one of us was speaking. This was ridiculous; I had to say something about my son. Maybe if I blurted it out fast, it wouldn’t hurt, like ripping off a Band-Aid with a quick flick of the wrist.

“I had a son. He died in a car accident.”

John quit clicking his pen. My foot kept jiggling. “I’m sorry to hear that,” he said. “How old was he?”

“Seventeen.”

“That’s a shame. When did this happen?”

“It was six years ago last July.”

Then, John asked the absurd question. He asked me how it made me feel, or maybe it was how was I coping, something psycho-cliché like that.

“Fine,” I replied.

He nodded and started clicking his pen again while he scanned back over his notes.

“So, you said that you began having these panic attacks in late June. Do you think they may have something to do with the anniversary of your son’s death coming up?”

“Oh, no,” I said. “Well, I don’t think so.” John stopped clicking the pen and started to take notes. I uncrossed my legs and put my feet flat on the floor. One hand was on my knee, pressing down, trying to make sure my foot stayed still.

“You’ve mentioned that you’ve had an increasing amount of problems that could be stress-related. Going back a few years, you complain of sleep disorders, weight gain, short attention span; you’ve been on various anti-depressants. You have problems staying with jobs for very long …”

“Well, they were crappy jobs.”

“When you were living in New Hampshire, you worked, right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, did you consider that job crappy?”

“No, I liked that job. It had a flexible schedule that was good with the kids. The pay sucked, but I liked the work.”

“What was it that you did?”

“Home healthcare. Worked with the
elderly. Did a lot of hospice work.”

“Couldn’t you find a job like that when you came to Massachusetts?”

“I did. But then I quit.”

“Why?” John said, and then he glanced at his notes. “Was that when you went back to school for a year?”

“Yeah, but I could never go back and do that work again.”

“Why’s that?”

“I couldn’t take it. The people kept dying.”

At my next appointment, John didn’t thrill over my triumph of doing a complete week of grocery shopping in one outing. When I told him about waiting in front of a crowded deli counter to get a pound of sliced ham, and not having heart palpitations or having my brain turn all muzzy, he seemed under-enthused. He nodded and kept referring back to his notes.

“How have you been this week?” he asked.

“Good,” I said. “Did well in the store.”

“Besides the store.”

“Okay.”

John folded his hands over his stomach and looked at me. His stare made me nervous, and the foot-fidgeting began again. I uncrossed my legs and forced my feet to be still.

“I know you really want to talk about my son’s death, but I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Okay.”

“I mean, I’m fine. My big concerns are my children and my husband, and how they’re doing. It has been very rough for them.”

“That’s understandable,” John said. “It must be really tough for them every July, when the anniversary of his death comes around.”

“You have no idea,” I said, then launched into descriptions and explanations of how all of them suffer, and have suffered over the past six years.

“Your husband and children have had a terrible time,” John said. “But you claim that you’re doing fine.” He opened his arms in an inquiring gesture. “Why is that?”

“Of course it’s been bad,” I said. “I’m dealing with it my own way.” My throat felt tight and my
voice began to strain. “Everyone mourns differently. My first concern is my kids. They have to be. They have to get through this and go on to live their lives. I’m a parent, that’s my most important job. To take care of my children. If I fail at that, then nothing else that I ever do will mean anything.”

John was silent for a moment, and somehow my legs had crossed again, and the foot wiggle returned with a vengeance.

“I’m a parent too,” he said. “And you’re right: taking care of your children is the important thing. It must really hurt to know you were not able to protect your son.”

I thought that remark was cruel. Then I realized he was baiting me.

“John, I really don’t want to go there.”

He nodded and then said today’s session was nearly done. Before making our next appointment, he gave me a new assignment. Since I didn’t want to discuss how I felt about my son’s death, he told me that I should get a journal and write down my feelings. John said he wouldn’t read it unless I wanted him to, but to please bring it to our next session.

On my next trip out to the store, I snagged a notebook with white lined paper out of the clearance bin. The book had a mottled black-and-white cover and said *English Composition* across the front. I really didn’t want to do this, but I thought journaling might be therapeutic. Several times before my next session I sat down and tried to write, with no success. I couldn’t bring myself to do it.

I sat in my car in front of the shrink’s office building with the empty notebook in my lap. My appointment was in five minutes and I didn’t want to go in with nothing written. I opened to the first page and wrote the first thing that came to mind: *Why?*

Once I was inside, John looked at the page and then looked back at me.

“That’s all I could think of,” I said. “That’s all that came out.”

John tried to prod me into expanding on the single word I’d written. I just shrugged; I didn’t have anything to add.

For the next several visits, I handed him the book and there was still nothing more. As much as I had tried, I couldn’t do it.

It was December, and as I looked across the parking lot from his office window, I noticed there were only a few shriveled leaves clinging gamely to the trees. These therapy sessions had become
tedious, with me not writing in the journal and running out of things that I’d talk about.

“I’ve spoken to your insurance company,” John said. “And with your diagnosis and the progress you’ve made, they don’t feel any further sessions are warranted.”

So ended my weekly visits with John. Forced into therapy by one insurance company, forced out by another. When all was concluded, we shook hands and said our goodbyes and good lucks. As I was walking to the door, he called my name. I turned.

“Don’t forget this,” he said, handing the journal to me. I went to take it, but he held on to it for a second. “Diane, please try to write in this journal. Please consider a grief group. You really need to express your feelings about your son.”

“I can’t. If I ever let all the emotion go, if I fully absorbed what happened, I just might fall into a million pieces. Don’t have that luxury, John. There will be no one to put me back together.”

It was a relief to go to New Hampshire. The humidity hung in a thick blanket over Boston, and there didn’t seem to be a breath of air anywhere. There was a temperature drop and the humidity dissipated as I drove up to the higher elevations. As I turned onto the mountain road, my physical relief ended when my stomach began to clench. The car strained and shifted gears, fighting against gravity. When I reached the plateau, and the ground leveled, I could almost hear the engine breathe a sigh of relief as I pulled onto the soft shoulder.

Leaving the car, I walked toward the tree, my hand on my abdomen, trying to relax the knot of anxiety. The bear was still wedged in the trunk of the tree. He was alone now, no remains of ribbons or balloons, no notes. Since the last time I’d been here, four years ago, his color had bleached out to a taupe and the fur was now tangled with debris. He looked forlorn, and for some reason, looking at the bear in the tree released the tension in my stomach. Maybe it was because the bear looked as pathetic as I felt. Maybe the bear was like a scapegoat taking on all my miseries. Looking at that damned bear, I began to cry. I cried for all the losses I felt: the loss of an only son, the loss of a place that I had called home for twenty years, and the loss of friends with whom I no longer kept in touch. I cried about the anger I felt, the anger I had dismissed as irrational. The anger I felt at God, who’d had the
power to save my son, and yet chose not to. The anger at having to be the strength and the glue, not being allowed the humanity of weakness.

As I prepared to leave, I went into the backseat of my car and pulled out the notebook I had stuck in the storage pocket behind the driver’s seat. I’d shoved it there, along with a pen clipped to the cover, the day I’d had my last therapy session, over seven months ago. I opened it and scribbled four more words, tore out the page, and folded it into a four-inch square. I returned to the tree and tucked the note between the bear’s paws. Maybe, I thought, the dead do stop by to pick up their mail.

As I drove down the mountain, out of the cool altitudes and heading south and east toward the ocean and the oppressive humidity, I wondered how long that little bear could hold that note. The winds would start to kick up in the fall. It might get pulled from his furry grip and end up being tossed about with the fallen leaves. It might swirl and bounce and land in someone’s front yard. Or get crushed under the tire of a car and remain stuck to the pavement until someone walking their dog comes along and is curious enough to pick it up. I wondered if anyone who reads the note will pause for a moment and speculate on what could have happened to make a person write a note that contains only the question, Why did you leave me? for which there is no answer.
last time i saw bill
sean w. miller

The heavy wooden door opens,
and a swell of cigarette smoke walks in
with me. The people are still
a mixture of the old neighborhood, hipsters,
and immigrants. An old-timer looks up
from the end of the bar and curls his lips,
gnashing a gapped row of busted teeth,
his gin-blossomed nose like a ripe black berry.
I remember him from before, when I used to drink here.
He didn’t look so old then.

I think of Bill, and I think about mortality.
Last time I saw him, he was standing
where I stood; we were debating the war,
and he was talking about moving his family
back to upstate New York. Someone he knew
bought us shots.

The fake fish tank still sits behind the bar
with a plastic goldfish on a string, swirling around
and around. The Irish bartender
with the horseshoe-bald head
and ponytail still has a line of half-poured

Guinness near the tap.
He takes my order without looking at me or speaking
and tops me off one of the pints.

This place has that same smoky smell
it did before the smoking ban, mixed
with the pungent smell of stale beer.
The men’s room is still blocked by the
speaker tower and tiny stage. The windows
still fogged and plastered with local band
advertisements. Two bluegrass musicians
with long beards tap something out
at a long wooden table along the wall.

The old-timer gets up to leave.
Some college kids enter.
I order another pint.
The bar has a greasy feel.
To Bill, I say to myself, and take the stout down.
For as long as Michael LePage can remember, he has revered veterans of the Second World War. It was his desire to personally thank them for their service, as well as his belief that their tales of heroism and sacrifice should be preserved for the historical record, that led him to begin seeking them for interviews. A faculty member who learned of Michael’s noble mission advised him to apply for the Shea Scholarship, a prestigious award sponsored by Bridgewater State College’s Alumni Association that provides grants for students to conduct in-depth research with faculty mentorship. Michael received the award in 2009. The following is an excerpt of his powerful creative nonfiction thesis, For Them. The entire thesis can be viewed at www.thebridgejournal.com.
June 6, 1944

Homesick and seasick. The Rangers watched drowsily yet apprehensively as the floor of the Landing Craft Assault (LCA) disappeared beneath the accumulating seawater sloshing around inside the vessel. The LCA provided no illusion of real security. Although forty-one feet by ten feet, it was miniscule given what had been jammed inside—a third of Dog Company and a plethora of supplies for scaling the cliffs. Heavy armor had been fashioned to its sides in an effort to protect its occupants, resulting in such decreased mobility that the craft seemed to crawl along the surface as the choppy swells pounded the hull. The wind carried a cold spray over the gunwales that blasted the faces of the Rangers onboard. In the distance, covered in the morning darkness, towered the sheer one hundred-foot cliffs of Pointe du Hoc—the Rangers’ destination.

Pointe du Hoc was the highest priority for the Allied naval and air forces on D-Day, the invasion of northwest Europe. The strategic point was believed to be home to six 155 mm guns, which could potentially bring the naval armada and the nearby landing beaches of Utah and Omaha under fire. Of course, such a threat to the soldiers coming ashore on those beaches and the sailors at sea was unacceptable. The guns couldn’t be allowed to remain operational during the landings. The 2nd Ranger Battalion had something to do.

Of all the American troops who were about to bust their traces to get into battle, I suppose the Rangers were the worst. That was because they had been trained like race horses, and if they couldn’t race every day they got to pawing the ground.

—Ernie Pyle, Here is Your War: Story of G.I. Joe
Bandoleers filled to capacity were strewn across shoulders, while grenades and extra rations found homes in pockets, and in uncomfortable assault jackets for the men who chose to wear them. Spray from the Channel continued to splash faces and drench uniforms. Up and down the LCA went. Side to side it listed. The Rangers’ breakfast sat uneasily in their stomachs. Those who were overcome by the nausea let loose their meals—over the gunwales if they could, but mostly inside the LCA. The brown paper bags issued to catch any vomit had become soaked and proved useless: Private Antonio Ruggiero’s undigested food tore right through his.

As the water submerged their feet and steadily rose up their shins, the men began to shiver. After an hour in their landing craft, the horizon before them, now enhanced by the day’s emerging light, revealed the Pointe in the distance, their first obstacle once on the ground. The Rangers watched shell after shell pummel the coastline, hurled from the large guns on the warships behind them. Tracer bullets from 20 mm guns atop the cliffs arced overhead. As the LCA approached, the cliffs loomed larger and the volume of fire increased, reminding the men that their landing and ascent would be under heavy fire.

One thousand yards away now, the Rangers aboard the LCA bailed water at a mad pace. They had watched earlier as a supply craft sank, all of the men inside slipping into the Channel. No one stopped to help; the Pointe was more important than twenty men. Knowing this, and not wanting to share a similar fate, the Rangers used their helmets as buckets, frantically throwing the water back to its source.

A shell landed near the LCA, hoisting its bow out of the water at an absurd angle before it crashed back down, causing water to rush into the craft. In seconds it was on its way to the ocean floor. The twenty-five men onboard rushed to free themselves of their gear, some of it weighing as much as sixty-five pounds. Ruggiero watched as the best swimmer in Dog Company, overloaded with gear, his lifejacket failing to inflate, futilely battled the waves. At last he sank, and like the men on the supply craft, no one could help him. As Ruggiero and his comrades struggled in the water, they watched the remaining Dog Company men, along with those of Easy and Fox, scale the Pointe under fire and move inland. All the while, shells continued to fall into the sea, one of which landed near an exposed man, the concussion of the blast killing him instantly. He, too, disappeared beneath the water’s surface.

Two hours later, Ruggiero and his surviving comrades, freezing and exhausted, waved to a Navy gunboat on its way to Omaha Beach. The gunboat sped over to them and immediately began to bring the Rangers aboard. Ruggiero motioned for the man next to him to be brought on first. By the time the Ranger was dragged to safety, he had died from hypothermia. Ruggiero was pulled up next. The sailors cut off his
uniform and provided him with a fresh set of Navy clothes, water, and brandy, but he still could not stop shaking.

The Rangers helped out on the boat as it targeted pillboxes along the shore, but they never landed in France on D-Day. Instead, they were brought back to a battleship and eventually taken to England to recuperate.

“So that was D-Day!” exclaimed Mr. Ruggiero, warm and dry in his living room in late June of 2009, only a couple weeks after the anniversary of the day that nearly killed him.

Many young men are fascinated by elite military units. For me, that unit was the Rangers. Within that select group, Dog Company interested me the most. Only two days after D-Day, barely a dozen men out of seventy from Dog Company were fit for duty, and a similar casualty figure would be seen six months later on Hill 400. Thus, with such alarmingly high casualties, I had never expected that a Ranger from Dog Company lived only an hour away. Most importantly, I had never expected that a man who had seen so much death and destruction would want to recall those events to a total stranger.

It was late May when I first contacted Mr. Ruggiero, and he told me he was scheduled to travel to France to commemorate the sixty-fifth anniversary of D-Day. “Call me back in two weeks and we’ll plan a date,” he said, his voice slightly raspy. I wouldn’t shut up, alternating between thanking him and telling him how shocked I was to even have the opportunity to speak with him.

Two weeks later I phoned him, and a date was set.

Mr. Ruggiero beat me to the door, welcoming me in with a smile. He could not have been taller than five foot five and stood slightly hunched. He wore large glasses and a button-down checkered shirt tucked neatly into his light-blue dress pants. The eighty-eight-year-old’s thick mass of hair was parted to the side and grayed from age. When we went to the kitchen, his wife, equally friendly, greeted me while busily baking Italian pastries. She asked me why I was so interested in the Second World War. I gave a multitude of jumbled reasons, but no clear-cut answer:

Mr. Ruggiero motioned me to the living room, where I began unpacking and setting up my equipment—tripod and camera, along with headphones and a clip-on microphone. At some point I paused to show him the books I had, letting him know I’d read about the exploits of his unit and that I was serious about wanting to hear the part he’d played.

Laptop powered up, camera and microphone on, I began. From the start, it became one of the most unique interviews I had ever conducted, simply because I rarely asked a question. Living
up to the Ranger motto, Mr. Ruggiero led the way.

France, 1944

Joe Flannigan was going to die; there was no question about it. The mortar shell had blown him in half. Moments earlier Flannigan had helped to boost Ruggiero over a hedgerow after someone called for the radio that was on his back. No sooner had Ruggiero landed on the other side, than the mortar shell slammed into the ground, showering him with dirt and debris and mortally wounding Flannigan. Adrenaline pumping, Ruggiero mustered the strength to climb back over the hedgerow. “Am I bad?” Flannigan asked. It was obvious that he was more than bad. Mr. Ruggiero had told his friend he was fine, but he told me, like an actor in an aside, “Oh, God, I’m telling you, cut him right in half!” With his life literally pouring out of him, Flannigan weakly asked Ruggiero to clean his glasses. Ruggiero took them, wiped them off, and handed them back to Flannigan, the color in his friend’s face fading with each second. A jeep came to bring Flannigan to a field hospital, and Ruggiero, together with another Ranger, put “what was left of him” on a stretcher. While the jeep drove off, Ruggiero stayed behind, knowing that his friend was going to die. And he did; he didn’t even make it to the field hospital. Pieces of him remained scattered across the ground.

In Flannigan’s pants pocket, Ruggiero found a German Iron Cross. He sent it home and vowed that if he made it back, he would give it to a member of Flannigan’s family.

Fifty-one years later, Mr. Ruggiero received a phone call from a man who had met one of the aging Rangers at a reunion and said he was Flannigan’s brother. The men arranged to have lunch. They met at a restaurant, and with emotions in overdrive, Mr. Ruggiero handed over the Iron Cross that he’d sworn he would deliver. Flannigan’s brother asked Mr. Ruggiero if he’d seen where his brother was killed. Mr. Ruggiero told him he was right next to him. Sitting back in his rocking chair, arms crossed, Mr. Ruggiero assured me it was a miracle that he had not been killed too. He’d gone over the hedgerow, he explained, only because he’d heard someone call for the radio on his back, and Flannigan was unlucky enough to remain on the other side. But there was more to the story. Two other men were nearby when Flannigan got hit, and they had also heard someone call for the radio. The only thing was that when Ruggiero reached the other side of the hedgerow, no one was there. On a humid summer day, I suddenly felt a chill.

Captain McBride was “crying like a baby,” remembered Mr. Ruggiero. He was recalling the day that he returned to his unit after being wounded early in the Battle of Hill 400 on December 7, 1944, the third anniversary of Pearl Harbor. He was unable to make
the assault and thus didn’t know the full extent of the casualties suffered by his company. “Is it that bad?” he asked McBride. It was worse. Nine out of ten Rangers were casualties. Two brothers from different companies were killed. McBride told him that only thirteen men from Dog Company came off the hill alive. He then rattled off four names—all close friends of Ruggiero, and now all dead. One shell killed them. That’s how friendships ended in the 2nd Ranger Battalion.

Just two weeks before I spoke with Mr. Ruggiero, when he was in France to commemorate the sixty-fifth anniversary of D-Day, he received the Legion of Honor, France’s highest decoration bestowed upon any civilian or soldier. He met Tom Hanks, who portrayed a fictitious Ranger captain of the same battalion, but a different company, in Saving Private Ryan. Tom Hanks saluted him. He met President Barack Obama and told him he prayed for him every night to help him with decisions regarding Iraq and Afghanistan. President Obama told him to keep praying.

All the stories that Mr. Ruggiero had told me were behind him now. In short, he had managed to do what many Dog Company men were unable to do—survive. “I can’t thank you enough for what you’re doing,” he’d told me during the interview. I was stunned. If anything, I was there to thank him. I simply wanted to hear his stories, record them, and pass them along, just as I had done with the other veterans with whom I had spoken. When his wife had asked me why I was so interested in the war, perhaps that was the answer I should have given.
ginny: the final act

a memoir by cynthia heslam

019. chapter 1: last days at burditt avenue
052. chapter 2: allerton house and a crisis of faith
088. chapter 3: resurrecting the dead
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Today begins as one of my mother’s good days. No panicky phone calls. The refrigerator must be thrumming along effortlessly, perfectly cold: no sour milk, no stringy green inchworms in the mayonnaise, no purple mold on the day-old spinach pie my sister Nancy brought to Ginny’s house for dinner on her way to work last night. The toilet must be flushing immediately and thoroughly, the heat undoubtedly clicked on, briefly warming the chill in July’s morning air; shutting off in a whisper. No obsessions, real or imagined, today. No need to call the plumber or the oilman or the doctor.

On the ten-minute ride to my house after picking up my eighty-one-year-old mother for supper—thank God she has agreed to never get behind the wheel of a car again after shaving off the side mirror on the neighbor’s parked car a couple weeks ago—she never once mentions the young man who sits in the bushes outside her bedroom window in the early morning hours “smoking a reefer.” No doubt she picked up that term at AA meetings—meetings she attended weekly up until about a year ago, when she became irritated by the new “riff-raff” showing up: “All those court-ordered kids coming in. You can’t force people to stop drinking. That’s not what AA is all about. It’s changed so much in the past thirty-nine years.” Over the roads, from her house to mine, there is no talk about how the reefer-smoker, waving Ginny’s stolen dirty underwear in the night air above his head, whispers sexual obscenities through the locked,
dusty screen of her bedroom window, exiling her to another night on the living room couch, where she pees in place rather than risks movement to the bathroom; the padding of feet could bring the reefer-smoker to carry out his dirty deeds at the living room window.

In fact, now she even jokes, a remnant of the vibrant Ginny of yesteryear: “You were five minutes late,” she said, laughing, when I picked her up. “Did you have second thoughts about asking me to dinner?”

No talk of calling the police, imagining me in a ditch at the side of the road. A good day. “Of course not,” I answered. “I like to feed you. Stove turn off okay yesterday?”

“Oh, yes. I got Ian, the nice young man working construction next door. He said it was off. He likes me, I think.” This sounds more like Ginny, the once self-proclaimed “social leader of the AA circuit.”

“How’s the man at the Fruit Center?”

“Lester?”

“Is that his name? You found out his name?” I don’t know why I find this strange.

“He winked at me yesterday. I think he’s on the make. I don’t know yet though, if God wants me to go out with him.”

“He’s asked you out?”

“No. No. But everything is in God’s timing. I just have to wait and see. Are we stopping at Dunkies?”

“I have a nice fish dinner all ready for the oven. It’ll be done in fifteen minutes, start to finish. You’ll spoil your appetite.”

I hear a soft groan. “When did you and Nancy become my mothers?” Ginny asks. “I have to have my chocolate cruller and iced coffee. I’ll eat. I’m looking forward to a home-cooked meal. I had to throw out so much food last week. Worms and bugs all through the bread. Do you get them?”

“No, I don’t.” I am hoping this is not where the conversation starts to go south. But I have promised myself that today I will not point out the error of her thinking. I will let her talk her ragtime tales. I will not say, “Can’t you see how nutty this line of talk is? There are not any worms in your house, certainly none in the mayonnaise. Don’t you remember? The worm on your skirt the other day was just a string of thread. And Nancy would not give you spinach pie with purple mold on it.” Today, a good day, I am determined to at least keep my head on straight. I won’t even ask her when the next appointment with the shrink is. She’ll know what I’m hinting at. She does not like to be called nuts, but prefers that term to the official diagnosis—bipolar disorder with paranoid delusions—which she refuses to acknowledge, even though it has been on the medical records since she hit sixty-two.

But the talk thankfully jumps over worms and bugs as soon as we pull into the Dunkin’ Donuts parking lot. I am tempted to walk in with her in case she falls again—the last time she fell, in her backyard, required ten stitches in her arm—but decide to wait in the car, where I can see her clearly. I tell myself she needs to walk on her own, as though she is my child and I am recognizing that she needs to be independent, do things herself for as long as she can. But that’s
not the real reason. I am too embarrassed by her appearance and motor-mouth, sticky evidence of her mental aberrations. I hate admitting that, but I am. She talks too much and too intimately with others, tells them about her constant walk with God, or how women are meant to have babies by twenty-two. She’s fond of saying things like, “There’s no better place for a woman than in the home.”

The lithium gives her a constant, thick drool; osteoporosis bends her head; untreated gingivitis and decay are turning her once-beautiful white teeth brown, causing them to loosen and drop out of her mouth. She will not go to the doctor’s, had to be dragged to the hospital to stitch up the deep, ragged gash in her arm, ripped open when she missed a backdoor step and fell into the forsythia bush; she insists that God will heal her in His own timing. At all costs, she does not want to return to Pembroke Psychiatric Hospital, the endpoint of many doctors’ appointments when she was first diagnosed with this disease. Increasingly, she does not want to sit in any more waiting rooms. Unfortunately, the aging process is taking its toll right along with the depression.

Now I am afraid her saliva will plop down, long and stringy, on the counter as she orders her coffee, noticed by everyone but her. She’ll ask the nice young man behind the counter where he goes to school. If he says Weymouth High School, she’ll say, “Oh, then you must know my daughter. She’s a teacher there.” She’ll lean in closer, as if she knows this part is nuts, and whisper something like, “I worry some large boy will get her alone in a closet somewhere and rape her. This is such a terrible world. We are in the hands of the Devil, you know.”

She shuffles to the entrance way, her jet-black hair with its white and gray roots covering her crooked head, and I am on the other side of the glass door, taking the large iced coffee and the bag of donuts from her lithium-induced shaking hand, opening the car door, helping her in, my hand guarding her head like a cop’s hand on a prisoner. She looks up at me, and I see, for a moment, shame, anger, and fear in her hazel eyes, and I am ashamed at my own shame. I see, just for a moment, the truth: she is scared of her own fragility, her need for others, and the promise, however near or far, of her certain and inevitable death.

After dinner, we sit in the living room. She is nursing her coffee, sipping slowly; I am drinking iced tea. Dinner was okay. Without my glasses on I couldn’t see the drool clearly, but I could hear the soft suck of her gums and remaining front teeth grappling with the fish, the rice, the carrots. She leans back against the sofa, looking at me sideways as I start talking about the latest world news.

“They caught one of the London terrorists in Leeds. That’s right where Wendy lives. Remember my friend Wendy?”

“Of course I remember Wendy. I’m not in the nursing home yet.” She laughs as she says this, but her sense of humor rarely surfaces these days.

“I just thought you’d like to know that Scotland Yard is onto the mastermind...
behind the bombings." I am appealing now to her love of a good mystery. She used to love espionage films, especially if they included Richard Burton, Alec Guinness, or David Niven.

"I just wish Bush would bring our boys back home. This isn't right. We should stay out of Iraq. It's not the same as World War II."

"Watch out for the coffee," I say, and reach over, take the coffee cup out of her hand, and put it on the table. It was almost perpendicular to the floor, its remaining contents close to spilling on my rug.

Then she begins another story. "Did I tell you about what that awful boy did to the cute duck that was waddling across the backyard?"

"What awful boy? What duck?"

"The Parson boy. The one who looks at me through the telescope from his bedroom window." She says this in an irritated voice, as though this is common knowledge, and I should just let her get on with the story. I do just that.

"He cut the head off this innocent duck, this cute little thing just waddling along. It was a female. A line of ducklings waddled in a trail behind her. They must have come over from the pond."

"Oh, come on. Why would he do something like that? Don't you think that's a little—"

"I knew you wouldn't believe me."

"When's your next appointment with—"

"If you start talking that way again, I am just going to have to insist that you take me home right now, young lady. I tell you he cut the head right off that poor duck." She shakes her head, her mind off in distant lands that I can neither fathom nor disturb. "And then he hung all her ducklings, eight at least, by their little webbed feet, on his clothesline. I can barely get the sight of those poor things out of my head."

I listen, trying to remain detached, trying not to judge, wondering if she should spend the night, knowing that it would be one paranoid delusion after another. Last week, she stayed here for the weekend, went out the sliding glass door off the kitchen at midnight, wandered into the bushes in the backyard, and ended up on the neighbor's front porch, hollering for my father to let her in. It's better that she be at her own house where she knows the lay of the land, I reason. Besides, in addition to George, her ex, now living with her as a senior roommate, my brother, Buzzy, and his wife, Frances, are yards away if anything should go awry. A few years ago, Buzzy and Frances bought my grandfather's house—next door to Ginny's house on Burditt Avenue—from the people who had bought it from my grandfather sometime in the late fifties. Knowing my brother and his wife are right beside both my parents assuages my guilt somewhat. I drive Ginny home while it's still light out; she hates to travel in the dark.

Later on, I will call my sister and tell her the latest. She will tell me that Buzzy thinks it's the crystallizing cataracts—which she refuses to have treated—that are causing her worm-visions. We will laugh and say cataracts are the least of her problems: Ginny
is just plain nuts. We will discuss whether or not to set up another emergency appointment with Dr. Stone, her psychiatrist. There must be some new pharmaceutical wonder that can balance those chemicals without causing such drooling, such shaking, some modern miracle that can give her a few more years of sanity, right? Or maybe we’ll just wait until September and her regularly scheduled appointment; it’s only six or seven weeks away. She is so resistant to drugs, wanting to rely on God without the interference of doctors. We will decide to wait it out, take it one day at a time, living by one of the many slogans Ginny learned in AA.

But later that night in the dark of our bedrooms, twenty miles away from each other, I know Nancy and I will both cry because we will realize how much we miss the “Jumpin’ Ginia” of days gone by. And we will remember vividly all the irritating and embarrassing God stories that strangely comforted us, and we will wonder if mental illness is hereditary, if

Ginny’s sojourn into her elderly years is a mere foreshadowing of our own.

A week later, it’s hot, even for July. I am up at five this morning, vacation from teaching is in full swing, and I am reading, trying also to catch the weather on the news. There is silence in the house except for the dog pushing her wet snout against the door of one of the upstairs bedrooms, padding down the stairs, joining me at the foot of my soft green chair; apparently having sniffed the Taster’s Choice. My sweet, elderly Simba groans, moving her arthritic body into place a few inches away from mine.

Sunrise is slightly later today, but I try not to notice. Give me some summer sun, some summer greens and blues and yellows; make it hazy, humid, and hot, the stuff of lazy afternoons. Barry Burbank says it’s going to be a scorcher today, quality of air oppressive; I should check on the elderly, combine a jaunt to the beach with an appearance at Burditt Avenue. The five-day forecast looks like this day, Tuesday, is the beach pick of the week, chance of precipitation increasing every day thereafter, from Wednesday to Friday. Reading is attractive, but the beach beckons.

I’m there by eight, before the crowds, a time for true beach bums and mothers who want their kids to sleep well tonight. The tide has taken the water level way out, leaving ripples of hard sand. Perfection. Skinny rivulets of ocean wind around islands of smoothly mounded earth, creating warm pools of water that are dappled with sunlight streaming across the morning from a blue sky. These pockets of fun are filled with children and me. The sand is perfect for walking, a natural pedicure. I walk and swim, swim and walk, up to the house with the two blue towers, then walk and swim back to my chair—three miles of summer. I try to sit and read, but it is too hot. I thank the god of summer for air-conditioned cars and air-conditioned bedrooms, traitor that I am to the natural life.

Shall I stop at my parents’ on the way home, check on the elderly? The doors will be shut, most windows closed to keep the bugs out; the air will slowly suffocate us. Ginny will be sitting in my brother’s old bedroom, long ago converted into her television room, sweat beading out on her face, Johnson’s Baby
Powder on the floor surrounding her and on her legs up to her knees, smothered on the bug bites that don’t exist. She believes in powder as the cure-all for whatever ails you. She will be suffering from the heat, but not complaining about it. Good Lord no, never a complaint about the weather:

“I do not talk about the weather,” she will undoubtedly say. “There’s nothing you can do about it anyway. I hate people who complain about the weather.”

