

dreamstreets

Number 51

Special Edition

June 2015



dreamstreets
1977 to 2015 and on

once we were young
full of energy and bounce,
nothing could deter us,
a small band of poets
against the world.

we read our poems
to whomever
would have us,
printed our works
to give away,
welcomed all
fledgling or seasoned
to lend their works
and talents to the world.

we persevered
through the years
paving the way
for voices young and old,
to caress or assault
our eyes and ears
with passionate art and words,
with sorrow or humor,
thoughtful and personal,
to share our zest -
the legacy goes on.

- e. jean lanyon
poet laureate emeritus

2nd Saturday Poetry Readings



Equal Pay ERA



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DREAMSTREETS 51

Steven Leech, Editor

Cover art and inside drawings by E. JEAN LANYON

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FOREWORD

During the 1970s and 1980s, Wilmingtonians witnessed a flourishing artistic community and the establishment of many of the cultural pillars that continue to support the visual and performing arts within the city today. Organizations such as the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, the Delaware Humanities Forum, and the Delaware Theatre Company were founded during this period as well as commercial galleries and city-supported arts initiatives. Within this encouraging climate, artists utilized collaborative, social practices to create spaces in which to share and grow the contemporary art community within and surrounding the City of Wilmington. One such platform was *Dreamstreets*, the artist magazine begun in 1977 by John Hickey. Like other independently published zines that experienced their heyday from the mid-1960s through the 1980s, *Dreamstreets* assembled writers and artists to create a literary and visual appraisal of the times.

The Delaware Art Museum's sponsoring exhibition, *Dream Streets: Art in Wilmington 1970–1990* (June 27–September 27, 2015), takes its title from the zine; a title that captures the enthusiasm that spread through the corridors of the city. This exhibition originated with a chance tour of the Queen Theater in downtown Wilmington in 2009 just prior to the start of a major renovation project to create World Café Live at The Queen. On viewing the Fifth Street stairwell, I was met by bold, black graphics that repeated the word, "gallery," up to the landing. My interest was immediately piqued, having not been familiar with any commercial art endeavors based in The Queen. A brief history of the building chronicles the construction as the Indian Queen Hotel in 1789, an upgrade to the first-class Clayton House hotel in 1871, and the subsequent conversion to a 2,000-seat movie theater in 1916. The last film shown was *House on Haunted Hill*, and following that April 1959 screening, the space was said to have remained dark and vacant for the next five decades.

What this concise chronology omits is the infusion of energy into the second-floor space of The Queen throughout the mid to late 1970s. On April 30, 1974, the Fifth Street Gallery opened its first show, and what followed through 1978 were regular exhibitions and events in the 3,000-square-foot gallery that brought artists, celebrities, and musicians into the city. Combined with the endeavors of non-profit arts organizations and elected officials, Fifth Street Gallery—with Robert Michael Jones at the helm—helped advance efforts to create a centralized artistic community in downtown Wilmington. The Museum celebrates this rich history with its summer 2015 exhibition and applauds the creative endeavors of past and current contributors to *Dreamstreets*.

Margaret Winslow
Associate Curator for Contemporary Art
Delaware Art Museum

Cycles

Steven Leech

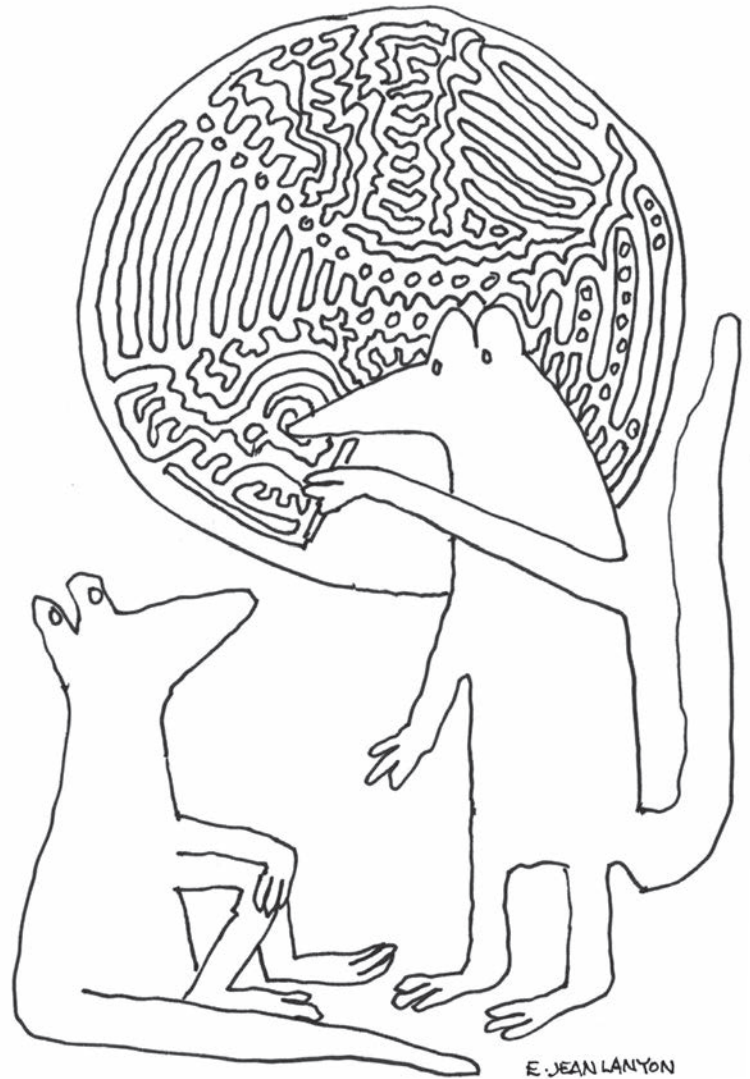
I never thought I'd be writing the introductory remarks for *Dreamstreets #51*. I was barely involved with *Dream Streets #1*, except to provide John Hickey, who was among the founders, with the name of a printer during a chance encounter on a city bus in 1977. Later, as co-editor for *Dream Streets #3* in 1980, sharing duties with Delaware's then newly appointed Poet Laureate e. jean lanyon, I wished only for *Dreamstreets* to continue by representing more of the Wilmington area's neglected and marginalized literary artists.

My and e. jean's literary interests stemmed from a splintered and fractured previous literary legacy that had hobbled along since the beginning of the post-World War II period. Involvement in that previous period's literary life ran a bit deeper for e. jean than mine. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, two of Delaware's Poet Laureates, David Hudson and Marguerite Weaver, who had been friends of my mother's side of the family, had both encouraged my own literary aspirations. For e. jean, her literary aspirations had been encouraged by two earlier Delaware Poet Laureates, Edna Deemer Leach, who was Delaware's first Poet Laureate, and especially Delaware's second Poet Laureate, Jeannette Slocomb Edwards. The impetus had been there for both of us and, perhaps, that had been part of the undercurrent that enabled us to join forces for *Dream Streets #3*.

We've now gone full circle with *Dreamstreets #51*. In these pages the reader will find recent work by some of those who graced our earliest issues. The reader will also find work from newer poets, writers, and artists.

My own earnest interest in Wilmington's past cultural history stems from my parents' experiences from the late 1930s and those first couple of years of the 1940s. My father had been a member of the Delaware Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration during the Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was my efforts to find my father's writing from that project that opened a Pandora's box of the vicinity's rich history, whether cultural, social, or economic. My father counted as friends during those times the noted local artists Edward Grant, Bayard Berndt, and William D. White. My mother took some courses from artist Frank Schoonover while still a student at P. S. duPont High School. She later attended some art classes at the newly built Delaware Art Museum, and it was there that she met my father.

Now I have the opportunity, thanks to that very same Delaware Art Museum, to take up the mantle of advancing creative work and aspirations on the behalf of local poets, artists, and authors. In an unavoidably obvious and self-indulgent manner, for me this new involvement of *Dreamstreets* with the Delaware Art Museum symbolically allows me to continue what my parents had to relinquish well over seventy years ago.



The words of my teachers
have become my words.

John Hickey
Dreamstreets' co-founder, 2015

Cereal

JoAnn Balingit

Poet Laureate of Delaware

I come to cereal slowly as to any offering
lean into its bowl, intentions pouring
into a spoon's cupped palm
where a wild population swims

I believe in cereal
because it needn't be taken seriously—
although my gynecologist says
oatmeal is what takes care of us

True, we walk toward cereal
as in a dream of travel:
tunnels bridges fields turning
gold to soggy brown

a deer herd pours down a hillside
and slows like the mind in a puddle
at the bottom of a bowl
in a tale brimmed with riches

real as my Rice Krispies
islands of gridlocked taxis
idling in milk snow...
back then I was a daughter—

Now I have a daughter
whose bowl I have had to empty
though I would like to fill it
whose bowl she turns hollow toward me

like the barrel of a cannon
in a battle, far away

Haikus

Steven Bennett

there is one mosquito in kurashiki
when heat hides in darkness
it visits my ankle

flattened balloon
easy in my pocket
last night's dream

a buckwheat pillow
like the one at home
moon over the mountain inn

the trestle stones are warm
i don't need this heavy jacket
traveling to see my old mother

caterpillar on warm concrete
soon the school bell
five hundred feet

Catching Chickens

Phillip Bannowsky

"Any of you speak English?"
Said to the leftover and hopeless Mexicans and me,
waiting for work, baked by day
and stale by nightfall like pizzas
I'd made all summer in Rehoboth on a J-1 Visa.
The Russian stole my passport, pay, and ticket home,
and there I was, hungry, but now Our Lady saved the day.

My English overflowed with accents
I'd taken with the tips—collegiate, grandma, six-pack Joe:
"Yes, sir; I am the man."
"Yes, you are." And I was in

the van, on the floor, propping myself with palms in slick straw
about the boots of four blacks already aboard.
"You like chicken?" the boss man asked.
"You bet I do." And the black men laughed.

Like a lone star in the manurey firmament that was
the warehouse, a single light bulb shown
on thousands of white chickens across a sea of dark dirt; they
roiled softly like expiring foam,
clucking mild reproaches at our approach.
A giant goose-necked machine with
a face of rubber snakes sat menacingly by:
the automated chicken catcher, side-lined for repairs.
We
would catch the chickens.

Mamacita, in the mornings under misted Imbabura,
would slip her padded hands beneath the hen,
cradle it sweetly while cooing Quichua words of love, hide
with one hand its eyes from her little act of shame, grasp and
like a chain whip of shoulder, elbow, wrist, and
neck—ah,
halal is not so merciful.

"Let's work, José." One waded into the chicken surf
to hook two-three-four-five pairs of chicken legs between his
knuckles,
fling them like feather dusters into a wire shelf, shake them
to the rear and re-load. It looked easy.

The chickens, too surprised to be un-docile to my comrades,
fought me like gamecocks, leapt
accusing from the sticking shelves,
and left them empty when the fork lift came. "Put
some ass into it, José. We ain't gonna carry you."
Behind is always twice the work; ahead, you pass the bottle.
When I finally got a sip it filled
the pores of my thirsty bones with grace.
"Thanks. My name's Jacobo."
"Call me Pea Patch, José."
"Work here always?"
"Naw, we're scabs. Union in? Get an Auto-Catch chicken catcher.
Auto-catcher break? Hire scabs and wetbacks.
That's why they call America
the land of opportunity."
And that was true, since the boss man fed me
cheese and mayo sandwiches and
offered me a job packing cut-up chickens,
which Pea Patch would not do: "Shit,
my people did this shit fo' fo' hundred years.
Your turn, now, José."

Had Our Lady, who had lifted me
from the river of misfortune, now dropped me
in the mountain's fire?



Spectres of Old Colorado

Arabella Sofia Bianco

To Alice B.



Death does not separate, only lack of love.

Miles above Red Mountain pass, the Land Rover snorts lazily,
Then takes its accustomed place among the lichen-encrusted boulders.

Our lovely Victorian chalet stands just below the tree line,
With its chestnut gables, violet drapes, and curving alpine meadow,
Perched on the edge of the sunset-stained abyss;

And high above it all, the brooding granite fortresses,

Where, glacially wreathed in white,

Dwell mute, unchanging Goddesses of solid rock.

Inside, the old-fashioned telephone rings nonchalantly.

Bonjour! You made it out! You're down at The Beaumont?

That place with the honky-tonk piano and the old bell-tower?

They say it's haunted, you know, watch out!

Spirit away a jug of that wine we like from the Denver Saloon on your way up.

I'll reimburse you ...

Two raps ...

The mahogany door swings wide, and there you stand, beloved pale-face,
In your long blond rivulets, your smirky smile, and your gorgeous gold-rush gown,
Glowing like a slender candle in the deeply sculpted shadows of that sweeping porch.

Come in.

Come in forever, my startling lamplight vision!

The fire's laid, the great four-poster's warm,

There's venison, chutney, and ice-cold beer on the ebony dining room table.

The trail to the waterfall's clear,

We can hike through the black satin night,

Sing an accompaniment to the sweet malingering of the stars ...

You vanish ...

Oh ...

I must go find a vacuum, dust is everywhere,

And snow is in the forecast for the High Sierras.

And that picture-postcard cemetery in the little town back east,

Where once we so audaciously made love among the giggling ghosts,

Are you resting there, hollow and white beneath your quilt of dazzling autumn leaves?

The November sky has taught me how to weep.

The wildflowers have departed;

The aspens shiver,

In the cold ...

Resurrection
Easter 2013

Robert Bohm

Unsteady on my legs, I gazed around, craving
something from

far back, but what? Swaying
this way and that

to the beat of a mass
of fly larvae seething

inside me, I arrived
differently than expected, a dazzler

eager to showcase
my swagger. Unlike Jesus, though,

no peepholes in my palms offered doubters
a glimpse at what lies

beyond the sky, nor was there
any vinegar on my lips that later could be mixed

with oil and sprinkled
on a salad. But what

I did have was enough. Or so it seemed. See
this line? It's where

a surgeon, wielding
an oscillating saw, cut

my breastbone in two, then
forced each half away

from the other, baring
my heart, a dying jellyfish

pulsing on a beach in
an anesthesia of light. After that

everything went dark. When I
awoke, I lay sprawled

on an Arctic tundra, the wind groaning
above me like Abraham about

to sacrifice son Isaac, but
I wasn't frightened, I knew

I'd survive. That's when
I awoke a second time and stepped

forth from my tomb, my soul
cold as ice, my mind capable of seeing

everything. Meticulously, I then pulled
out my stitches and wove them together

like Rumpelstiltskin's daughter spinning straw
into gold — I was a magician

mining riches from my wound! Afterwards
I pried open the unhealed gash with my fingers

and released
my apostles, the flies. Now

look at them, alive and well
in every nation of the world, even

in your house! See how agile
they are, darting

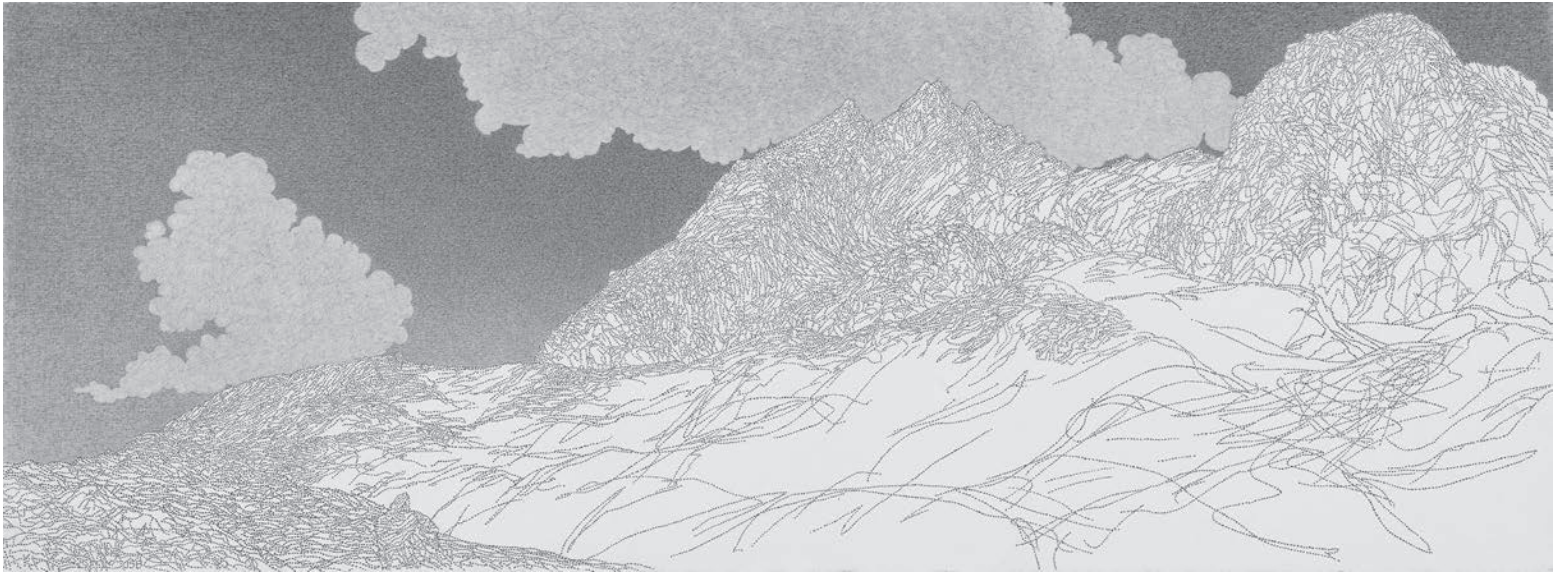
around your home, landing
on a greasy pan one minute, then exploring

a toilet bowl the next. What
true missionaries they are! — flitting

from one place to another and buzzing happily
while laying eggs everywhere. This is what

I have to give, infestation
as salvation's twin, joy as heard

in the jaunty music
of flies parading with dirty feet across spoiled meat.



Jonathan Bragdon | *Looking toward Tete Pegnet, Anseinde, Switzerland, 2014* | Graphite on rag paper, 11 ¼ x 30 inches

Singularities

Jonathan Bragdon

1.

The intimacies
of physics are indifferent,
compared to those of a line
being drawn, for example,
from an eye tangled
in turns and shifts
in a tree's life
from crown
to root
in earth,
instant and slow,
in events no trace or wash
can repeat, yet for itself
are index and address.

2.

Whose restless
distance took a body
in hand, drew lines of sight
for arrivals, split surfaces
inward and raised an horizon,
like the hem of a curtain,
and gave randomness
invitations?

3.

Who threads thoughts
like fish caught, lives given
and bought, breaths drawn and
let out, deaths found and then
lost?

Death of a Poet

CaseyJ.

SILENCE.

Troops rally 'round
Lady Willow assumes her post
As her leaves tickle the dust of the ground.
Trumpets Rise to blow
No sound is released.
The sail is erect
However the wind is at rest
~An eerie kind of peace.
Barrenness loiters
Silver moon doesn't take its place.
Orion weeps
Refusing to show the hairs of his face.
Volcano tried
Eruption dare not take place.
The air is thicker than usual
Why must one struggle to breathe?
The Death of a Poet?
Ah, now I see.

As motivation groups go, gathering around a best-selling book works well, until an American literary legend enters the picture ...

The Bargain

Robert Hambling Davis

"You hold in your hands *The Bargain*," Greta said, reading the jacket copy of the self-help bestseller to her support group, who stood in a circle in her living room. "When you apply the principles of *The Bargain* to your life, you will fulfill your desires and get exactly what you want. You will think Blue Chip thoughts and reap dividends of the highest destiny. Invest in *The Bargain* and turn your life into a miracle."

Greta closed the book and bowed her head. The four other members cradled their copies to their chests and bowed their heads. "May we invest in *The Bargain*, one day at a time, for the rest of our lives," they prayed. "May we think Blue Chip thoughts and attract prosperity and abundance. May we get exactly what we want. Amen."

They sat and Greta said, "Who wants to share?" She was the group leader, and she swayed back and forth with a tight-lipped smile in her creaky, velour-padded cane rocker. The others shifted about in their Amish oak chairs, drinking tea from her bone china cups and staring down at her Persian carpet.

"Thank God time is part of *The Bargain*!" said their newest member, Harriett, who'd joined the group a month ago. She clapped her red Crocs together, brushed back a strand of her graying hair, and sported an impish grin. "Just think if all our wishes came true at once. We'd be in a heck of a mess! Like having seven tons of four-leaf clovers dumped on us, topped off with eleven tons of rabbits' feet."

No one laughed except Ralph. He cocked his head and cackled brashly till Greta glared at him. Then he shut up, his face flushed, hands stuffed in the coat pockets of his plaid polyester suit, which looked a size too big. He'd joined the group two weeks before Harriett and hadn't shared much at the meetings.

"Don't try to woo us with your jokes, Harriett," said Greta. "The *Bargain* is no laughing matter."

"I was just trying to begin our meeting on the light side," Harriett said, her grin gone. "Plus I thought I was making a good point about time and desire, and that too much of a good thing—"

"You thought wrong," Greta said.

The group was silent for a long moment. Then Peg, a bleach blonde with a double chin, said, "I must think thin to lose weight."

"Now that's a testimonial," Greta said. She rocked faster and nodded at Peg. "When did you last weigh yourself?"

"This morning. I lost five pounds in a month," Peg said, her gold molars flashing from the wings of her smile.

"Yay, Peg!" cried Marvin, who sat next to Greta. "You'll get exactly what you want! You'll be a Blue Chip yet!"

"Last night I dreamed I starred in a low-budget indie I knew would launch my career," Peg went on, looking exuberant. "Then it was *Red Carpet Night* and they opened the envelope and read my name. I walked on stage to a standing ovation. I laughed, I cried, I blew kisses at the cheering crowd. I held my Oscar high and said, 'If not for *The Bargain*, I wouldn't have this.'"

"Thank you for sharing," Greta said. She stopped rocking, sipped her tea, and peered hard at Peg. "But you're too old to

star in movies, and the only time you acted was in your senior play. When did you tell us that was?"

Peg swallowed and said, "Twenty-five years ago."

Ralph unbuttoned his coat. "Maybe you're interpreting her dream too literally," he said, with a deferential nod at Greta. "Maybe her Oscar means something besides all that Hollywood glitz."

"I'm not interpreting," Greta said. "I'm—"

"What gown were you wearing, Peg?" Harriett burst out in a shrill voice, cutting Greta off.

"Eduardo Lucero. Soft silk, a deep plunge front and back."

"What color?" Harriett asked, with a look of longing.

"Cerise."

"See, that could mean many things," Ralph said, shaking his stubby finger at the group. "Yeah, that there could point to a part of Peg that's—"

"You don't know what you're talking about," Greta said, raking him with her steel-blue eyes. "Have you even read *The Bargain*, or do you merely scan it for sound bites?"

"I've read it plenty," Ralph said in a cracking voice. He gulped his tea, rubbed his red nose, and looked down at his feet, as if regretting his lame comeback.

"Hey, I'd like to remind everyone," Marvin cried, waving his copy of *The Bargain*. "We're all Blue Chips in the making!"

"We're all Blue Chips in the making!" the others cried, waving their copies, except for Greta, who locked her suspicious eyes on Marvin.

Marvin gave her a self-assured look and nestled the book in his lap. "I haven't shared what I'm about to tell you. I wasn't ready till now," he said, gazing around the circle. "Last month I lost my job and my close friend died in a car wreck, both on the same day. I never felt worse, but in my despair I was graced with a miracle. It came in the form of an ancient pre-*Bargain* scroll my terrier dug up in the backyard and brought to me before retrieving the morning paper. That day—"

"Marvin," Greta broke in. "You're delusional."

Marvin fell back in his chair, blinking and muttering to himself, like he'd been rudely awakened from a joyful trance. Then he hushed and the room filled with the steady creak of Greta's rocker.

"Please, all of you watch me," Harriett said, breaking the group's silence. She closed her eyes, opened her book, and touched her finger to the page. "As you can see, I trust *The Bargain* to speak to us at this difficult moment." She put on her bifocals and read, "Invest in Blue Chip thoughts and you will get exactly what you want. And remember, simply owning a copy of *The Bargain* puts you on the path toward becoming a Blue Chip." She looked up with a perky smile. "There, that says it all, doesn't it?"

"I don't know," Ralph said. "I bought my copy when it came out, three years ago. I've read it cover to cover, forty-seven times, and I doubt I'll ever be a Blue Chip." He bent over with his face in his hands, and sobbed.

Peg patted his nearly hairless head. "Ralph, take it easy. We

aren't here to beat ourselves up. Your problem is our problem. We're in this together, even though a part of me has become a Blue Chip, or I wouldn't have lost five pounds."

"We're all Blue Chips in the making," Greta said. "But some of us will be bigger Blue Chips than others."

Peg gave her hanky to Ralph. "Thanks, Peg," he said, wiping his baggy eyes. "But you know," he told the group, "I have a hard time seeing life as a strategy. I'd make a lousy Napoleon or Patton."

"Both were powerful Blue Chips," Greta said, cutting the air with her long bony hand.

"I don't have a strategic mind," Ralph went on. "But I don't think I'm a wimp ... Well, maybe a little, I suppose."

"Suppose bigger," Greta said.

"Okay, I'm a wimp," he said, with a cringing look. "I was abused as a boy, so maybe that has a lot to do with my wimpism."

"Wimpiness," Greta said.

"Oh, call it what you want." Ralph pawed his hand down at her. "All I'm saying is The Bargain isn't a true spiritual path because it's limited by the self. If the self invests in Blue Chip thoughts, it will get exactly what it wants."