My ninety-year-old father will be out in the family room—a room that started out as a garage when they had the house built on the plot of land given to them by my dad’s father in 1950—sound asleep on his sofa, but looking pale and dead with the circle of his opened mouth sitting just above his bare and hairless chest, sucking air in and out, in and out. I’ll stare for a while, checking his chest for the up-and-down movement. His television will be turned off.

Separate rooms for these two, divorced officially now for thirty-six years. A frightened Ginny asked George to move back in about ten years ago when she was immersed for a second time in the despairing stage of her bipolar disorder—having weaned herself off the first round of pills, clean then for five years, despite the advice of her psychiatrist. Ten years ago we were worried that after the new dosage of lithium kicked in, she would wake up horrified one morning and wonder what kind of nightmare she was in the middle of with her ex-husband—the one it took her twenty years to build up the courage to divorce—snoring in the spare bedroom. But she never did. She tells us she did it out of compassion for my father because he was becoming elderly, living alone in his apartment. She wanted him to spend his waning days in the house next to the one where he grew up, the one where his mother had birthed him in the back bedroom. But we know better. She was terrified of living out her own waning days alone.

To visit the elderly or not to visit the elderly. That is the question. There is a fifty-fifty chance that the portable fan will be propped up on the chair opposite the sofa upon which my father sleeps. It will depend on his memory. Usually he doesn’t remember that he has a fan; he doesn’t remember and Ginny doesn’t remind him.

“She talks about the weather,” she will say. “I can’t stand it. Please don’t remind him. He’s fine without it.”

And I will probably reply, “He looks like he’s going to expire. There are pools of water all over his chest and stomach. It’s ninety-five outside in the shade.”

Nevertheless, she will remain adamant: “I don’t talk about the weather. Stand still. There’s a lovely breeze coming through the kitchen window.”

“What?” My father will raise his head. “Who’s there? I wish I had a fan.”

Other than occasionally forgetting to bring the small bag of groceries in from the car—the bread and milk and the Chicken a L’Orange Lean Cuisine he’s just bought down the street at Tedeschi—he does remarkably well. He recognizes his three children, asks after all the grandchildren. He can’t remember that my daughter, Juliette, is a math teacher or that my sister’s
Michael, son of Homeland Security and living in Florida, but he knows which grandchildren go with which children.

He volunteers at the library, shelving books twice a week and delivering books once a week to elderly men and women who can no longer drive. He has an office at the insurance company where he is on the board of directors. He goes there to have coffee with the staff, which includes my brother, the vice president of the company. He pays all the bills for himself and my mother—as he has done since they were married in 1947—and balances all his bank accounts once a week in his office. He has always been in love with numbers, balancing checking accounts to the penny. He particularly loves schedules. He is proud that he limits his booze intake to one large whisky and water, started precisely at six-thirty, finished exactly at eight along with the Lean Cuisine, cooked in the good old reliable oven, not in the microwave. He does not know how to use the microwave, nor does he want to learn how to use “that ridiculous-looking thing.”

He has always been a gentleman, a product of a quieter generation, and the staff at the Hingham Mutual Fire Insurance Company love him. He stands up when women enter a room, tips his Red Sox baseball cap to ladies as he passes them on the street, takes off his hat when he goes inside a building. He has no paranoid delusions. He is not bipolar. He is a gentleman: courteous, sweet, emotionally distant, very forgetful, but mentally healthy for ninety. Still, if someone gave me the choice of being stranded on a desert island with either my mother or my father, I would choose Ginny without a moment’s hesitation.

Shall I check up on the elderly? Try to convince them to get an air conditioner? My hands are sticking to the steering wheel. I turn up the air conditioning in my 1995 purple Prism and make a mental note to get another shot of Freon.

Buzzy, Nancy, and I joke sometimes about an imaginary news story: An elderly couple was found dead in their non-air-conditioned, six-room ranch, suffocated by the oppressive air in the recent heat wave. The couple’s son and his wife discovered the decomposing bodies during a routine check of the old folks. They live next door in a six-bedroom, three-story home with central air conditioning. Reporters caught up with George Cole Jr. this morning, but he had no comment. Police say . . .

Ginny is stubborn, refuses also to operate the microwave we got her for Christmas last year. I think sometimes I know her stubbornness, her need to hold on to the values of her generation. A huge part of me loves summer breezes, loves being scorching hot, waiting, lusting for the wet, satisfying ocean. A huge part of me loves it because of Ginny. It feels as though I too, so long resisting, have been lured at last into the mechanized world Ray Bradbury cautioned us against in his novel, Fahrenheit 451—the book I teach in September to my tenth graders, trying to impress upon them the importance of reading, of face-to-face discussions.

Yet, I admit that I, too, marvel mindlessly at the cool relief produced in a flash by a switch, forgetting the simplicity of resting in the heat, listening to my body, the weather a reminder to lie low, rest, contemplate, meditate, read. Ah, but the air conditioner. I caved in two years ago when hot flashes led me to believe in
spontaneous combustion; but I do share my mother’s love of summer breezes, of resting in the afternoon.

I turn off the highway onto Burditt Avenue, where the house I grew up in resides, the place where they will now be resting, I am certain. It is one in the afternoon, this scorching afternoon. I can see the heat in waves outside my air-conditioned car. I step out and the humidity hits hard, the sun frying the salt on my bare arms.

I quietly pass through the kitchen and peer into the family room on my right. My father is sleeping, his chest is moving up and down, and he has found or remembered the fan. He has also opened a window (no bugs for him) and is asleep. I head down the hallway to where my mother sleeps on one of the twin beds. The other bed is empty now, a place for me to lie down quietly, separated five feet from a resting Ginny.

It’s hard sometimes to listen to this woman, this person labeled “bipolar with paranoid delusions,” with any sense of reliability. Our society tends to dismiss the elderly and the deluded as having nothing to say, but that’s not true. Every soul has its own golden story, protected perhaps by delusions or age against the judgment of youth, but there, waiting to be told. Every soul has something to share, something to teach, even at eighty-one or ninety.

“Is that you, dear?” Ginny’s voice is pleasant, soft. “You’ve been to the ocean. I can smell the breeze.”

“Yes. Nantasket. You want to come with me tomorrow?” I only say this because I want to be polite, socially graceful, and because I know she will not come. Her circle of existence is dwindling. She is afraid of so many things.

“No. No. I’m a Maine girl. I remember York Beach. I don’t know why my mother ever sold the cottage. I’d love to go there now. Maybe He’s already got another little cottage in mind. But everything is in God’s timing. He’ll remove me from this place when He’s ready.”

She’s been saying this for several years now; her God tends to stand stubbornly still, but once again, I try not to judge my mother or her sense of faith. She’s not talking of bugs just yet. She’s not even sweating. The window is open and a small breeze passes through the screen. When we lie still, we can feel it, softly easing us into remembrances. At times such as this, I miss the Ginny who talked God with such confidence. I miss her God stories. For twenty years, between the divorce and the first episode of depression, she was golden, sparkling with a new life—one devoid of any hint of depression or addiction. Still, I’ll take the Ginny I am with now, in these rare quiet moments, these times when nothing agitates her, these times when she remembers her life.

“I never liked Hingham. It was your father’s town. Newton was so close to Boston. We used to go there all the time, you know. I played for all the boys—those poor boys in their khaki uniforms going off to war—at the Fargo Building in Boston. I played for the USO. But in the summers there was York Beach.”

“Tell me again about the ketchup bottles.”
“Oh. You remembered. The ketchup bottles. The job I had for five days. Well, at the end of my shift at Spiller’s Soda Fountain, Mrs. Spiller asked me to clean the ketchup bottles.”

The telling of these stories smoothes out her face, makes it younger. Her voice is happy, her stories vivid. Her spirit seems to fill the room. There’s peace, quiet, and that gentle breeze. It is the same breeze that cooled Ginny at York Beach and sustained her in the evenings, no air-conditioned rooms or cars for her generation, no units bought on over-extended credit cards, no soft hum from plastic boxes cooling the air with chemicals—at least not for the working classes or even the moderately well-off middle classes.

“I emptied them all, just poured the ketchup into a bowl, washed the five or six bottles out, and put the ketchup back in.” She laughs, shadowy, not as brilliant as when she was younger, but still she laughs.

I can see her now, half-listening to the boss, looking out at all those young, flirtatious boys, at life, looking for a wink, a sigh. Maybe it’s Myron, before he goes off to France, who says, “Hello, Ginny. How’s my raven-haired beauty today? How about a swim? The water’s great.”

“In ten minutes,” she answers, averting her bright eyes from his gaze, her chin down and to the side, hiding a smile. “As soon as I put all this ketchup back into the bottles.”

“Tell me more about Myron,” I say. I am taking a risk here; Myron is a sad subject, the so-called love of her life, immortalized by his early and romantic death. Of course, that’s not quite true. Myron’s life and death have only been romanticized by me. For Ginny, his death must have been debilitating.

I discovered the letters when I was twelve. I have no idea why I was leafing through her Bible in the room where we now lie, but I was, and I found one of those blue airmail envelopes pressed between the pages. There were two letters inside, one letter, written and mailed from France in 1943, explaining the other. The details are gone, but the essentials remain: one letter was from Myron, a boy she had loved before she married my father, the other from a man my mother did not know, a soldier who had wanted her to have Myron’s last letter to her. The memory blurs: where was this last letter found, exactly? In the shirt pocket of Myron’s dead body? Taken from his back pocket on the bloody battlefield in Nance, France, where he died? Found later in the desk in his barracks, one of his last “effects,” and mailed off by a kind-hearted buddy to my mother? And the letter from Myron, what had that been about? Only the essence remains in my memory: terms of endearment, a love professed, a promise to come back. Time is a stealer of the details, but never the essentials.

My reaction to this discovery I do remember well. I looked at my mother in a different way. Wow. She’d had a lover before she met my father, and he had died for his country in a far-off battlefield of Europe. My mother, my ordinary mother, was in actuality a character in a fantastic romantic novel. Later, I knew this: his death, her life without him, was not romantic; it was monumentally painful, so painful that, in one night of rage, she burned all his letters save this one tucked between the pages of her Bible.
But the extent of my mother’s pain is unknown to me: I could only guess because whenever I pressed too closely to know her past, she would resist, as she does now.

“All that’s in the past. How was the beach?”

“Okay. Then tell me about the time your rubber bathing suit ripped on the tire tube when you were swimming.”

“Oh, that.” She laughs, remembering the embarrassment of a teenage girl. She begins a story that I have listened to with delight over and over again, but I am drifting, lulled to sleep by her voice, by her stories, by her love, by her heart and soul, by the warm summer breeze wafting through the screen. For a moment, my mother has awakened from this exceptionally long and dark period in her life, and I am grateful for this afternoon in time.

My father died in September, never recovering from emergency gall bladder surgery. Soon Ginny became practically catatonic with fear, running to Buzzy’s whenever a car drove up the street or Mr. Parson started up his lawn mower. She hired a woman, at an exorbitant price, to stay with her during the week, even though my sister-in-law was right next door during the day and Buzzy was there at night. She alternated weekends between Nancy’s house and mine, insisting on going to bed before eight with several cups of water beside her bed in case she choked, and rising before seven. During this time, she was uncharacteristically quiet, withdrawing even from her three children, paranoid, perhaps, that we would put her in another psychiatric facility.

Finally, miraculously, we convinced her to sell the house and live at Allerton House, a lovely assisted living complex of apartments a couple of miles down the road from Burditt Avenue. But by now, she was filled with fears, would not even attempt to socialize. Though she did consent to continue seeing Dr. Stone, there seemed to be no dosage of lithium, nortriptyline, Risperdal, Seroquel, or any other pharmaceutical miracle with the power to quell her fears and compulsions. Throughout her year-and-three-month stay at Allerton House, she grew increasingly reclusive and more paranoid, often hostile, sharing, I am sure, only a handful of the physical pains or mental aberrations that she felt, fearful of what disclosure might lead to. On one trip to the shrink, she made this comment: “If he knew half of the fears that went on inside my head, he’d put me in a padded cell and throw away the key.”
tree  
nicole johnson  
woodcut 12” x 4”
ale
kat dolan
acrylic 36” x 48”
walk

mellisa pace

box, sticks, ink 9.5" x 6.5" x 4"
crave
tegan henderson
graphite, book board, linen 8” x 6” x .5”
treasure chest stool

laurie riley

wood, plaster, spray paint 10.5” x 17”
apples
christina winsor
cotton 6” x 60”
carnival masquerade

sallee bickford
digital photography 8” x 12”
In the backseat of the station wagon, he pulls up his sweatshirt sleeve to show me his arm. It has a scar on it in the shape of a swastika. He explains to me that he made it by pressing pins into his arm and holding a lighter to them until it seared the mark into his skin. Beneath this is an "M," imprinted in similar fashion. He flashes me a grin, revealing his shark’s smile; his mouth is full of snaggleteeth, uneven and broken at various heights. “I used to be fuckin’ stupid,” Nate explains.

We arrive at the Fall River venue and are promptly patted down by cops for weapons. Entering the main hall, I see the band’s equipment assembled on the floor instead of the stage; this puts them at the same level as everyone else. As the band approaches their instruments, a small group of guys hops up on the stage. With amazing speed they hang a giant banner featuring the band’s name in calligraphic writing and a pentagram with a goat skull in the center. The vocalist steps up to the mic, muscles taut in his skintight shirt. His tall, remarkably thin frame is ominous as the lights begin to dim. “Hello, we’re In Dire Need,” he announces.

The guitar kicks in before the sentence is even finished. The room comes alive as kids begin to pace the floor. Some leap into groups, throwing crowd-punches, diving strikes aimed more at the mass than the individual. Like bulldozers, guys with their arms spread clear a swath through the crowd until a semicircle...
is formed in front of the band. A sack is thrown into the clearing. The loosely packed contents fly out on impact, spilling over the floor what appear to be animal hearts, livers, and dead fish, all covered in a viscous slime.

I watch Nate charge back and forth between sides of the crowd, a three hundred-pound human wrecking ball. People throw roundhouse kicks apexing just below his forehead. He instinctively avoids a few hits before a foot collides with his mouth. He is unfazed. I begin to understand his teeth.

I'm standing inside the record store, having a conversation with Paul. I've been coming to the shows here every Saturday for months, and he's here a lot. Paul, his bleached-blond hair flopping as he sways from side to side, appears thrilled that I play bass. He informs me that he's starting a band and naming it Jesus Christ and the Flaming Watermelons. He thinks the name is amazingly funny. None of my friends go to shows anymore. I have to talk to random people. Making friends is awkward and results in me having conversations about bands I'll never form. I tell him my phone is ringing, and I walk outside to stare at the street.

I'm playing a game of electronic ping-pong on my phone. There is no winning; my paddle just slams the ball against the wall, shrinking until it becomes microscopic and I lose. This happens often. I don't care. I consider going back inside for a second. No. This is not more entertaining, but certainly less painful.

Nate is outside and asks me why I was talking to Paul. I start to explain that he wants me for a band. He stops me mid-sentence to tell me not to do it. “Paul's a fuckin' tool,” he says. I laugh and we begin talking. We think the same people are tools. We head back inside. Flipping through the CDs, I find out we like the same music. Even better, we hate the same kind too. He tells me he has a friend who plays guitar. I don't have to feel awkward anymore. I have friends. I might have a band.

Luke and Nate are outside the record store in a side alley. They, along with a couple other guys, have cornered a scrawny kid against the brick wall. Nate is screaming at him.

The kid is wide-eyed and shaking, looking at his Converse. If he is a Nazi, he's the most terrified Nazi I've ever seen. I make a mental note about fascist fashion.

“N-n-no man,” the kid says, barely able to get his words out. "I'm not a Nazi."

Luke, all wiry muscle in his wife-beater, grabs him by the collar and throws him down the alley. “Get the fuck out of here before you get fucked up, man,” he advises him. “And if we see you around here again, you're going to get stomped the fuck out.”

The kid runs for his life down the alley as they laugh at him. They all know he's not a Nazi. This was just for fun.

Luke and Nate walk over to me. “Bat attack!” Luke screams as he flings his hands at me, thumbs hooked together, fingers flapping.
in my face. I leap back and he begins to crack up. Nate cracks up too. “Holy shit, man. Loosen up,” he says. Luke is still laughing. Nate tells me he and Luke go back a long ways. When they were homeless, they used to go to McDonald’s together to hustle cheeseburgers from the workers. If this didn’t work, they ate the ketchup and mustard packets.

As they holler across the Taunton Green, it seems they know every homeless person in the city. They used to drink with them, they tell me. They don’t drink anymore. They don’t smoke anymore. They don’t do anything anymore. They don’t even drink coffee. As Luke screams at a passing car, I wonder what they used to be like. The same, but less coherent, I guess.

We get back to the record store and hear that the set has already started. We walk in. Luke stands along the wall and crosses his arms. Nate stands across the way, cracking his neck. It’s a small crowd, even for this classroom-sized venue. The people running back and forth are probably friends of the band. I don’t recognize them. Nate didn’t give them daps as they came in. I guess he doesn’t recognize them either.

Luke has his eyes on a guy who is getting close to him. This guy runs up the wall next to him, lands, continues bounding across the room, and runs up and down the other wall. The guy comes back toward Luke and takes a false swing at him. This is what Luke has been waiting for.

In a second Luke has him on the ground and is slamming his fists against the back of the guy’s head. I look at Nate. He’s laughing. He lets Luke get in a few good swings before walking over and ripping him off the kid. The guys we don’t recognize drag their friend out the door. People shoot each other smirks from across the room. Luke shakes his hand. It must sting from when he slipped and punched the floor instead.

We’re practicing in Craig’s basement. Craig is a drummer I’ve known for a while who has been dying to get into a band. Luke’s guitar monotonously chugs as Nate growls into the mic. I try to follow with a loose bass line. I’m not sure what the drums are doing. We’re not in time. We’re not tuned together. It sounds awful, but at least we’re playing together in the same room.

After twenty minutes of audio sludge, I tell everyone to stop, and say we should work on making a song. I ask Luke if he has any ideas. He goes back to sloppily playing the open and muted chords from before. I ask him if he can write a new song. He grimaces and stares at his guitar for a while. Finally, he plays a slight variation on the previous riff.

It’s a start.

_________

I’m testing my amp in front of fifty people. This is our first show together as Take Control. My bass sounds louder than the guitar to me. I write it off as relative distance. I’m at eye level with the crowd; I recognize at least half the faces here. I’ve seen them at other shows. Some of them I hate. Some of them I like. They all showed up to see us. Some of them even heard our demo.
We know our set is short, clocking in at around fifteen minutes. None of our songs are longer than two. We’re quick and we’re aggressive. We’re a little repetitive, but we’re energetic—when you’re playing live, that’s all that matters.

People are reacting to our music. This is our first show and people are dancing. Some big guy with spiked hair gets hit so hard he has to be carried out. I’m ecstatic. Our last song contains a chant, a crowd-oriented part in the song where the lyrics become more rhythmic, and people rush the mic to repeat the phrase. If they can’t reach the mic, they leap on top of the people in front of them to try to get to it. I don’t expect anyone to know our chant. As it begins, a couple good friends run up to steal the mic from Nate. Then a few more. Then a lot more. People I’ve never seen before are climbing up the writhing mass to scream words they don’t even know. As I stare at the expanding group, a kid running to join in rips the cord out of my amp. No one seems to notice. A minute later, Nate is at the center of a ball of people who don’t even know our set is over.

I’m at a Saturday show. I’m hunched over, clutching the side of my head. The guy had been aiming for me. It’s not the pain that bothers me; it’s that my eye has been involuntarily watering for the past ten minutes. I rub the side of my temple. I wonder if I have a concussion.

Really, I don’t care, and have no reason to. Ice will take down the swelling. My glasses aren’t broken. I’m pissed I even wore them. I made myself a target; I looked vulnerable and someone took advantage of it. I would have done the same thing.

Luke and Nate follow the group of kids out the door into the McDonald’s parking lot. They had been staring at Luke for a while. “What the fuck were you grilling me for?” Luke demands.

The kids are stunned. One of them looks intensely scared. Craig and I look at each other, and Nate begins walking toward them as they scramble into the car. “What are you talking about?” the driver says, quivering. “We didn’t look at you.”

Nate backs up a little. “Just making sure,” he says, confident he’s scared the shit out of them.

As we turn to go inside, one of the kids from the back yells something at us and they pull out of the parking lot. “Get in the fuckin’ car,” Nate bellows. We pile into the van and peel out after them.

We pursue them down 44 and get within a few feet of them at a stoplight before they switch lanes and drive off into the night. We lost them. But it’s okay. We saw the bumper stickers. We’re pretty sure of where they’re headed.

We reach Skater’s Edge just as they’re exiting their car, but when they see us, they jump back in. Craig blocks them in with our car and Nate steps out and walks to their driver’s side window. Luke produces a padlock from his pocket and wraps it in a bandana. Presto—makeshift flail. I rub the edge of my knife sideways on my palm. Dull, but sharp enough to flatten a few tires.
Nate is banging on their window. “We let you go, but you won’t fuckin’ squash it, will you? Get the fuck out. Get the fuck out of the car.”

They assure him that their friend is an idiot. They don’t want to die. They don’t want their car destroyed, or stolen, or their tires slit and windshield broken. Luke opens the door and gets out, bandana in hand.

“Get back in the car,” Nate yells at him. He turns to the petrified kid in back. “He really wants a piece of you,” he says, flashing his shark smile.

We’re assured it’s all good. The kids aren’t tough guys; they’re just a few young punks who drove to Taunton to skateboard. As we drive off, Luke leans out the window and swings his bandana, narrowly missing them.

It’s Saturday afternoon. I could be at a show, I could be at band practice, but no, I’m at my dad’s girlfriend’s house playing basketball in the dirt with her son. He’s beating me at least eleven to one. He’s my age. He’s not more in shape than me. He just knows how to play. Every time I try to dribble, he snatches the ball from my hands.

I go for a layup and he blocks me. I don’t know basketball, but I think it would have been a foul. I don’t care. I don’t want to play anymore. He snatches the ball away from me for the fifteenth time. “You fucking dick,” I sneer. He makes another layup. I begin to walk away.

“Where you going? Tired of losing, bitch?” he taunts.

“Call me a bitch again, you cunt,” I say, turning around. “I swear to God, do it.” He doesn’t respond. “That’s what I thought, pussy.” I begin to walk off again. That’s when he spits on me. This is what I’ve been waiting for.

I leap onto him, pushing him by the shoulders to the ground. With my knee on his chest, I slap him. I scream at him, an inch away from his face, telling him that he will never spit on me again. His lips purse and spittle hits my face. My left hand shoots for his throat. Try and spit now, you smart cunt, I think. I begin to demand he not only apologize, but that he tell me he will never do it again. My dad pulls me off just as the kid’s face reaches a bright violet.

I’m not coming back here for a bit.

We’re in our practice space at Craig’s, trying out a second guitarist. His name is Chris and we ask him what type of guitar he has. “Cadillac guitar,” he says, grinning. “One of a kind.” From the storage case he pulls out an old red Ibanez. It’s covered in stickers and right on the front is a metal Cadillac Escalade logo. It’s been screwed on. He pried it off a car on his street, he explains. He plugs it in, and his Indian-inked hands spring out riffs. He runs circles around Luke musically, technically, mentally. Luke is unimpressed. Nate loves him. He’s in the band.

We chug on as usual at the beginning of practice, warming up. After this continues for a few minutes, Chris looks up and tells everyone to stop. He has something to say.
“You guys actually want to play a song?” he suggests. He even proposes tuning together.

I like this guy already.

It’s our first show with Chris. Despite the lack of progress over the past few months, we managed to write two songs in just a few practices with him. Our set is pushing twenty minutes. Luke is on rhythm now and his chugging is overlaid with a series of chords, slides, and other guitar acrobatics. Unfortunately, the only people who stay to watch us are guys in the other bands, their girlfriends, and Luke’s and Chris’s girlfriends, Sarah and Amanda, respectively. They’re sisters. They hate each other. Each clings to her boyfriend as we walk outside following the set. Nate is pissed. “This is fuckin’ shitty,” he announces. “If no one comes, we might as well fuckin’ break up.” No one came because they thought we’d just play the same garbage as last time, I think.

Craig takes Luke and Chris home, while I walk with Nate to the Chinese restaurant down the street. I’m starved, both physically and monetarily, and he says they have an awesome chow mein sandwich for a dollar fifty.

Opening the door, I can taste the air. It’s humid and I feel like I’m getting sick just being in here. A man smoking on a stool a few feet away from us looks ancient, like he was born on that stool and the whole place was just built around him. “Two?” he asks, the ash from his cigarette dropping onto the tile.

Sitting down in a booth on ripped fake leather, Nate asks me what I think of Chris. “He’s pretty cool,” I respond. “He’s got the guitar lines down pat. He’s funny too.”

We’re delivered two pieces of white bread with an ice-cream scoop of chow mein on each one. My stomach churns. Nate digs in.

I continue. “You know, he showed me it’s free to just walk into Jordan’s Furniture and sit in the massage chairs. It’s even better if—”

“Chris told you all this?”

“No,” Nate replies, wiping the greasy sauce from his face with a napkin. “Sarah read one of Amanda’s notes from Chris. He said all this bullshit in it.”

“I’m caught off-guard. “What?”

“That motherfucker said in a note that I’m a fascist.” His eyes blaze up. “He said I’m a controlling douche-bag who’s ruining the band.” He takes another bite of the auburn slop. “He also said that Luke can’t play guitar for shit.”

So far all of what Chris has said is true. They prevent progress. Luke really can’t play guitar for shit; he can barely play our over-simplified power chord riffs. But I can’t say this. This is insulting. This would destroy my weekends. This would destroy my security at shows. I’m curious as to why Chris isn’t dead yet.

“Chris told you all this?”

“No,” Nate replies, wiping the greasy sauce from his face with a napkin. “Sarah read one of Amanda’s notes from Chris. He said all this bullshit in it.”

“What, did she drop it on the floor?”
“No, grabbed it out of her backpack in school.”

Fucking nosey bitch.

“We’ll get this straightened out tomorrow, though,” he assures me. He looks at my plate. “You going to finish that?”

I look at my food. I only took two bites. “No,” I reply, pushing it toward him. “Have it.”

Nate seems overjoyed as he devours the noodles, bread and all.

When we’re on the way to his house, Chris calls me. He says he can’t come to practice because he’s sick. To Nate, this is high treason. No one misses band practice, ever; particularly, no one misses it just because they’re sick. “Go to his house anyway,” he orders.

Craig beeps outside of Chris’s house. Chris stumbles out into his driveway wearing pajama pants, his hair a mess. Even from fifty feet away, I can see the bags under his eyes. Nate steps out of the car to meet him. Halfway there, he produces the note from his pocket. I can hear him yelling indistinctly as he shoves the paper in Chris’s face. Chris begins to say something and Nate just screams louder. I don’t need to hear him to know what he’s saying.

Then Nate pulls a knife from his sweatpants pocket. He points it at Chris’s chest. Chris appears horrified, backing away as Nate gets closer. I look at Craig. His face mirrors mine, jaw wide open. This shouldn’t be happening.

Eventually, Nate folds the knife up and puts it away, and Chris goes back into his house, shaking. Nate opens the car door and steps in. “Chris is out of the band,” he announces. “Drive.”

At practice, Nate screams as Luke’s guitar chugs. We sound like we did the day we started. We’ve violated the primary rule as a band: stop moving and you die.

Sitting down and reading Nate’s lyric book, I finally begin to consider what he’s screaming about in our intro song: brotherhood.

I think about the knife gleaming in the sun, pointed at Chris. I think about the times we’ve jumped people at shows for a wrong look. I think about strangling my dad’s girlfriend’s son. I think about the kids at the McDonald’s, scared out of their wits. There’s no honor in this. We’re not brothers. We’re sharks, sniffing the water for a scent of blood.
dormer
kate thurston
line etch, aquatint, roulette, drypoint with chine collé 15” x 12”
untitled

mary gillis

charcoal 22” x 30”
The place still had that new-carpet smell. The rug was Chinese made, a blend of the latest synthetic fibers, the brochure had told them. Cheaper than the real thing, like the plastic hardwood flooring that took over where the carpet ended near the room’s perimeter. Julia’s brainchild. “Renovations on a shoestring,” she called it. The smell was plastic in its essence; it punished the air, and it seemed to be squeezing his lungs, like dread.

He heard rumbling and wasn’t sure if it was somebody moving something heavy upstairs or distant thunder. With a finger stroke on a computer key, another story was in the bank. Too little effort, this final flourish. A gentle nudge of the airy, plastic key backed by a pillow of foam, the product of a society bent on too much ease. Still, that final period felt good. They were always a relief, but this one seemed especially so. For the first time in his life, he felt as if he’d simply run out of things to say. Words were beyond him now, as if the vast amount he was granted at birth had simply run out.

That was just his years talking, he knew. Still, these days it was hard not to read finality into things: Sugar in the blood, protein in the urine, every bodily activity seemingly tinged with some poison or another, all in a race to the end. Mysterious pains percolated through his body at random intervals, signaling that even if these other things were overcome, more were lurking. It’s called aging. A T-shirt he’d seen in Florida last winter told him it wasn’t for the meek.

Then there was the self-inflicted.
Years earlier, it had been cigarettes and Maker’s Mark. These days, it was the bran and raisins Julia set out for him each morning, the result of which was the onrushing bowel movements that typically came when he was writing. Sometimes he’d alternated: paragraph, movement, paragraph, movement, and so on. He dared not even joke about the possible connection.

His joints had begun to swell like marbles after a day at the old Remington—the world telling him he’d overstayed his welcome. As if attempting to stop the progress, his oldest child, Emma, had a shiny, new laptop sent overnight from some company out west. The ten stories he’d recently finished were enclosed therein. His work, scattered bits and digits, sat settled like dust inside it awaiting a pair of eyes to oversee its re-assemblage.

The writing was the best of a long life in the trade. Each story upon completion gave him that old, triumphal feeling of having stopped time and walked to the edge and back again. Would it endure? Who knew? But it should be worth something for Julia after he was gone. Funny, he thought, how a work of art becomes more valuable once the creator is no more. It was as if things created took on some magical aspect once the line of authenticity was no longer traceable. People pay for magic like that. And last gasps, even in a down market, are always worth something.

He used to go to museums and marvel that people paid all that money for what was essentially pigment on stretched cotton. His offerings, small marks on paper, were even more tenuous. And these days, words came over wires and through the air. Why didn’t a gust of wind carry them off? he wondered. Emma had told him she’d gotten off her computer a recording of some actor reading Gatsby. She listened to it when she jogged. When she told him this, he felt small, as if the world had surpassed his ability to comprehend it.