"Have you gone Buddhist on us? Is that where your wimpiness is taking you, Ralph?" Greta said. She rocked furiously, her chair creaking like a tree in a gale. "If so, we want no part of it. Don't bring your Bargain-killing crap to our group."

"When the self gets exactly what it wants," Ralph said, "it will want more, because the self is never satisfied." He shook his fist by his jaw. "The self is a hungry ghost locked in the prison of the strategic mind. The immense gobbling mouth of the self is never stuffed full."

Greta stood and stabbed her finger at Ralph. "You've gone too far," she said. "You're not the least supportive." She narrowed her eyes and scanned the circle. "As our group leader, I move we terminate Ralph's membership. Who seconds the motion?"

"I do," Harriett said, hoping to change Greta's opinion of her.

"All in favor, aye," Greta said, thrusting her hand up.

The vote was three to two, with Harriett, Greta, and Marvin (who'd damn well show Greta he wasn't delusional) the Ayes, and Peg and Ralph the Nays.

"Now leave, Ralph," Greta said, pointing at the door.

Ralph puffed out his chest and said, "I might be wimpy, but I'm not a loser."

"The hell you aren't," Marvin said. "And don't think we buy your 'self' rap. You must have a self before you can lose a self, and you never had a self in the first place."

"I've got one all right," Ralph said, "or I wouldn't be a drunk."

The group stared at him.

"Yeah, you heard me." He took a silver flask from the inside pocket of his coat, unscrewed the cap, and spiked his tea. "I've used your bathroom, Greta, to sneak vodka from my flask. It's why I wear this oversized suit to the meetings."

"Put that away and leave!" Greta shouted.

"AA didn't work for me," Ralph said. "Neither did the other

groups I joined over all the years I've been a drunk. When I read The Bargain, I figured I could quit boozing by thinking sober thoughts. But it hasn't happened."

"Get to the point," Marvin said, with a karate-chopping gesture.

"I feel Ralph is getting there," Peg said. She sat tall and raised her voice. "I feel he's really trying."

Ralph slurped his spiked tea and said, "Right now I'm investing my thoughts in the world's best-selling poet, Charles Bukowski. He drank his ass off and never read The Bargain."

"How do you know he didn't?" Marvin said.

"He died before it was published," Ralph said. "When he was a boy, his father beat him, like my father beat me. Charles Bukowski grew up a loner who wrote raw poems about booze, women, and beer shits. He raged against the world, investing in all kinds of Bargain-killing thoughts, which got him into barroom brawls. But his books have sold millions. Now what does that mean?" Ralph asked, and chugged his tea.

"Maybe you shouldn't try to quit drinking," Harriett said, and everyone laughed except Greta and Marvin.

"This isn't funny. No one drinks at our meetings," Greta said, standing over Ralph. "Now get out of my house."

Ralph took a swig from his flask and raised it, as if toasting her. "I've invested my thoughts in this chilled Smirnoff. A few slugs and the world is my Red Carpet." He tossed back his head with the flask attached, and the group gaped at his bobbing Adam's apple.

"Enough!" Greta stamped her foot. "I won't have this in my home."

Peg took a cigarette and lighter from her purse.

"You can't smoke in here," Greta told her.

Peg lit up and said, "Smoking helps me lose weight."

"Put it out." Greta pointed at her fireplace. "Put it out. Now."

Peg took a long drag and looked euphoric as she blew smoke at Greta.

"How dare you!" Greta cried, flailing her hands about.

Harriett stood and said, "I feel we've been traumatized. I feel we need to refocus on our mission statement."

"I'm doing that by smoking this cigarette," Peg said. "I inhale goodness and joy. I exhale darkness and pain."

"Sounds like my kind of woman," Ralph said, and gave her his flask.

Peg held it high. "I drink in goodness and joy." She drank and stood. "I pee out darkness and pain." She gave the flask back to Ralph and swaggered to the bathroom.

"I won't invest in rage," Greta said, her face a wince, her breath a rasp. She walked over to the window, opened it, and blinked out at her trimmed hedge and neat flowers. "The meeting is over," she said, her back to the group. "Everyone please leave."

"What's happening?" Harriett asked. She shifted side to side in her Crocs as Peg, dragging on her cigarette, sauntered back from the bathroom. "I feel some of us are misusing The Bargain. Just think what she would think of us." Harriett held up her copy with the megapixel color photo of Desiree Flemming on the cover.

"She'd say we'll never become Blue Chips. She'd correct the next

edition, saying some people are beyond help."

"She would do nothing of the kind," Greta said, spraying lemon air freshener at the group. "Desiree is too compassionate to give up on anyone. Look how messed up her life was before she invested in Blue Chip thoughts and wrote *The Bargain*. Our lives are no worse ... Well, maybe some are," Greta added, and sprayed extra long at Peg and Ralph as they sat smoking and drinking.

"Peg," said Harriett, sitting down beside her. "Can I have one of those?"

"Sure." Peg gave her a cigarette and lit it.

"If you smoke that cigarette," Greta said, looming over Harriett, "you will cancel all the progress you've made. So why on earth would you want to smoke it?"

"To lose weight, like Peg," Harriett said, exhaling a faint puff. "I've never smoked, but I hear cigarettes control your appetite." She took a bigger drag, and let it out with a hopeful look. "So if I invest in thin thoughts and take up smoking, I should ... no, I will lose my unsightly pounds and never regain them."

"I'll drink to that." Ralph swigged from his flask and passed it to Harriett.

"Vodka?" she said. "I've never drank in my life." She tilted the flask and took three swallows. "Ahh, how refreshing! To think I've denied myself the pleasures of smoking and drinking, and I'll be fifty next month!" Harriett raised her cigarette and said, "Thank you, Peg." She raised her flask. "Thank you, Ralph. From now on, I will not live in denial." She tipped her ash in her teacup and said, "Did this Bukowski guy drink vodka?"

"He drank everything," Ralph said, lighting one of Peg's cigarettes. "He wasn't fat, either, but he looked like a gargoyle."

Now, tainting the scent of Greta's air freshener, a pungent odor crept up the group's noses as a hissing sound came from Peg.

"How could you even think of smoking marijuana in my home?" Greta said, and blasted air freshener at Peg. "How could you think of smoking it, period?"

"Yeah, Peg," said Marvin. "You shouldn't have brought that stuff to our group. Goes to show your devotion to *The Bargain* is a sham. You're nothing but a doping Blue Chip wannabe and that's all you'll ever be."

"Really?" Peg said in a pinched voice. Then she whooshed out a lungful of smoke and offered the joint to Marvin. "Want a hit to sharpen your intuition?"

"You can't pay me enough to smoke that shit," Marvin said.

"I'll take one," Ralph said, and Peg passed the joint to him and lit another.

"That's it!" Greta said. "This is my home and I won't tolerate smoking, drinking, or drugging."

"I think we should vote," Harriett said.

No one said anything, not even Marvin, who was seething through his teeth at Peg and Ralph. Greta dropped her air freshener and collapsed in her rocker with a stunned look. Is Greta stoned on the secondhand smoke from Peg's joint? Harriett wondered, perched in her chair. If so, am I stoned? Like

Bill Clinton, Harriett had taken sociable puffs at college parties, but never inhaled. Maybe I should have, she told herself.

Ralph closed his eyes and leaned back with a happy face. "I've just invested my thoughts in raising Marilyn Monroe from the dead and humping her on an expanding bed of venture capital," he said, blowing smoke at the ceiling.

"Say, Ralph, could you pass that joint?" Harriett said.

"Sure, baby. May it fill you with Blue Chip bliss if that's what you want."

Harriett sucked on the joint and sat busty and flushed, holding her breath till she saw spots. Then she exhaled and waited for a miracle. Suddenly she felt weightless, no longer in her body, but floating like a birthday balloon. And there, floating beside her, was a man who looked like a gargoyle. He was drinking beer and smoking a hand-rolled cigarette. Harriett guessed it was the ghost of Charles Bukowski.

"Nothing is worse than to finish a good shit, then reach over and find the toilet paper container empty," he told her. "Even the most horrible human being on earth deserves to wipe his ass."

"Ralph, I'm having a vision you should be having," Harriett cried, shaking his arm. "I'm having a big Bukowski Bargain-killing vision!"

"Cool," Ralph said, and pulled another flask from his coat. "Let's drink to your vision."

Peg was slung back in her chair, laughing hysterically. Marvin was trying to revive Greta, who clutched her brow and slumped motionless in her rocker. Her china cups were filled with roach ends and cigarette butts. The summer wind blew through the room.

Peg sat up, opened her purse, took out a vial, and uncapped it. She shook onto her palm what looked like tiny round pieces of candy, pink as a kitten's tongue.

"Try one," she said, holding her hand out to Harriett.

"What kind is it?" Harriett said.

"Ecstasy," Peg said.

"Oh, yes!" Harriett popped one in her mouth. "It's exactly what I want." ♦



E. JEAN LANYON

For those who came to stay

Gemelle John

It's where you get your fruit

It's where you take vacation

It's where you need not mention that you don't quite speak the language

Inside nature's fence, aesthetic

The urban planner's polite directive

"Add a few exotic shrubs and trees,

So that it feels—authentic"

Thorn free bush and carefully culled tree

adorn resorts

But let you breathe,

Sweep breeze over the scent of great, great, almost descendants,

Erase the fact that this same sand once acted as a shallow grave pit

and the resort's catchphrase

"Where does a body go to get relief but

Where the sea is?"

It's where you believe you can fly

Always with a round trip ticket,

Where sandy white and crystal blue say here and fiction are seamless

It's where a thrice daily "welcome sir" redefines what a stranger is

It's where you trade your courage for chances

Your nods for humble glances

And currency exchanges remind us where success lives

And where it stopped to rest

The backyard of my barrio is your beach and my oasis

Imported sand thins out under my feet

Gives way to dirt, scrap metal from construction projects

Treeless heat

Palm trees fray in an over-fertilized afterthought

Conqueror, your first love is the last place they want to be

They crave the sea not the trouble it's caused

Broken seashells of people

Their eye lashes moss

Moist slapping cruise ships bigger than you could ever have ventured

And the blue skies and family ties

Tell me

Stay true to yourself

But it seems that they have come back

And you may have to leave

So

Second chance

Oh second land

Ushered in US passport stamp is code for

We accept you

"freedom and justice" is code for

You aren't just born free

You pay the tax with your feet

Planted not dragged

Under fences, electric

Words wired—stick to bodies

Buzzed on fear.

Only the planted can drag and blur the lines

Between what is wrong and who is right

On TV you see children's blood

Bright and lonely

Trickling outside long weathered body

But you only imagine that once they're here they are home-free

Where is home

When home born is a sandy shifting safety net

And home created, is a life vest with a hole in it

It's where the grass looked greener

It's where I'll learn my patience

where every anonymous—"go back to your country"—redefines what a stranger is

It's where I'll get my fruit

It's where some take vacation

It's where I need not mention that I don't quite speak the language



on thinking of the myth of noah

e. jean lanyon

what children do not delight
with the story of the little wooden ark
and pairs of tiny animals
to march up a plank
into a boat with no windows?

perhaps there was once a flood
or several somewhere
and a rowboat
come to save whatever it could,
a human, a dog, a chicken or two.

i, myself have been
in such a flood climbing
from a porch roof into a tiny boat.

my father's house and all he owned
was torn and tossed
forever gone in such a flood,
will he become a legend?

his piano, his tools, all of his art,
i wonder where the river took them?
does anyone have them now
wondering whose they were
and telling stories that grow
and grow and

then become powerful legends
does a rowboat have a manifest
of cargo and passengers,
or just a bunch of little
wooden animals
to fill out the story.

i see them go

e. jean lanyon

i see them go
the industries that once
fulfilled our lives
one by one the buildings
empty, hollow out,
fall to ruin —
but the bars fill up
as if to house
the overflow
of men and women
whose pride is hollowed out.

i see them go
the breweries, morocco shops,
metal shops, plumbing ceramics,
pipe fitters, carpenters,
auto workers, seamstresses.

i see them go
the busy streets,
the bustling markets,
delivery trucks,
support shops that sell
string, wire, nuts and bolts,
sandwiches for lunch.

and soon the hollow
buildings go and
empty lots fill up
with weeds and trash
and no one goes
to work or smiles
and neighborhoods
become ghettos
with drugs and guns.

There had been evidence that a murder had occurred, but there was no body. The mystery is recounted by Sheppard Lee's faithful servant in this retelling of Delaware's first novelist, Robert Montgomery Bird's Sheppard Lee

Searching for the Body of Sheppard Lee

by Steven Leech

While most everybody had given up to the notion that Sheppard Lee been long gone dead, I didn't. It'd been almost two years to take me to prove myself right. Along the way I'd found some converts to keep me going. After all there never had been a body found. There was only the great suspicion of murder.