But he was beyond all this now. He’d been spending a lot of time thinking of the old days, and they gleamed surreally through the scrim of time. His first acceptance letter from NYC magazine, with an effusive “send more” under the handwritten P.S., sat framed next to his desk here in the basement. From there, it was almost too easy, and he spent a lifetime juggling the achieved bravado necessary to create, and the guilt of never having to work too hard at it. Boxes now crowded the refurbished basement around him, moved down from the attic that once served as his writing garret.
until the steepness of the stairs became too much for him. The boxes were filled with photos and videos of him with well-known faces. They worked so hard to collect it all, to capture it, as if fearing a great failure of collective memory. Now what? The rainy season would likely transform them into moldering clutter in this dank underground. Where does all this stuff go when we die? He used to stand in the houses of old people and think this as he looked around at their crowded bookshelves and crammed nooks. The detritus of life overwhelms us at some point, and then off we go. Eventually we drown in our own obsolescence.

There were more noises from above.

Sitting in the office of their lawyer, Julia was crisp as always. Her gray skirt and red blouse were pressed to the point that no wrinkle would dare tread upon either. New pantyhose—always new—smelling not of perfume or detergent but of packaging, and hair that wouldn’t budge in a hurricane, completed the look. He preferred her without makeup, but she even put it on to greet the maid each morning, back when they had one. Sitting here, she looked implacable and as ready as a suitcase.

In her semi-retirement, Julia had taken to reporting to him the bad news of the day. It comprised most of her conversation toward him. She was a chronicler of the world’s degradation, Pollyanna’s dark twin.

“Oh, that poor baby in the Bronx, the one with the mosquito bite, she died last night,” was a typical morning greeting. These days, her death news could rattle him for hours. Usually, he just said, “Hmm,” and made like she was discussing fictional characters.

A whoosh of circulating air chilled his ankles. The rain had followed them downtown; it tapped at the office window like a shy intruder.

“The car fire on Third Avenue?” Julia said as they waited. “I’ll bet someone died. You know, only one-sixth of all car fires turn fatal, but this one looked like there may have been an explosion, too. Right up the steering column to the head and neck area. I didn’t see any sign of the engine block. That’s not good.”

The law office was a place where life and death were transacted, yet it was oddly drab for the inherent drama he imagined took place within. The pale-yellow, plastic, honeycombed curtains that ran nearly floor to ceiling in big folds, the gray cabinets and standard-issue matching desk, none of it had changed since he’d first walked in here four decades previous. Could it be that the potency of what unfolded here didn’t call for much in the way of setting? The human spectacle at its most extreme never requires much else: Aristotle probably said that.

Joe Seneca bustled in like a walking question mark.

“How’s my favorite author and his lovely wife?” he said, he always said.

He knew Joe didn’t read anything but legal briefs, never mind one of his books. Do I even exist to him? he wondered.

“We’re here for the five-year
review of the wills,” Julia said. “Don’t want to end up like that actor who just had bone cancer. Shame.”

“Yes,” Joe said. “Righto.”

Joe had spent time in England during the war and still retained a bit of the phrasing he’d picked up. It probably made him feel like he stood out, so international. Words as fashion accessory. Language as commodity.

The lawyer looked up at Julia, and on cue she handed him a folder.

“All our current statements,” she said. “Alphabetical.”

Joe nodded. He looked through the pages and made a clucking noise with his tongue. “You folks weren’t immune either,” he said.

“I want to be buried,” he said, stopping Joe mid-sentence.

“Thousands gone. It was just on paper, as they say, but it still hurts.”

“Indeed,” Julia said, pulling her skirt down a millimeter so that it touched the top of her kneecaps. She was equationally precise.

“The good news,” Joe said, “is that the way your wills are set up, the amounts to be bequeathed don’t matter. Just as long as the language is clear on who gets what.”

In the silence that followed, he felt like his lawyer was sizing him up as to his general health. Meanwhile, he noticed for the first time that Joe’s teeth were only a shade less yellow than the curtains.

Joe gave a quick overview of their wills and then moved on to what he called “the final details.” Joe began, “And your ashes are to be spread—”

Julia looked at her husband. “What?”

“In the family lot back in Boston.”

“What brought this on, for heaven’s sake?” Julia said. “We agreed on cremation. We’ve already paid for it.”

He’d recently made his mind up about this. The explanation was beyond words.

“You think we’re all going to drive to Massachusetts to visit your grave?” his wife said, looking in her black purse for a tissue.

Julia got up to use the bathroom. He thought of telling Joe about the stories in the laptop and how they would constitute a book that should help Julia financially should something happen.

Instead, he said: “Yankees?”

Joe shook his head. “Jolly mess, ol’ chap.”

There were papers to sign and a check to leave, and soon he and Julia were headed home. She didn’t speak. When they pulled into the driveway, she couldn’t hold back.

“We have a shelf full of books, a lifetime of memories and boxes of memorabilia, and you think we need a stone slab three hours from here, too? Jesus …” Tears welled again.

Inside, he waited until the atmosphere returned to some sort of normalcy. Then he announced he was going downstairs. He grabbed Julia in the kitchen and gave her a long embrace and told her how much he loved her. It’s not for the meek, he thought.
Though he’d already begun to accept certain facts, his favorite companions remained his imagination and its endless search for moments outside his own experience, and the still-vibrant visions amidst the lengthening shadows of his days. The past, too, was always a welcoming refuge. The future, less so, but he tried hard and thought of grandchildren yet to be and possibly another trip to Florence, where perhaps he would stand once more at the Baptistry of San Giovanni and stare at the altar where Dante first knelt.

He reached across his desk and pulled toward him the old Remington typewriter that had been sitting on the desk for months like a pile of dusty coal. He elbowed the laptop aside, sat down and felt that welcome grind as he twisted the knob and watched a piece of paper get swallowed in and then appear as if by magic, delivered from between the rolls. It shot skyward like a white flame. His whole world lay cradled in this old iron machine. White and black, the delineation clear as day.

After a moment, the pushing fingers and galloping mind caught the old gear and the benevolent clicking filled the basement.

He wrote:

The Last Story

What looked like a translucent, black-and-white map of some dense terrain glowed on the computer screen. In the end it’s true, she thought, we do return to the earth. Nowadays it’s at the level of the electron, energized dust left behind to tell the story. Margaret had asked to see the autopsy results. It was a way to make the unreal seem real. However, an X-ray of his midbrain and temporal lobe was not what she’d expected. A doctor with a folder of information, documents filled with abstruse descriptions and certificates bearing an official seal were what she’d envisioned. But here she was in a sterile room with the hum and buzz of machines and voices mingling, a beeping noise and the hurried shuffle of quiet shoes. This was the other side of life, and its banality, as much as the smell of ether, was nauseating.

The bullet looked like a pale-gray rocket. It glowed before her on the screen, and had the doctor not been there, she would have traced its outline with her fingernail. It was less opaque than she’d thought.

Death is always lighter than we expect.

“Most people don’t ask for this,” the doctor said, nodding at the glowing image. His voice lowered: “Especially since it was—”

Her look cut him off. She’d come to bear witness, that was all. “This is what he wanted,” she said. “I’m sure of it.”

A loud noise interrupted his typing. Julia must have been moving something upstairs again. That woman never stopped with the furniture, he thought. Or, maybe it was thunder this time. He could hear the rain pounding outside and a slow drip at the front of the musty basement.
The rusty '28 rigid frame was balanced on the rock, tiptoeing from frame to exhaust, exhaust to frame. The rain was gathering in pools on the leather seat. Dandelions were wedged in between the spokes and behind the rock was a path cut through the field.

In the seconds the scene rolled by I could imagine a father rolling the old beast across fields, hills and rivers. Lifting the beast of metal onto the rock and placing the cracked helmet on the seat. He would rub his hands together, readjust his cap and walk away.
Faith has gone on an extended vacation this January of 2007, travelling elsewhere, certainly not here in blustery, rainy New England. This most immediate dark night of my soul continues, and I can tell you this without compromise: it is not a chemical imbalance. It is another one of those awful disconnects from God, a sustained abyss devoid of any sense of an ordered, benevolent higher power. This awareness, however dismal, I know is a gift of grace: from here, there is no other place to go but into the light. Somehow this depression, if I do not feed it with honey-dipped donuts or Golden Girl repeats and recognize it as the disconnect that it is, will carry me to a more compassionate place; that is to say, somewhere out of this darkness, there will come a deeper awareness of God.

Nevertheless, once again, the bleakness is here, set off this time, as is somewhat common, by the never-ending mental aberrations of Ginny. She has triggered in me that old sense of futility, and I wonder, what is the use of a belief in anything beyond the day-to-day plans of a nine-to-five world obsessed with stock market averages and medical health benefits?

A couple of weeks ago, a very concerned nurse at Allerton House, where Ginny has been an increasingly reluctant resident since last July, phoned me. The call
did not surprise me: it had been well foreshadowed by conver-
sations my sister Nancy and I’d had all winter with my mother.

“Mrs. Heslam, I just wanted to bring something to your attention. We’re a little con-
cerned with Mrs. Cole—”

“Yes,” I interrupted, hoping not to sound too ungracious. “We’ve been to Dr. Stone. He was weaning her off the Risperdal, but has decided to put her back on it, thank goodness. My mother should be back to normal within a couple of weeks.” Whatever that is, I thought.

“Oh, good. Because Ginny has been calling the desk several times during the night all week.”

“Someone’s outside the hall with a buzz saw, trying to get in?”

I listened as she politely suppressed a laugh. “Yes. And the thing is, we can’t get in the door because she has it barricaded with chairs. I’m also a little concerned that if there’s a medical emergency …”

“My sister and I are meeting there tomorrow to give our mother her weekly shampoo; we’ll make sure she’s taking her medication.” I wanted to add that there would probably never be a medical emergency, if Ginny had anything to say about it. She has assured my brother, sister, and me that she will never leave “this hell-hole” on a hospital-bound stretcher; as so many of the other “inmates” have, never to return. She will leave when the time is right, when God knows she is ready, perhaps on the arm of a fiancé who will rescue her from herself.

“I’m getting out of here as soon as a man comes. Who knows? Maybe I’ll get married again soon and surprise you all.” Never mind that this has been her mantra since she divorced my father in 1969, when she began to examine her life with sober eyes. The “here” has changed, from the family home to Allerton House, but the hope has not—hope in the assurance that God is just waiting for the right time to drop a second husband into her lap.
And that seems to be the crux of the entire problem between my mother and me, at least the part of the problem that involves God: we both have different pictures of Universal Truth (my words, not hers). Ginny’s God is a handsome, well-mannered, financially secure, Harvard-educated man with a penchant for dancing, who will eradicate all her fears immediately, without her having to do anything more than pray with the assurance that all things hoped for will come to pass. This God will have the ability to transport her to worlds she has only dreamt of; He will hold the magic key that will instantly dispel her fear of dentists, doctors, escalators, elevators, planes, expressways, closed doors, and marijuana-smoking men intent on knotting her limbs together with thick ropes. She has waited a long time for this God to appear; and yet, even at eighty-two, she still has faith that this handsome God-man will make his divine entrance into Allerton House someday, any day, soon, and rescue her from this dismal life of incapacitating fears.

My God is vastly different, not even a person, more a sacred inner urging that encourages me to move forward in pursuit of dreams, regardless of sometimes overwhelming fears. He is a positive, knowing intuition that reiterates constantly the importance of action—acts of faith on my part that are invariably followed by several serendipitous actions of affirmation and support coming from a compassionate and caring universe. Ginny’s God cautions her to wait for a set of circumstances outside of herself; my God assures me that goodness exists within each person, waiting only to be made manifest and brought into the world.

We see God differently, my mother and I, but we both see Him, and I suspect we are both in similar places now, fearing, once again, that we have been abandoned by an inaccessible higher power.

Throughout the years, the official treatment for Ginny’s bipolar disorder has been various drugs and various combinations of drugs, primarily lithium and nortriptyline, reaching a grand total of ten pills, taken all at once, except for the Risperdal, which should be taken at night since it tends to make her drowsy. The pills would do their magic, tempting Ginny to gradually insist on being weaned off them since some of the side effects—drooling, hand-shaking—were embarrassing. Besides, she believed she should be doing everything by prayer. After all, hadn’t she stopped drinking through the power of God?

The psychiatrist has told us that the beauty of psychiatric medications is that the pills can be taken all at once since their effect builds up through time. He has also told us we should be glad this is the only problem she has: lots of elderly people deal with blood pressure issues, heart problems, Alzheimer’s disease. If she had to have an illness, bipolar is a good one: you can’t die from it. He failed to mention that you can’t live with it either.

I wonder at times: has the psychiatrist not noticed the rotting teeth (fear of the dentist); the bent spine (fear of the bone doctor); the unchanged dirty clothes (fear of drowning by slipping down the shower drain and fear of not being ready at night to run, fully dressed, should the man
with the ropes/buzz saw reach her bed); the six-ounce can of prune juice she brings to every appointment (fear of anal blockages and dried-up bladders)? And the list of fears goes on. To the doctor, it’s just depression, and the prescribed treatment—balancing the various chemicals in her blood—is, to him, far more effective than probing the psyches of her soul, especially at her age. Besides that, he listens to her, and though we three children also sit in his office, telling Dr. Stone about our mother’s latest hallucinations, he shuts us out, concerned only with Ginny’s stories. She offers the doctor very little information about herself, flattering him from time to time: “What a nice tie that is, doctor; did your wife give you that for Christmas? She has such good taste.” She knows he holds all the power.

I hate to put my faith in pills, but I have also waited for the Risperdal to bring her back to a place of function. I worry that she will be kicked out of Allerton House if she opens her mouth to share too much of her paranoid view of the world. My sister assures me that they will never kick her out, but I can’t help but wonder if what the shrink implied is correct: Would the staff at Allerton House, would I, for that matter, have more compassion for Ginny if, for instance, she were dying from a cancerous tumor of the brain, something that can’t be helped? Would Ginny herself be more amenable toward help? This depression, this paranoia and despair of the mind, keeps my mother from accepting help, diabolically pointing out over and over again that no one is to be trusted.

But, of course, neither the staff nor the doctor knows the real Ginny, the one who has tried to live on prayer and faith in a generous God—one she discovered in AA—since 1966. This God gave her the courage to stop medicating her sorrows with sherry and to start living a better, happier life, one that did not include marriage to someone she did not love. During her years in AA, she was happy with a new group of friends who offered understanding and showed my mother the way to self-acceptance. It seemed as though she was miraculously returned to us, her children; we had waited a long time for her to be sober, and an even longer time for her to be happy—as happy as she had been when we were very young. AA gave Ginny a new sense of a benevolent higher power, and the divorce set both my parents free. They were much better, much kinder, as separate people than they had ever been as a couple.

Ginny constantly talked the AA lingo, and I listened. This was an entirely new concept of God, the one I have relied on since I was a teenager and first heard Ginny speak of a higher power, of turning my will over to His goodness on a daily basis, of asking for help, not just for life’s traumas, but for life’s daily ups and downs as well. This was an accessible God, one who could help me find the right parking spaces, enough money for milk at the end of the week, and friends who did not judge me for being an unmarried mother at the age of twenty-two. This God was non-judgmental, unconditional, forgiving love, pure and simple, and a far cry from the bearded sourpuss taught to me in Sunday School—a pissed off old man with lightning bolts in his pockets ready to be dispersed, for instance, if you stole your parents’ Pall Malls and smoked them down at the beach. And if you put
another book on top of the Bible, well, you might as well have pounded another nail into Christ’s hand.

She birthed me twice, my mother, once in body and once in spirit. This is the mother I have lost, the one whose living death I witness three days a week, the one whose illness, now seemingly immune to any medication, I cannot accept. Looking at her now, I often wonder where God is. When she was actively drinking, I could always count on Ginny’s real, rational self to return the next day, after a night of witnessing her verbally abusive counterpart; lately, her real self seems lost to an illness that has consumed her soul. It seems as if the real Ginny, the good and sober Ginny, will not stand up, will never return.

Nancy is much better with her than I am. I get too mad, reacting to Ginny’s insanities as though they are direct proof that God has hightailed it out of her life, out of our lives. Why, I rant at God, have You done this to a woman who has spoken about You to everyone from the kid in the grocery store to the man delivering oil?

“I don’t know where God will lead me today; I do everything by prayer,” she would say to anyone who asked what her plans were for the day. Some people loved her, desperately soaking up her faith in a good God; some people disliked her, questioning what they called her “over-simplified” faith, but no one was left untouched by Ginny. She always defended You, God. Now where are You? And why is my faith so embedded, so dependent on my mother’s well-being?

At Allerton House, seeing her naked, helping her sit on the padded seat in her handicapped shower where her bottom leaves streaks of shit, we can’t help but notice how physically frail she has become. Nancy rises above Ginny’s complaints, while I keep silent, fuming, soaping her down, wondering, of course, if this is a rather large hint at my own fate: am I my mother’s daughter? I keep quiet now, but on other days, I have ranted too, have asked her why she wants to stink, why she can’t just trust that the night people at Allerton won’t let any rope- or saw-wielding men go up the stairs or climb up the ivy on the outside wall. Why are you so goddamn nutty? I want to rage at her; I have raged at her. She usually replies with something like this: Why can’t you see the good in me? Why can’t you see that I am trying? Or this: I’m still your mother. Don’t talk to me that way.

We shower and change our mother three times a week, meeting here in the afternoon before Nancy begins her shift at an insurance agency down the street and just after I end my work day, because our mother won’t let anyone at Allerton House touch her. Even though this is routine, when the shower includes a shampoo, the bathroom turns into a nightmare scene for all three of us. Now I am quiet, letting Nancy field any questions, swallow any insults.

“Please, please rinse now. It’s in my eyes. Ooh. You’re drowning me. I am so cold. I’ve never been this cold in my life. I’m going to tell them down at the desk that you got soap in my eyes on purpose.” Our mother is livid with indignation, humiliation, shaking with rage like a fractious child.
Fine, I want to say. Let them wash you. Let them listen to you, you old cantankerous hag. Instead, Nancy says, “We’re almost done. We know you don’t like this, but your hair needs to be washed at least once a week.”

Her hands cover her face. “What’s the matter with you, Cynthia? Why aren’t you saying anything? Do you enjoy looking at me like this?”

Next we dress her. She doesn’t want to wear any of the flowered skirts we buy her; she sticks to the solid black elasticized ones with the exception of the dungaree skirt that she wears from time to time. “Those skirts are too dressy. The men will think I’m on the make if I wear those. You don’t know this place.”

“They’re too old to be on the make,” Nancy says, looking over at me with a roll of her eyes.

I rout through her top drawer where she has hidden several damp pairs of underwear. She has attempted to wash out the stains before we can see them. I toss them in the laundry basket along with a skirt and top—she sleeps in her clothes, only consenting to our changing her two or three times a week, so there isn’t much laundry, other than the underwear. I brush her hair, gently tugging at snarls created by residual clumps of black mascara she uses to cover up the gray in what is now a half-black-dyed, half-gray head of hair. Her once-thick hair falls out by the handful, and I lean over to kiss her face, but only lightly; otherwise, I will want to bury my head in the hollow of her neck and weep. Instead, I walk into the kitchen to clean up the pudding that has spilled from the counter to the floor—she cuts up and buries her pills in butterscotch pudding since she fears she might choke on the whole pills—while Nancy prepares the saline solution so she can tend to our mother’s feet.

I am grateful to Ginny for so many gifts of the spirit. I owe the direction my spiritual life took when I was nineteen to my mother; borrowed phrases from AA have sustained me through countless dark nights: one day at a time; accept the things you cannot change; let go and let God; don’t project. Of course, since then, I have also deepened my connection to God by reading countless books by modern psychologists, philosophers, co-seekers of the spirit: Marianne Williamson; Deepak Chopra; Wayne Dyer; Alan Cohen. I stay away from formal religion because the exclusivity of it bothers me. According to strict Christian belief, a lot of people are destined for hell simply because they do not accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, but I emphatically reject this belief and see Jesus more as a fellow traveler, a brother-guide who has achieved a perfect union with God: another source of disagreement between my mother and me.

Ginny’s inactivity over the years, her insistence on waiting for God to act, has incensed me and scared me at times; luckily, it did not immobilize me. When I was forty, I awakened to the fact that a dream to get a bachelor’s degree in English was not going to materialize if I sat waiting for imagined obstacles to disappear, the right conditions to present themselves. As I sat on the bleachers at Braintree High School one sunny June day in 1990, watching Jessica, my oldest
child, graduate from high school, the sudden realization that I could be sitting here when my youngest child graduated in another eight years, still dreaming of going back to school, horrified me: What had I been thinking? That some college official would discover me, read my mind, plead with me to enroll in his college? I needed to get up from those bleachers and do something; I needed to deepen my faith in a higher power because I certainly could not get the degree on my own.

I signed up for a course at Northeastern and found out it was true what spiritual writers said about the universe: when you act, the whole universe comes to your aid—obstacles disintegrate, the Cosmos provides. It took a while, but within a few years, I was teaching English at a local high school, and I had found a deeper higher power within myself.

Although Cosmos and Universal Intelligence are foreign concepts to my mother, she and I agree on the basic premise: God is great, good, omnipresent, and sometimes works through people. I could list a thousand kindnesses this higher power has proffered through Ginny’s hands. She made a trip to Canada, traveling with her newly divorced ex, my father, despite her fears of hotel rooms (“First floor only, must have windows”) and speeding oil trucks (“Please don’t pass them, George”), to meet her first granddaughter, the child I had in Canada before marriage, to hug her, to welcome Jessica into the family.

And the God of little things proffered His goods through Ginny as well. The countless kindnesses: a ten, a twenty for milk and bread; an English class at Northeastern for me; a prom dress for Jessica. But deeper than money, she gave of her time: babysitting, no questions asked, when my husband was late coming home from a soccer game and I needed to be at my waitressing job or school; driving fifteen minutes over rain-soaked roads at eleven one night, long after she had flossed her teeth and gotten into her nightgown, to comfort me when I’d told her my six-year-old dog had died at the vet’s. She never judged my life, my circumstances; she only told me of a loving presence, a higher power who helped out in all the areas of life. All I had to do was listen and believe.

And I do; I do believe a higher power is here, even in my darkest hours. When my faith wavers, the fault is mine: sometimes God seems so distant, so disguised.

This woman I look at now, propped up on the bed, is waiting for her feet to be cleaned, the toes massaged so that the ridge in the big toe, where the second one has crossed over, will lessen and the toes will go back to their correct positions. I suppose it was a miracle that my brother got her to go to the podiatrist when she could barely put her feet into her shoes anymore because of the sores created by the crossing of toes. We had told her that she might be facing amputation if she did not keep the appointment. That statement, disturbingly true, may have prompted her to get into the car without too much whining when my brother picked her up and drove her to the doctor’s.

As advised by the podiatrist, Nancy has been cleaning, soaking, bandaging our mother’s feet three
times a week for the past ten weeks now, and there has been a slight improvement. With a bit of gauze between the offending toes and the help of some new shoes (“I can’t believe I’m a ten wide; I was always a nine and a half narrow”), her feet look and feel much better. I see a sliver of light start to illuminate my darkness; maybe it will permeate Ginny’s darkness as well.

I have been here in this dark night before because too often I go the way of the world, judging, comparing, demanding immediate answers, wanting quick solutions. But, paradoxically, the way of the spirit is often found in the stillness of darkness. The spirit-way sees people without judging them; the spirit-way offers love as the antidote for fear because it knows we all experience the darkness, and it knows that we are all one in the mind of God.

Nancy washes our mother’s feet, and suddenly I am reminded of Jesus washing Peter’s feet, a simple act of kindness by a man who wanted his disciples to know that the teacher was not above the student, that He was not a man who would judge others, only try to teach them about the mutuality and importance of kindness without judgment. I realize now I have been too judgmental, looking for God in all the wrong places, seeking the high and mighty when this higher power could really be found among the low and lonely. I realize now that I just need to accept the things I cannot change and offer love.

And Nancy is the link that bridges the gap between my mother and me. There is no intellectual discussion of Chopra’s quantum physics, nor any mention of chemical imbalances, only the love of two daughters for their mother.
crescent moon

jessica m. sircar
line etching 14” x 17.5”
flowers

sarah tolland

found cigarette butts, glue 10.5” x 12”
contours
Tania Henry
stoneware, carved and altered 4” x 4” x 3”
the barn
chelsea berry
woodcut 42" x 18"
clark tegan henderson

German case binding with Japanese silk, live bird 11” x 9” x 14”
untitled

martin mchugh mullane
coil-built, pit-fired raku 10” x 10” x 13.5”
square vase

nicole johnson

laminate wood 7” x 7” x 7”
orchids

jennifer grinsell
colored pencil 18” x 24”
nonsense

stephen plummer
vector illustration 11” x 14.5”
Laika put in her hair extensions, on her makeup, on her gold booty shorts. She waited in her dorm room—a single she’d acquired with a fabricated medical report verifying that she had Tourette’s—until I called to tell her we were outside. She had a plan. We could hide the whisky in a can of iced tea so dorm security wouldn’t notice. We would drink, and then go elsewhere to see Cedric.

A week earlier, I wrote her, “You should come with us to Cedric’s birthday party.”

She texted back, “Cocaine?”

I wrote, “Yes.”

Cedric would think her gold booty shorts were for him. It was his birthday.

Months before, over a cigarette, I talked with Cedric. I was an amateur smoker, but he had started years before me, so instead of comparing Marlboros to Camels like rookies, we talked of other things, like how in the recent past a cocktail waitress had allowed him to sodomize her with the neck of a wine bottle. As vile, perhaps, as the deflowering of lungs, but more engaging than talking about the transition from cloves to Marlboro 27s. I didn’t think of this on the night I introduced him to Laika.
Lawrence drove, speeding whenever he saw brake lights ahead of him and realizing his bizarre habit only seconds before each near-accident for twenty miles up the highway.

She asked me, “Should I wear gold short shorts?”

I wrote back, “Yes.”

I, smelling mostly of cigarettes and a neglected molar that slowly withered in its coat of nicotine, chocolate, and scotch, thought the shorts were for me, but I was wrong, just as Cedric would be.

We drank in her room.

“… And then I noticed the bottle was empty and there was a ginger kid in my bed! Hey! Have you read *House of Leaves*?”

She was on Adderall, paired with Wellbutrin, and drowning in a vodka-based elixir she’d finished before Lawrence and I had arrived. In her shorts, purple top, and half-fake hair splotched with bleach streaks the color of ooze from a sinus infection, she was Pop Art itself—Andy Warhol’s wet dream. She bubbled, flitting her wrists, red nail polish glinting.

We drove her to Virgil’s to eat, and to visit Cedric before he punched out for the night.

Cedric’s arms were lumpy with crescents, bubbles, just-healed sores—a pink and beige timeline of every spill and accident that could scar a man in a kitchen. He wore them absently, like his stained Celtics sweatband. He wobbled against the heat of an avant-garde, Neo-Mediterranean steak frites dish that sizzled before him on the line. He wobbled, too, from dehydration and anticipation of the pick-up to come later that night when it was properly dark and the cars that stalked West Roxbury slowed. He called it mostly by aliases—David Blowie.

It was his birthday.

He greeted us warmly, already half-drunk and smiling.

He hugged Lawrence. “Hey, cowboy.” He called everyone that, or “money.”

“What’s up, man?” Lawrence hugged him back and shook his head.

Cedric saw Laika for the first time and paused. We ordered food, then he brought her vegetables in pasta and offered her a cigarette.

“These are nicely packed. I appreciate it,” she said, inhaling deeply and blowing it away. It was warm for late September; we talked and smoked on the patio of Cedric’s beloved Virgil’s, a three-star Mediterranean place on the Charles River. The place drew crowds, better dressed than us, who talked over champagne mojitos and fourteen dollar appetitinis about Los Angeles, celebrity chefs, and the stock market. Or of drugs, as we in the corner by the patio bar did.
“You ready for tonight, man?” Cedric asked me.

“Of course. Party supplies are on me. Happy birthday.”

“My dude,” he said, and hugged me. “All right, bitches—excuse me, Laika—I’m going inside. Meet me back here in an hour. We’re going to my place.”

I felt like I knew her once. A year before, sober, we walked through a park and she got giddy, poking a cluster of gypsy moth caterpillar larvae with a twig. When you squish them, they bleed goop like lime syrup in a slush—like ooze, a green that rarely exists outside of magic markers, candy, and caterpillars.

“I like walking with you and just being able to talk,” she said.

“I like it too.”

She thought she knew uppers that summer when I knew none, but she knew only those of orange bottles, not those of crumpled baggies pinched with dirty fingernails in the hours when restaurant staff, addicts, and crazies are out for the night. She called them Adderall Picnics—romps in the woods with other buzzing friends, wired on prescriptions. They would dance.

Her dosages were upped to handle the transition to college life.

“I’m not worried about it,” she said as we drove to Cedric’s place. “I’ve basically been taking speed in an orange bottle; I can handle it.”

“I didn’t know this was your first time,” I said. “I feel weird about it.”

“This guy across the hall from my dorm room sells, so I’d do it anyway, eventually. Don’t worry about it. We’ll have fun.” She sat closer to me, eyeing the little bags I tucked into my wallet.

Cedric and his girlfriend Marcy, the same cocktail waitress who appreciated fine wines, invited us into their studio apartment in Somerville. It was nicer than I had expected, but dim. At one end, a bed; to its left, a kitchenette covered in empty bottles of Belvedere and defeated beer cans; in the middle, a floppy and inviting couch by the television; and at the other end, a weird couch—like a discarded spool without its top.

The crowd was gathered around a dining room table, glossy and black, reflective. There were mirrors passed around. Bigger bills are cleaner, but the only money any of us had left were ones, so we rolled them up.

“You’re sure?” I said.

The air was dense.

“Don’t worry!” She nudged me.

It was instant. The room, dim and quiet before, started to burst as if waking for the first time. No lights turned on, but the room became brighter. No one moved anymore quickly than they had
only moments before, but now they were ghosts rushing around, faster, more brilliant, overwhelming; the gunk was shot into our brains and it wouldn’t stop until the bags were emptied—we had enough for hours—and that’s what I saw. We were born again. The whole room was a dream. Drinks, green like the caterpillar blood, floated between manicured hands of shiny guests I’d never met before. I’m sure we exchanged names and other drink recipes, but they are gone now. Cedric looked proud, smiling and red-faced and hugging everyone.

His red face, beaming, reminded me of another time. At a party the summer before, a girl was drunk. Having finished retching in the bushes, she remained bent over, lifted her skirt, and called out for the nearest man, any man, and he was near.

He turned away from his guests and stared at Laika. First her hair, wild and huge, then her shorts.

Lawrence, the temperate one, only had a few drinks and watched us snort up our lines off a CD case.

“Not tonight, man,” he’d said. “I’m just going to roll this joint and watch a movie. Cedric! Do you have anything with Samuel L. Jackson in it?”

“Shit, B. I don’t know. Why are you smoking that hippie shit? Do some cocaine!”

“Nah, man.”

“Oh my God, oh my God . . .” It’s all she said at first. “This is amazing. I want to do this all the time. Fuck Adderall.”