My name is Jim Jumble, and Sheppard Lee owned me. I was his property. And until I went off and got married, I was his onliest slave. Now don't get me wrong. I wasn't figuring on escaping. That'd do me no good. Sheppard Lee was just as responsible to me as I was to him. Me and Dinah, my wife, were just fine right where we was, as long as Sheppard Lee kept us. I heard them stories about down south where they whipped their slaves and worked them to death from sun up to sun down picking cotton or tobacco, and maybe give them Sunday mornings off so they could get some God fearing. I sure as didn't want to get sold off from my wife to go down south and work in the fields never ever to see her again in my lifetime. As long as Sheppard Lee's kept alive, even in the notions of some, including me and Dinah, I got half a chance to keep from being sold off.

I could say that Sheppard Lee got a responsibility for my welfare. I could take him to task on account of his abandoning me, but I won't because I was part responsible for him getting into trouble. But the first place belonged to him.

If'n Sheppard Lee weren't so dan blessed lazy and not thinking about the farm we'd called Watermelon Hill ever since his father first had it, I wouldn't have let him get into trouble. But I was getting desperate. And so was Sheppard Lee.

When Sheppard Lee got back from college up in Princeton and his sister Prudence was the onliest ones left from nine other brothers and sisters, and when his father died and his mother died soon after from madness, Watermelon Hill was left to him and his sister. But his sister, Prudence, had married Tom Alderwood and they had their own farm. Instead of settling down to take care of the place proper, Sheppard Lee went off with a whole bunch of hair brained schemes. First he hired this overseer named Aikin Jones to look after the place for him. I know there ain't no overseer you can trust, but Sheppard Lee trusted Aikin Jones, and then he went off hunting. I should've knowed an omen had been set. Sheppard Lee weren't no good at hunting. The best he could do was to shoot his own dog, then shoot his neighbor's prize cow, then, to top it all off, he got a fine for hunting off season.

After that, Sheppard Lee bought a race horse and never won a single race. On a trip to New York he got robbed. Then he lost big in stock-jobbing. He even failed to marry into money, and all the while Aikin Jones, his overseer, was robbing Sheppard Lee blind right under his nose. The cornfields got took over by the swamps. The orchards rotted away. The barn started falling down, and the house weren't far behind. Little by little, Sheppard Lee

had to sell off pieces of Watermelon Hill until he was left with only 40 acres. He thought running for office would be the answer to his woes, but because he'd never been in politics before he just got took again. By the time Sheppard Lee finally learned he hisself was the fool, he was almost broke.

There'd always been that story about Captain Kidd, the pirate, got a treasure buried somewhere about. Being right on the Delaware River he was sure to've buried something around here. My wife, Dinah, knowed some tricks of conjuring and making spells. Since I'd heard that Captain Kidd's treasure is sure to be buried out in Owl's Nest, I quite naturally put two and two together and asked Dinah about it.

She told me the best way to find the treasure is to wait until you dreamed about it three nights in a row. The dreams would tell you exactly where to look. But you had to wait until the full moon. That was sensible since you need light enough because you had to wait to dig when it came midnight. Finally, when you starts to digging, you had to do it while reciting the Lord's Prayer backward. My mistake was to tell all this to Sheppard Lee. Man, you should have seen Sheppard Lee's eyes go wide.

It weren't too long before Sheppard Lee woke one morning jumping up and down and laughing, saying he'd just dreamed about Captain Kidd's treasure again for the third time. I looked over to Dinah. She just shrugged.

Sheppard Lee could barely keep a lid on his excitement til the next full moon come around. He gathered all the digging tools he needed. I made sure Sheppard Lee took a shovel instead of a spade he nearly took with him. Sheppard Lee didn't really know a whole helluva lot about tools. I knowed he was in trouble because I knowed he hardly ever even used tools. And to go out digging at midnight, I knowed we was all in trouble.

I knowed there was cause enough to murder Sheppard Lee. When he was coming to the end of his bout with politics, he was getting real nervous. You couldn't talk to Sheppard Lee without him going off in a rage. Sometimes even if you talked nice to him he'd still go off. There was one incident where Sheppard Lee ran the brewer from Philadelphia, Squire Higginson, right off his property when he caught him hunting for quail. After a while there weren't almost nobody could stand him. In fact, the very night of the full moon when Sheppard Lee went out to dig up Captain Kidd's treasure, I heard the last person he went off in front of was this Dutch doctor, Dr. Fire Devil. The bad omens were piling up.

The next morning they found some of Sheppard Lee's clothes and the hole he'd been digging. There was some blood laying about, but no Sheppard Lee. Thomas Turnbuckle, who lived in the house closest to Owl's Nest, said he'd seen the ghost of Sheppard Lee that morning. Thomas Turnbuckle said it was

certain to be a ghost because it scared his old hound Nick near to death. The ghost of Sheppard Lee told Thomas Turnbuckle to come help, that his body was lying lifeless up by the hole he'd dug at Owl's Nest. And sure enough that was the scene of the crime. But there weren't no body of Sheppard Lee to be found anywhere about.

It was Squire Higginson who was first suspected of murdering Sheppard Lee. He'd been out that night and he had a gun. But Squire Higginson couldn't be held since no one was really sure a murder'd been committed because no body'd ever been found.

My doubts for my own self began to accumulate one day when Squire Higginson hisself showed up on Sheppard Lee's doorstep yelling at me, insisting he was Sheppard Lee. At first I thought he sure must be drunk. Even Sheppard Lee's old hound Bull ran off and latched his jaws around Squire Higginson leg to try and run him off. That made Squire Higginson put his hunting gun into old Bull's side and blow him to bits. Still, Squire Higginson kept yelling, "you old dog, I'm your Massa Sheppard," til I had to toss a brick at him, hitting him in the side of his head, then go get Sheppard Lee's old musket and threaten him with more violence. That did it. Squire Higginson run off with his own dog, Pronto's, tail between its legs. In fact, he ran all the way off to Philadelphia never to be seen again because I heard some weeks after he got there he went and drowned hisself in the Schuylkill River.



There were some things about that incident that made me think though. It was strange enough that Squire Higginson kept insisting he was Sheppard Lee that made me think about some other things about that particular day. One was how Squire Higginson knowed the name of Sheppard Lee's dog, then how he shot Sheppard Lee's dog much in the same way Sheppard Lee had shot his neighbor's prize cow not meaning to. And speaking of dog, Squire Higginson called me "old dog" just like Sheppard Lee used to do. Finally, Squire Higginson declared that he'd "finished" Sheppard Lee and went on to say that I'd never see him no more. It weren't, to my ear, like he was confessing to a murder, especially after convincing everybody he didn't kill Sheppard Lee. And as time passed without no body of Sheppard Lee being found, what Squire Higginson said to me stuck with me more and more. And the more I grew suspicious the more confounded I felt.

But there were other things to worry about. Without Sheppard Lee, with or without his body, my own body was in jeopardy on account of my being his property. That's when Sheppard Lee's sister, Prudence, and brother-in-law, Tom Alderwood, come to the rescue. They came to help me repair Sheppard Lee's house and barn. We worked real hard to plant a new orchard and drain the swamp from the cornfields. It was a lot of work. We had accounts to settle with Aikin Jones, the overseer Sheppard Lee had hired. We couldn't prove Aikin Jones had cheated Sheppard Lee so we just had to deal with him the best way we could.

All during this time I told Prudence and Tom Alderwood about my suspicions about Sheppard Lee. They finally became as convinced as me that Sheppard Lee was alive somewhere and that he'd come back someday, and he'd have one tall tale to tell. Besides, I think Prudence and Tom Alderwood felt for me and my wife, Dinah, and all the loyalty I showed to Sheppard Lee and their father before him. They didn't want to get to where's Aikin Jones could sell me off, and Dinah too, and separate us forever.

Then one day, Aikin Jones took sick. It weren't like it showed in his body. He got sick like something got scared in him. It was almost like it come to him that he'd have to give back everything he took just so nobody would take it from him. We didn't know it then, but his time had done run out and he died, as Tom Alderwood declared, "of great agony and fear of spirit." That was a good way of putting it.

As we worked to save Sheppard Lee's 40 acres, we didn't know it, but Aikin Jones' spirit had pained him so much in life, that he made amends in death. He paid Sheppard Lee in his will near everything he could give back. If only we could find Sheppard Lee, because his body still went missing.

For a whole set of seasons we were kept busy fixing up Sheppard Lee's farm. We couldn't think about nothing else. When time come around where we could think about it, we come upon a name of a Quaker philanthropist named Zachariah Longstraw who lived up in Philadelphia. He was knowed for giving money away to near every sad story. He was even knowed to find freedom for slaves in trouble too.

By the time Tom Alderwood got me a pass so I could go up to Philadelphia to tell my sad story to Zachariah Longstraw, it was too late. When I got to Philadelphia, the night before Zachariah Longstraw got took away by a gang of slavecatchers down to Virginny. I'd heard he'd already been tarred and feathered and that he'd been took by his manager Abel Snipe for everything he might have, otherwise, gived away.

With the onliest one who could help us find the body of Sheppard Lee done took south, I began to feel despair because here I was in Philadelphia with a pass and nowhere to turn. Then the omens started stacking up again because I happens to run into Dr. Fire Devil and he tells me he's getting ready to go down to Virginny, so's I latched onto him. I figured if'n I'so lucky to find Zachariah Longstraw down in Virginny and rescue him, maybe he'd find it in his heart to help me find Sheppard Lee.

Dr. Fire Devil had a big wagon. He had it full of crates. He said if I'd help him watch over them and help with the horses, he'd hire me on. That was all the extra security I needed. I surely didn't want to go traveling alone down in Virginny. My pass weren't expected to retire, so Dr. Fire Devil could hold it until the trail run dry and I'd have to return empty handed to Watermelon Hill.

First place Dr. Fire Devil was heading to was a town down in Virginny. If I knowed then what I knowed now we might never had to go that far. When we got to where we was going in Virginny, Dr. Fire Devil rented a hall, then had me help him haul out all the crates into it. He kept mum about what he was up to, but I got some inkling of what it was all about when he had me go around town distributing handbills while he got ready back at the hall.

I never could read a whole lot, but I always was able to make out a fair amount of words. On the handbills was words like, "lecture and exhibition" in big letter across the top. Smaller words said things like, "Perfectly preserved body parts," and other words said, "preserved head a famous female mass murderer," and in big letters near the bottom of the handbills it said, "Modern Mummy."

My task of handing out and tacking up the handbills must have worked good because a whole lot of people showed up for Dr. Fire Devil's lecture and exhibition. Look to me like it might have been the whole town.

Dr. Fire Devil allowed me to help out during his lecture that night. I didn't understand a lot of what Dr. Fire Devil was saying, part on account of the way he spoke—like he was from Germany or South America or some place. But all them that were in the audience surely understood Dr. Fire Devil. He had them hanging on every word. Probably it was on account of what he showed them. He showed them all sorts of animals that looked alive but were as still as statues. He showed them human arms that looked like stone, some of them looked like polished wood. All these he said were once attached to people who were recently alive. He had a leg that looked so fresh you'd expect a real person to come hobbling in any minute to come take it back. The thing looked

that much alive. Then the real surprises started coming.

The next thing he showed was the head of a woman who looked about 50 years old. It had a lot of black wavy hair. It was then that the shock slowly came over me. At first the head of the woman looked only familiar. Then I recognized the face from pictures on the broadsides. I'd seen it about five or six years before when she was captured up in Delaware. It was the head of Patty Cannon who'd killed hunderds of people and who used to catch slaves for money. The face looked so real it sent chills up my spine so strong I almost fled out of there. It seemed to me she was looking right at me with evil intent in her eyes. But I'm glad I didn't run out of there for the next thing was my biggest surprise.

Next, Dr. Fire Devil rolled out a big box with cabinet doors in front of it. Before he opened it, he said, "But you shall see de grand specimen, de complete figure, de grown man turned into de mummy, and look more natural dan de life."

When he opened the doors my legs almost gave out under me. Some of the women shrieked and many of the men let out gasps I could clearly hear. I couldn't believe what I'd just seen. I had to blink a couple times. I had finally found the body of Sheppard Lee. But it was as still as a stone statue. But that weren't nothing.

Suddenly pandemonium broke out as this man from the audience charged the stage. He must've been somebody important or at least well knowed by the town's folk.

"Why, that's Arthur Megrin," somebody near me said.

The man named Arthur Megrin run up to the box Sheppard Lee was in and started beating his fists on it yelling, "Let me live again in my own body, and never—no! never more in another!"

I didn't have time to be confused by all this because the next moment Arthur Megrin dropped dead on the spot. Then, all of a sudden the body of Sheppard Lee come to life. He had a confused and fearful look in his eye. It was then that I near about absolutely fell out. But I didn't have time for that neither because Sheppard Lee started running out of there like there was a bear on his tail. I turned and run after him. I surely didn't want to lose sight of him. But I weren't the onliest one to run after him. So did Dr. Fire Devil, shouting, "Give me back my mummy! Give me back my mummy!" and several town's folk running after all them wanting their money back because they'd been cheated and fooled.