So we talked of things as if we’d remember them in the morning—of abstractions, mostly, in the stupid tongues of kids believing themselves grander than lonely imitations of rockers in what would become by dawn a stranger’s apartment. Cedric and Marcy cuddled in one corner of the couch, having some conversation about new staff at Virgil’s, and Laika leaned in on me, let me put my arm around her. I was surprised; we were always platonic with only playful hints otherwise. I could smell her unwashed hair, perfumed with the smoke of Lawrence’s joint and all of our cigarettes, as the back of my tongue went numb from the drips. We flew. There are no words that will do justice to such a high. We finished a drink and then got higher, cutting up chubby lines that caught in our noses and burned before numbing. I don’t think there was any music playing. We couldn’t pay attention to anything, high like we were—funky basslines wouldn’t impregnate us the way they would have with weed. Rather, we wanted our own voices, the quick and bubbly conversation of two raving maniacs, feeling brilliant as the night gripped the world outside Cedric’s den. We looked at the hanging lights above us, at the faces of strangers turned friends, passing mirrors, ruddy-faced and entitled, like bloated American tourists in a foreign land. We smiled.
Things were quieting; people were leaving, turning into strangers again. We had run out of drugs and we were only a little depressed. The couch swallowed us. Marcy went to bed.

It happened to both of us around the same time—a small shadow played across her face and she removed my arm from her shoulders. I saw her for the first time with a pang like that which follows loveless sex—she was hag-gard, too skinny, never making eye contact, watching my hands that cut her lines and not my face. She, too, looked at me like a stranger. We’d been together for hours, but now we had come down.

Lawrence’s specialty at parties was falling asleep and leaving anyone he drove without a ride for the night. I wasn’t surprised when he started to sink in his chair.

“Cedric, do you have somewhere I can sleep?”

“Sure thing, money.”

They took apart the circular couch, set the cushions on the floor, and put blankets on them.

Laika was twitchier than usual.

“Are you all right?” I asked.

She looked away. “Cedric!”

He turned around to face her.

“Do you have any more coke?”

“Shit, no. But there’s more on the way.”

She got up and followed him to a closet near his bed as he reached for pillows. Lawrence was already asleep.

I sat, staring at the television, until JD showed up. He was little, with a generic face and haircut and a bland personality. I could talk to him about several electronic musicians and nothing else. We worked together at Virgil’s, briefly—I quit after three weeks—and I’d been to the club on nights he DJ’ed drum and bass tracks, mostly for aging socialites.

He sat next to me and started cutting up lines on the coffee table.

“‘Heard the new BT album?’ I asked.

“No. It’s good?”

“Can’t really dance to it,” I said. “I think it’s his best.”

“Huh.”

Cedric and Laika came out and sat with us. We did more. She didn’t look at any of us. Cedric leaned in toward JD—he was a giant next to him, a jagged Nordic telephone pole with appendages—and whispered something. They both looked at Laika. She barely took in her line before she stood, announcing that she would be sick. She went into the bathroom and closed the door.

Cedric went to the kitchen to make a drink.

“Hey,” JD said, “she’s hot.”
I moved.

“You and Cedric going to …”

“No, man.”

He thought I was kidding, or he wasn’t listening, or I was scared and vague of tone. I looked at my hands, shaking. The smell of smoke and liquor turned from an ignored atmospheric norm to something more invasive. Dawn was breaking through the white blinds. We had been doing cocaine and drinking for almost eight hours and I hadn’t eaten since the day before. I was drained as, coming down again, I saw the apartment, my friends, myself newly.

JD continued, “When she comes back out, think she’d be into it if we all played?”

“That’s not why she’s here with me.” I got up and shook Lawrence. “We need to go, man.”

“What’s up?”

“Cedric, man. I don’t think Laika’s safe.”

“Okay, let’s go,” he said. He sat up, eyes wide and his face concerned and then he went back to sleep and wouldn’t wake up again.

It was a half hour before she’d answer behind the bathroom door. Finally, she let me in.

“You can hold my hair back if you want to.”

“We need to go.”

“Cedric tried to hook up with me in the closet,” she said, then retched into the toilet. The bathroom was green and windowless.

“He’s a predator. I shouldn’t have brought you here. We need to go. I’m going to wake up Lawrence.”

“It’s cool, don’t worry. I’m fine,” she said. “I want to stay.”

“I’m serious. I’m sorry. We have to leave.”

“It’s cool! I’m fine. He won’t do anything. It’s cool.”

“But he will.”

“I’m okay. Leave me alone.”

I walked out and shook Lawrence again and he wouldn’t wake up. While my back was turned, Cedric went into the bathroom and locked the door. I could hear his voice, deep and direct. He told her she should be worried that I would try something while she was vulnerable.

She said, “I know, right,” but interrupted herself with a belch and a groan and then I heard a splash.

Lawrence wouldn’t wake up. JD came over, blocked the door, and smirked at me. I decided I was done.

I left the apartment and knocked on every door on the fifth floor—I couldn’t fight Cedric, but I could expose him. None opened, so I took the elevator to the lobby and I was lucky. A woman walking her dogs was just coming in.
Without her, I wouldn’t have known Cedric’s full address. We called the police.

“This girl might have alcohol poisoning and I think she’s going to be raped,” I said, doubting the former because she could speak and kind of think, but I would have said anything to get someone to interrupt Cedric.

I looked forward, waiting with the dog lady, to a triumphant rescue: Laika and Lawrence would be escorted out and we could go get breakfast, sober up. Instead, I learned that I shouldn’t have said “alcohol poisoning” at all. One cop had arrived with a crew of firefighters and an EMT and they looked bored. I stayed in the lobby and watched them file into the building and into the elevators and then return without Laika or Lawrence.

“She said everything is fine,” a firefighter said to me as his entourage left.

“He didn’t touch her?”

He shrugged. “She said everything was fine.”

And everything was, until around the time he told me that. What I know of Laika’s rape, I learned later that morning. She would still speak to me.

Back upstairs, the cop and his crew had left. There was a moment of transition, a weird pause throughout the room. Marcy awoke, saw what was happening, liked it, and went to the bathroom. Laika was only dry-heaving now, coherent, but wracked with chemicals and exhausted. She was crouched over the toilet, but Cedric lifted her easily, sliding off her gold booty shorts and putting her in his shower. Marcy took her own clothes off, then reached for Laika, then he slipped his fingers into them both.

She shook. “You’re taking advantage of me.”

“Don’t worry about it. It’s my birthday.”

I called her. I called Lawrence. I called her friends to see if they could call her and tell her to leave Cedric’s place. None answered, so I called a cab.

I waited and watched as morning drenched a rusted Somerville. I thought of forgiveness that flailed like thread from a broken spool with nothing to wrap around because none of us deserved it. I hoped so badly that the police would take her away, but they had their chance. And I like to think she her own.
Mr. Larry Doherty is the president of the highly successful international art storage, transportation, and installation company Fine Arts Enterprises, which he founded in 1976. Larry has a personal collection of over six-hundred remarkable pieces, many of which were given to him as gifts from the talented artists he met while working with the State Department in Russia. He has generously donated many exquisite works to our institution and his Russian collection was recently on exhibit at the college's Anderson Art Gallery.
THE BRIDGE: Where did your appreciation for art come from?

DOHERTY: When my wife and I were dating back in high school, she was constantly visiting museums, and I would say to her, “What do you see in those places? I would rather be working on a hot rod.” And then one day I walked into a museum and thought, “This is pretty cool,” never knowing that it would be what provided me with a great, happy living. I love what I do. I meet great collectors. I meet some of the greatest artists in the world.

But as for me, I can’t even draw a straight line. I’ve always wanted to be an artist, but I can’t draw, or paint, or do much of anything. I’m a good photographer though, and that’s why I have such a large collection of Russian photography. I’m also a good woodworker; I’ve made lots of very interesting furniture. But mainly, it’s my job that allows me entrance into this world.

THE BRIDGE: You’ve done very well in your profession. How did you get to where you are?

DOHERTY: I was at the Fogg Museum at Harvard for a number of years, and one of the things that was happening back in the mid-sixties was that a lot of the endowment was drying up for museums. They began to realize that they needed to have exhibitions to bring the public through the doors. This meant that artifacts had to travel, and at that time very few museums had ever traveled anything. One of the reasons was that the transportation world couldn’t create the kind of environment that a work of art needed while it was in transition from one museum to another. Because of my work at the Fogg, I understood the physical needs of the objects, the financial constraints of the institutions, and the emotional needs of the clientele. I spoke with a friend of mine who had recently graduated from Harvard and suggested that we start a museum service company.

We started very small and in just a few years our services were in huge demand from museums all over the country. We were the first company in the United States to have climate-controlled air-ride trucks, which eliminate vibration and shock. We set the standard in the museum world for how art was going to travel in the United States and Europe. We had so much pressure from so many museums because we were the only ones transporting art safely. That was the most difficult part—meeting that demand.

That’s what made us successful. And I feel very fortunate and honored to have helped protect and preserve works of art by simply developing the kinds of handling devices, shipping devices, and materials used in museums that will prolong the life of those pieces for future generations.
And I’ve even researched and worked with NASA to gain a better understanding of the shock absorption in material that we now use. This is extremely helpful when we’re dealing with shipping really fragile pieces, like Carl Fabergé’s eggs and glass flowers.

But that’s how we started. And to this day we continue to do huge installations all over the country. We’ve worked with all the major sculptors in the United States and in Europe—from small Egyptian pieces to Richard Serra’s big sheets of corten steel that weigh thousands of pounds.

THE BRIDGE: Have you had any difficulty moving Serra’s pieces?

DOHERTY: No, you just have to know how to handle the material. His pieces are very big, very heavy, very unwieldy, and you need to have an understanding of what it’s going to take to install them safely. You’re dealing with big sheets of corten steel that are cut in unusual ways, and many of them have a slight lean and a curve to them. But if you understand the material—where to grab it, where to hold it, how to use different cranes and different applications—it can be done safely.

THE BRIDGE: What are some of the large moving exhibitions you’ve handled?

DOHERTY: We’ve traveled exhibitions like King Tut, Ramses, and Rodin’s Gates of Hell around the country. We’ve moved exhibitions into Japan that involved dismantling dinosaur fossils. For major aquariums, we’ve assembled and installed life-size whale skeletons. We’ve actually worked with sculpture so large that we’ve had to cut holes into museum roofs and then lower the pieces in.

Basically anything that is connected to the museum world, we’ve moved at one time or another.

We even designed the packing and casework for the Jackie Kennedy exhibit, and traveled all of her inaugural ball gowns around the country. That was a huge success.

Those are a few of the biggest exhibitions that we’ve done, and they are probably the biggest that have ever traveled.

THE BRIDGE: It seems like you have to come up with some very innovative moving techniques. Could you tell us about some of the more unusual methods you’ve used?

DOHERTY: We recently encountered a problem with a
huge marble piece shipped in from Europe. It weighed twenty-three thousand pounds and had a thirteen thousand-pound base. One of the problems you face, especially with large stone pieces or contemporary pieces, is that they are delivered to the gallery in separate sections and have to be assembled.

With this particular project, after we installed the base we had to figure out how to install the figural or top piece, which was carved and decorated with all sorts of intricacies—extremely fragile.

Now, here’s the catch: The figure is resting on a pallet with straps underneath it. Because it’s so fragile, the straps are necessary for lifting the piece without damaging it, but you have to figure out how to get the straps out before you set the piece on the marble base. Once you put the piece down, you can’t jack it up or rock it to get the straps out because you’ll damage the base. You have to find a solution.

We use—we’re the only company that’s ever done this—we use blocks of dry ice. The blocks are extremely hard and can carry tons of weight: they don’t crush like ice cubes. So, very secretly and quietly, so that word doesn’t get out about our technique, we get the dry ice guys in on the project.

We set out the blocks of dry ice—you have to wear gloves because it’s so cold it can burn your hands—and then we lower the figure onto the blocks. That way we have enough space to pull the straps out. Then we just put up guides so as the piece settles down onto the base, it won’t shift. In twenty to forty minutes the dry ice has evaporated into fog and disappears. The piece finishes settling in, and nobody can figure out how you ever got the straps out.

The person who hired me for this project couldn’t believe that it worked. I’d told him my plan and he let me go through the process because he trusted me. And he was more than surprised that the method was successful. So, you know, there’s always a way. Again, you just have to understand the physical needs of the object.

THE BRIDGE: What was the most difficult piece you’ve had to install?

DOHERTY: We moved a huge Robert Indiana piece from the United States to Singapore. Robert Indiana is the artist
who does the LOVE sculpture. Each of the letters was a separate section about twelve feet tall, and they were fastened together very intricately with pins. The problem was that the pieces were fabricated down in Connecticut, and they had a special finish on them. If we were to bump one against another even slightly, we would chip the paint and have to send it all the way back to Connecticut to be touched up, which would cost thousands and thousands of dollars and delay the installation.

This was the first piece of public sculpture in Singapore, so we were working with crane operators who are used to sling big chunks of concrete at construction sites. They’re not used to somebody telling them they need another eighth of an inch. They laughed at me and said that there was no way they could go any farther. But I assured them that there was a way, that I had done it before, and explained what they needed to do and we completed the project successfully and safely.

Another difficult piece was an Egyptian sphinx that we installed for a private collector on the North Shore. The piece was so heavy that the front of the crane came up in the air, which is very dangerous. I knew the operator well and had worked with him on quite a few projects, so when I kept telling him that I needed another couple of inches—we had to reach out over the corner of a waterway—he would do it. But finally he told me he was getting light on the front end. I sent one of my guys over to stand at the back of the crane where he could tell the operator to stop as soon as he saw light underneath the wheels. I also sent a bunch of guys to stand on the crane, putting an extra five hundred pounds of counterweight on the back end. And that’s what it took to get that extra foot. But it only worked because I had absolute trust in the crane operator and he had absolute trust in me.

THE BRIDGE: How do you stay calm during installations like that?

DOHERTY: You know, I used to fish with some really close friends who are surgeons, and they perform brain surgery ten hours a day. When they asked me the same question, I would say, “Are you kidding me? If I drop this, it is going to cost a few million. If you slip, you’re going to gork some guy and he’s going to be a vegetable for the rest of his life. So don’t ask me how I have the patience and ability to concentrate when you’re the
one looking through a micro-
scope all day."

It’s all relative. You can be under
just as much stress if you’re a guy
digging a ditch or if you’re a brain
surgeon. You just have to have
confidence in your ability and
you need to know when you’ve
exceeded the limit, when you need
to say stop.

Some sculptors push beyond
the limits set by their structural
engineers. An engineer might say,
“Okay, you can go out fifteen
feet. That’s all you can do.” Then
they would go fifteen feet and
one inch. They are constantly
testing the limits. It’s a great
thing to try this, but there are
two major problems: first, you
could kill someone—sculpture
has killed—and second, it could cost you
your reputation.

Now artists are generally more con-
servative with their pieces; they don’t
take on such large projects. And they
often use materials like corten steel,
which is structurally sound.

THE BRIDGE: Do you think artists gain
a better understanding of the financial
side by working with you?

DOHERTY: We’ve helped a lot of artists
who couldn’t exhibit well or couldn’t sell
their pieces. They didn’t know how to
present their work effectively or how
to mount it correctly. This one woman
made these big paper collages. She came
to me one day and told me that she
hadn’t been able to sell them. I thought
they were fabulous and told her so. She
said the problem was that no one could
hang them on the wall. So we established
a way for it to be done, and then she
was able to sell them.

Artists who work with us see how
we use different techniques and this
gives them ideas for their own work. It
provides them with a better understand-
ing of what materials to use and what
materials not to use, depending on their
individual projects.

THE BRIDGE: Do you have any advice
for students interested in your field?

DOHERTY: Find a company like mine—and
there are a lot of others out there—
that allows young artists to continue
making art while they are earning enough
money to support themselves. It also gives
them exposure at galleries and exhibi-
tions. Our employees get invitations to
many openings where they are not only
invited but welcomed. And it’s hard to get invitations to those black-tie open-
ings. And a lot of the time, they can make use of excess materials. Currently I have several sculptors who use the leftover materials from projects: foam core, can-
vases, ethofoam, that kind of stuff. And they can come in on the weekends and work on their own projects.

We also have a photographer, but most of our employees are painters—they do both realist and abstract work. They have studios in Boston that they live in, and they have first Monday night open studios.

They generally stay with me for four or five years and then they get to a point where they are making enough to earn a living through their own art. Or they realize they don’t want to be an artist and would rather work with us full time, making a very good living this way. And sometimes even the very successful artists will stay on with us because they really enjoy the environment and can’t imagine leaving it.

It’s important for me to hire young artists. It’s my passion to help advance art in this way. If down the road my employees become famous and create great works that hold real meaning for people, then I consider myself successful.

THE BRIDGE: It seems you get to draw close relationships with your artist employees.

DOHERTY: I only hire artists, specifically students or graduates, and a lot of them have been with me for years. One of them, Jonathan Imber, is a great painter and does very well. He worked part time for me at the Fogg for a couple of years, and then when I started Fine Arts Enterprises he came with me. He’d do the New York run, where he’d get to go to the galleries and meet other artists. Exposing them to young up-and-
coming artists in the New York and California scenes really helps their careers.

We have a number of young artists who are doing very well and have galleries of their own. As a matter of fact, I get invited to a lot of the exhibitions that many of these guys are having in New York and the Boston area, which is really fun for me, and I often find pieces to add to my collection.

THE BRIDGE: What type of artwork do you collect?
DOHERTY: I really love prints, photography, and watercolors. My real love is Russian watercolor—it’s so free. It isn’t tightly done like some of the other stuff you might see. In my mind, there is nothing more beautiful than a freely painted watercolor. It’s a very hard medium to control, so to really get into it like the Russians do is extremely difficult.

Between watercolors, lithographs, photographs, and etchings, I probably have well over six hundred pieces in my Russian collection, and at one point I had the largest private collection of Russian photography. It’s mostly from the early to mid ’80s, but some of it goes all the way back to 1920. I collect it because I love it. I love the
imagery. I love where it’s from and what it represents.

Over the last four years my wife and I have donated a lot of art. I have flat file after flat file after flat file of artwork. I love art, and I love sharing it, especially with smaller institutions that wouldn’t have the wherewithal to have a Russian exhibition because it’s so costly. It’s great for the students to see and a lot of the work is really exciting: many students, when they see what the Russians were doing in the late ’70s and early ’80s, say, “Well, we were already doing that here in the United States.” But what they don’t realize is that artists were doing it here because they had the materials to do it. The Russians didn’t. They had to be innovative.

THE BRIDGE: How do you choose what to collect? Are there specific pieces that you look for?

DOHERTY: I don’t collect pieces because I think they are going to be worth a lot or anything like that. I collect a piece because I like the subject matter. It doesn’t matter whether it’s an abstract or figurative piece, it just needs to be of high quality and of interest to me at a particular time and place in my life. I have some Alexander Calder and Ellsworth Kelly pieces that are very valuable, but to me, they are no more valuable than a particular Russian photograph. It means more to me to have sat in a studio at midnight, talking with a Russian artist whom I really became friendly with, and then to have been given one of their pieces personally.

THE BRIDGE: Do you have a favorite piece?

DOHERTY: Well, that’s hard to say. I’ve never looked at it like that. They each hold a specific meaning. One piece that means a lot to me is a small pencil sketch from a photograph of my mother, father, and first son. It was done by a very good portrait artist in Moscow. Both of my parents are gone now, so it’s something special. But it’s hard to say that this piece is better than the rest.

THE BRIDGE: You’ve spoken quite a bit about Russian art. Where does that interest come from?

DOHERTY: I lived in Russia part time in the early ’80s. I was with the State Department for three years on a project and during that time I traveled to every major museum from Moscow to the Sea of Japan to Siberia. By the end of that project I’d gotten to know a lot of museum directors
and I ended up doing a lot of work with the Hermitage and with the State Russian Museum.

While I was with the State Department, I would go out to the artists’ studios with friends and other artists in the evenings. Every night of the week I was with a different Russian artist from Moscow or Siberia or Vladivostok. I got to know them. We would discuss what was going on in the United States and Russia at the time, and we also often talked about the avant-garde movement.

I love the Russian Constructionist period, and I got to know some of the avant-garde underground artists, which is how I got a lot of my watercolors. I have a large collection by the head of the Graphics Institute in Siberia. Museums in Russia and all over Europe display his work. All together I must have two hundred or more of his pieces.

Russia, at this time, was under the Iron Curtain, which affected many artists greatly, so I would bring back supplies for several artists whenever I returned from the United States. I was also able to help a number of Russian Jews by buying their artwork to raise money for them; they were friends of mine and wanted to immigrate to Jerusalem, but couldn’t because they didn’t have the money.

The last one that I was able to help was a woman named Leah Ratner. Because she was Jewish and a woman, the government wouldn’t let her buy materials or exhibit her art. She had to get friends to buy for her. She was a fabulous artist. Her father had been a very famous publisher. There are a number of copies of his works and the paper that he ran on the arts in Russia in the Houghton Library at Harvard. But her whole family was killed off over the years. Leah was the only one left. She lived by herself in a little one room apartment. I loved her dearly; she was my babushka. She was very old and didn’t want to die in Russia, so I raised enough money to pay off all the Russian big shots. She made it to Jerusalem and died a few months later. But she made it and died happy. I still miss her.

THE BRIDGE: That’s amazing that she was so committed to creating her art.

Yes. Art was really important for many Russians. It was also very political for those who ran the country. People had so little then, and they would stand in line for hours and hours, day after
day, for a pound of cheese or a loaf of bread. Life was very difficult, especially for the older people. So many men died in the war, which is why there were so many older women who worked sweeping the streets. Thinking of all of this one day, I asked myself: Why, in this country, is art so important? Why are some of the greatest writers, poets, composers, and musicians not profiting from their work? Why are all of these museums free?

I had been sitting in the assistant director’s office of the Hermitage and saw this old woman, whom I had noticed a few times before, come into the museum. She was probably in her late-sixties, but had the appearance of a much older woman. You could just see it on her face—the hardships she had endured. You could easily imagine that she had lost her husband during the Siege of Leningrad.

When she came in that morning, she was hunched over, wrapped up in robes, and carried her broom; it was her responsibility to sweep the sidewalk in front of the museum. She put aside her broom, and as I watched her, she had this really sad, lost look on her face. She went into a gallery and moved from picture to picture, which I noticed was common for many of the elderly to do. As she walked through, she would stop and stand in front of a picture or painting for fifteen or twenty minutes. You could see her whole complexion change. She stood straighter. A real proud look came across her face. You could see the sparkle in her eye. It was an amazing transformation for her to spend time in that museum. You could tell that art was an escape from the reality of her world. That’s when I really began to realize the power of art.
shambles

kara doucette
digital photography 12” x 8”
chapter 3: resurrecting the dead

At the age of thirty-seven, married for almost three years, Jessica is pregnant with our first grandchild, and I want to shout it from the rooftops. Actually, I don’t. I just want to tell my mother, but I can’t because she’s been dead for about six weeks now, since two days before Christmas, which is already referred to as last year. In fact I wonder, and it shocks me that I wonder, how will I get through the next nine months without my mother to talk to?

Wherever you are, Ginny—I mean, aside from the ashes waiting at the funeral home until your three children can get it together and sprinkle them in your favorite places—talk to me, talk to all of us. If ever there were a person who could make it back from the dead to give us a little sober advice, seasoned with humor of course, it would be you. So where are you? It’s not like you to be so stony silent.

So I’ll talk. Jessica will not stop wearing those infernal high heels, and you must tell her, Ginny, to stop eating like Robin Red Breast, quit trying to emulate Nicole Kidman, and cut out the Saturday morning video dancing. Put it in her head to stuff some carbs in, please. Remember how you used to bring over Hostess Cup Cakes and Ring Dings when Jessica was eight and she looked too skinny? Nothing homemade—you were not that kind of grandmother—but
Entenmann’s mini-chocolate chip cookies (the soft ones) and Suzy-Q’s. Of course, you never forgot the milk and hamburger either, to get us through from one payday to the next.

Speaking of food—did you know that’s how you died? A tiny particle of food, not large enough to be detected in an x-ray, found its way into your lung, causing something called aspiration pneumonia. Apparently, lots of elderly people die from this type of pneumonia since they—you—did not have the strength to cough up the particle. How’s that for irony? In a hospital with doctors and psychiatrists trying to stabilize your mental status, trying to figure out the correct combination of pharmaceuticals so that you could go back to your room at the nursing home a relatively sane person, capable of some semblance of happiness, while the body continued its corrosive process—and you die from a piece of food, eating being the one pleasure you still had left. I can see you now, enjoying Indian pudding topped with vanilla ice cream, just this past Thanksgiving at Nancy’s.

Which reminds me again: we never did get around to discussing the food served at the buffet following your memorial service last week at the Episcopal church. Yes, we had it at the church. I know you hadn’t been upstairs for a while, much preferring the less ceremonious, less stuffy, weekly AA meetings in its basement. But the food. Arthur Roebeck’s chicken-and-rice casserole was delicious—elegant, you would say. And the desserts: mini-éclairs, cannoli shells stuffed with chocolatey cheese, oatmeal raisin cookies with butterscotch chips, marble cakes topped with a chocolate frosting so creamy you could just sink into it and eat your way out.

But never mind the food; we didn’t even get to discuss the people who came—filled the church, actually, which surprised us—or the fact that cousin Midge was late, came in the side door while I was at the end of my eulogy—how rude—walked right in, sat right down, missed my tribute. (It was the best one, by the way, although Buzzy’s and Nancy’s could be tied for second place. I am such the middle child, am I not?) Midge never got to hear the wonderful recap of your life, with allusions, of course, to what most people would call mental illness; I am a realist, after all. But I did it tastefully, always with you in mind, Mama. Anyway, don’t you think Midge was incredibly rude?

“Rude? No, not at all. Typical, yes. What would you expect, Cynthia, from your father’s side of the family?”

“But Uncle Parker wasn’t there. Your own brother.”

“Well, I wouldn’t have gone to his funeral either; I wouldn’t have wanted to mourn my younger brother. He’s eighty-one. How could he have driven in all that traffic? Especially since he has to piss all the time. I know he loves me. It’s just as well I went first.”

“But Aunt Joan didn’t even send a note. You would have.”

“Was Shirley there?”

“In a pantsuit.”

At that, I’m sure my mother would roll over in her ashes; I don’t remember ever seeing her in a pair of pants. Or maybe not; maybe she wouldn’t be rolling over
in her ashes. After all, pantsuits and inappropriate entrances are petty grievances compared to the real catastrophes of life. Maybe she has nothing more to do with us down here on earth. Why would she—especially if there’s a God, as she so firmly tried to believe, right up until her last demented days, although she must have wondered at times where the hell He was—why would she be judgmental at all? And why am I worrying about where she is, anyway?

I’ll tell you why. Because we baby boomers are obsessed with aging and dying. Because we are next. And because work, play—it’s all really just a distraction from the truth, isn’t it? We may think we are doing something important by hanging onto life, but we’re all going to end up in the same place. No exceptions to the rule.

But here’s what I really think (sometimes): I believe as Shakespeare might have, that all the world’s a big, fat stage and at the end of this incarnation, we all reunite in a huge cast party and discuss the various parts we played, painfully, regretfully mournful of the fact that we forgot that they were just parts, and we were supposed to be learning something, rising above mendacity into meaning. At the cast party, between the ginger ale and the mocha chip brownies, I can hear myself say to Ginny how I wish I had been kinder, hadn’t been quite so irritated when Nancy and I had to shower your frail body, with all its evidence of loss and decay, the last few years of your life, how I wish I had gone to see you in that last hospital sooner than I did.

She, Ginny, would reply, no doubt, “Well, I could have been nicer too, but I felt so demeaned, not being able to take care of myself. I felt like such a burden to you and Nancy. And I don’t blame you for not visiting me in the hospital. I really wasn’t there anyway.”

Yet, the logistics of this life being a theatrical production defy the odds, don’t they? I mean, when would the cast party be held? After each incarnation? Or when the sun finally burns out? Maybe there is no cast party until the sun grows cold and it’s all over here on earth and humankind didn’t make it to Venus or Mars or some other galaxy in time. Which brings up the inevitable question of where. Is there a hall large enough to accommodate all of resurrected mankind?

How about reincarnation until then? A recycling of bodies. Science backs up this theory. Who was it that proved matter is neither created nor destroyed, just changed, converted into other forms of energy? Ginny could be reborn, recycled as Jessica’s child. She would love to be brought up in the city. And Dave and Jessica would be good parents, working with any mental illness, any bipolar disorder, any OCD, ADHD, et cetera (as we so love to label mental deviations from the norm down here on earth), finding a way to give Ginny back her right to live freely, devoid of unhealthy thinking. Yeah, sure, I think, but why was her thinking so unhealthy? What’s a few dead ducks compared to man’s real atrocities? No wonder she was paranoid. The news, local and global, would make—has made—anxiety freaks out of millions.

But reincarnation at least makes sense, gives hope, offers meaning. And there’s proof of a sort, with the ending of life so much like its beginning, just not as cute.
Babies and the elderly have a lot in common: not many teeth, some uncontrolled drooling, wobbly walking, trouble with sentence combining, bald heads with wispy hair, the need for diapers, complete dependency on another human being. But babies gain. The elderly lose.

My mother lost almost everything before she died. No child wants to put her elderly parent in a nursing home, but when Ginny needed round-the-clock care, a nursing home was her—was our—only option. The beginning of the end came about as a fall at Allerton House in the middle of the night. Going from the couch to the bathroom—she still preferred to sleep, fully dressed, on the couch in the living room, refusing to sleep in a nightgown under the covers of a bed, so she could make a fast “getaway” should the man with the axe start harassing her again—Ginny fell, somehow landing under the coffee table, face down, unable to move or holler. She was not discovered until she was missed at breakfast. At South Shore Hospital, we learned that nothing was broken, but she would need rehab, the object being to get her mobile again, this time with the help of a walker. At Bay Path Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Duxbury, it was soon evident that our mother now needed more than assistance in living; she needed constant care. At least now she would be washed and dressed every day. Here they could also safely experiment with various medications. They even managed to get her into pajamas once again. I think, for a while at least, even she felt safe, felt cared for.

But the elderly usually don’t stay in nursing homes for long, and my mother was no exception. She was at Bay Path for a little over a year, with satellite trips to Caritas Hospital in Brockton for psychiatric evaluations interspersed throughout the year, in what would prove to be vain attempts to balance her erratic chemical levels with other drugs. The pills would work for a while, but nothing ever gave her lasting relief from the paranoia. Back at Bay Path, she scared off all roommates, eventually ending up with a room of her own, right outside the second floor nurses’ station where she could see (and call out to) whoever happened to be on duty. Bay Path proved to be my mother’s last formal place of residence.

The right hip was the proverbial straw that broke my mother’s contact with the earth: a pain at the end of November, excruciating; an x-ray at the nursing home, routine; another ambulance drive to Jordan Hospital in Plymouth; and the long wait for a surgeon who had to take care of an emergency Cesarean section while Ginny lay in a hospital bed, fretting almost uncontrollably. Later he, the doctor, told us, “Oh yes, babies take precedence over old ladies.” I secretly wished that doctor a long, long life, blowing out one hundred thirty-four candles from a wheelchair, all relatives deceased or too busy to care.

Demented, overwhelmed, and in pain, with none of her usual medication to manage her various psychoses—not that they had been doing her much good in the last five years anyway—my mother began her post-operative recuperation in the psychiatric, geriatric ward of the hospital, waiting to be transferred to a hospital in Boston that specialized in...
mentally ill—the hospital where she would die. While she recuperated, Ginny, grossly out of character, ungraciously accepted a few visitors. She introduced me to one nurse as “a teacher, but not a very good one.” She told Jessica, “You ought to have children.” And wagging a finger at Juliette, my other daughter, she maliciously intoned, “And you ought to be married.” But that’s not exactly true. She actually got her two granddaughters mixed up, telling Juliette, the unmarried one, to have children, and Jessica to get married. All this was said, of course, between the usual pleading: “Get me out of here. Please. You don’t know what they do to me in here when you go. At night, it’s just awful. Please, just take the hurt away.”

One day, when Nancy and I visited Ginny, shortly after the operation to repair her fractured hip, we witnessed an extremely agitated, unreasonable substitute for our mother, fraught with fear. Sweating, trying to worm her way out of the ties that bound her to the bed, she pleaded with us, whispering vehemently, “Get me out of here. The executioners are coming to get me first thing tomorrow morning.” Moving a crooked finger across her throat, she said, “I am going to be beheaded.” Without losing a beat in the conversation, my sister plumped up our mother’s pillows and said, “No, you’re not. You received a presidential pardon about an hour ago.” With a huge sigh of relief, my mother accepted her pardon graciously, and I looked upon my sister with a new sense of absolute and endearing love.

In those last couple of weeks, it seemed as though our mother resurrected the nasty drunken character she had played so well when we were all younger. It was a part we never expected her to reprise. But Ginny had no intention of going gently into any sort of night, and we did not witness, in those last days, those final hours, even a momentary reprieve into sobriety. The right-minded Ginny, the sane and sober mother who had returned to us every morning after every drunken night, all those many years ago, was never to come back again, lost irrevocably to the forces of fear.

The silence is the hardest part, Ginny. The unrelenting stillness. I will have to fill the void with sound. Forgive me, but I must reclaim you just long enough to hear how ecstatic you are to know that Jessica will have a child in November. I need to hear you say what I know you would say had you lived and been in your right mind, and so I will write the words that will resurrect your voice. This is what you would say: “Well, it’s about time! There is no better joy in the world than to have children. Look at the three jewels I had.”
still life

corinne corey
soft pastel 18” x 24”
trees II  daniel silva
woodcut 7” x 5”
simple geometry
laurie riley
fine silver
earrings .5” x 1.5” bracelets 1.25” x 7”
collage of woven color

zelmia harvey
textile 86” x 20”
landscape II

anthony ferris

multiple woodcut, variable print 56” x 30”
self-portrait

daniel silva

woodcut 7.25” x 10.5”
ascension, 2009

alan tibbetts
army footlocker,
found objects, plaster
15” x 4” x 33”
froot loops

sandra sorrenti
acrylic paint 18” x 24”
“My God, I’ve killed it, the poor thing! I’ve killed it,” she cried.

Steadying his breath in the passenger seat, the man laid his hands neatly across his lap and stared in the direction of the windshield, rain forming soft ripples gliding down the slope of the glass. He followed one particular wave as it slipped nearly to the base before being swept away by the ticking wiper blade, and he watched another start from the top.

With his breathing under control, he placed one hand behind the woman’s headrest and slowly twisted his body around. She sobbed still, her forehead pressed on the wheel between her fists, and murmured in gasps about what she’d done. He removed his hand from her seat.

The man gazed beyond the rear window, but could see nothing, just the broken gleam of a distant streetlight. He shifted back into his seat and glanced down at the dashboard, then at the door handle beside him. He paused for just a moment and pushed the door open. The rattle of rain outside joined the cannonade on the roof.

“Give me your keys,” she said.

“You’re drunk.”

He began to dispute the claim, though he knew she was, in fact, in a much better state for driving than he. When she merely glared at him, hand outstretched, he dug into his pocket and
dropped the keys into her palm where they lay for just a breath—just long enough to be a clearly intentional pause. She turned from him and paced to the driver’s side door, her tall black shoes clicking pointedly on the pavement. When her steel expression wavered as she fumbled with the key in the door, the man turned his head, pretending not to notice. The woman stepped into the black coupe, closed her door and adjusted her position in the seat, adjusted the rear-view mirror, adjusted her dress around her waist, and pressed the unlock button beside her. At the whir of the electric lock, the man opened his door and ducked into the passenger seat.

He thought about the smell of her perfume filling the car. If she were half the woman I fell for, I’d still love her, as long as she smells like that. It wasn’t a fruity smell, or a flowery one. It was a rich, woody smell. Or maybe like an old book, but not so musty, just full like the pages. Or it could smell like a river after rainfall—Well, now I’m just being poetic, he thought. It smells like sweaters and her apartment before she moved into mine; that’s why I like it so much.

Rain started to fall, droplets at a time landing on the windshield, as the woman put the shifter into gear and left the parking lot behind. The man hoped she would see, in the imploring look he gave her, that he truly did feel sorry about the fight, but she simply looked past him as she checked the traffic out the right-side window. She gets like this sometimes. The drive should calm her down.

He wanted to apologize, to make everything right again. He always wanted that comfort, the relieving squeeze of her hand on his, letting him know he had nothing to worry about. Whatever got him to that place fastest. But I can’t be the one to concede every time. It can’t always be me. It’s the principle of the thing, he thought. The woman was pulling onto the highway, windshield wipers like metronomes, visibility flickering in time. No, it’s worse than that. A principle is nothing. I’d apologize every time and bear it if it were that simple, but if it’s always me apologizing, she’ll believe it’s me making her miserable. “Yeah, I know. You’re always sorry.” That’s what she would say if he didn’t carefully avoid the word “sorry.” When you apologize, he thought, debate ends and from that point on, you were wrong. It was your fault, regardless of the truth.

The man festered in his thoughts, staring at the window without seeing anything. He could apologize for the inadvertent insult, or she could apologize for overreacting. Those were the choices, and this time he had made up his mind. The more he thought, the more he became convinced he wasn’t at fault. Not about the fight in the restaurant; that had ceased to matter. He wasn’t at fault for any of it. Their relationship.

The ride remained silent. Not silent—the battering rain had been playing on the car the whole time. It was in fact quite loud, but no one had tried to speak. There was no reference point from which
to notice the volume. Nothing distinguishing, until the bridge. As the car passed under it, the homogeneous, unnoticed roar ceased for a startling moment, as if the rain itself had stopped, slinging silence upon the car like a snap.

And then the tumult returned. It had not been stopped, only hidden. But it resonated with him. As he recognized what had happened, and that it often had before, but that every time there was that moment of mystery and surprise, he realized he loved this. This is happiness, he thought. It was then, as he savored this, that a small animal dashed into the road ahead of them.

“My God, I’ve killed it, the poor thing! I’ve killed it!”

The man’s stomach had lurched as the creature leapt into the road. He tried to remember if he’d felt a bump. The woman had screamed. He remembered her gripping the wheel, repeating “Oh my God,” before ever touching the brake. They were a good thirty yards past whatever it was before they slid to a halt off the side of the slick road.

He turned to her, began to reach out, and then he remembered the fight. He placed his hand on her headrest instead. He wanted to comfort her, to rub her back and tell her everything was all right as she cried with her head on the wheel. He could do that. She looked so sweet, and he again became conscious of her perfume, and of the haunting peace passing under the bridge had given him. But he pushed these thoughts aside, unsure of what to feel. He wasn’t ready to let their fight be forgotten. He turned to check the road behind them.

“What are you doing?” she asked as he stepped out of the car. He motioned for her to wait and walked away without a word. The rain was lessening, but only a little, and he was soaked through within seconds. He paced slowly, scanning the glistening asphalt by the blue glow of his cell phone. It illuminated almost nothing. And nothing was what he hoped to find. He didn’t want to know. And yet, for someone searching in the rain for nothing, he found himself searching thoroughly. He knew he wouldn’t let her know if he found anything. It would only upset her. He could cheer her up and she would forget she was angry, and he told himself that would be enough. No apologies.

Approaching the lone streetlight, the man convinced himself there was nothing to be found this far back. But he saw, a moment before he would have safely turned back toward the car, the pile of light fuzz in the dirt, just within the radius of the streetlight’s orange pall. It trapped him as he looked on, pausing, not wanting to move close enough to see. From where he stood, it could still be a plant, or some trash thrown by the roadside.

He stepped closer, though he was sure he shouldn’t, until he could clearly make out the scene in its grotesqueness.
The animal lay on its side, flattened through the middle, belly to spine, its ribs crushed in. But its whole front half and most of its back legs seemed intact. There wasn’t even blood or gore that the man could see, just a largish rabbit. It looked almost normal, save for the depressed midsection, making it all the more gruesome. The man turned and scanned the area around him; in case the woman was watching, he would still appear to be looking.

He came back to the rabbit, not yet ready to leave it, and gasped, horrified to see that it was moving. Not much. Not any optimistic amount. But its head was up. It could lift its head, look around. The rabbit was alive to experience its own terrifying tragedy, and it looked directly at the man. He stared back, wonder mixing with grief for the doomed creature. Its eyes revealed no pain, no accusation, no expression to hint at its predicament. They were blank. They seemed unnatural to the man, frighteningly controlled. He imagined the rabbit should at least look scared, if not like it was experiencing excruciating pain—which it seemed it should be, unless its spine being broken protected it from feeling. There should have been fear in its eyes. Fear of death, fear of the end, fear simply at its inability to move if it didn’t understand that it was dying. Those eyes should have been pleading. There should have been something, not just the emptiness. Not just the plain, monstrous look of nothing.

I should kill you, the man thought, anxiously. I should end this for you, spare you a slow death or having to watch something eat you. The man looked vainly into the night for guidance. He thought about crushing its head under his heel. It was all he could think of. He imagined, though he knew better, that the rabbit would feel betrayed by this, with its dark eyes seeing what was coming and begging to know why. Or begging to know why it was being abandoned, if the man just left it to die alone. How could he make it understand? I’d save you if I could, believe me. But the man knew that was absurd. There was none of this in the rabbit’s eyes. It would not feel betrayed, or abandoned. It didn’t need anything from him. The man found uneasy reassurance in this. It would maintain a kind of dignity in death. He shared one last look with the rabbit, supplying the despondency it lacked.

“I’m sorry,” the man said.

He got back into the car, soaking the upholstery. “There was nothing. It must have gotten past you.” He said it curtly, without compassion.

“Are you sure? Are you lying?” she asked.

“There’s nothing there. It got away.” With no softness in his voice, he didn’t sound at all like he was trying to comfort her, like he would be lying to make her feel better. He sounded angry. She would believe him; anger sounds like the truth.

“Oh, thank God,” she said, sighing in relief and trying to compose herself. She turned to him.
as he used his wet hands to wipe away the cold water dripping from his face. “Thank you for checking,” she said. “That was sweet of you.” The man thought she sounded tentative, like she was testing his mood. She continued. “I’m sorry. About tonight I mean. I’m sorry I got so upset. I guess I was just being touchy.” She lifted her hand, hesitated, and then put it on his, resting on the console. It felt good. He didn’t break his gaze from the windshield, but he focused on the feeling of her fingertips on the back of his hand, the gentle tickle and the warmth. It was exactly the comfort he had wanted, and he hadn’t had to apologize. “Are you mad at me now?” she asked.

His expression remained blank while he thought about her question; he gave her nothing to show that for a moment he had been happy. When he turned to her, there was no sign of forgiveness in his face, nor in his voice when he said, “No, let’s just go home.” Nor was there any sign of anger now. He pushed the feeling of her hand from his mind, focusing on the rain pelting the glass in front of him.
down at the yard
william regan

Behind the concrete edifice,
A run-down pickup truck stands
In boastful decadence on cinderblocks
Like the Venus de Milo on its pedestal.

Piles of rock salt snowcaps
Staining the cracked pavement,
Stray nails scattered below
Our feet like landmines,
A homeless tire rests
Under a rusty bumper;
Bitter cold on bare skin,
Tall grass surfaces
From fractures in the foundation,
And empty beer cans lay crushed amongst weeds.
A thick film of grease and testosterone
Coats steel, blocking
Its luster with darkness,
The rusty chainlink fence embraces
The vines that weave through it,
A lifeless refrigerator lies
Disembodied from its doors,
Stacks of pallets, rotten,
Devoid of purpose;
We like it here because
Our conversation is unfiltered,
We do as we please.
Throng of outdated hand-tools
And misfit hardware
Spread among the dripping cans
Of leftover paint,
And the burn of whisky in our chests.
Only music exists.
Building from bass, the rhythm
churns forward, orderly.
Outside both my eyes, I hide
behind sympathy and verse.
I am perfectly alone. All the while
the harmony designs
a mantel-place landscape
along a track of beats and measures.
For a moment, the world is decent.
Jessica sat at my kitchen table that night in mid-February and very quietly announced, as though she were contemplating the weather; that Richard Gere would be the star attraction at the Boston Youth Moves (BYM) yearly benefit, and it was all I could do to prevent my aging body from leaping across the table to plead with her to let me go. “Sure,” she said, in that same matter-of-fact voice, “but you have to buy a ticket and they’re $175 apiece.” Did she think that would have kept me at home? I would even buy two tickets, one for me and one for Nancy, my younger sister—albeit only by three and a half years—who also happens to be my best friend. I knew without asking that my husband would have no desire to see Richard, preferring to watch whatever sports event from the plethora of choices that happened to be on that Saturday night in March, probably English soccer. I would have no trouble convincing Nancy to go with me. I’d simply say, “How often in a lifetime do you get to be in the same room with an officer and a gentleman, one hunk of an older man and not a bad dancer to boot?” It took her four seconds to say, “I’ll pick you up at seven.”

My mind raced. I even had a dress I could wear—the one I wore to Jessica’s wedding two and a half years ago. I suggested Nancy wear that ugly blue thing that covers her gorgeous legs—the one she brings out on certain occasions because it hides the rolls, if you know what I mean—telling her, of course, that yes, she looks stunning in it. I was so excited; I could hardly stay within the lines of my molecular structure. Here’s what lay before me on that cold but promising February night: two weeks to plan appointments for an eyebrow waxing, a manicure (Revlon’s Midnight at the Park), a possible pedicure (even though I can’t stand anyone touching my feet), fourteen lettuce-leaf lunches, no wine with weekend dinners, and several dreams with a couple of recurring scenarios.

This is what I envisioned: me, gorgeously alluring, and Richard,
not able to take his eyes off my dancing legs, my lithe body moving in its black, silky dress, my perfectly coiffed and still-brown hair with no errant strands flipping up when they should be rolled under. (Amazing that I have no gray, isn’t it? Jessica will laugh when she reads this and say I always try to make myself look attractive in stories.) And finally Richard’s gaze is drawn to my lovely, large brown eyes (I eliminated the glasses and dark circles for this particular scenario). I just make sure not to smile and show my aging teeth that cannot be whitened because they are bonded.

But enough about my looks; we are in a luxurious dining room—muted lights, plush carpet, white linen on round tables, polished-to-perfection dance floor (the décor proves to be the only true part of this story). Richard and I are dancing quietly, involved hand to hand, eye to eye. And my Walter Mitty mind— inherited from my mother—attempts to create a witty, albeit profound, dialogue between Richard and me:

“Boy, am I glad to see you, Richard,” I say, all coquettishly smiles and glamour. “I’m glad to see that you really didn’t die in that mudslide.”

He smiles, as only he can, and gleefully twirls me around the dance floor, his hand pressing into my lower back, drawing me in close, recognizing, of course, that I am referring to his latest picture, *Nights in Rodanthe*.

In another of my dream scenarios, we are leaning against the bar, facing each other, lights still muted, carpet still plush, white linen covered in sparkling silver and dinnerware from Tiffany’s, talking quietly, intently:

“And what is it you do, Cynthia?” His eyes are riveted on mine as he awaits my answer.

“I’m an English teacher at a suburban high school.”

“‘What literature do you teach?’ He says this after telling me I don’t look like the studious type, eyeing my dress, my svelte figure, leaning in close.

“‘Right now, *Macbeth*, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, and *The Great Gatsby.*’ Mentioning all three will, of course, add to my versatility, not to mention, my intelligence.

“‘Ah, *The Great Gatsby*, such a great dreamer, all that ‘romantic readiness.’ I loved that book. You’re so lucky to be able to read for a living. You must be incredibly intelligent. Beauty and intelligence in one woman is something you don’t come across very often, you know.”

Melting almost into the roses in the carpet, I continue, telling Richard things I have only admitted to my family and close friends. “I wrote a book once, too.” I decide not to tell him I had it published at my own expense and that it is still number three million something on Amazon.com.

“Really,” he returns, obviously fascinated. “Tell me more.”
Me (obligingly): “Well, it’s called Thirst and it’s about our thirst for the spiritual in life.” Suddenly I remember that he is a Buddhist, and we have an incredibly spiritual conversation that goes on well into the night, until Jessica tells me it’s time to go. What has happened to my sister in these scenarios, I haven’t got a clue. I only know that she has no place in this dramatization.

The last thing Richard says to me is this: “Where can I buy the book?”

And here’s the ending: He reads it, loves it, calls Oprah, and once again we are reunited as I am telling Oprah the story of Richard and our conversations and what it has to do with the book—an overnight sensation on all the best-seller lists. Oprah and I have been discussing featuring it in her book club when she announces that she has a surprise guest, like the ones on This Is Your Life. Richard walks on stage and once again we are in each other’s arms. But here’s the best part: Lifetime Television for Women wants to make a two-hour movie out of one of my short stories; Richard Gere has agreed to play a part, but only if I will accept the part of his love interest in the title story.

Oh, I can hear you now, Jessica, with at least two comments: “Why do you always have to mention your legs and still-brown hair in every single story?” and “Even when you write about Richard Gere, it always ends up being about you.”

“Of course,” I will answer, and then we will laugh our heads off, especially since we both know what really happened on March 8, 2009, at Westin Copley Place, this recreated Gatsby world, this place where American dreams are promised, but never delivered.

March 8: I had the worst hair day of the year. Ends flipped up and stuck out; I put in too much conditioner and my hair was flat, not something a fifty-nine-year-old woman wants. I looked in the mirror one hour before showtime and decided that all the makeup in the world would not camouflage the sagging skin on my neck. Even with my glasses off, to somewhat mute the reality, I looked like my grandmother did back in the fifties. Harrumph. My insecurities had a field day: When did Nana bequeath me her neck? My sister doesn’t have the neck yet, although it’s starting its downward journey. Neither does she have to wear glasses to make out the distinguishing features of people’s faces; she does, however, have to dye her hair; while I do not. Even so, as I stood in front of the mirror, I knew she would look better than I did, which upset me since she’s ten pounds heavier than I am. She just knows how to dress is all; instead of the blue number, she informed me via cell phone that she had bought a new, knee-length sparkly thing and looked gorgeous.

Anyway, we arrived, and opened the door to the V.I.P. room on the fourth floor of the Westin Copley, where Jessica, on BYM’s board of directors, and many other beautiful people would soon be able to talk to Richard. Why Jessica? my jealous heart asked. (Yes, aging mothers
can be jealous of their young, gorgeous daughters. I made a mental note that my newly pregnant daughter could still get into what was probably a size-six dress.) She wasn’t even born when Richard rescued me—I mean Debra Winger—from her lousy factory job, carrying her into the promise of an emerald green, ruby red life. Jessica and other reporters, along with photographers, and the generous corporate couples who donated more than a thousand dollars to the dancing company’s cause were privileged enough to converse with Richard before all the minor figures (the ones who paid under a thousand dollars for a ticket) would be admitted into the banquet hall for the buffet dinner. Jessica blushed, hushed, and rushed us out of the room: “You aren’t supposed to come in here. Wait outside in the other room.” Dutifully, we exited the room where we did not belong. This other room, the foyer to the V.I.P. room, was very lovely, elegant, with waiters offering champagne amid groups of people talking, waiting. Mitzi Gaynor, the other celebrity guest speaker, was in this room as well, posing for pictures before going into the V.I.P. room, with photographers and reporters crowded around her. My sister, even without her glasses, recognized Mitzi. I had to put mine on and still did not recognize her, even though I admired her immensely in South Pacific. She had on too much makeup, her dress was too short, and she was making a concerted effort to stand up straight, smiling with stark white teeth that flashed right along with all those important cameras. She’s at least seventy-five. Why, I wondered, somehow already knowing what my chances of talking to Richard would be, why are we—why am I—so obsessed with aging, with staying presentably, flawlessly beautiful? Will I still be preening in front of the mirror at seventy? And who really cared about my just-waxed upper lip—which got burnt, by the way, making the area around my mouth a little too red even with the makeup. All around Mitzi—whose legs were still gorgeous, and justified the short dress, I suppose—all around my sister and me were young girls in sleeveless gowns, exposing taut arms, smooth skin, necks that were necks, not pelican pouches or turkey wattles. But here are the real, more to the point questions: Why can’t I just accept graciously the things I cannot change? Why can’t I go gently, without all that resistance, into middle age, into old age? This thinking, this depressing thinking—all too common after watching my mother deteriorate, losing everything to age, watching out-of-control skin lesions taking over her legs, looking as though grape jelly had been ladled onto them in hunks—this thinking began to permeate and destroy any hopes I had for fun that night. Oh. Except for one small moment when we saw Richard Gere, or rather when Richard Gere saw my sister and me. This part goes by fast: Getting off the elevator, surrounded by an entourage of men (bodyguards? at the Copley?) he moves (waltzes?), just as he did when he came to get Debra Winger, through
pockets of lesser donors, eye on the V.I.P. room. Standing in the foyer, sipping champagne, leering at Mitzi and then spotting Richard, I wonder, do I have time to take off my glasses? I could reach out and quite possibly touch an arm as Richard Gere passes within a few feet of Nancy and me, who stand breathless, speechless. And here’s the moment, the seconds: He looks to the right and sees us. It is not my imagination, I hear myself later telling Jessica, because Nancy also notices it and later, one minute later, tells the bathroom cleaner that Richard Gere looked at us. And he does, as though he recognizes us. Stares for maybe thirty seconds. Okay, pauses for maybe thirty seconds, and half smiles. I wave like a schoolgirl, and am instantly annoyed with myself. What am I, an aging groupie? But he really did look, more than look, less than stare, in recognition. And that was it, the best part of the night, our only personal contact with Richard Gere. No more glances our way, no photographs with the actor, no conversations, certainly not a dance, just that moment.

At dinner, Jessica offers what she thinks to be a plausible reason, “Oh, he probably thought you were his sisters. They’re also here since his niece is a graduate of the dance program and is speaking tonight.”

I want to strangle Jessica—she with the taut arms, she in the stunning, figure-fitting, red dress, she with all her neck skin in its perfect and smooth place, she with the gleaming white teeth and sturdy bones. I want to strangle her because Nancy and I know the truth: Richard Gere, for one fleeting moment, thought that I was Diane Lane and that she was Cindy Crawford.

That night depressed me for a long time. I took to my metaphorical bed for at least three days and three nights, trying to come to terms with my aging body, my need for … romance? validation? fun? What? What was it? The pictures came back online. Mitzi Gaynor looked stunning. Nancy looked stunning. I still looked like my grandmother, only my hair was flatter than flat, not beauty-shop curled like my grandmother’s had always been, and my face was old. Richard Gere, on the other hand, in other pictures with other people, still looked dashing, even with his very white hair and wire-rimmed glasses. But we all know what they say about aging men in relation to aging women.

Imagine me, thinking someone would be swept off his feet looking at me. What was I thinking? I had read The Great Gatsby. But judging someone else’s life and being in someone else’s shoes are two very different experiences, aren’t they, my reader-self says. F. Scott Fitzgerald knew that even the prince gets rejected in the end, even men fall victim to the shallow promises of the American Dream, yet Fitzgerald failed to step away from the allure of the dream himself until it was too late—a dream and a boozy lifestyle that contributed to his wife’s mental illness and his
own death: all those parties, all that sparkling champagne, all the handsome glitter of tuxedoed men and silk-gowned women rescuing one another from the squalor of life in the factories. Well, at least my dreams are in good company.

Yet, most traumatically of all, who was I to think, I wondered, that I was any smarter than Ginny, that because I am not dependent on a man for financial support, that because my intellectual life is busy, filled with writing and teaching, that because my social life is overflowing with children and friends, who was I to think I would not end up like my mother, still waiting for some sort of prince to rescue her even when she was in the nursing home? Or was it not even that, was it simply some validation that we are still worthy of human contact because we are still attractive?

At least now I think I understand a little more completely, a little more compassionately, why my mother wanted so desperately to dance with Russell Curry, so long ago, when I was fourteen and she was thirty-nine.

___________

Ginny. Self-medicating Ginny. Before the days of pills, there was always booze. Ginny and George had no money, but they both came from money, and Ginny wanted her three children to be schooled in the social graces. Even on a sparse budget, my sister and I took weekly piano lessons, and of course, she signed all three of her children up for Russell Curry’s twice monthly ballroom dancing program. Mr. Curry was suave, debonair, dashing in his polished shoes and tuxedo, with his jet-black hair Brylcreemed into place (a little dab’ll do ya), and yes, the cliché chiseled features; he was a handsome man, in total charge of his partner—we’ll call her Marie—as he glided with her across the polished ballroom floor, a floor that seemed to sparkle like champagne, a floor that could promise even Gatsby some sort of happiness. Every dancing lesson included one hostess in addition to Russell and Marie. The hostess was a volunteer, a mother of one of the students. Mr. Curry would demonstrate the waltz or the foxtrot or the tango step with his partner, before instructing the boys on the politely proper way to ask a girl to dance.

“You want to approach your prospect in a gentlemanly way. You don’t go up to her, grab her by the arm, and say, ‘Come on, snake, let’s roll.’”

One night in March, it was my mother’s turn to hostess. I knew, even at fourteen, that my mother was drunk before we left the house. Her lipstick was not in line with her lips. She was gaining weight then, but had on a beautiful rust-colored fitted suit—it just fit. My father either did not notice or did not care; she had left his dinner in the oven. Even as a young man, George adhered to a schedule: work, cocktails, dinner, bed by nine. He rarely deterred from this routine, never to take my mother to a movie at Loring Hall in downtown Hingham or a show in Boston or a dance
at a club, never even a walk around the block. A businessman, my father was definitely not the Jay Gatsby—not even the Russell Curry—type. So my mother and I left at six-thirty, with my father sipping away at a tall bourbon and water, watching the local news. My mother had enough sherry in her bloodstream—and it didn’t take much to make her slur her words and weave in her heels—to mortify me, leaving me with a memory that embarrassed me for years. I remembered as we drove through the tree-lined streets of Hingham: At six, the sherry line on the decanter was far below where it had been at three that afternoon. My sister, brother, and I had already begun to keep an eye on such measurements.

My classmates and I were all seated, waiting for Mr. Curry to begin. He stood across the shining ballroom floor, lined in a row with Marie and my mother. My eyes, of course, were on my mother, who was trying to stand tall and still, but a foot tapped to the music—“Blue Danube,” I think—and her body swayed drunkenly, musically. She smiled, and even from where I sat, I could see the lipstick spot on her white teeth. Mr. Curry demonstrated a waltz step with Marie, incorporating a turn, counting one, two, three, turn. So smooth, so graceful, so quiet until my mother cut in on this demonstration, her suit noticeably tight, her curled black hair dampening, flattened on her head, that stupid smile, those half-closed and glazed hazel eyes. Mr. Curry, surprised, gestured for my mother to return to her place and continued to demonstrate the waltz with Marie, until my mother butted in again, this time swinging her hips and raising one arm high above her head, snapping her fingers, the other arm wrapped around Mr. Curry. This dance, back and forth between the line and the dance floor, continued among giggles and the buzz all around me: “Look at that. Cynthia’s mother is drunker than a skunk,” and “Shh. She’ll hear you.” My mother continued to corner Mr. Curry, insisting on dancing. Out-of-step with the waltz, Ginny moved faster, trying to lead him into following her until she almost fell, or he said something and she stopped, moving back into the line. Who remembers how it ended? It just did.

This is what I know now: of course my mother wanted to dance. Even at thirteen or fourteen, I sensed her sadness. Later, as a young mother myself, I knew my mother, stuck in a loveless marriage, seemingly with no way out until her children were grown, only wanted to dance, to return, even if just for a moment, to the life she had during the war; before she married at twenty-one, when she had played the piano in the USO for all the boys who would soon be shipped overseas to England, France, Japan. How they must have loved her piano playing, her bright-red smile and deep-black hair. How easy to fall in love and then fall away—no commitment, no need to live without perpetual music, without perpetual dance. She only wanted to be loved, steeped in music, the center of attention amid the youthful gazes of all those adoring boys in their uniforms.
For a while, alcohol must have offered Ginny a solution to a dreary and boring life. Why else do people drink? During the middle and ending years of her marriage, sherry or whisky helped create a momentary illusion that perhaps crystal chandeliers and ballroom floors could make for a perfect life, could help ease the pain of living way beyond the reach of her dreams. But why, I ask myself, when she finally became sober and divorced George and lived on her own for the next twenty-five years, why did she still insist that God would be sending her a man, in His time, who would whisk her away to happiness? Why would she only feel complete with a man? She divorced my father when many women of her generation stayed stuck, suffering humiliating and debilitating marriages in silence, and she stayed alcohol-free from 1966 until she died in 2008. It seems incongruous to me that she still believed the right man, a gift from God, could and would save her from despair when she herself had done so much to save her own life.

Compassionate and understanding as a daughter should be, I nevertheless refuse, as I approach the end of my sixtieth year on earth, to ever again be lured into the silly illusion that white linen and plush carpets walked on by celebrities offer a pathway to happiness, however brief: Richard Gere is just a man whose job is acting, a man with thick white hair and glasses—which he wore graciously, without apology, by the way—a man, to be sure, with the sexy swagger of a gentleman, but a gentleman with as little chance of rescuing any damsel in distress as Jay Gatsby or Daisy Buchanan had of rescuing one another.
Scott Campbell
2009 John Heller Award recipient

This annual award was established in 2003 to recognize a student whose body of work exemplifies excellence. The award received its name from one of our most beloved and distinguished faculty. Professor John Heller taught in the department of Art from 1968 to 2001. He was an inspired artist, a dedicated, gifted teacher; and an unselfish giver of his time, wisdom, and expertise.
johnny
digital graphics 9" x 12"

rashomon
digital graphics 18" x 42"

akira kurosawa

APRIL 25th & 26th
47pm & 3pm

campus center auditorium
fred’s shoe, 2009

alan tibbetts

shoe, acrylic paint, photographs, tools
6” × 4” × 14”
rock ridge
mary shea
stoneware
large pot 5" x 7"
self-portrait

bianca piemonte

colored pencil 30" x 30"
autumn leaves

corinne corey
copper foil 19” x 13”
still life  jillian donovan
charcoal 24” x 18”
ribbon candy
crystal ptacek
digital photography 13" x 8.5"
untitled

mary ellen mazzoli
silkscreen 21” x 28”
On Mother’s Day morning, I wake to the sound of my younger sister Bridget’s voice in the hallway outside my bedroom. “This is so disgusting,” she says, slamming the bathroom door. She calls to her boyfriend: “Sean, if that wasn’t my water that broke, then I definitely wet the bed.” Within minutes, they are gone, off to the hospital. I guess it was her water after all.