For someone who'd been stiff as a board for Lord knows how long, Sheppard Lee lit out of there like he had a fire in his pants. I don't think he even knowed where he was running to. But he was running in the right direction and about out run everyone who was chasing him. It took every ounce of get up and determination to keep up. But after all, I had the most to lose.

A few miles clear of all them that were chasing Sheppard Lee he collapsed. I'd had enough money I made from Dr. Fire Devil to hire a wagon and a team of horses and I loaded Sheppard Lee into the wagon to take him on the long road back to Watermelon Hill. But every now and then he'd wake up and start running. I don't think he even saw me or recognized me. But he'd start

again running in the right direction like something in him knowed the direction and he'd run til he collapsed again. It went on like this til finally we got to Watermelon Hill to the grand surprise of his sister Prudence and brother-in-law Tom Alderwood. It was there that Sheppard Lee finally collapsed and slept for several days. When he waked up finally, I fixed him a big plate of scrapple and it weren't too much longer that Sheppard Lee seemed like his old self. It was then that he told us what had happened to him.

He told us when he was digging for Captain Kidd's treasure he'd hit a large rock with the shovel and it kicked back and knocked him in the chin and killed him. After that he wandered around as a ghost trying to tell people he'd just been killed. That's when Thomas Turnbuckle saw him and got scared. Sheppard Lee said he'd gone back to where he'd been killed and he couldn't find his body. This really scared him on account of his knowing he didn't feel like he was really dead.

It weren't much longer before he'd found Squire Higginson and Squire Higginson was really dead. The thought crossed Sheppard Lee's mind that if he could use Squire Higginson's body maybe he'd be able to find his own. That very thought suddenly put Sheppard Lee in Squire Higginson's body and he waked up. But it weren't no use. No one would believe nothing he had to say about the matter, but it sure does explain Squire Higginson's queer behavior that day I run him off Watermelon Hill.

Things didn't go as good for Sheppard Lee as he thought they would even though Squire Higginson was real rich. He'd also had the gout and a nagging wife up there in Philadelphia.

One day while mulling over his sad fate, Sheppard Lee, in Squire Higginson's body, happened by a young man full of despair trying to drown hisself in the Schuylkill River. In an effort to save the young man, a dandy named Dawkins, Squire Higginson hisself drowned instead and Sheppard Lee found hisself in the body of this young dandy named Dawkins.

The tale Sheppard Lee told us was taller than I ever expected. When Dawkins died after trying to latch onto a rich woman and get her to marry him, Sheppard Lee entered the body of a miser named Abram Skinner.

Sheppard Lee always thought that having money would make him happy. Abram Skinner had lots of money and Sheppard Lee thought he'd now be a happy man. But when he saw how Abram Skinner's own son planned to rob him, Sheppard Lee began to realize money don't necessarily bring happiness. That's when Sheppard Lee discovered that giving away money would make him happy because it would make others happy. You see, when Abram Skinner got killed by someone trying to get his money, Sheppard Lee found hisself in the body of Zachariah Longstraw, the very one I went running after to help me find the body of Sheppard Lee. But Sheppard Lee learned that people'll likely take advantage of someone too willing to give his money away.

After Zachariah Longstraw was kidnapped by slave catchers and taken down to Virginny and lynched, Sheppard Lee found hisself in the body of one of Arthur Megrin's slaves named Tom.

Life as a slave weren't as hard as way down south in Alabamy or Missippy, not even as hard as my own life. Arthur Megrin was one of them slave holders who took good care of his property. But the kind of property Arthur Megrin had, like with all slave holders, was property thought to be unmoral and wrong for decent people to have. When old Tom got caught up in the activities of Ablishonists his fate was the same as Zachariah Longstraw's and that's how come he ended up in the body of Tom's owner, Arthur Megrin, who'd just lost his life due to his own ailments. Arthur Megrin was a frail sort of man. His stomach weren't good for no kind of eating of any sort of thing, and this weakened his whole body. When Sheppard Lee, in the weak body of Arthur Megrin, saw how his original body got turned into a mummy, it was too much for Arthur Megrin's frail body to take and he died on the spot from the shock of seeing it.

Now that we're all back at Watermelon Hill, Sheppard Lee turned to me and said with tears in his eyes how grateful he was for rescuing him from an awful fate. He thanked me for being so loyal to him and his father and his whole family, including his onliest sister Prudence and her husband Tom Alderwood, and having the faith that he'd be found. He said he was going to reward me by giving me my freedom, and said I could go if I wanted to, that he'd make out the proper papers forthwith. But then he added that he knowed that weren't enough, and that he should be taking a special responsibility for me. He said he was going to give my a piece of Watermelon Hill, and instead of me being his property, I'd now have some property I could call my own and be a free man to boot.

Sheppard Lee said he learned some valuable lessons during his strange journey. He said money don't bring happiness unless you are willing to really work for it, and what you work for is the real and lasting wealth. He also told me that on account of hisself once being a black man and a slave, and being that he lived among slaves, he come to realize they was just as much human beings as he was, with all the same kinds of feelings as anyone else. He told me he was surely sorry if'n he ever treated me poorly because he surely knowed he'd must've hurt my feeling bad on occasion. He said he'd hoped that giving me twelve of his best acres, which took a good chunk of the orchard that me and Prudence and Tom Alderwood worked so hard to bring back, were enough to pay me back, and he ended up by saying that he looked forward to me and Dinah raising a family here on Watermelon Hill, and if'n he were so lucky to find a woman as good as Dinah to marry him and raise his own family that he'd be proud to have all our children grow up together here on Watermelon Hill because it was really my place more than it was his.

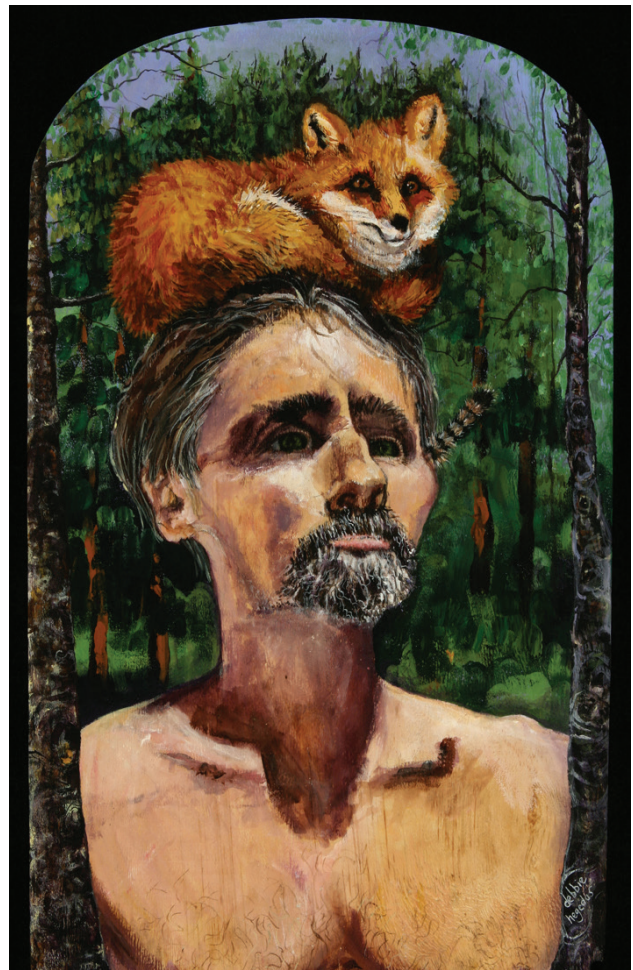
With all that I accepted his generosity, and his 'pology, and I wished him good luck for the future, and that's the story of how I found the body of Sheppard Lee. ♦



Adam Campbell | Assata Speaks, 2015 | Graphite on Canson mixed media paper, 12 x 9 inches



Carson Zullinger | *Untitled, 2014* | Archival pigment print, 26 x 39 inches | Model Anoush Anou



Debbie Hegedus | LEFT *Bronchopulmonary Aspergillosis, a self-portrait, 2014*; RIGHT *My Woodsman, 2014*
Acrylic on wood panel, diptych, 17 x 27 inches and 13 ½ x 23 ½ inches



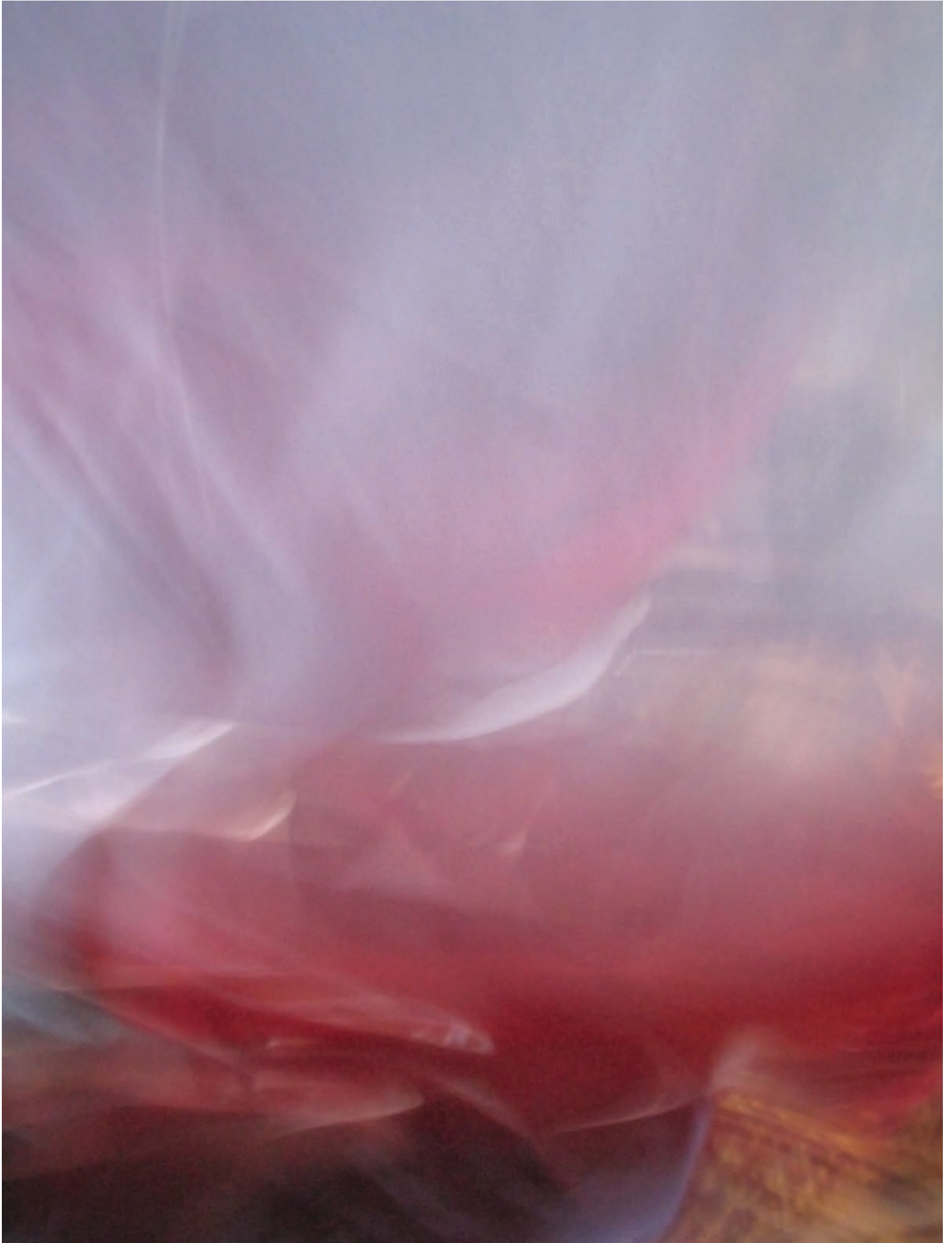
Geraldo Gonzalez | *Seated View*, 2014 | Colored pencil on paper, 22 x 28 inches