I lie back and close my eyes, not sure what I’m feeling. Excited for Bridget, sure, but there’s something else there, something I can’t place. Maybe jealousy, but I can’t understand why. Because you’ll never have children, that’s why, comes the answer as I float somewhere between sleep and consciousness. You can’t keep a baby alive long enough to give birth.

“Fuck off, brain,” I whisper into my pillow as I draw the sheet up to my chin, roll over, and then sleep for another two hours, until my mother calls upstairs to let me know that she and my dad are on their way to the hospital. She wants to know if I’m coming.

I sit up. “Eventually,” I call back. “I’ll be there by noon.” I hear my parents leave the house and I flop back down and stare at my ceiling fan for God knows how long before I force myself out of bed to begin what I’m sure will be a very long day.

A few hours later, as I walk through the automatic doors of South Shore Hospital, I remember how much I used to like hospitals as a kid. I liked the clean, sterile smell, the toy-filled gift shops,
and the Jell-O from the cafeteria in those little plastic cups. But then again, when I was that young, I only went there for good reasons—new siblings and cousins, mostly. It wasn’t until I was a teenager that they began to make me feel uncomfortable, around the time my grandfather had a series of strokes that landed him in a string of hospitals and rehab centers, hooked up to machines that made bizarre sounds. Every time I’d visit, Grandpa looked a little worse. A little weaker. A little closer to death. Future visits for various family members did nothing to remedy my hospital anxiety: car accidents, surgeries, broken bones, and cancer became my reasons for visiting. The smell hasn’t changed, nor have the gift shops and cafeteria desserts, but being here forces me to think about things that I’d rather blot out.

Six years ago, when I was twenty-three, I woke one morning to warmth trickling down my legs and pooling on the sheets. At first I thought I had wet the bed—something I hadn’t done since I was a kid—but when I jumped up and pulled back the sheets, I saw blood. A lot of it. And it wasn’t stopping; a puddle formed at my feet as the blood soaked through my panties and dripped down my pale, naked legs. I would have run for a towel immediately, but the cramps had me doubled over, and the best I could do was hobble to the bathroom and plant myself on the toilet. I hadn’t known I was pregnant at the time, but I knew I was having a miscarriage.

I had to go to the emergency room because it was a Sunday. I sat in the crowded waiting area for at least two hours and saturated two menstrual pads, comparable in size to pillows. When a nurse finally called me in for an examination, a miscarriage was confirmed. “Make an appointment with your physician,” she advised as I gathered my belongings and walked out of the curtain-partitioned room.

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I sat in my physician’s office a few days later, clad in a johnny that didn’t fit right. My doctor, a woman who was just a name on my insurance card until that moment, asked questions about my menstrual cycle, which had always been irregular, and commented on my extra weight and where I carried it. She took notes on a clipboard and peered at me over the rims of her wire-framed glasses. There was no real conversation between us, unless her random interjections of “Uh-huh” and “I see” counted as a discussion.

She called two days later, asking me to come back. She wanted to discuss some test results. I prepared for the worst, imagining myself with cancer and what I would look like without hair. When it was time to sit in her small office and hear her findings, I had picked at my cuticles so much that they bled.

The doctor diagnosed me with polycystic ovarian syndrome, a disorder that affects a woman’s menstrual cycle, blood vessels, hormone levels, heart, and ability to conceive and maintain a pregnancy.

“Wait—does that mean I can’t have a baby?” I gripped the edge of my chair so tightly that my hands lost all feeling.

She hesitated. “It’s not impossible to conceive, as you well know, but it’s significantly more difficult.” She went on to explain that there was an extremely high risk of miscarriage. There was something unsympathetic and
cold in the doctor’s delivery of the news, and she seemed ready to move on to her next patient. Or maybe she felt as awkward and uncomfortable as I did; giving a patient this sort of news couldn’t have been pleasant. She scribbled a prescription for a medication that would regulate my hormone levels. “Work on losing weight, too,” she said as she showed me to the door. “That will help a lot.”

When I went home that afternoon, I did what I always did when something scared me: I researched. I learned everything I could about the disease, poring over symptoms, treatments, and pictures of cyst-covered ovaries, which reminded me of raspberries. Though I knew each ovary was no larger than an almond, I imagined them the size and shape of yams, enveloped in cysts, akin to something warty and repulsive—a monster overtaking my body, something I couldn’t control. I was sure it was only a matter of time before the deformity spread to my skin, covering my body in fluid-filled cysts. It was all I could think about for days.

At the time, I thought I might rather have cancer. If I couldn’t have children, my life seemed a little less worth living.

When I was alone, I would close my eyes and imagine I was a statue, and I swore I could feel myself turning to stone. If I made any sudden movements, I feared I’d break down. In these moments, I felt I was in control of my body, that I could demand it to work the way it was supposed to. But my blood continued to circulate, my heart continued to beat, and my cyst-covered ovaries continued to malfunction.

I read somewhere that if a couple had unprotected sex regularly for a year and the woman didn’t conceive, chances were that someone in the couple was infertile. My boyfriend and I stayed together for another two years. Though I took the medication regularly and lost over fifty pounds, we never used protection, and I never became pregnant again.

I find the elevators, press the button, and wait. Normally I’m terrified of elevators, but today I have more important things to worry about besides the snapping of cables and crashing to an untimely death. The doors slide open, and I step in.

When I reach the birthing room, it’s freezing and dimly lit. There are several chairs, a small television mounted on the wall, and no windows. Sean is watching some movie starring Brendan Fraser. “It’s the only thing on,” he says, smirking.

Dad has already left. “He wanted you to have this experience,” Mom tells me. “They have very strict policies when it comes to the birthing unit; no more than three visitors at a time, no exceptions.”

“That was really nice of him,” I say, suddenly more grateful for the privilege. I set my bag down in the corner and sit in a chair beside my sister. “Hey, you,” I say as I gently rub her knee. “How’re you feeling?” And then I realize what a ridiculous thing that was to ask. She’s in labor.

Bridget doesn’t seem to mind my question. She says she’s feeling okay, just a little tired. “The contractions aren’t even that painful, really.” She
looks so little, lying there in a johnny that appears to be a size too big, despite her gigantic belly. Her hair sits in a loose, messy bun near the top of her head. She seems a little nervous, and I wish I could find something comforting to say, but all I can produce is “Thanks for letting me be here.”

“I’m glad you came—” She closes her eyes. Her breathing changes and she grips the bed sheets.

“Here comes another one,” Sean says. I ask him how he can tell, and he points to one of the machines. “When the numbers go up, she’s having a contraction.”

We watch in silence, and only begin speaking again when the numbers have dropped. I pull out my laptop and Shakespeare anthology a few minutes later. “Final paper’s due tomorrow,” I say to no one in particular. “I should’ve planned accordingly.”

I only work between contractions. It seems wrong to do anything while Bridget’s in pain.

After a few hours, the pain gets worse, and Bridget decides that listening to music might make it a little more bearable. Sean plugs an iPod into its docking station, and a song by The Eagles begins to play. “It’s the ‘Here Comes Shaneila’ mix,” Bridget tells me when I compliment her choice in music. “There are twenty-five hours of songs on there.” It’s been almost ten hours since the contractions started, and I wonder how long we’ll be waiting in this room. “Hopefully we won’t have to hear the entire mix,” she adds, and now I wonder if she has read my mind.

“So, Shaneila, huh?”

Bridget smiles. “You like that? Figured I had to call the baby something until I know whether it’s a boy or a girl. A Sean or a Neila. Kind of sucks, though. I wish I knew ahead of time.” Bridget’s main complaint throughout her pregnancy, besides the varicose veins and exhaustion, was that every time she had an ultrasound, the baby had its legs crossed.

“Oh, I don’t know,” I say. “I think it’s cool that it’ll be a surprise.”

Before she can respond, Bridget closes her eyes and groans as another contraction passes through. The numbers on the monitor climb rapidly, spiking higher and higher. She clutches her belly and works through the pain, and there’s nothing the rest of us can do but look on. When it passes, her eyes open slowly and we all begin to breathe again. I picture the baby inside Bridget, its little body shifting downward, preparing to leave the womb. I wonder if it can hear “Hotel California” over Bridget’s heartbeat and the constant hum of the machines.

I’m curious what the contractions feel like. I wish I could feel them, and I try to fool myself into believing that I want the pain because I don’t want my sister to suffer. But I can’t force the truth from my mind: I’m jealous of her and angry at myself, as I am fairly certain that I’ll never lie in a hospital bed and suffer the agony of splitting open. This is the closest I’ll ever get to experiencing childbirth, I conclude, and really, it just seems unfair.

Hours pass, and when the pain causes Bridget to cry out, Mom
calls the nurse—a young, blond-haired woman named Anne. She rushes in and checks Bridget’s cervix. “You’re at a six, sweetie,” she says. “Let’s order you an epidural.”

The anesthesiologist arrives and she explains in detail, over Bridget’s moaning, the size of the needle and how the drug will be administered through a catheter. Mom, who has been standing beside me, murmurs an apology as she turns and exits the room—seeing Bridget in this much pain is no longer an option for her. Anne hands Sean and me pale-blue surgical masks. I wonder why we have to wear them, but I don’t ask.

“Do you have to tell me what you’re doing?” Bridget asks as the anesthesiologist swabs her back with antiseptic. “I really don’t want to know.” She’s shaking now and struggling to curl into a fetal position, an act that looks nearly impossible, given the size of her belly.

“Most people want to know,” the woman says, shrugging, “but I won’t talk about it if you don’t want me to.”

“Do you like country-western, Bridget?” Anne asks, trying to direct my sister’s focus onto something other than the needle that will soon pierce her back. “You have such a wide variety of music playing in here.”

“Not really,” she says through clenched teeth. “But I like Johnny Cash and Bob Dylan.” She swallows hard, and I can see she’s trying not to cry, trying not to let the fear consume her.

“You have to stop shaking, sweetie,” she’s told. “Just think about how great you’ll feel in a few minutes. This pain will be gone.”

Bridget nods and adjusts herself and squeezes her eyes shut. Anne continues to talk as the anesthesiologist prepares the needle, and it reminds me of times that I had to distract Bridget during visits to the doctor’s office whenever vaccinations were scheduled. I’d sit next to my sister as our pediatrician swabbed her arm. I’d hold her hand and say to her what I would have wanted an older sister to say to me: getting a shot is nothing to worry about, we all have to get them; and hey, isn’t it cool that you get to sit shotgun all day; and what kind of pizza will you get at Pizza Hut after we leave the doctor’s; and, oh my, look at that picture on the wall—a goldfish swimming in a gumball machine, how funny. Then, as the needle entered her arm, Bridget would yelp and grip my hand tighter, digging her tiny, surprisingly sharp fingernails into my palm. She never cried, but I’d walk out of the office still holding her hand, or sometimes she’d stretch her arms up at me, signaling that she wanted me to carry her. And I always would.

Nearly twenty years later, I want so desperately to play that role again, but Anne does a stellar job without me, holding Bridget’s hand and telling her to breathe.

“Here we go,” the anesthesiologist says. “You’ll feel a little pressure.”

The string of obscenities that spew from my sister’s mouth the moment the needle enters her is impressive; there’s something almost musical about the way “shit-eating” and “taint-licker” meld together. Behind my mask I grin, delighted by the colorful
array of dirty words, but tears form in my eyes. Like my mother, seeing someone I love writhing in pain is just about the worst thing I can imagine.

Hours later, I put the laptop down, rub my eyes, and lean back, wishing I could sleep like everyone else in the room, but even though it’s two-thirty in the morning, I’m wired. Bridget seems to have found a comfortable position; she lies still most of the time, until the numbers on the monitor rise, and then her legs twitch and her brow furrows, but she doesn’t wake. She looks too young to be a mother, I think again, even though I know I’m being ridiculous.

When I was six, Mom taught me how to change Bridget’s diaper; I remember standing on a stool beside my mother the first time I sprinkled baby powder all over Bridget’s bare behind and learned how to fasten the safety pins without pricking myself or my sister. I got so good at it that I would volunteer to change her when the time came. I wanted to do everything a mother would do. I’m sure I would’ve tried to breastfeed her too, had the equipment been functional. I believed Bridget was my responsibility, and I took this very seriously.

I taught Bridget how to tie her shoes. I protected her from the flesh-eating lake blob that she was sure lived under the dock at our neighbor’s beach. When she was older, I gave her the sex talk (to spare her from the same awkward conversation I’d had with our mother years before). I sat in the backseat during her road test when it was time to get her driver’s license. The first time she got high, it was with me. When she needed birth control, I took her to the women’s clinic.

As far as surrogate-parenting goes, I made some questionable decisions, but none that I would change, really. She’s twenty-three now, a full-grown woman, but I’ll always remember when she was a messy-haired five-year-old who worshiped Barney the Purple Dinosaur and occasionally stuck rhinestones up her nose.

Bridget wakes with a jolt, sitting straight up in her bed. She’s nearly hysterical, pleading that Sean bring her to the toilet, sure she’s about to shit her bed. “That’s not shit, Bridge,” Sean says, taking her hand. “It’s the baby’s head. You can’t push yet.” Mom rushes away to find Anne, and I feel like I should be doing something, but I remain in my seat, a spectator, watching the scene unfold.

Anne returns, feels around inside of Bridget, and decides it’s time to call the doctor. “You’re nearly at a ten,” she says. “It’s almost time to push.” When the doctor arrives a few minutes later, he brings two more nurses along. I cross to the opposite side of the room and watch.

“Let’s see what we have here,” the doctor says, pulling away the sheet.

What a dumb thing to say, I think. Obviously, it’s a vagina. And there it is: Bridget’s vagina, in all its glory. “Oh, Christ,” I say, covering my eyes and turning away for a moment, because I feel like it’s something I’m not supposed to look at. But after the initial shock, I turn back and uncover my eyes. I have to look. And suddenly I’m eleven again, questioning how anything could pass through a hole so small; it seems beyond all logic and reason—something straight out of Alice in Wonderland.
Anne holds one leg; Sean holds the other. Mom and I stand at the foot of the bed beside the doctor, who is seated on a rolling stool next to his tools, which are neatly arranged on a stainless-steel tray.

The numbers on the monitor climb. “It’s time to push, Bridget,” Anne says. Her voice is gentle, and I know my sister is in good hands. “Push-push-push-push-push-push-push-push,” Anne says, coaching. I like the way her voice sounds. It’s soothing, and maybe a little hypnotic, because I find myself wanting to push, too. The rhythm of the music and voices of the people who surround me coalesce as I watch my sister break open. There’s something dark in the opening, which at first I think is a blood clot, but it’s actually a mop of dark hair on the baby’s head. I can’t believe what I’m seeing. I could never watch The Miracle of Life in science class, no matter how many times it was forced on me during my middle school years. I’d watch the beginning through the narrow spaces between my fingers, but as soon as there was any hint of blood or vagina, forget it; my palms would practically be fused over my eyes. I liked babies as much as the next person, but at twelve years old, I had no desire to see one emerge from a part of the body that I didn’t fully understand. No, thank you. But now I can’t look away. “Come on, Bridgie, push!” I shout, all but jumping up and down. “You’re a champ! A fucking champ! Keep pushing!” It couldn’t have been more than ten minutes since she started pushing, but even I can tell that she’s making major progress. It’s almost over. The contractions come faster now; there’s hardly any time for Bridget to rest in between. A vein bulges in her temple, her hair is soaked with sweat, and the moans and screams she releases are primal and raw, more like the cries of a wild animal than anything human. With every push, a little bit more of the baby’s crown surfaces, then the forehead, too. When I see the baby’s eyelids and the bridge of its nose, I cover my mouth and gasp, and then I gasp again when the doctor calmly picks up a long pair of scissors from the tray and carefully snips the skin that has been pulled taut.

Bridget screeches, and with one last push the baby shoots out in a fashion that is more cartoonish than anything I have ever seen in real life. The baby, who had taken the shape of the birth canal, snaps back into shape as soon as it hits the table and slides into the doctor’s hands. It is followed by what seems like gallons of blood and fluid. It nearly floods the table, and I half expect Bridget’s organs to spill out, too, but it’s all fluid. Just fluid.

The baby is grayish-pink, the color of half-thawed meat, caked with gunk, and damp with blood and water. And it’s not moving. Or crying. The umbilical cord is wrapped snug around its neck. Within three seconds, before I can even panic, the doctor unravels the cord, clears the lungs, and a shrill cry sounds from the baby’s mouth. Relieved, I cry, but turn away quickly so that Bridget can’t see me. I don’t want her to think anything’s wrong.

“It’s a girl,” Sean says before anyone else can make the announcement.

I have a niece. Neila Mae. Nurses brush past me as they move back.
and forth across the room, but they seem blurry and far away. I hardly move from where I stand.

The doctor presents Sean with a pair of scissors to cut the baby free from the umbilical cord. Once separated, Anne brings Neila around so Bridget can meet the one who had been using her bladder as a pillow for the last nine months. “I knew it was a girl,” my sister says, her gaze fixed on her daughter. She smiles, seemingly unaware of the doctor, who is preparing to deliver the placenta and sew her back together. The nurse takes Neila to the other side of the room to be cleaned, weighed, and swaddled, and Bridget seems to relax, hesitantly at first, until exhaustion overtakes her. She lies back and closes her eyes.

The doctor sews, the nurses tend to Bridget, and a freshly diapered Neila lies in a plastic-walled crib under a set of warming lamps.

Everything’s so overwhelming that my head feels as if it’s going to implode if I don’t get some sort of release, so I turn to my mother. As I sob into her shoulder, she cradles my head and strokes my hair. I think of Bridget, and then of Neila, and I can’t help but wonder how I’d feel if I could have a child of my own. I think of how Neila and I will always be connected. I think of the books we’ll read together, the movies we’ll watch, the cookies we’ll bake, the talks we’ll have over tea. “I was there when you were born,” I’ll tell her someday, “and it was the most spectacular moment of my life.”

I compose myself and pull away, leaving an uneven wet spot on my mother’s coral-colored blouse, and do not allow myself to think of the son or daughter I will likely never bear.
works by reiko kawahara
a portfolio

134. nature of cat
135. delights of the four seasons
139. puzzle
140. self-portrait

nature of cat
linen, paper, string, 15" x 15" x 8"
puzzle
graphite 23” x 30”

self-portrait
colored pencil 23” x 30”
The kid’s two this year
and in a neon pink snow parka
for although it is April
it’s April in New England.

Her snow pants are maroon
and large enough for three
so she squats when she sits,
it would be too easy to say,
like some surprising flower
amongst dry mulch and piles
of last November’s leaves.

But her grandmother does
plant her in the saffroned lawn,
and go inside a moment.
Someone is always watching here
from a stoop next door or through
a window from across the alley.

And when she comes back,
pointing at a robin shivering
on a frozen clothesline,
and when she says, “Spring,”
to the child blooming before her,
she’s right of course.

Even in here, behind the grimy
storm windows, even the inside plants
hunched in corners and clinging to
their few handfuls of dirt,
stir as if remembering.
the final goodbye

catherine barros

lithograph 12” x 9”
Tunnel—c. 1440, ‘funnel-shaped net for catching birds,’ from M.Fr. tunelle ‘net,’ or tunel ‘cask,’ dim. of O.Fr. tonne ‘tun, cask for liquids,’ possibly from the same source as O.E. tunne (see tun). Sense of "tube, pipe" (1545) developed in Eng and led to sense of "underground passage." Which is first attested 1778, about five years after the first modern tunnel was built.

tunnel book

donna k. schiavo

cotton string, paper 7” × 1” × 5”
Wake up; inhale my scent, drowsy eyes. Fold your frozen hands around my warmth as you would before a campfire. Let my fumes draw you, carry your lips. Open your eyes; take it. Stop staring at the clock; I want to feel your kiss again.

Put me down gently. I’m not the same: old, tasteless. No words, yet my heart spills down a drain. When you return, I won’t be here. But I’ve left—a ring behind.
who could do this?
*brianna weaver*

I feel the sound of heat clicking as
I read about a Jewish child bellowing
I dream about the sound of his skin crackling in flames.

A faint cry from my son’s bedroom, then dead silence as
I read of a newborn babe suckling on a scarred, barren tit
I dream about that sound.

Hot air howls from the radiator as
I read about the humming of an electric fence like millions of buzzing flies
I dream about the sound of a toddler impaled like a chuck of meat on a skewer.

I wake from reading
Like an angel, my son sleeps
In the next room I hear him dreaming.
self-portrait

caitlin gelatt

alumna
digital photography 20" x 24"
untitled

mary ellen mazzoli

intaglio 10" x 8"

PRINTMAKING
Ashes to ashes and dust to dust—that’s what the Bible says somewhere. And that is irrevocably true; I can see it now, if I couldn’t believe it before. My mother struggled all of her life against dying, would never discuss—even when things pretty much looked like she was headed toward that deep ditch of nothingness—the practical considerations of her own burial. On Thanksgiving at my sister Nancy’s, we had asked her point-blank. I mean, shouldn’t everyone have a plan, especially someone in her mid-eighties with a nursing home address? And we were right to ask, of course. It was to be her last Thanksgiving.

Once a week, during the final year of her life, she would travel two miles down the road from the Bay Path Nursing Home to Nancy’s house, her favorite luncheon spot, where she would be treated to hamburgers or Monte Carlos or Reubens or scrambled eggs and English muffins—my mother savored meals, her one final pleasure. She would go either on a Saturday or Sunday, depending upon what else my sister had going on with her own family of teenagers, dogs, cats, and of course, Bill, her husband. Ensconced in her favorite sofa, our mother would eat, talk to family members who preferred to visit in Nancy’s living room rather than the nursing home with all its elderly odors, and then later nap on the couch until it was time to check
back into the “hell-hole.” Though Ginny professed to hate the place, she insisted on getting back there by three p.m. This was when the shifts changed and she could find out who was putting her to bed. She would also be in the hub of activity, set to solve the mystery of which caretaker would befriend her that night. Finally, she was protected at all hours by the doctors and nurses and other staff members who came and went behind the nurses’ station.

That final Thanksgiving, before the turkey and butternut squash, my older brother was the first to broach the subject of what to do with corporeal remains—not hers in particular, but corporeal remains in general.

“I told Frances,” Buzzy began, “that I want my ashes spread out on the sands of Marco Island. I love that place.”

“I want to have half of mine spread in England,” my British-born husband said, “and the other half here. I haven’t decided which half yet,” he added in an obvious attempt to lighten up this dark subject.

“In Ginny’s flower garden,” I said. “Frances, you’ll have to sneak over in the middle of the night and deposit a handful among the forsythias or maybe the azaleas. Just make sure that when they fire up that furnace, I’m dead. The other alternative, underneath the ground, losing flesh day by day, is too macabre even for me.” I turned to face my mother. “What about you, Ginny? Where do you want your weary bones to rest?”

“Nancy, when is that turkey going to be done?” my mother hollered to my sister in the kitchen, looking past us all to the television set, sound muted but picture stuck on some pundit talking about president-elect Obama’s possible choices for cabinet members.

“Ma, you know we’re the ones that have to make the decision if you don’t. Don’t you want to be in charge of what happens to your body?” My brother said this as gently as possible.

“Bill,” my mother said, “can you switch the station? That Hillary Clinton is giving me a headache. Don’t you think she should be at home cooking dinner for her family?”

And the conversation kept going, our mother seemingly oblivious to our entreaties, our gentle suggestions. Sometimes I think that maybe she believed Christ’s Second Coming would happen just before she expired so she would have no need to worry about such mundane things as what to do with her body.

But, unless He came to her surreptitiously in the middle of some ghostly night, Christ did not make an appearance, personal or otherwise. So we made the decision, less than four weeks after Thanksgiving, to cremate her body rather than entomb it whole in a patch of earth in Hingham’s downtown cemetery. Why should we allow our mother’s body to slowly waste away in a claustrophobic coffin,
we reasoned? Ginny couldn’t even get into the backseat of her new Camaro in 1972; how could she rest easily in a coffin six feet under the earth? She’d be haunting people left and right. All those cohabitating bodies within boxes, waiting, waiting, waiting for what? That Final Judgment Day? No, best to get it done fast, done and over with. We opted for the furnace, making sure, of course, that she was good and dead before her body gave way to its inevitable ashes.

Today, six months after she died in the psychiatric ward of the Radius Hospital in Roxbury while awaiting chemical relief from her paranoid state of mind, waiting also to dislodge that stubborn piece of food causing infection and pneumonia in one of her lungs, pain eased by morphine and oxygen—six months after she died with her three children by her bedside, we will bury our mother’s ashes, commend her body to the earth in the garden of the Episcopal church where she made coffee for over thirty-five years for the members and visitors of Friday morning AA meetings. Although she became a member of the church shortly after her sobriety began in 1966, during my senior year of high school, Ginny preferred talk that centered around a more forgiving, more inclusive God—conversations that took place every Friday in the church’s basement. In fact, she really only went to the church in the first place because she was in love with the Reverend William Canter, or “the cantering man,” as my father dubbed him.

It was an unrequited affair, the majority of which took place in Ginny’s Walter Mitty/Nancy Drew mind, but it kept her going to the church faithfully for six or seven years after her sobriety began. I remember her examining his postcards in the light of the window one summer, between my freshman and sophomore year at college, looking for signs of his love. She took care of his dachshund while the reverend and his wife went to Europe for a few weeks that summer; between my freshman and sophomore year at college, looking for signs of his love. She took care of his dachshund while the reverend and his wife went to Europe for a few weeks that summer; and he wrote her weekly postcards. My mother was beautiful then, booze-free, svelte, still young, still hopeful that she would one day be married again, to the right man.

“He has to be secretive, you know. He’s with his wife. See? Read this latest postcard. It says, ‘See you soon. Give my love to Hannibal.’ I know, I just know, that word ‘love’ was meant for me, not the dog. That poor man, stuck without love with that diabolical woman. Terrible. Don’t you think so?’"

I had not seen my mother—my crazy, nasty drunk of a mother, the one who’d had to close the broom closet door in sets of eight, sixty-four times, after her first glass of sherry at the end of her drinking career, or the exhausted one who ranted and raved about housework in monotonous repetitions, “picking up,” “cleaning up,” spreading Comet bathroom scrub on the piano keys and bathtub after her second glass of sherry, or the one who passed out in the living
room chair shortly after supper on most nights, only to awaken a couple of hours later, hungrily for a submarine sandwich filled with hot peppers until someone went out to get one so the repetitious monologues would stop—I had never seen my mother look this good or be so happy in years. At that point, she was a few years sober, free of a man she had only married to escape her domineering mother at the age of twenty-two, and in love with someone who probably admired her, but did not love her in that way, and so I said, “Of course he loves you. Thank God he has you to write to. What a bore his wife must be.” What difference would it have made?

And it had made none, except that perhaps she was happy, romanced in her mind for a few years at least. Years later, the reverend remarried a few months after his wife died, but by this time my mother was dating a fellow alcoholic, purged of her love for the reverend. She never remarried, but was able to live within her mind and find happiness there from time to time, among her deep and fantastic dreams of men who would come to her rescue at the last possible moment, dreams that somehow remained true to their monotonous plots, even amid the increasing bouts of deep and fantastic paranoia.

Wednesday, June 24, 2009, six months and one day after Ginny checked out of life on earth and four days after my nephew Michael’s wedding, we fall into a circle in the beautiful foyer of St. John the Evangelist’s Episcopal Church, the minister chatting with us, as we wait for one or two more relatives so we can go outside and shake my mother’s ashy remains into the ground. The circle reminds me of the wedding-dance circle at the end of Michael’s reception, when guests, their inhibitions left at tables filled with champagne and chocolate wedding cake, entered the inner circle one at a time, strutted their stuff for sixty seconds, and returned to the periphery, letting someone else showcase his or her dance steps. I make a joke now and enter the inside of the circle; it’s a very different occasion, but I do a two-step on the Oriental rug anyway—something Ginny would have appreciated. A few uneasy laughs in the sanctity of the foyer and someone mentions the give and take of life. I have a feeling the good reverend does not approve of my momentary gaiety.

It is a fitting day for an ashes ceremony, although I only base this on my own fondness for romance. Outside in the garden, the rain will not let up. It is a gray day in a long series of gray days, warm, but drizzly with rain—drops that require umbrellas. Jessica stands beside me now and I wonder if she remembers, as I do, how Nana loved dancing with her first grandchild thirty-odd years ago, when Jessica was a baby, to “Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head.” Does Jessica remember the dance, her young grandmother’s laughter? Are the raindrops a sign from Ginny, a reminder to feel the joy brought about by the remembrance...
of a song? Or am I reading too much into this gray day, looking for some sort of order in this ceremony of ashes, just as my mother looked for love among the words of the Reverend Canter’s postcards?

Why, I wonder, do these questions so often haunt me: Is there some sort of higher power loving us, sending signs to be deciphered like symbols or metaphors in a novel? Does this life have meaning? Was my mother a nutcase all her life or did even she, as demented, as deranged as she could get, have something meaningful to say? Did her life add something to the world, this world that shuns the mentally ill, this world that would rather discuss openly the proliferation of nuclear warfare than the possible existence of a loving higher power? This world that separates the secular from the spiritual? With all her insistence on speaking of God, was my mother onto something true, or was she just some crazy lunatic with a wish to believe in something good?

The reverend begins his homily. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. For most things or all things? I have always wanted to attend a funeral, or in this case, an ashes burial, in the rain, particularly now, in part because I love my umbrella, a gift from my husband, with its Renoir print of men and women celebrating life with bread and wine and grapes in a floating café somewhere on the River Seine, sometime during the late nineteenth century. Renoir’s reds and blues and greens now pop open and make their ascent into the gray and weepy sky. I also love my new black patent-leather high-heeled sandals, darkly shining in place of the absent sun, with my red-polished toes, in honor of Michael’s wedding, peeking out with their own declaration of Renoir-type brilliance in an otherwise monochromatic day. I never wear heels, not even slight pumps, always flats. But lately, I think, I must be channeling Ginny because I suddenly have a penchant for high-heeled shoes and pencil skirts, although today I am wearing black pants and a blouse, underneath a black raincoat, and praying that she is not shivering in her ashes to see me thusly dressed. She never wore pants a day in her life; even when she gardened, she wore one of those pencil skirts. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me. At least I will try to believe that there is nothing to fear.

The lawn in this small patch of earth, surrounded by bushes that separate this rectangular garden of buried ashes from the parking lot, is a deep verdant color, lovely and lush because of so much rain—a pure and dewy stretch of green, except for a small, pale-purple, jagged-edged flagstone. It looks out of place, like a birthmark on an otherwise smooth surface. I soon come to realize this patch of purple covers the hole into which we will shake the ashes of my dead mother’s body. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. I hope so, Mama.