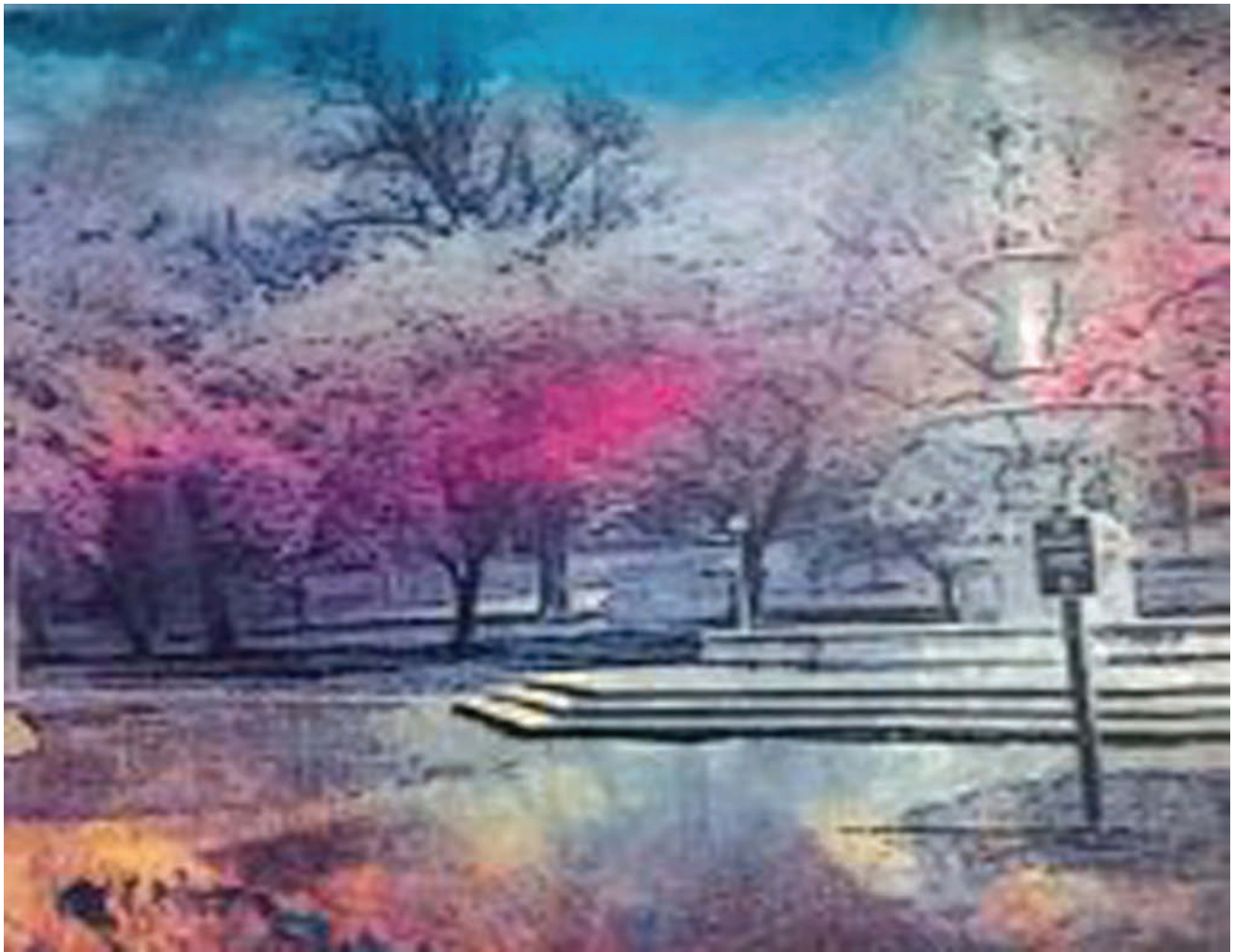
Wendy Hatch | *Brandywine Blue*, 2012 | Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



Nina Logan | *Disfigurant*, 2014 | Low fire ceramic clay, 14 x 12 x 12 inches



Dave Magyar | *Twilight of the Gods*, 2009 | Photograph, 16 ½ x 12 ½ inches



Roldan West | *Fountain at the Mid-town Brandywine*, 2015 | Oil, air brush, and pen and ink with ecological varnish, 8 x 11 inches



Knicoma Frederick | *Untitled from Lightning Road*, 2013
Colored pencil on paper, 8 ½ x 11 inches

Malik

Marian Lee Lewis

Dark angles with cap spun back,
a young urban cliché,
with careless shorts, slung from the hip,
khaki, faded tee shirt, hungry blue
and pods growing from his ear,
he was plugged into a crooked world,
moved as if to make a fast break
away from the police and contempt
back to the hoop games on asphalt
with soft poetry curse words
that said "niggah please"
and a white pearl smile as he
looped, dribbled and jived his way to
score; a ballet of by any means
necessary

His face was etched coal
mined from some cruel joke
some red, white and blue fantasy
that life could be fair
and God never gives you more
than you can handle
and poverty builds character;
someone was laughing in a rigged
poker game from hell

Homegrown man-child stalks the
streets resisting the notion
that he is prey
as white people scatter
or cast a gray shadow
that invites him into invisibility

"smelling his piss," his grandmother said
with basketball schemes and cigarettes
his mustache curved into suspicion.
Nonetheless, he was eager about life,
licking his lips to meet opportunity,
gut it, and make it pay,
but in a few years, his knife would hesitate
and the blood would be his own.



Flying

Douglas Morea

It's not the Wright Brothers' fault.
I don't blame them.
For 4 and a half billion years there were no telephones.
Then, on the one same day
2 claimants independently showed at the Patent Office.
Bell beat the other guy and won.
(Though I've his phone was better.)
If not the Wright Brothers, it'd've been someone else.
The time had come.
Lucky us his name wasn't Alexander Graham Honk.
Then I got born.
Not my fault—the time had simply come.
Lucky my name wasn't Jack Ripper.
Lucky I was born free—unless you're hyper on
prole oppression—in any case,
not to my credit.
The world doesn't need an airplane, or a telephone,
or me.
But nobody's to blame.
There's nothing out there but daisies.
All you can do is push 'em down or push 'em up.
Or let them be.

Arnetha was terminal, and so was the roller coaster ride she was about to take. All's well that ends well, or does it?

Sweet Ride

Franetta McMillian

My brother Jerry had been saving for a ride on the River Styx ever since he was thirteen. At first it was just because he was an adrenaline freak and the idea of a coaster with a half kilometer drop and six monster loops to propel you into the afterlife appealed to his warped brain.

I remember when he first showed me the ad on the Net. The death coaster was located on a tiny private island in the South Pacific. There it was in all its gleaming macabre glory along with a five-star restaurant, a luxury spa and hotel, crack medical staff, and crematorium.

The River Styx had been erected by one Arnetha Spire, a Silicon Valley mogul with credits to burn and a flair for the dramatic. She'd copped the design from an obscure doctoral thesis she'd found collecting dust in the basement of her alma mater's library. It struck her as the perfect way to die. Certainly more pleasant than rotting away on a back ward and infinitely more thrilling than the standard shot of morphine in the butt. She'd adored roller coasters as a kid, along with the heady mix of elation and white knuckle fear you got from riding one. It was almost as good as jumping out of an airplane, which Spire did every year for her birthday.

This was how the coaster of doom was supposed to work: as the Styx slowly transported you to its notorious five hundred meter drop, you were supposed to meditate upon your time on this earth. Once you reached the top, the coaster would pause for a few minutes while you waved goodbye to family and friends and said your final prayers. Then you'd give the operator the signal, and proceed to drop and loop your way to sweet nothingness. The whole process—at least for the rider—was supposed to be painless. There would be a brief moment of weightlessness, followed by a flash of euphoria, followed by oblivion.

When Spire first bought the secluded island and began construction, everybody thought she was just another rich person whose wealth had driven her mad. But Spire assured people she planned to use it when the time came.

And she did, almost as soon as the towering monstrosity was finished. Some time before she'd been diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor and for years behind the scenes she'd fought the gallant fight. But eventually she realized her quiver full of credits could only stave off the Grim Reaper for so long. So she got her house in order and rode the Styx. It worked like a charm. "Her eyes were a little bloodshot," reported one of the few witnesses, "but she died with a smile on her face."

"That's how I want to go, Casey," Jerry declared when the story first flashed on the newsstreams. "I bet you it would even be more awesome than the Kublai Kahn!"

The Kublai Kahn was another gleaming hunk of fright porn Jerry had duped me into riding during a family reunion. I just made the height requirement. Not only did the Kahn have the death defying drops Jerry loved, but the seats also spun around as they dipped and looped you into divine vertigo. A camera snapped a picture

of riders as they rounded the first hairpin curve and you could purchase your photo for a few extra credits at the conclusion of the ride. Of course Jerry purchased ours. There he is looking calm, cool and collected while I am scarlet-faced and obviously terrified. My eyes are squeezed shut and my mouth open so wide you can literally count all my teeth. For years all Jerry had to do was glance at that photo and he'd burst into giggles.

I wasn't quite a decade old when Jerry first mentioned the death coaster, but I thought the Styx was beyond nuts. "Why don't you just go ride your bike off a cliff?" I taunted.

Even at that tender age I already knew the answer. My brother, like most sighted males on the planet, had a thing for Arnetha Spire. The woman could write heavenly code and break the land speed record and look hotter than a five-alarm fire in a leather miniskirt. "Because it's just not cool," he finally replied. "I don't care what you say. That's how I'm gonna go."

"Well, you better start saving up your credits now. Cuz I bet you riding that coaster is gonna cost almost as much as a trip to the moon."

That was the last I heard of the River Styx for a while except for the occasional netbloid report of some celebrity riding into the sunset. I noticed Jerry had a Ride the River Styx folder on his phone, but I figured he'd get over it.

And maybe he would have if something hadn't happened to make him start saving with new urgency. Suddenly Dad couldn't stop his hands from shaking and inexplicably fell down the stairs one night and broke his arm. And even before that, he'd been acting strangely, slurring his words like he was drunk and generally being miserable.

Mom sat us down one balmy Sunday afternoon to have one of those serious talks. "Your Dad's really sick," she began in that same halting tone she used when she broached the subject of the birds and the bees. Except I didn't remember her face being all red and blotchy when she talked about that. "Something called Huntington's. It's gets worse over time. And there's a fifty-fifty chance you two could get it, too."

"Why?" I asked petulantly. I was twelve and in no mood for that kind of life-altering bad news. I had things to do and friends to see.

Mom's reply was barely audible. "It's genetic."

I whacked Jerry on the arm. "What did she say?"

"She said it's genetic," Jerry mumbled down his shirt. I got the feeling he knew the score way before me. Such was the burden of being the oldest child. But his face wasn't red and blotchy like Mom's. He looked more pissed than heartbroken. "That means it's in your genes."

"I know what genes are, Jerry!" I snapped. Hell, that was back in third-grade science with the pesky fruit fly experiment and all. "How come they didn't take care of that before he was born?" Jerry asked angrily. Because that was possible. There were ads

for genome screening and correction all over the Net like it was a procedure as simple and cheap as breathing. Give your children the gift of perfection.

Well, that did it. It was like a dam burst. Mom wept like the world was about to end. I'd never seen an adult cry so hard. "Back when your father was born," she explained between sobs, "that procedure was very expensive. His family simply couldn't afford it." Her breath hitched in her throat. "It's still expensive...now." I suppose Mom added that last bit to explain why we weren't fixed.

Dad wasn't with us for much longer. About a month after Mom's grand announcement, she cooked a Sunday dinner worthy of a holiday with all of our favorite foods: gooey macaroni and cheese for Jerry, green bean casserole for me, smoked turkey for Dad, her extra special four decker dark chocolate cake for the whole family. Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter rolled into one. Dad treated us to a host of his signature horrible puns and we laughed until we cried. After the anxious merriment was over, he told me and Jerry to continue to do well in school and live full lives.

They sent us to bed early that night like we were babies since Mom wanted to have Dad's final moments all to herself. She drove him to the clinic where his doctor administered a lethal cocktail to gently him to the other side. He died in her arms a few hours later.

Of course there was a black hole in our hearts, but it wasn't just a result of Dad's early death. What do you do with the knowledge that your body is a ticking time bomb, that the faceless dude in the midnight black monk's habit is always tip-toeing two steps behind you, snickering?

Jerry and I dealt with it by being overachievers, although we expressed it in different ways. Jerry emulated his idol, the late Arnetha Spire. He hadn't even graduated college when he landed a job at the company she founded. He rose through the ranks until he became head of cyber security. When he wasn't working 100+ hours a week battling pranksters and cyber-jihadists, he was chasing the latest thrill. He drag raced across the desolate wasteland of the Mojave; he swam with sharks; he jumped out of planes; he changed girlfriends like he changed his custom tailored suits.

I became a high school math teacher, hardly as glamorous, but I was good at what I did and won several awards doing it. Other than that, I tried to live as normal a life as possible. I even got engaged once to a man I swore was my soulmate. But my fiancé changed his stance on the no children thing and it ended in ruins.

One day Jerry called me out of the blue—which was highly unusual. We e-mailed occasionally and spent every other Thanksgiving together, but otherwise we didn't talk much. We didn't hate each other or anything; we just lived in different worlds. He got right to the point: "How'd you like to ride the River Styx with me?" I couldn't see his face since the call was audio-only, but he sounded like he was grinning.

"Jerry, that's not funny," I said. Recently I'd begun to notice the tremors and strange shifts in mood. My doctor had prescribed something to quiet the symptoms, but it wouldn't stop the ensuing

avalanche, only slow it down. I hadn't got around to telling Jerry yet, but perhaps he already knew. He always kept tabs on his little sister.

I suspected something was up with him. The netbloids were all abuzz about Spiresoft's head cyber ninja taking an extended leave of absence to "smell the roses." There was all sorts of speculation as to what that meant. Was he going to climb Mt. Everest or branch off to start his own company? Either one seemed likely.

"How long have you been ill?" I asked.

"Going on five years now," he said. "The treatments after the fact are much better than they used to be. Still: there's no cure. I'm just postponing the inevitable."

Those treatments must've been cutting edge. I had absolutely no idea. That past Thanksgiving he was his usual swashbuckling self. I'd even seen him interviewed three months ago, not too long before he announced his leave of absence and all the rumors started. He looked fine to me.

"How long as it been for you?" Jerry asked.

"A few months," I mumbled.

Silence.

He continued: "We'll have to apply like everyone else, but I have a feeling we'll be cleared to ride."

"Jerry...uh...I'm not sure about this."

"Is it the credits? Cuz I've got more than enough."

"I'm...uh...just not ready..."

"Well, it's not like we can do it tomorrow. Like I said, we have to get cleared first. I'll e-mail you the application. Think about it."

And before I could object, he terminated the call.

Applying to ride the River Styx was a little like trying to get a top secret security clearance. The River Styx Consortium wanted to know everything about you. All addresses for the past ten years. Every job for the last fifteen. All brushes with the law including parking tickets. Every significant other since your pimply teenage phase.

Are you married? Do you have children? Do you have debts? Have you made a will? It seemed to take forever to get down to what I felt was the most important question: why did you want to ride their damn death coaster in the first place?

And here was the kicker: the application fee was equal to a quarter deposit on the ride: 100,000 credits. So it wasn't quite as much as a ride to the moon, but almost. A shot of morphine was 500. Sometimes Jerry had more money than brains—but he had plenty of both.

It took nearly two weeks to complete the application and another week to compile supporting materials, namely my doctor's diagnosis and my prognosis, as well as copies of my advance directive and will. But I couldn't sign and send the thing because I didn't have the funds for the deposit. Well, I did—but just barely. Which meant I had to call Jerry. I hoped he'd had a change of heart. Not that a pre-planned death hadn't crossed my mind, but I didn't want it to be a spectacle.

Jerry looked amused—as well as a tad surprised—when he answered. He was dressed in his golf clothes and probably on his way out the door. "Casey, I wasn't expecting to hear from you so soon. I was sure you'd drag your feet on this."

I shrugged. "If you're intent on going, I don't want you to go alone. You're my brother. You're the only close family I've got."

He blushed, lowered his eyes and actually looked...well...touched.

"Besides," I continued, "I won't be able to hold off the monster as well as you."

"Casey, if it's a question of treatment, my resources are always at your disposal, even though I know it pains you to ask. So if you'd like to hang on a bit longer, or if there's a promising clinical trial...I guess what I'm saying is: don't do this just to keep me company. I can muddle through for at least another year..."

"I'm not," I said—and in the instant I said it, it was suddenly true.

Jerry transferred the credits to my account. I re-read the small print before I gave my digital OK and submitted the application. Most of it was the standard legal babble. I certified that everything in my application was true and correct to the best of my knowledge and that I understood I rode the River Styx at my own risk. But there was one clause that thoroughly baffled me. Basically it said that if by some miracle I should survive my ride, I would automatically become a ward of the River Styx Consortium. Under no circumstances could I leave the island or discuss my experience of the coaster with the outside world.

I laughed uneasily as I read this out loud to my brother. "Jerry, they're kidding, right? No one has survived this thing. No one could. And on the off chance they did, they'd be brain dead."

He laughed along with me—although he seemed more amused than nervous. "No, I don't think anyone's survived. But Arnetha liked to be prepared for the unlikely and unexpected. That served her well when she was alive. That's how she built an empire." He winked. "Plus she had a wicked sense of humor."

Crazy rich bitch, I thought. Later, on a lark, I searched the Net for River Styx survivors. Surprisingly, there were rumored to be a few, including Arnetha Spire herself. Still, I didn't see how it was possible.

The Consortium's decision came down almost exactly two months later: We'd been approved and we could even ride together just like we did when Jerry used to drag me on all those scary coasters when we were kids. All we had to do is cough up 600,000 credits for the both of us, along with 100,000 additional credits for any family we wished to bring along. After the Consortium received their payment, we'd get a formal invitation to ride within five business days. The Consortium would fly us out to the island. When we arrived, we'd have seven days to collect our thoughts and indulge in a few earthly delights. Then we'd have one final interview (as well as one final chance to bail) before we looped our way into the sunset.

Jerry could barely contain his excitement—he was almost hyperventilating in anticipation of his daredevil demise—while I was terrified. It wasn't death that frightened me—it had been stalking me ever since that fateful afternoon when Mom told us about our Dad—it was the thought of dying on some freakish amusement park ride. What would that feel like? Death by morphine was supposed to be like sleep, and I already knew what sleep was. But dying scared breathless while suspended in midair?

"Don't worry, Casey," Jerry said, as we boarded the Consortium's unmarked private jet less than two weeks later, "I will hold your hand." And he took my trembling hand in his. "You won't be alone." When we were kids, he coaxed me onto a lot of scary coasters that way. Once I held on to his hand so hard, it turned black and blue.

Styx Island, as the Consortium's hundred odd employees called it, was a tropical paradise. Lush technicolor vegetation along with several miles of beautiful beach surrounded by deep, almost electric blue, water. The coaster, of course, dominated the view, a towering abstract sculpture, at once ominous and beautiful. It was constructed of a dark, almost black metal, that glistened with indigo highlights in the abundant afternoon sun.

Aditi, our assigned guide, met us as we deplaned. She was a striking woman with deep caramel skin and long jet black hair that fell past the small of her back. She looked so much like Jerry's ex-girlfriends, I wondered if she'd been assigned to us on purpose. She had the strangest color eyes. They were a very pale gray, so pale as to almost be colorless, far too light for her complexion. But even though they lacked color, they glowed with a singular light. At first I thought she might be wearing contacts for effect, but she didn't seem vain enough for that. She was dressed in a crisp white camping shirt and navy blue walking shorts.

She greeted us warmly, with a friendly peck for each cheek. She recognized my brother immediately and was star struck for an instant. "So this is what you meant by smell the roses," she said in a crisp British accent. "Our founder would be proud," she added in a tone so worshipful it made me want to puke.

"Our founder?" I echoed.

"Ms. Spire," she clarified.

Aditi showed us to our rooms. They were next door to each other and beyond luxurious, with sunken marble tubs and fully stocked bars and kitchenettes. The bedroom featured a panoramic view of the beach. You would have thought we were going on a second honeymoon, not to die. Jerry might've been used to such accommodations, but I never dreamed I would stay in such a place.

I struggled to climb onto the fluffy mountain of a bed. (What size was it? I wondered. California King or something even larger?) Aditi noticed the worsening tremors in my hands. It was past time for my medication.

"We'll have to get you to the doctor," she said breathlessly. "Or we could have someone come by your room."

I was confused. "I brought my own meds."

"Our doctors have better treatments. We'd like you to be as comfortable as possible. And we'd like your head clear."

Aditi left and sure enough, before I could lie down for a quick nap, someone from the medical team arrived. He introduced himself as Dr. D'Angelo and took my vitals.

"Your dossier says you have early stage Huntington's," he said.

I nodded.

"We don't see many cases of that anymore," he offhandedly noted as he prepared the pocket hypo.

"Our parents couldn't afford to get us fixed," I quickly explained. I always felt the need to explain, just like my mother did.

"I don't fault you for being ill. That's not my place. I realize miracles are often reserved for the very few." He gave me the injection, and then took a seat while the medication took effect. I watched my hands. In less than forty minutes, they weren't shaking anymore. I hadn't been symptomatic for long, but it still felt like finally seeing the sun after years of stormy weather.

Dr. D'Angelo couldn't help but notice my amazement. "It's the same thing your brother's been getting. It works quite well while it works. But even the best treatments don't alter the disease's course once it's started. I'm trying to develop a true cure. And prevention will get more affordable, I assure you. I'm working on that, too."

While he was there, I decided to ask him a few questions. "How many people are here to ride?"

"There are four rides scheduled this week. That's the most we allow."

"So how many guests are here?"

"Approximately ten, including clients' families," he replied.

"So this hotel is mostly empty?"

"This is not a hotel. It's a dormitory. I live a couple of floors above this suite."

Huh. If only my college dorm had resembled a five star hotel. I hesitated before my next question. It was stupid, but I had to know. "Has anyone ever survived the Styx?"

He laughed like I'd told the best joke he'd heard in years. "You read too many netbloids. No one could survive that thing."

"Will I meet any of the other riders?" I asked.

He just shrugged. "It depends. A few riders are sociable. Most are not. Death is private."

Most weren't sociable. In fact, I barely saw them. Even Jerry and I didn't see much of each other, as he spent most of his time with Aditi. I wondered if Jerry had paid extra for one last "girlfriend experience." Hell, knowing him he'd probably blown every credit he had on our final days. It's not like he had to save up for anything else.

On our fifth day, as dawn broke over Styx Island, the first rider in our group rode. I'd met him on the beach just the day before. He was in his early thirties with a rare kidney disorder. He had the additional curse of a bizarre blood type and had spent years waiting for a suitable donor. "I couldn't even buy a kidney on the black market," he joked—or maybe he wasn't joking. He had a portable dialysis machine, one of those tiny ones I saw featured on a tech show once, but that routine was getting tiresome and expensive—even for him. Besides me and Jerry, he was the only rider who hadn't come alone. His wife and two brothers were there to see him off.

I listened for the sound of the coaster as the sun rose out of the sea. I heard the waves. Other than that, it was surprisingly quiet. You might say deathly so. In fact, come to think of it, I'd never heard the Styx, even though Jerry told me they tested the coaster every night around 2 AM.

That evening, as the sun set, I watched what remained of the rider's family gather on the beach. A priestly looking figure held

what looked like a small model boat lit with votives in his arms. While the family held hands and bowed their heads, the priest knelt and placed the vessel in the water. Then the family lifted their heads, sat on the beach and watched as the vessel drifted out to sea.

That's when I started to get cold feet. When Jerry and I went, we had no one else. Our boats of ashes would leave the island together, but no one except Aditi would be there to see us off. Who will care when I'm gone? I thought. God in heaven? Except I didn't believe.

We had what was supposed to be our final interview early the next morning after the next rider rode with the dawn. I arrived at the appointment about a half hour early; Jerry stumbled in a few minutes later looking disheveled and suspiciously content.

"God, you are a piece of work," I grumbled as he sat down beside me. "Is she at least good in bed?"

He looked confused. "Is who good in bed?"

"Aditi, she of the glowing silver eyes."

He had a good laugh, far too good for what my sorry quip was worth. By the end of his giggle fest, he was crying. "Casey, that's ridiculous. I haven't been able to get it up for the past year. It's a side effect of the medication." He paused to wipe away a tear. "I will admit she is hot, though. And she did score me some starlight."

I shook my head. How was Jerry supposed to hold my hand when he was three sheets to the wind? "I've never known you to do drugs."

"Normally I don't, but this is a special occasion. And while the effect is certainly pleasant, I truly don't see the point. I mean, it's hard to believe people ruin their lives over this shit."

Silence. I noticed he hadn't stopped crying. I reached for his hand; he reached for mine.

"Jerry, I'm scared."

"So am I," he confessed.

"I mean, I don't want to spend my final days in a rest home drooling and twitching, but..."

"You're not sure if you want to go out screaming either."

"Well...yeah." By now I was crying, too. We sat there for a while, bawling like idiots.

Then Jerry said suddenly: "Aditi told me people almost never scream..." After dropping that bomb, he started doing the starlight stare.

I let him drift for a while before I pinched him back to earth. "So what do they do?"

He leaned in close. "Nothing spectacular," he whispered conspiratorially. "After they give the signal, they usually just close their eyes and breathe deep and slow. Aditi told me one guy looked more serene than the Buddha." Then Jerry leaned even closer and started whispering so softly I could barely hear him. "You know, she let me watch a ride even though she's not supposed to. That kid with the bum kidneys."

I imagined Aditi and my brother crouched in the foliage like

thieves. "The family didn't see you, did they?"

"No, we watched from the operator's monitors. Aditi is one of the coaster's operators."

Well, I guess I shouldn't have been surprised. Some said the angel of death was as beautiful as Medusa was ugly. "So what did he do?"

"He was crying on the way up, although he wasn't sad. His tears were more like tears of relief. No more waiting for a donor. No more dialysis. No more worrying if the credits would run out. Just before he gave the signal, he was all smiles. His eyes got huge as he started to round the first loop. I swear I heard him say something like, Wow! "

"Did he die smiling like Arnetha?" I asked.