Each of her three children, under the rain, will shake a third
of Ginny’s ashes, now in a blue square cardboard box, into the hole. My turn comes, and I am fascinated by the pure white flakes, chips of what must be bone, among a mixture of a gray gravelly substance. The bone is so pure, so new- and fresh-looking, as though my mother’s body, inside, had remained deceptively young. Last night, Buzzy scooped out some of the ashes from the larger box and deposited them into three smaller round cardboard boxes so that we could all keep some of our mother’s ashes to sprinkle where we like. Now I remember he told us that he saw, in among the ashes, a large horseshoe-shaped staple that must have been used to repair her fractured hip, a remnant of the medical profession’s attempt at easing the pain of growing old and staving off, for a while, evidence of death’s inevitability. I look now for a brown, cracked tooth, the only one that remained in the front of her mouth in those last few weeks when she began to lose everything. Apparently, I am once again lost in the fascination of the macabre because Nancy takes the box from me, upends it, and pats the bottom, making sure all the ashes are inside the hole. Is it my curiosity or my fear that has made me so sacrilegious?

As we leave the garden, I wonder if my mother would have approved of what we are doing. But all I hear is her voice, even now, saying, “So, what’s Buzzy having back at the house for breakfast? I hope he made some scrambled eggs. And what about muffins? Did Nancy make those elegant corn muffins for us?” Dying was not among her plans, certainly not a priority. Right up until the end, she envisioned some knight in shining armor, Cinderella’s prince, galloping up to rescue her and depositing them both in a large house by the sea, one big enough for each of her children and their families to have their own ell. In fact, for several months before she died, she had her eye on the priest who came once a week to the nursing home, giving communion to the faithful or the desperate. She never drank the wine, remaining sober for a grand total of forty-two years (if you don’t count the anti-anxiety, anti-psychotic, and antidepressant pills), and in the last few weeks, she put lipstick on while Nancy held the mirror, wondering aloud when the priest was going to ask her out. When Nancy would tell her that priests do not marry, Ginny would sometimes reply, “Well, that’s because he hasn’t met anyone like me yet.” But those romantic notions, as unsettling as they sometimes were to us, kept her connected to hope, to something good. She lived so much inside her head, all of her life, never quite grasping that princes on white horses have very little rescuing power. Still, she was always looking, always hoping.

And as strange as it seems to say this about a woman who accused a paramedic of raping her on her way to the hospital for the hip surgery, she never gave up her hope in God, in meaningful signs, in order. Why else could she have seen the priest as a personal gift from God?
As we head toward our cars, the minister shows us a bronze plaque hammered onto the side of an archway above the side door of the church, displaying the names of the parishioners whose ashes are buried in the ground of the little garden. In the second column, near the end, the Reverend William Canter’s name appears. A few names down the list, the reverend’s second wife’s name appears. My mother’s name will end this column, before the inscribers start on a third. Her ashes commingle with the reverend’s. She would like that, I think, or at least get a good laugh out of it. Is this plaque a sign that I should laugh, remember that she once had fun? Or merely a list of the dead whose ashes occupy this space in time? Am I my mother’s daughter, looking for, believing in, signs as sacred messages, where there may be only dust? Am I still looking for You, God, in all the wrong places, or are You truly everywhere?

There are no scrambled eggs at Buzzy and Frances’s. Instead, there are bagels, homemade blueberry muffins, miniature cinnamon buns, and the most delicious coffee I have ever tasted. My brother puts his laptop on the table and we are treated to the pictures he took at Michael’s wedding, among them, photos of the circle of dancers. “And look,” I say, pointing to a picture of my sister’s youngest child, eighteen-year-old Sarah, in her pale-green bridesmaid’s dress, as she walks down the aisle, “there’s proof that Ginny is still alive, still carrying on in the DNA of her ninth grandchild.” Sarah’s dark hair and large smile are reminiscent of her grandmother’s youthful pictures.

But then again, most things these days spark memories of my mother. From where I am now sitting, in one of the rooms my brother has added on to what used to be our grandfather’s home, the house where my father grew up, I can see the house on Burditt Avenue. There, behind the forsythia bushes, I see the flagstones and remember what I am supposed to remember now. Here, at last, is some order amid the chaos, or at least some happy memory that comes bubbling up, and the layers of her life, with all their darkness and light, with all their depression and joy, unpeel and reveal more of the multi-faceted woman that was my mother.

Flagstones half-hidden behind the bushes, some of them the same color as the one that now covers her ashes, pale purple, bring me back to what I loved most about Ginny: her ability to take pleasure in the simple joys of life. The flagstone patio was her project to beautify a patch of dirt and grass beyond the wooden steps we’d walk down outside the kitchen door. She was happy, so it must have been before I was in junior high, sometime in the late fifties, early sixties. She bought each flagstone when she could afford to, three or four a week, from the local hardware store—this was before Visa and MasterCard, when people
bought things only when they could afford to pay for them—and carted them from the car to the backyard in a wheelbarrow. The patio eventually grew into a small place where we could lay our towels out after the beach, warm ourselves on stones that held in the sunlight, and eat tuna fish sandwiches on white Wonder Bread with Hunt’s potato chips before taking the requisite one-hour rest. This, of course, was before any collective awareness of mercury levels in tuna fish, refined sugar in over-processed white bread, or melanoma lured to the surface of the skin by the deadly ultraviolet rays of the sun. On other days, we played hopscotch on the patio, throwing stones, chalking in the lines to mark what was out of bounds and in bounds on each flagstone.

Right after she joined AA, Ginny was happy once again for a time, for what seemed like a long stretch, something that would last forever, but proved only to last for twenty years before the depression started its back-and-forth journey into her life. She had the flagstones all to herself, children grown up, ex-husband living on his own, and would sit out on the patio in a bikini and sun herself. When the neighbors were away and the sun was out, Ginny would shed her bathing suit top and expose her “tits,” as she used to say, to the sun’s rays and the wind’s breezes, and lay free and unfettered underneath the sky, behind the forsythia bushes, on top of her beach towel, dreaming up, perhaps, soothing scenarios of love. In those years, she added an assortment of flowering plants, including azaleas, hydrangeas, and daisies, to the garden surrounding the flagstones. Later we would position lawn chairs on the flagstones, adding more chairs as we married and our families grew. Ginny had bought a charcoal grill and on spring and summer evenings, her nine grandchildren ate hamburgers and hot dogs on that little mosaic of purple and gray and red flagstones of various shapes and sizes, while their grandfather grilled in the yard beyond the patio. Ginny often included George in these cookouts because his apartment had no backyard where he could fire up a grill. He would cook, and they could both enjoy their grandchildren. Sometimes she left for an AA meeting and we remained, lounging in the chairs, chatting, sipping on beers or wine until we cleaned up and went home. The flagstones, that little patch of stone-covered earth, made my mother happy, made us all happy for a time. She dreamt it, built it, used it for her own pleasure, shared it with those she loved.

In search of more coffee, I join the others in the kitchen. Frances has wrapped lovely white ribbons around the three round cardboard boxes, tying bows on top. Each box contains a portion of my mother’s ashes. We plan a road trip to sprinkle some of the remaining ashes in places my mother loved. In the months between my father’s death and her stint at Allerton house, she was too afraid to step beyond the path from her house to my brother’s, and we want to free Ginny’s body in some way. We plan on secretly
tossing a handful of ashes in a corner of
the yard she played in while growing up,
sprinkling some by Bullough’s Pond
in Newton where she ice-skated as a
teenager, leaving some behind at York
Beach, Maine, where she summered as
a child, perhaps throwing some out by
the Nubble Lighthouse. The boxes are
lovely, all butterflies and flowers in vary-
ing shades of pinks and blues and greens
with that white bow, white as bone.

The drizzle gives way to momentary sun,
and Buzzy and I stroll out to the porch and
look across the lawn to the small house
where my mother lived alone for so many
years, alone and sometimes happy, sunning
her half-nude self on her flagstone patio.

“Do you ever see your new neighbor?”
I ask my brother.

“Only to wave. She has a full-time job
downtown, I think. We can hear her play
the piano once in a while.’

“So, you haven’t been in the house? I
wonder if she’s changed anything,”

“Don’t know. I did see her sunning her-
self though, on the patio the other day.
She and her boyfriend were out there
in their deck chairs.”

“Did she have any clothes on?” We both
laugh because we both remember
something that was so typically Ginny.
How, we wonder, can she really not be
in the world anymore?

Did Ginny orchestrate the dedication
of her ashes? Did some fearless part of
her join God to plan the burial of her
body after all? Raindrops on an umbrella.
A flagstone. A name on a plaque. A
neighbor sunning herself on a patio.
Are these signs of order? Is a flagstone
just a flagstone, or a gateway to a
memory, a sign that there is divine
order in an otherwise chaotic world,
even if it’s just we humans who make
the connections?
innocence

mary shea

stoneware 20” x 4” x 8”
untitled

tania henry

wheel-thrown stoneware 4.5” x 5”
blue shirt

lauren hall

line etch, aquatint with chine collé 18” × 24”
sailboat

michael sim
copper foil 22” x 27”
modern couple

nancy zimbalist
white stoneware 6” x 13”
self-portrait

fred jackson

charcoal 22” x 30”
caytin m. buckel

steel, spray paint

12" x 6" x 12"

SCULPTURE

steel flowers
boats ashore

Caitlin OBrien

Woodcut 12.5" x 9.5"
nesting bowls
thoa nguyen
high-fire glaze 5" x 3"
Between Gila Bend and San Diego, in that goddamned heat with vapors hallucinating from the blacktop, the whole thing came into question. It was always about the ride for you, the only thing in life that brought you peace of mind. But for me it was grossly vague and at times as empty as the tortuous desert road. Who was I?

Snap! A brief happening, some moment of highway life breaks me out of it. Breakfast of green chili in Tucumcari and a smile forms on my cracking, sunburned lips.

Dining on rattlesnake and fried cactus kabobs in Sedona, watching a black widow toy with a cicada above the hotel sink in East Texas. Little moments, both mundane and meaningful, even profound: stopping outside of Memphis, buzzed from beer and whiskey on Beale St., listening to the Mississippi River in the dark.

7500 miles in 20 days
(for yodel calarski)

sean w. miller
The bikes were taking a beating, the engines wheezed like some old, forgotten smoker walking the stairs of a loveless nursing home. This weariness matched by our own fatigue brought symmetry of suffering between man and machine and I wondered if you realized this, if it brought you further into the grimy meditation the road had become.

Those solitary hours. Where was your mind? Were your thoughts different in the Arizona dust as in the void of the Oklahoma plains? My thoughts were too fast paced, scattered. Who am I? The same themes repeating in a thousand different ways, churning and spinning with the tires and falling off into the exhaust trail behind me.

Until that stretch along the Mexican border on the way into San Diego. That heat where the sweat dried on the body before it had a chance to form a drop, with the mind boiling in the skull, misfiring repeatedly. Four thousand miles from home with nearly as many more to go and the same questions return with an urgency that demands answers.

Where was I going? Then on cue, the sirens, and we are pulled over to the side of the road. I watch you confidently hand your Identification over to that patrolman.

It was about the ride for you. I looked down at my license as I pulled it from my wallet, and saw the name next to my picture. I laid my helmet down beside the idling bike on the steaming black tar surface. There was only the road, there was only the ride.
Sister Mary Eleanor had recently been reprimanded for poisoning the squirrels. A sprinkling of white cyanide powder in the birdfeed was all it took to kill them in droves, and while she took great pleasure in ridding the grounds of these pests that had chased away her beloved birds, she also considered it her duty to end the suffering of the starving creatures.

In past years, the ancient oaks, their thick shadows crisscrossing the convent’s walkways, had dropped their autumnal seed by the thousands, blanketing the grounds with their bounty. This year, however, hardly any seed had grown for lack of rain. Mary Eleanor had even watched intently the footage of wildfires raging across Florida and southern California on the forbidden bunny-eared television in the gardener’s quarters—blazing infernos brought to life in 256 shades of gray. But it didn’t cross her mind that the dryness caused such chaos, both for the far-off Floridians and Californians who fled their homes rather than perished with them, and for herself, who dealt with her own, more immediate, cataclysmic event—the sudden appearance of scores of skinny squirrels.

Sister Claire Francis, Mother Superior of the eleven nuns, all elderly, who still roamed the halls of the crumbling convent, had just shut off the front light on her way to dinner when she
spotted Mary Eleanor moving in the opposite direction. Taking her aside, she delivered the chastisement with a fervor that bespoke her unwavering faith in a chaotic world that was coming apart at the seams: “There may be many and their value may not be apparent, but God notes the fall of each one!”

Mary Eleanor suspected she knew just what Claire Francis was hinting at—together, in the name of God, they would mercifully deliver these creatures from their suffering. She nodded heartily in agreement, her smile approving and her eyes glinting with a hungry light.

Somewhat baffled by Mary Eleanor’s reaction, and sensing she had missed her mark, Claire Francis straightened herself up a bit more and darkened her tone: “The dispensation of death is neither our duty nor our right. The power to judge lies only in the hands of God!”

Mary Eleanor recoiled slightly. Her eyebrows creased and her smile slipped away. It wasn’t the mention of God that brought on the overwhelming sorrow she suddenly felt; it was something else, something she couldn’t place.

As Claire Francis observed the change in the older woman, her sternness gave way to a thin, apologetic smile.

There was a knock at the door.

“I’ll get that,” said Claire Francis when she noticed Mary Eleanor’s eyes flick to the convent’s heavy oaken double doors. “Why don’t you join the others in the refectory for dinner,” she added gently, pointing down the corridor that led to the dining hall.

Mary Eleanor nodded and took a few steps in that direction, the meaning of the feeling she’d just experienced still swirling out of reach in her mind. But then, recognizing her destination, another thought struck her—she didn’t want to join the others in the dining hall. She stopped. When in the dining hall, she preferred not to spend her time there with the other Sisters, but alone with her acorns.

Mary Eleanor was fond of acorns. In past years, she would gather them from the ground in bucket-loads and lug them into the dining hall where, after hours, she would pack them into containers and hide them about the convent. Since this year’s harvest was small, she had become more particular about her acorns, and would meticulously sort, shine, and polish them, buffing them bright and observing the perfect sheen and symmetry of each one—divinity harbored beneath a dusty coat. Then she would drop them, individually, into a large glossed bowl, receiving a certain satisfaction from the tinkling of a freshly polished acorn as it tumbled about until coming to rest comfortably among the others.

She heard the creaking of the door being opened, and turned back, peeking around the corner. An old man, resting partly on a short staff, with head bent and shoulders slumped, stood before Claire Francis. Mary Eleanor chanced a few steps nearer and slipped into the recesses of the darkened entryway behind Claire Francis to get a closer look.

His hair was a tangled mixture of white and black, each stubborn strand
remaining independently one color or the other. His beard was gray. The threads of his brown, buttonless corduroy coat had begun to give in to the ceaseless tugging of its heavy sleeves, and now were loosening at the seams. His baggy khakis threatened to plunge from his narrow hips if not for the cord of abrasive polyethylene rope that held them in check. His sneakers were a vibrant white.

To Mary Eleanor’s aged eyes, which could discern little of this detail, he seemed a man in need. To Claire Francis, with her uncompromised eyesight, he seemed only another of the many miscreant vagrants who would occasionally stumble upon the convent from the surrounding city—a city, incidentally, that had sprouted up around the convent only a few decades earlier at the expense of the verdant forests that used to blanket the land. To Claire Francis, this old man was just the fallout, a symptom of a diseased and godless society that seemed bent on consuming itself at an ever-increasing pace.

Claire Francis stood, her legs positioned wide, seemingly rooted to the checkerboard floor, one hand resting easily on her hip and the other holding the door ajar, as though, at any moment, she might invoke her powers of judgment and slam the door shut. She did not glimmer as might a saint, but instead stood cast in darkness, a broad, featureless silhouette illuminated by a backdrop of pallid yellow light.

The old man, seeing this apparition before him, gave a slight cry and retreated a half step, unable to utter a word. His gaze dropped. His eyes, searching, came to rest on the hard-soled beige moccasins only partially obscured by the dun-colored habit Claire Francis wore. To the old man, those shoes seemed to provide little support and probably chaffed her heels.

Claire Francis had not slammed the door shut. But after a few moments of observing the speechless old man, who seemed to be staring into an oblivion that lay somewhere about her feet, she uttered a quiet prayer and let the door swing toward a close. At the groaning of the hinges, the old man shifted his gaze upward. He opened his mouth as though he were about to speak, but found he didn’t know what to say. His eyebrows furrowed. The rectangle of light that shone through the doorway narrowed to a slit. His lip quivered. The light vanished and the door locked with a click.

Although Mary Eleanor couldn’t see very well, she could see the old man’s expression as Claire Francis closed the door; it roused her memory, but nothing was clear, as though she were searching in the darkness with only broken beams of light. She tucked herself more deeply into the shadows and waited for Claire Francis to pass. Then she hurried toward the door with a series of small but rapid steps.

While the old man stood hunched, staring at the closed doors before him, it began to drizzle. As he turned to leave, he again heard the click of the lock, and that same pale light came forth, weaving its way about a figure bent and shriveled with time.

“Come in, come in.” Mary Eleanor’s piping voice cracked as she spoke.
The old man blinked, expecting the offer to be revoked at any moment by this old woman dressed just like the one who’d turned away from him. But he found something reassuring in the way she smiled at him, seemingly unburdened by the creases etched in her round face. He stepped forward.

“No,” she scolded, stopping him in his tracks, the sharpness of her rebuke diminished by the brittleness of her voice. “Take the gardener’s stairs,” she added hastily, sounding irritated, as though he should have known. She pointed to a small recessed doorway just below the ground level, nearly consumed by shadow.

The old man observed the shadowed doorway for a moment before bringing his attention back to the old woman. She had turned away now and hummed gaily as she closed the door behind her. A slight smile tugged at the corner of the old man’s mouth. Using his staff and the railing for support, he made his way down the set of cracked stone risers to the door.

Mary Eleanor ambled down the corridor toward the boiler room, continuing to hum along the way. When she reached the stairway, her humming stopped. She grasped the railing and cautiously lowered one foot at a time. Her jaw was set. Slowly, haltingly, she progressed, counting down the remaining steps until she reached the platform, the halfway point, and paused. She looked back up the half-flight of stairs she’d just conquered, smiled, and resumed humming her tune. She continued on.

From far off, a sound rose in the air: At first it seemed only ripples in the stillness, too far removed from Mary Eleanor’s reclusion in the stairwell for her to perceive them as a threat—like the quiet rumblings of a distant storm. But steadily they grew louder and invaded Mary Eleanor’s distracted mind. Her humming stopped again. She held her breath. Footfalls from above were quickly closing in on her.

Mary Eleanor hastened down the remaining stairs, wincing from the impact on her withered feet. Her hands clutched the railing. The hem of her robe danced about her ankles. The volume above increased.

She stumbled and a sharp pain shot through her foot. She let out a muted yelp and glanced up. Her pursuer was nearly upon her. She hurried on. Reaching the bottom floor, still clinging to the railing, Mary Eleanor rested for a moment. Then she pushed herself away and rushed down the hall, grimacing with each step. She ducked into the boiler room, closing the door behind her.

It was dark. A deep, constant grumble from somewhere in the room muffled the noise from above. Her fear lost its edge.

She crept forward tentatively in the darkness, hands searching, until she found the string attached to the overhead light. She gave it a tug and the room lit up.

In the corner sat the boiler, a mass of black iron complaining quietly, but churning on faithfully as it had for a century. Shelves lined the walls, stocked with all manner of things: bolts of coarse cloth smothered in dust, boxes of cracked porcelain idols, dented paint
cans stained from use. Strewn among these were stores of acorns carefully concealed by Mary Eleanor.

Since the other Sisters had begun stumbling upon her secret caches and plotting with the gardener to dispose of them, Mary Eleanor had become more prudent, and now hid them in and about the boiler room where the other Sisters rarely ventured. Next to the boiler room was an alcove where the gardener would take his meals, and so, Mary Eleanor fancied she was pulling a fast one on them all, hiding her acorns right beneath the gardener’s nose.

She continued to the door, beyond which the old man waited, his shadow pressing against the drawn shade. A slight hitch now hampered her step. She could hear the rain outside, the heavy drops slapping into the rapidly forming puddles. Her gnarled hands wrestled with the rusted sliding bolt. Finally, it screeched open. Seeing the old man hunched against the rain, she hastily ushered him inside.

Mary Eleanor took one look at the old man—at his rain-soaked coat and grisly hair flecked with tiny droplets—and said, “Oh! This won’t do!”

She rushed over to a shelf along the wall and yanked down a section of fabric. Unbothered by the cloud of dust that billowed around her as she swatted the cloth, Mary Eleanor hurried back to the old man and wrapped it around his shoulders. “That’s better.” She smiled.

The old man smiled back.

They stood without speaking, the only sounds the pattering of the rain outside and the droning of the boiler within. Moments passed and they did not speak. They did not feel rushed. They were simply taking each other in.

Their smiles hadn’t yet faded when Mary Eleanor’s eyes lit up. “Come, come,” she said excitedly, tugging his sleeve.

The old man laid his staff beside the door and allowed Mary Eleanor to lead him around the room, gleefully revealing her hidden caches: a corroded tin watering can at the back of the paint shelf, a large jar underneath the sink, a box of frozen preserves tucked neatly behind the ice cube trays in the gardener’s mini-fridge.

When he saw the refrigerator, the old man reacted instinctively. His hand reached out, grasping for what might lie beyond the door, then stopped abruptly and hovered there. Mary Eleanor looked closely at the old man; something in the way his face tightened, and his eyes, almost pleading, clouded with uncertainty, sent a sudden rush through her. Fragmented memories flashed through her mind. “Oh,” she muttered, the word catching in her throat.

The old man’s hand dropped and he looked away. He stood unmoving while Mary Eleanor struggled to make sense of the reel of images playing through her mind. But they came and went too quickly. She tried to slow them, tried to pin them down and force out the blurriness, force the pictures into focus.

The old man shifted. Mary Eleanor, remembering him, released a deep breath and let the images fade from her mind. She focused on the old man and took hold of
his hands. His skin was cool and rough to the touch, dry and calloused, but she didn’t seem to notice. He turned back to her. She smiled. “I’ve got just the thing,” she said, and opened the refrigerator.

A minute later, as the old man munched on an array of leftovers, Mary Eleanor looked on and enjoyed a satisfaction nearly as great as that of hearing the tinkling of a freshly polished acorn tumbling about in the bowl. They sat at a small folding table pushed up against the wall in the gardener’s alcove, its thin plastic surface peeled back and torn, revealing the particle board beneath. The lighting was dim, coming only from the main boiler room and only partly making its way around the bend into the alcove. Atop the mini-fridge the ancient television sat quietly, its screen dark. The old man ate, glancing up occasionally to see Mary Eleanor smiling, and he would smile back. When the old man finished, they sat in silence for a time, taking solace in one another’s company.

The door to the boiler room opened. Mary Eleanor’s eyes widened. She bent down and scrambled under the table, waving for the old man to join her, but he was already getting to his knees and scooting in across from her. Swift footsteps made their way into the boiler room outside their alcove. They stopped.

Mary Eleanor and the old man felt the hot puffs of the other’s breath and listened as the sounds of their breathing grew impossibly loud, thumping in their ears, drowning out all other noise.

Claire Francis had reached the center of the boiler room, the frayed string from the overhead light dangling before her. She glanced this way and that, quietly cursed the gardener for not turning off the light, and pulled on the string, sending the room into near-darkness, the only remaining light spilling in from the hallway.

The footsteps receded and the door closed. Inky blackness fell over Mary Eleanor and the old man. They remained crouched on the floor until the sounds of their breathing were barely audible above the pouring rain and the hum of the boiler.

“It’s gone,” Mary Eleanor said at last, and shifted from the floor. Pain shot through her injured foot. She stifled a cry and fell back to her knees. The old man bumped the table and chairs as he tried to navigate toward her in the darkness. “I’m fine,” she assured. “Stay put.” Using a chair to help support her, Mary Eleanor slowly rose to her feet, her whole body trembling with the effort. When she finally stood, she gave a satisfied sigh.

The old man listened as the old woman’s shoes scraped across the dirty floor and her hands groped about. He heard a click. Dull light shimmered about them and a quiet buzzing from the television filled the room.

The old man still knelt under the table. He appeared somewhat dazed, jaw slightly slackened and eyes wide, betraying perhaps a hint of fear. Mary Eleanor helped him to his feet. He glanced to the door leading outside.

“No,” Mary Eleanor said, shaking her head. “It’s not time to go yet.”

She pulled up a chair in front of the television and motioned for him to sit. He took the seat hesitantly. “Don’t
worry,” she said, taking one of his hands in both of hers. “You’ll be safe here.” She smiled, then turned toward the television’s snowy screen. She angled the antenna this way and that and the picture dived in and out of focus, finally coming to rest, only somewhat hazily, on a newsman in what could have been a navy blue suit.

“I’ll be right back,” Mary Eleanor said, and crossed through the boiler room.

The old man observed the hobble in her step. He turned down the volume on the television and listened intently as the old woman shuffled out of sight and into the corridor, closing the door behind her.

Paying little attention to the flickering images of reporters on the screen, speaking silently of the spiraling degradation of the world, he bent down and untied his vibrant white sneakers, then tugged them from his feet.

He’d discovered them the night before, when he’d witnessed a trio of teens throw them high into the branches of a tree. All night he had plotted tirelessly as to how he would retrieve those shoes, sparkling star-bright beneath the streetlight.

By morning, he fancied he’d memorized every curve and crux of the stunted oak. And with a strength borne of determination, he had grappled the low-hanging branches, tugged himself skyward, and shimmied to his prize, knocking it free with his short staff.

He had then tucked his old shoes into his pockets and slipped into his new ones. And for the next few hours, he had walked with pride, lifting his feet high so as not to scuff his prize on the pavement, and pumping his staff in time with his strut.

The old man’s eyes remained fixed on these shoes as he patiently polished them with a corner of the cloth still draped about his shoulders. He tried to ignore the catastrophic images flashing on the screen before him. He knew he would soon be returning to that world.

Mary Eleanor worked her way up the stairs and toward the dining hall. With each step, the pain in her foot flared. She thought of the old man. She thought of how he must soon leave. She thought of where he would go, what he would eat. She thought of how he must suffer.

When she reached the dining hall, it was warm. She switched on the light, revealing a pair of long wooden tables that stretched nearly the length of the room, one bare, the other laden with a broad wooden platter of fruit, a dozen small loaves of bread wrapped in aluminum foil, and at the far corner, a large glossed bowl. The heat wafted in from the kitchen through the open door and the narrow horizontal serving window.

She shuffled to the laden table and laid out a large cloth. She placed two loaves of bread on the cloth and carefully peeled back their aluminum coverings. Next to these, she placed four apples. From her habit she withdrew a small clear jar half-filled with the white powder. She examined it closely, the powder caked against the sides of the glass, and an image of the old man smiling as she showed him her acorns came into her mind. She faltered, but quickly remembered the old man as she’d first seen him, bent and tired, leaning
heavily on his staff. She knew he could not escape his suffering. This would be her greatest act of mercy. She uncovered the jar and placed it beside the cloth.

Everything now seemed to be in order: the bread, the apples, the jar resting open beside them. She need just commit to the final step. She glanced around to see if there was something she’d forgotten, something she’d missed. Her eyes locked onto the large glossed bowl and the handful of acorns harbored within. Thinking of the old man, she smiled sadly. Then her face brightened, and she disappeared into the kitchen.

She returned with a small plastic container and carefully poured the remaining acorns into it. She admired them closely, thinking of the comfort they would surely bring the old man in his final hour. Then she placed the open container on the cloth.

Faint echoes came to her from the corridor. She listened as they grew louder, not immediately recognizing them as footsteps. By the time she did, the noise was rolling toward her.

She panicked. Picking up the jar of powder, she splashed it liberally across the entire spread, capped the acorns, wrapped the food, grabbed up the whole bundle and hustled into the kitchen. She covered, the noise booming about her. It stopped. After a moment’s hesitation, she peeked out through the narrow window of her hiding place.

Claire Francis surveyed the room briefly—everything seemed as it should be, save the light being on. Then she noticed the small jar resting uncovered on the table. She moved toward it with her typical measured steps and snatched it up, studied it briefly, then twisted the cover on and dropped the container into her pocket.

Mary Eleanor spied the stout woman and a gloom settled in on her. Though she knew the woman wasn’t the cause of her unease, she couldn’t pinpoint the source. She sorted through her thoughts, even long after Claire Francis had switched off the light and disappeared down the hallway. In the silence, her thoughts slowly laced together. Her unease grew. With a start, she realized what she’d been about to do. Thinking of the old man and her own unraveling mind, she slid quietly to the floor and wept.

When she was at last able to get back to her feet, Mary Eleanor turned on the kitchen light and laid the bundle out before her on the table. She wanted to throw out the entire bundle, try to rid her mind of this burden, but stopped herself and withdrew the container of acorns. The rest, she put in the trash.

She went back into the dining hall and packed a fresh meal for the old man. Carrying with her the new bundle, neatly tied with twine, Mary Eleanor made the laborious journey back to the gardener’s quarters. With each aching step, wisps of gloom slipped from her mind.

She found the old man in the chair where she’d left him, eyes averted from the television, the cloth he’d worn now folded neatly on the table. On his feet were his old shoes with the thin soles and the frayed laces heavily knotted to keep from pulling through the torn eyelets. Atop his lap rested his gleaming
white shoes, the laces tied into a bow, holding the pair together. Though he noticed the redness in the old woman’s eyes, he said nothing. He lifted the shoes from his lap and stood.

Mary Eleanor handed the bundle to the old man. He accepted it, and later, he would be grateful for the loaves of bread and the fresh fruit, and though he wouldn’t quite know what to make of the container of acorns all frosted white, he would smile. He offered her the shoes. She tried to wave off the gesture, but the old man was adamant, prompting her with a nod and holding them forth until she finally accepted.

Sensing their business complete, the old man made his way to the shadowy basement door, Mary Eleanor close behind. He took up his staff, turned to her, and gave a slight bow. She reached up and gave the crown of his head a pair of gentle taps. He smiled and left the convent.

Mary Eleanor held aside the window shade and, hugging the shoes to her chest, watched as the old man moved off. Even when his figure had vanished from sight, lost amid the rain and darkness, she remained.

“There you are!” boomed a voice. The old woman slowly turned her head. Claire Francis, at last having sighted her quarry, closed in fast. Mary Eleanor did not move.

“Where have you been?” asked Claire Francis earnestly. “And what have you got there?” she continued, gesturing to the pair of shoes the old woman clung to. Mary Eleanor looked at the shoes and squeezed them a little tighter. Claire Francis took her gently by the arm. Her other hand fished in her own pocket for the small jar. “You shouldn’t be wandering around by yourself,” she scolded. Her hand closed around the jar and she began to draw it from her pocket. “What is—”

“I’m tired,” said Mary Eleanor, her voice distant.

Claire Francis stopped her hand and looked closely at the old woman. She seemed beyond tired: weary, weak, enervated, as though her perpetual vigor had finally worn too thin to support her failing frame. She released the small jar, allowing it to plunge into the recesses of her pocket. “It’s getting late,” she said firmly. “You probably just need a good night’s sleep. Let’s get you to your room.”

Mary Eleanor nodded.

Claire Francis guided her to the elevator that serviced the three floors of the convent. She noticed the old woman’s slight limp, but said nothing. As they boarded the elevator, Mary Eleanor clutched the shoes tightly. When morning came, she would look at them shining on the nightstand beside her bed and wonder where they’d come from.
self-portrait
lyndsay snow
ink 9" x 9.5"

DRAWING
Before leaving for a month-long trip to Hayashi, I studied the Japanese culture by reading as many books as I could get my hands on, by looking up Harajuku and Lolita fashion, and even by watching some anime. I felt confident with my preparations.

The day after my roommate Ayumi and I arrived, we decided to meet up with a couple of her old upper secondary school friends for dinner in the nearby city of Yokohama. As we made our way toward her favorite noodle shop, I looked around the street, noticing the many boutiques that housed bright clothing and had bubble-letter advertisements splashed across their windows. I glanced down at my Harajuku-inspired outfit, which closely resembled Ayumi’s—the black leggings and off-the-shoulder, funky yellow shirt with tears near the bottom almost made me blend with the unfamiliar surroundings.

An old man zipped by on his bicycle along the packed sidewalk, nearly clipping me as he passed. I watched as he easily maneuvered through the crowd, paying little attention to the grocery bags slung over the handlebars of his bike, a loaf of bread peeking out of one, as they bumped against his knees. Around us, the scenery had changed abruptly: the street was now lined with small, cloudy-windowed restaurants that had dingy-looking welcome mats on their stoops.

When Ayumi entered the noodle shop, I followed closely behind. Saying that the space was cramped would be an understatement; there was hardly enough room for the two of us to stand in the entryway without bumping into the circular bar. Steam billowed in through the rectangular kitchen window, carrying with it a sharp aroma of melded spices and turning the room a smoky yellow as it mixed with the glow of the dim overhead lights.

We walked toward her friends, and I mimed Ayumi’s action as she bowed her head in greeting. She introduced me to Kenji and Toshio and the three of us nodded at each other again. I took a seat next to Ayumi and shifted around on the unstable wooden barstool. A man with thick eyebrows peered at me over the top of a crinkled newspaper. When I looked at him, he quickly returned his focus to the paper. I turned toward the group and tried to decipher their exchange, thinking that my study of the language through an online program would be enough to help me draw out a word here and there, but their conversation was fluid—unlike the robotic, choppy voice I had practiced with—making all the sounds merge together incoherently.
The waiter came over and placed a bowl in front of each of us. He was also holding a handful of chopsticks. As I looked at the noodle-filled broth, it felt as if the shop had shrunk to an even more confining size. (Before this, my practice with chopsticks had consisted of ordering Chinese takeout and proudly picking up large pieces of orange chicken and beef satay.) The thin slip of white paper slid off the chopsticks easily and I pulled at the bottom of them, splitting the pair apart. They hadn’t cracked along the seam as they were supposed to, and had instead broken unevenly near the top. I watched as the others flawlessly separated theirs. I picked up my fractured set and moved my fingers in a quick practice; the chopsticks snagged against each other awkwardly.

My hand shook as I lowered the chopsticks into the murky bowl. I glanced around the bar to make sure no one was watching, then aimed for a noodle and pinched the tips of the chopsticks together around it. My face grew hot and sweat formed on my forehead when the noodle slipped out of the chopsticks’ grasp.

Using two hands, a chopstick in each, I tried again: I trapped the noodle between the chopsticks and leaned down, pulling it up cautiously toward my mouth. It was just above the bowl’s rim when it slid back in, swirling the broth around it.

A small-framed man across the bar held his bowl to his mouth and drank from it. After copying him, I set the bowl down and picked up the chopsticks again. This time I looked to Ayumi, who casually drew out noodles and sucked them up quickly. I was mystified as the noodles disappeared, wondering how she was possibly even chewing before swallowing.

With a sudden confidence, I aimed for a noodle. I snatched it, pulling my hand up swiftly, as Ayumi had, but the noodle fell back into the bowl. Frustrated, I poured myself a cup of tea. Kenji motioned in my direction, catching Ayumi’s attention.

She pointed toward my soup. “You do not like it?”

“No, it’s great,” I said, moving the chopsticks around as if I were looking for my next bite. Her bowl was nearly empty. She used the collar of her shirt to stifle a laugh and then briefly turned to Toshio and Kenji, who failed to hold back smirks as soon as she spoke.

“You cannot eat it?” She was staring at my bowl.

I looked down at it, ashamed. “No.”

She motioned for the waiter to come over and spoke to him in whispers, her hand cupped around the side of her mouth. I could tell by his surprised expression that she’d explained my situation. Ayumi turned to me. “This is a very traditional restaurant,” she said, “so he is not sure if they have any silverware, but he is going to look. He said they have never had a tourist here before.”

I cringed at the word tourist. “No, it’s okay. Tell him I’m fine,” I pleaded, my voice low, my eyes focused on my lap. “I don’t want to cause any trouble.” The few patrons there were stealing quick glances in my direction, clearly not wanting to seem rude, but at the same time, captivated and amused by my lack of cultivation.
Ayumi translated what I had said, or at least pretended to, but the waiter shook his head and disappeared into the kitchen. Kenji and Toshio were trying to suppress laughter; it seemed, as I continued to swirl the sticks around while silently cursing myself for having brutishly broken them earlier.

The waiter came out, appearing apologetic. He gave me a small bow, and then pulled something from behind his back and held it out to me over the bar. It was a baby feeding spoon the size of my index finger. Its plastic base was adorned with colorful, cartoon kittens. I froze, gaping at it. Ayumi took it from him and handed it to me when she noticed I wasn’t moving.

I forced myself to look up at the waiter. “Thank you,” I said meekly in attempted Japanese. I pressed the back of my hand against my cheek, trying to blot out the inevitable growing red splotches. He nodded, then returned to the kitchen.

Ayumi could no longer stand it and began to laugh quietly along with her friends. I tried to join in, but could only manage small, self-conscious giggles. After taking a deep breath, I returned my focus to the meal. The other three had already finished eating and watched me struggle with the spoon that proved even harder to use than the chopsticks: I had a noodle cornered against the side of the bowl and was trying to slice off a piece of it, but it was too rubbery and ended up splashing broth onto the countertop when it flopped back in.

“It is okay,” Ayumi said reassuringly. “It takes a really long time to get used to using them.”

I nodded and forced a smile. When Toshio started talking, distracting the other two for a moment, I took the break from their stares to try again. Grasping a chopstick in one hand and squeezing the spoon between the index finger and thumb of my other, I pulled up a few noodles and managed to get one into my mouth. I quickly ate a couple more, and then sipped at the broth, feeling relief as more of the bowl’s orange-colored porcelain came into view. Satisfied that I had made a large enough dent, I slid the now cold soup forward across the bar as Ayumi, Toshio, and Kenji already had.

Ayumi looked over at me. “You can finish. We don’t mind.”

“I’m very full,” I said. I hoped my stomach wouldn’t growl.

She nodded. Toshio grabbed the bill and the rest of us followed him to the register. When Ayumi told me the total, I pulled some coins from my pocket and checked them over three times to make sure I had the right amount before handing them to Toshio.

Kenji looked toward me suddenly. The image of the kitty-cat spoon popped into my head and I lowered my eyes slightly, my cheeks again beginning to burn. Kenji’s mouth pulled up at the corners, forming a large, childish smile.

“Nice to having met you,” he said shyly in quiet, attempted English.

I smiled, feeling the heat leave my cheeks, and we bowed to each other in parting.
chapter 6: all roads lead to ginny

Yesterday I was lead: same density, same color. I hate it when the lead days are upon me; during the ten months of teaching high school English, I haven’t time for the leaden hours. All the distractions, the busy work of living, keep me from feeling weighty. And make no mistake about any of it—it’s all busy work: teaching literature deemed appropriate by the school board, writing new questions or tweaking old ones for each chapter of every book, devising vocabulary lists befitting an honors class or a college prep class, creating quizzes, tests, revamping writing assignments, and then grading quizzes, tests, and writing assignments. It’s difficult too, trying to share my love of literature with teenagers, most of whom can’t understand, for instance, why Ethan Frome would be in love with a distant cousin in the first place, or why Lady Macbeth wants to unsex herself.

And before I know it, there’s June, and I’m like a child anticipating Christmas, time being the gift. This year there’s a bonus week in June, without any snow days to make up, and two whole months with nothing to do but relax: no piles of papers to grade, no new books—chosen by someone else—to read.

But the dull density intercedes. I try to rise above this heaviness by ignoring it. I try to tell myself how privileged I am to get two whole months of vacation a year. Just relax; don’t feel guilty about sleeping later, reading People magazine, writing e-mails with no punctuation,
going for a walk along the beach. But inevitably the weight drags any joy I might feel down to its level, like the slow suck of quicksand. Summer brings the busy-ness, the distractions of my life, to a screeching halt, and without work, I can feel how miserable I am; there’s no more avoiding how meaningless my life feels. I mean, shouldn’t I be spending my time doing something actually worthwhile? Finding out what truly matters to me so that I can make a difference, change the world somehow? I don’t care what any school board thinks: teaching Macbeth to a bunch of teenagers is not going to help assuage the pain in the real world; in fact, it is very quickly turning a generation of school children off to reading and on to Sparknotes.com.

But these are such depressing thoughts for someone with a whole vacation-load of days in front of her; maybe I can blame the weather: three weeks of endless clouds and intermittent rain.

Yesterday, in my leaden state, I contemplated calling up the doctor and joining the long caravan of many Americans, young and old, already heralding the benefits of prescription medication, but something prevented me from doing so. I know why I feel this way, no mystery there: the state of the world as depicted by the six o’clock news. I also know what I am inclined to do to alleviate my leaden state—okay, we’ll call it depression—and I’m just wondering, as I always do, how medication will be more effective in the long run, than, say, an ice cream sundae, an old Alfred Hitchcock movie with Cary Grant or Jimmy Stewart, a trip to Macy’s, or a glass or two of White Zinfandel and dreamless sleep? That is, until the hot flashes remind me, once again, that I’m getting old, that my evolutionary purpose for being on earth is long gone. Maybe I should blame my age.

It’s just that medication has always seemed such a cop-out to me, a way of fixing my reaction to the shitty state of the world instead of fixing the shitty state of the world. Back again to the meaningfulness of my life—a life some would justifiably envy, I suppose. After all, I do have a job with great benefits. What’s better than a summer of freedom?

I hesitate to share my true belief because I know the world will not support me in this since, generally speaking, people are more inclined to believe in what can be scientifically proven or chemically balanced. But here is the truth I am so resistant to write: I stubbornly hold to the belief that this depression is another rift between a higher power and me. What little faith in God I have managed to accumulate over the past forty or so years has slowly crumbled once again throughout the secular year—school brings about a separation of spirit and body, and what is not paid attention to is lost. After ten long months of distraction, of pledging allegiance to one nation under God—how that still passes inspection with the school board is beyond me—I am alone with my soul, which has been neglected and longs for solace, for an affirmation that human beings just might not have all the answers, that scientific advancements may not be the end-all and the be-all of life. In fact, we seem to forget that science could very well kill us someday via nuclear weapons in one fell swoop, or via the television clicker, one coma-tose viewer at a time.
Look at all that desperation, all that negativity; get thee to a physician quick, I say, rereading this. But wait: this summer is probably worse because my mother died in December; admittedly, she had been dying for the past five years, succumbing along the way to the effects of her mental illness, a depression that, somewhere along the line, morphed into dementia—at any rate, a disease of the mind. Ah. Here we go again: all roads in my life inevitably lead to Ginny, and this particular road is a meandering string of words, a troubling memoir to write, a troubling life to contemplate.

Here’s the backup reasoning for my resistance to medication: after a while, even medication failed to shield my mother from the mental illness that rose to the surface, one final time, with a vengeance, taking away everything, until finally age joined in and rendered my mother paranoid, fragile, and helpless, still hanging on hopelessly to a God who refused to rescue her from bedpans and diapers, fractured hips and walkers, nursing homes stinking with the foul odors of decaying matter. But what was she thinking? What was I thinking? Not one of us escapes death; not one of us is rescued from that most terminal of events. Don’t we have to come to terms with that fact sooner or later?

No, I will not call my doctor for a referral to some other doctor who can dispense medication for depression. Sometimes I feel as though I am the last holdout in a world gone mad, the sane one among the insane; that’s not good, I know. Since my mother was diagnosed in 1986, when she was sixty-two, only a couple of years older than I am now, a plethora of drugs has entered the market and a plethora of manic-depressives has been diagnosed and medicated.

As a teacher for the past eight years, I have seen this increasingly often, the more disturbing because the patients are younger and younger. One young teenager informed me in the writing lab that her ADHD was really “kicking in” that day, and she couldn’t do any writing; she also informed me that she had a permanent pass to the adjustment counselor whenever she felt this way: “It says so on my 504 plan.” Exit this particular young lady. Another teenager apologized for telling me to “fuck off” the previous week—for which she received an office detention—assuring me that it would not happen again because “that’s what happens to me when I’m off my meds.” Still another young man snapped a ruler in my face, and then enlightened me as to why: his doctor told him he was genetically wired to not be able to sit still for more than twenty minutes at a time. So leave him the fuck alone.

On the other hand—and here’s my dilemma—lithium gave us back our mother, for a while at least. The Ginny who returned after a three-week stay in Pembroke Psychiatric Hospital was not the typically vivacious Ginny, but she was a reasonable substitute, her out-of-control hypochondria and obsessive-compulsive behavior managed quite nicely for a time by medication. The before and after of her stay in Pembroke Psychiatric Hospital proved different enough for my brother, sister, and me to gain a healthy respect for medications meant to tackle mental disorders.
But in the final two years of her life, no amount or combination of any of the new pills could balance our mother, and no amount of prayer seemed to help either. She retreated further into her own world, keeping any aches or pains to herself this time, so no one would know, so she would not end up in a psychiatric hospital. But that’s exactly where she did end up, that’s exactly where she died. Paranoid, scared, in a ward with people just like her.

She must have prayed fervently in those last few days, alone, before her children sat by her bedside in the last hours. She must have prayed fervently and secretly, paranoid perhaps that people would try to dissuade her of her belief in God. She must have kept her faith hidden so that no one could take it away from her, no one could call her weird or just plain nuts. She resisted, denied all those labels, and receded deeper into her own thinking, perhaps because she was demented, or maybe because she could find no one else who saw the world as she saw it. In the end, she must have felt irrevocably alone, cut off from her children, from the world at large, taking solace only in her belief in a higher power.

During the night of her death, over the course of ten hours, we walked along the corridor several times, from the room where she lay to the television room at the end of the hall. As we passed by doors, patients would try desperately to get our attention. One woman, strapped to her bed, cried out, “Can you please get me a glass of juice. Actually, even water would be okay. Oh, please. Why can’t I just have a glass of water?” Another shouted, “Who are you? Can you get me out of here?”

But then there was the nurse who told us this in her Jamaican accent: “Death is just a part of life. God will decide the moment when your mother will die.” In a secular setting, someone, thankfully, dared to mention God.

And there was the patient, a woman wandering the halls, unbeknownst to the nurses on duty, who walked into the room, sat silently beside my sister, kissed Nancy’s cheek, and kept a sacred vigil with us all until one of the nurses discovered her.

At the moment Ginny was declared dead, Buzzy, Nancy, and I were acutely aware of the last words of “Silent Night” coming from the radio at the nurses’ station right outside the door. It might have been Elvis Presley who sang, *Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.*

Today, I am at the counter at Bed Bath & Beyond, using my twenty percent-off coupon to replace the toaster that had recently conked out, not willing to forgo my sprouted bagel for the second day in a row. At the checkout counter, the teenage girl, with dyed-black hair and an angel tattoo on her arm, is friendly, and tells me she’s not used to this awful weather, all this rain—she’s from sunny California. She notices the small gold cross I have on a chain around my neck and says how beautiful it is.

“I have one too,” she adds, pulling a lovely cross embossed with the tiny figure of a crucified Christ out of her blouse so I can see it. Mine, a more Protestant rendition, does not have the crucified man. He’s gone
somewhere, gotten over His own doubts of being forsaken, and risen, so the story goes, to another life. No more bloodied crown of thorns, no more nails holding Him to the cross, no more eternal suffering.

“It’s lovely,” I say.

“Are you a believer?” she asks me, smiling.

I step back, shocked. A believer? A believer in what? I am not one of those Jesus freaks, if that’s what you mean. God, I am such a hypocrite, so afraid of being accused of sentimentalism. I am a huge fan of Christ because he had so many doubts, and because he sang that song about the cup of poison and Gethsemane so poignantly, so passionately, so humanly in Jesus Christ Superstar, but I really don’t want to admit this, let alone discuss my spiritual views with the teenage cashier. I mean, in daylight, with all these people around? What will they think?

Ginny would have loved her—this fearless teenager—and would have said, in the good old days, anyway, how her whole life was God-guided. I can hear her now: “Why, I go where the Spirit moves me. He sent me here today because He knew I needed to hear someone else say they believed too. I was feeling shaky this morning. Thank you, young lady. As we say in AA, ‘I’m on time!’” But I am not my mother, and I mumble something about being spiritual, not religious. God help me if anyone thought I prayed, if anyone thought I believed in something beyond what is actually proven. I am a school teacher, an educated person, after all.

The teenager notices my embarrassment and says, “As long as you’re a believer; that’s all that counts. I never take my cross off.”

“I don’t either,” I say, managing a smile. And that is the truth. I want to tell her that she has made my day; instead, I pick up my packaged toaster and leave the store.
the old track

jillian donovan
charcoal 18" x 24"
chapter 7: the final act

Setting: Nighttime, a few days before Christmas, mid-1960s, living room at Burditt Avenue.

Characters: Ginny and her three children.

Major Theme: No matter what she does, you must love Ginny. Love is an essential, however difficult it is to sustain; it is the necessary force that keeps us moving on, and it offers living its only meaning.

Scene: Ginny, bitterly and drunkenly complaining over and over again about her rotten life with George, who has uncharacteristically taken a two or three day leave of absence to think about his life with Ginny; her three children, pleading with her to just shut up and go to bed.

Buzzy, the gentlest of people, with one sweep of his arm, dismantles all the tiny reindeer, the miniature elves, the jolly-faced Santa Claus in his sleigh—everything Ginny has pulled out of one stored cardboard box to decorate the mantle. As the knick-knacks crash to the floor, the curtain falls on a crying Ginny and a scared Nancy; only Buzzy and Cynthia remain on stage in front of the curtain.

Cynthia is crying, asking only one thing of her brother: “Do you still love her?” Buzzy’s answer now is of the utmost importance. When her brother shakes his head, closing his eyes, saying that he does not know, Cynthia, heartbroken, says nothing, understanding only that there is still the hope of love.
Catherine Barros is a senior Art major with a concentration in Fine Arts. She plans on becoming a high school art teacher after graduating in January 2010.

Chelsea Berry is a junior double-majoring in Elementary Education and Art with a concentration in Fine Arts.

Sallee Bickford is an Art major with concentrations in Photography and Graphic Design. She is a junior.

Rob Bradley is a junior double-majoring in English and Economics; he hopes to attend graduate school to continue studying either one, or both, of these subjects.

Caytlin M. Buckel is a freshman majoring in Art with a concentration in Graphic Design. She is originally from Brimfield, Massachusetts, and is currently residing in Bridgewater. Caytlin hopes to travel to Europe after graduation.

Scott Campbell is a senior majoring in Art with concentrations in Fine Arts and Graphic Design. His work is largely inspired by music, film, nature, and the unseen beauty of life. He plans to work in and out of his comfort zone, realizing the importance of creating out of one’s field.

Corinne Corey is an Art major in her junior year with a concentration in Art Education. She currently resides in Middleboro, Massachusetts, and plans on becoming an art teacher after graduation.
Evan Dardano is a senior majoring in English.

Kat Dolan is a senior Art major from East Bridgewater. She plans to attend graduate school for illustration and video game art.

Jillian Donovan is a sophomore originally from Abington, Massachusetts. Her major is undeclared.

Kara Doucette is a Management major in her senior year. VitalSpark Photography is her freelance business.

Anthony Ferris is a junior majoring in Art with a concentration in Fine Arts. His work has also appeared in BSC and Bristol Community College student shows.

Caitlin Gelatt is an alumna of BSC. She graduated with a degree in Art with concentrations in Fine Arts, Art History, and Photography.

Kyle J. Giacomozzi is majoring in English with a concentration in Writing. After graduation he plans to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing.

Mary Gillis is an Art major with a concentration in Graphic Design in her junior year. She is new to BSC and hopes to learn what the art program has to offer.

Jennifer Grinsell is a junior majoring in Art. She hopes to have a career teaching art in high school or college.

Lauren Hall is an Art major with a concentration in Fine Arts in her senior year. She plans to continue her education in hopes for a master’s degree in Fine Arts. She loves to print!

Zelmia Harvey is a junior pursuing a BA in Art with a concentration in Art History. Originally from Dorchester, Massachusetts, she now resides in Randolph. She would like to dedicate this piece to Zelma Lark, who will always be in her heart.

Lauren Hazirjian is a senior majoring in Art with a concentration in Graphic Design.

Tania Henry is a senior majoring in Art with a concentration in Fine Arts. She is an international student. She has had fun studying at BSC and would like to thank her professors and classmates for the experience.

Cynthia Heslam graduated from BSC in January of 2010 with an MA in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She is also in her ninth year of teaching English at Weymouth High School.

Fred Jackson is a senior majoring in Art and Secondary Education. He hopes to become a middle school art teacher after he graduates.

Nicole Johnson is a senior double-majoring in Special Education and Art with a concentration in Fine Arts. She appeared in the last edition of The Bridge with a self-portrait.

Reiko Kawahara is double-majoring in Physical Education and Art with a Fine Arts concentration.

Matthew Keogh plans to graduate in 2011 with a BA in English and a concentration in Writing, as well as a minor in Mathematics. He served as an editor on Volume VI of The Bridge.
Michael LePage is a History major in his senior year.

Brian Mandeville grew up on the South Shore and Cape Cod. He is an English major who plans to graduate in 2013.

Mary Ellen Mazzoli is a sophomore studying fine art. This is Mary’s first experience with printmaking and she is very excited with her newfound knowledge. She plans to use her collected skills to take on the exciting world of art.

Jennifer McGunagle is an Art major with a concentration in Graphic Design in her junior year. She currently resides in Weymouth, Massachusetts.

Sean W. Miller is currently a senior majoring in English.

Jacquelyn Mirick is a transfer student from Quincy College. She switched majors from Early Childhood Education to English. She also plans on pursuing her Education degree at BSC.

Martin McHugh Mullane is an Anthropology major in his junior year.

Thoa Nguyen will graduate in 2011 with bachelor’s degrees in both Secondary Education and Art with a concentration in Fine Arts.

Caitlin O’Brien is an Early Childhood Education and Art double-major with a concentration in Fine Arts; she is in her junior year. She currently resides on Cape Cod and loves creating images of seascapes.

Melissa Pace completed the post-baccalaureate teacher-licensing program at BSC, and then continued on to obtain an MAT in Creative Arts. She currently teaches at Grafton Elementary School in Grafton, Massachusetts.

Bianca Piemonte is a sophomore majoring in Psychology with a minor in Art. She hopes to spend a year in Europe after graduation.

Stephen Plummer is an Art and English double-major in his senior year. He has a concentration in Graphic Design.

Crystal Ptacek is a junior majoring in Art with a concentration in Photography. She is also an out-of-state student from upstate New York.

William Regan is an English major who plans to graduate in June 2011. He works as a teacher’s assistant in a special education class at Ottoson Middle School in Arlington, Massachusetts. This semester is his first at BSC since he withdrew in the fall of 2007.

Laurie Riley is a senior majoring in Art with a concentration in Crafts. Laurie would like to thank family and friends for their unwavering support.

Shannon Rosenblat is a transfer student from the University of Washington. She is a senior double-majoring in Philosophy and English with a concentration in Writing.

Donna K. Schiavo received her BA in Art with a concentration in Fine Arts in 1991. She received her MA in Psychology in 2001 and is a Staff Counselor at the BSC Counseling Center.

W. M. Scott is a junior majoring in English with a concentration in Writing. He would like to thank his mother for everything.
Mary Shea graduated in May 2009 with an MAT in Creative Arts. She plans to continue her ceramic work.

Daniel Silva is an Art major with a concentration in Graphic Design in his senior year. He currently resides in Brockton, Massachusetts.

Michael Sim is an Aviation Science major in his senior year.

Jessica M. Sircar is an English graduate student. She plans to continue to a master’s in Art Conservation after graduation.

Lyndsay Snow is a senior majoring in Art with a concentration in Graphic Design. She would like to dedicate all her art and inspiration to her parents. They are a big influence in her life and she looks up to them.

Sandra Sorrenti is an Art major with a concentration in Fine Arts in her junior year.

Diane M. Sullivan is an English major in her sophomore year. She is returning to finish her English degree after an extended hiatus. Diane lives in Hull, Massachusetts, with her family.

Tara M. Sullivan graduated in May of 2009 with a BA in English. She is a past editor of The Bridge.

Bruce Taylor graduated from BSC in ’64. He was an editor of the campus literary magazine back then, Roots & Wings.

Kate Thurston is a graduate of BSC and plans to continue to print for the rest of her life. She would like to shout out to Professor Craven and others of Print Land!

Alan Tibbetts is a graduate student completing an MAT in Creative Arts. He teaches Digital Arts Photography at Braintree High School.

Sarah Tolland is a senior majoring in Art with a concentration in Graphic Design.

Brianna Weaver is a full-time student and a proud mother of one. She is positively passionate about ELA and poetry.

Christina Winsor is a Special Education major in her sophomore year. She lives in Raynham, Massachusetts.

John Winters is working on his MFA in English. He works at BSC’s Office of Institutional Communications.

Nancy Zimbalist is an MAT student in Creative Studies. She teaches art in Boston Public Schools.
honorable mentions

nick antonopoulos sea of sorrow poetry
erin bergeron stop and go nonfiction
jim brosnan sometimes in autumn poetry
shayna curran wilde writing, inspired by henry nonfiction
christina doris done poetry
yi du i can endure no more nonfiction
michael j. everett crayons and paper nonfiction
michelle maher coffee with a side of sexual assault fiction
marissa meade therapy fiction
zachariah grover milauskas the bitch must die nonfiction
amber rhilinger white diamonds are forever nonfiction
kelly schoop yes we did nonfiction
andrew twiraga luster poetry
andrew wood to years worth counting poetry
christopher yokel per terra ad astra, vice versa poetry

jean cabral cloud cover sculpture
jessica gillane introvert printmaking
scott kosmeh twisty cat sculpture
jessica o’toole fibonacci elements and space weaving
joseph olson lamp in green and brown sculpture
victoria osborn organic emotions photography
alex pawling night hustle hiroshima japan photography
dennis j. perko jr. acorn churchwarden sculpture

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VOLUME VI

COLLEGE MEDIA ADVISERS

apple award: best-in-show for literary/art magazine

COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION

gold crown award

COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION

annual critiques: gold medalist

twenty-three gold circle awards:

sarah haag
first place for cover design, two or more colors

sarah haag, “self-portrait box spread design”
first place for literary single spread

ryan olson, “the games these children play”
first place for single illustration rendering photographic material, black and white

madeleine patch, “in utero series”
first place for photographs, black and white or black and white and one other color

amanda armas, “poetry/b&w image spreads”
second place for page design literary portfolio

the bridge staff
second place for general use of typography throughout magazine

sarah haag, “self-portrait spread”
second place for literary single spread

the bridge staff
third place for overall design literary magazine
gr ant h. ferro, “waiting”  
third place for photographs, two or more colors  
jason r. gregory, “untitled”  
third place for photographs, black and white or black and white and one other color  
jason r. gregory, “untitled”  
third place for photographs: portfolio of work  
sarah haag, “in utero series spread”  
third place for literary single spread  
lauren hall, “self-portrait”  
third place for single illustration not based on photographic material, color  
reiko kawahara, “do not enter”  
third place for single illustration rendering photographic material, color  
amanda armas, “the bridge submission guidelines”  
certificate of merit for typography, use of typography on one page or spread  
amanda armas, “do not enter spread”  
certificate of merit for literary single spread  
eric bailey, “parallels”  
certificate of merit for photographs, two or more colors  
debra brandzen marek, “on the couch”  
certificate of merit for single illustration rendering photographic material, color  
the bridge staff, “path/scarf spread”  
certificate of merit for literary single spread  
the bridge staff, “woodstar/fiddle spread”  
certificate of merit for literary single spread  
kyle j. giacomozzi and matthew keogh, “the mind at work”  
certificate of merit for non-fiction interview  
denise p. king, “the cookbook”  
certificate of merit for poetry, open  
michael lepage, “what’s important”  
certificate of merit for essay
VOLUME V
COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION
- gold crown award 2009
- thirteen gold circle awards

ASSOCIATED COLLEGIATE PRESS
- pacemaker award 2008
- best-in-show for literary magazine: third place

COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION
- annual critiques: gold medalist 2008

VOLUME III
ASSOCIATED COLLEGIATE PRESS
- pacemaker award 2007
- best-in-show for literary magazine: first place

COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION
- gold crown award 2007
- nine gold circle awards

COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION
- annual critiques: gold medalist 2006

VOLUME II
COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION
- gold crown award 2006
- seven gold circle awards

COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION
- annual critiques: gold medalist 2005

VOLUME I
COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION
- silver crown award 2005
- six gold circle awards

COLLEGE MEDIA ADVISERS
- apple award: best-in-show for literary/art magazine 2005

COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION
- annual critiques: gold medalist 2004

...
General Guidelines Accepting submissions now through December 17, 2010. All work must be accompanied by a cover letter that includes the submitter’s name, phone number, e-mail, year or graduation date, major, and each entry’s title and genre. Please also include a 20 to 25 word biography. Submissions will be accepted in more than one genre or as multiple works in the same genre, but no more than ten works per genre per person will be considered. The work itself should include only its title, not the submitter’s name.

Literature Guidelines Prose must be double-spaced. Preference will be given to shorter pieces. Retain a copy of your work, as it will not be returned. Email submissions to: thebridgejournal@bridgew.edu. Deliver hardcopy manuscripts or send via campus mail to: The Bridge, c/o Mail Room (located in the basement of Tillinghast Hall). If sending from off campus, address to: The Bridge, c/o Mail Room, 131 Summer Street, Bridgewater, MA 02325.

Visual Arts Guidelines We no longer accept electronic art submissions. You may submit work by bringing it to the Art Center, Room 202. Please be sure your artwork is either in high-resolution digital format or is photo or scanner ready (unframed). No work will be stored, except for in special circumstances. Specific guidelines will be available after October 1 at our website: www.thebridgejournal.com.

Send Inquiries To thebridgejournal@bridgew.edu

invites submissions of literature poetry, fiction, nonfiction, drama and visual art painting, drawing, photography, digital art, three-dimensional, mixed media for its 8th volume all BSC students and alumni are eligible to submit work

Works accepted will be eligible for The Bridge Award, given for the most outstanding works in literature and visual art. Up to seven $200 awards will be granted.