Jerry shook his head. "No, but he did look pleasantly surprised, like the end he'd worked so hard to avoid wasn't as scary as he expected. Aditi grabbed my hand and told me not to worry. The Styx is one sweet ride, she said."

I rolled my eyes. Surely that was the starlight talking. "How the hell would she know?"

"That's the same question I asked her. She laughed it off. Said she was pulling my leg."

Silence. Jerry pulled away. "Are you sure you want to go through with this?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied without any hesitation, "I'm sure." Then he reached in his pocket for something; turns out it was that ancient picture of us on the Kublai Kahn. I couldn't believe he'd kept it all these years. He thrust the photograph in my hands. It was cracked and worn like he carried it with him always.

"I can't believe you still have this," I said, looking at my gaping mouth.

"It's my favorite picture of you," he said with a sly smile.

"Really? Me scared half to death? And those buck teeth? Thanks a lot."

"I didn't think you were scared. I thought you were brave. I couldn't get any of our cousins to ride the Kahn with me and believe me, I begged. I'd thought you'd say no, too. Thing is: why didn't you?"

Huh. That was a good question. He was right; I could have said no. It just never occurred to me. I guess I didn't want to disappoint him by being a scaredy cat. It was bad enough I turned out to be a sister when he'd wished so hard for a little brother. And no matter how terrifying those rides looked, Jerry never let anything bad happen to me; he always held my hand. "I guess I trusted you."

Jerry snatched the picture from my hands and stashed it back in his pocket. He looked me straight in the eye and asked: "Do you trust me now?"

I didn't answer right away, although not because I didn't trust him. The question just seemed totally absurd. Because really, at that point, my trust in him was immaterial. It was the Consortium that held my fate in its hands. They were the ones I had to trust not to fuck it up. Still: that look in Jerry's eyes... I'm not sure why, but he looked like he needed an answer more than anything in the

world. "I trust you," I finally told him. "With all my heart. With all my life."

That's when the interviewer finally appeared. Jerry and I had been so wrapped up in our little soap opera, we hadn't noticed she was nearly a half hour late. She looked like she could have been Arnetha Spire's glamorous older sister. She was in her late sixties, model gorgeous, with fiery auburn hair and piercing gray eyes. Those eyes reminded me of Aditi's, although they weren't as jarring as Aditi's because this woman had paler skin. Her eyes had that same queer glow, however, and cut right through you. I got the feeling she knew us better than we knew ourselves. Perhaps she'd been eavesdropping in the next room.

She shook hands with the both of us, then sat down. Strangely enough, she never gave us her name (and stranger still, we never asked) although she addressed us by ours like we were old friends. The interview was anti-climactic. Mostly she reviewed what we had written in our application: our medical situation, our estates, our burial wishes. She gave us our ride time ("Be there at 4 AM sharp.") and inquired as to what we'd like for a last meal ("You can be as outrageous as you want. Our chefs can whip up anything."). Then, she asked us one final time: "Are you ready to ride the Styx?"

"Yes," Jerry and I replied, almost in unison.

Jerry and I showed up for our ride wearing nearly identical navy power suits. That certainly wasn't a conscious thing. We'd never dressed alike in our lives. Jerry was the eternally stylish one while I was hopelessly utilitarian.

"Well look at you, baby sister," Jerry teased, "all snazzed up."

"It's my conscious last day on earth," I said. "I figured I'd dress for the occasion."

Aditi and an assistant showed us to our seat, which looked like any other coaster seat, except it was black with indigo metallic highlights and far more luxurious. The restraints, though, were something else. It took Aditi and her associate nearly ten minutes to strap and lock us in.

"What's with all the fancy restraints?" I asked.

"For the Styx to work properly," Aditi explained, "we can't risk you falling out."

After we were properly secured, Aditi's assistant left the three of us alone.

"Are you ready?" she asked.

Jerry and I stole a quick look at each other before we responded.

"Yes, we are." I was surprised at how calm our voices were.

She leaned over to give my brother a kiss on the cheek. He blushed like a school boy and I thought I detected a hint of rosiness in her cheeks as well. Maybe under different circumstances, they would have been a couple. Then Aditi walked around to give me a quick peck on the forehead. "Don't worry," she whispered. "The Styx is one sweet ride."

I glanced at my brother. So it hadn't been the starlight talking. He'd told me the truth.

The view from a half kilometer up was breathtaking. Even though dawn was just breaking, you could see all over the island and

beyond. Earth and sea blended in boundless shades of endless blue. The setting moon was low in the sky. I started to cry.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Jerry said. He was holding my hand like he'd promised.

"Yes," I finally managed to croak.

He smiled and wiped away some of my tears with his free hand. "Make a wish," he said.

"What?" My mind went completely blank. Actually, it had emptied out almost as soon as the ride began. I had expected to dwell on the life I'd left behind—my few friends, my many former students, my marriage that almost was—but instead I could only think about the present as the Styx made its slow climb. I didn't even reminisce about all the coaster rides that had led to this one. The Styx didn't call attention to itself. It was as silent as a cat on the prowl, though strangely, not as menacing. I can't think of anything, I said, or maybe I only meant to say it.

I do know I glanced at Jerry to find him with his eyes shut tight, wishing something fierce. Then he blew out a puff of air like he was blowing out candles on a birthday cake, opened his eyes and looked at me. "Casey," he asked, "are you ready?"

I nodded yes. We raised our arms—that was our signal—and let go. It was like sailing over Niagara Falls into a sea of fluffy white doves.

The afterlife looked disturbingly like a post-op recovery room. Nurses dressed in navy blue scrubs bearing the Consortium's logo rushed around soundlessly, occasionally pausing to check a monitor or poke a needle in me. I felt a flash of anger. I didn't just spend my last credits to land in a cheesy hell like this.

The nurses cleared out as soon as Aditi walked in. Don't tell me I was dreaming about her too. What the hell was the matter with me? How could I still be asking all these questions? I thought when you died all questions ceased.

"Casey?" Aditi called.

I didn't answer.

"Casey, I know you're confused, but it's true. You did survive."

"What?"

"You survived," she repeated.

"What about..."

"Jerry's gone."

I burst into tears. I didn't think to ask if he had left this mortal coil smiling.

A few days later after I had been assigned a suite in the Consortium's posh dormitory, Aditi stopped by to explain: "You're one of a very elite club. There's only five of us. I mean, there would have been only five. Now there are just four counting you. Roland passed away a few months ago. So in case you're wondering, you're not immortal. The only thing we survivors have in common is that we shared what we thought was our final ride with someone else. I shared mine with a childhood friend. We both had stage 4 environmental cancer. My friend died. I didn't."

I could only stare. This was not what I wanted to hear. I wanted to be gone.

Aditi went on to tell me Arnetha Spire was the first survivor. Arnetha also rode with a childhood friend. The next survivor was the sculptor Roland Howard, the man who turned holograms into high art. He rode with his husband who refused to live without him. Then there was Dr. Antoine D'Angelo, the esteemed medical researcher, who rode with his brother. In his second life on Styx Island, Dr. D'Angelo had gone on to develop the treatments Jerry and I took. When you survived the Styx, Aditi explained, you were basically the same, except you got "the eyes" and whatever drove you to ride the coaster in the first place disappeared.

"Dr. D'Angelo doesn't have the eyes," I objected. "His are a very normal brown."

"He wears contacts. The eyes freak him out." Well, I understood that. Because the first time I braved a look in the mirror, I wanted to scream.

"Why do you think we lived?" I asked.

"I don't know," Aditi replied. "In your case I think it's because your brother loved you so very much. He really did. He talked about all the coasters he got you to ride and how brave you were to keep him company."

I recalled when Jerry asked me to make a wish. Had his wish been for me to live? Had this been his plan all along? "What about your case?"

She shrugged. "I guess my girl Chandra loved me, too."

A couple of weeks later, Aditi presented me with the small white boat that held Jerry's ashes. That evening I went down to the beach alone to say goodbye. My final farewell took most of the night. For a long time I just sat in the sand with Jerry's boat by my side talking to him. I told him I'd decided to spend my remaining years on Styx Island as one of Dr. D'Angelo's research assistants so we could find a cure. I didn't know a damn thing about medicine, except for what I'd read on the Net, but since my brain had been given a new lease on life, I figured I could learn. I asked if that picture from the Kublai Kahn had burnt up with him in the crematorium and if so, good riddance. I told him I missed him terribly and I wished he was there to hold my hand because Lord knows, this ride had gotten awfully strange. Finally: I thanked him. Sitting on the beach rambling to his ashes was far better than oblivion...

Safe travels, my brother. Here's to a sweet ride... I placed Jerry's boat in the water and watched it drift out to sea. ♦



Mom was the kind of woman the men chased after. It would take a smart daughter to come to her rescue.

Fresh Start

Teresa Burns Murphy

Mom and I were sitting on the living room floor in our apartment in Kennerly, Arkansas. We had our backs against the couch, and she was having me spell words to her. School was out for the summer, but Mom still made me do lessons every single night. She said the most important thing for a girl to be was smart. She said fifth grade was a big year and I needed to be ready for it. I had just spelled receive when a rock, the size of a biscuit, came flying through our front window and landed with a thud on the floor in front of our feet.

Mom yanked me over to the side of the couch and whispered, "Get down, Crystal!"

I buried my face in the shaggy green carpet that still smelled like cat pee and Cheetos from the people who had rented the apartment before us. Mom had poured a ton of carpet freshener on it and vacuumed the dickens out of it, but that smell just wouldn't go away.

At first, I thought some high school kids might be in the parking lot showing off, but when I heard a woman yell, "Leave Big Chuck alone, Debbie, or the next time it'll be a bullet aimed at your head," I knew that rock had been meant for us.

I raised my head a little bit, but Mom hissed, "Keep down, Crystal!"

I pressed the back of my hand to my nose and kept still until I heard a car revving up its motor and the sound of tires screeching out of the parking lot. Just as I raised my head again, Mom's cell phone rang.

She crawled across the floor and got the phone out of her purse. "She was just here, Chuck, but I think she's gone now."

There was a pause, and then Mom said, "But, didn't you tell her nothing was going on between us?"

Mom's voice didn't have a bit of zing left in it when she finally said, "I understand. Soon as we can get packed up, we'll be over there."

"What's going on, Mom?" I said as she put her phone down.

"That was Big Chuck. He told me he's going to have to let me go."

"But why?"

"He said his wife got some ideas about us."

Mom didn't have to say anything else. Men and their wives or their girlfriends or whatever they had were always getting ideas about Mom. Even my own daddy got ideas about her, and I don't know how many times he accused her of flirting. He said she drove him straight up the wall, and that one day he wouldn't have any other choice but to kill her or leave. I guess he decided against killing her because when I was in the third grade, he just up and moved to Little Rock. He was less than a hundred miles away from us, but the only times we ever heard from him were once a month when he sent a child support check and on my birthday and Christmas. He sent me a card with a fifty-dollar bill in it and the same message every single time, "Hey, Crystal. Hope you have a good one. Love, Dad"

"So are you going to get another job?"

"I sure am, Crystal, but not in this town."

"Why not?"

"We're moving?"

"Tonight?"

"Good a time as any, I guess."

"But I like it here," I said. "Plus, tomorrow's Saturday. You know that's my swim day."

"We'll get us a motel with a swimming pool. How about that? You can swim all day tomorrow if you want to. Now, come on, let's get our stuff ready to go."

It was after midnight when we pulled into the parking lot of Big Chuck's Diner. Mom had worked the breakfast and lunch shift there ever since Dad left. She was always talking about doing something different, but I didn't think she'd really ever leave Kennerly, and I sure didn't think she'd do it in the middle of the night. She got some good tips from the regular customers and even some from people just passing through town. Big Chuck said she was the best waitress he'd ever had. I figured her talk about going somewhere else was just a lot of hot air.

The lights were on inside Big Chuck's Diner, and I could see him looking through the slats of the open blinds. It wasn't long before the glass door swung open, and Big Chuck made his way across the parking lot.

"I'm sorry, Deb," Big Chuck said, resting his muscled-up arms on the side of Mom's car and leaning his big square head toward the open window. "My wife's always been a little crazy."

"A little crazy?" Mom said, her blue eyes as big as moons. "She could have killed Crystal with that rock."

"I'm sorry, but I can't talk any sense into her. I think it's good you're leaving town."

"What choice do I have, Chuck? I don't have a job, and your wife has threatened to kill me."

Big Chuck straightened up and pulled his billfold from the hip pocket of his jeans. He counted out ten one-hundred dollar bills and handed them to Mom.

"I'm sorry things worked out this way, Deb. But you know what? You're always talking about getting a fresh start. Use this money and go out there and get you one."

"That's exactly what I intend to do," Mom said, starting the car, and then we were off.

It was dark on the highway. Other than a few cars and some big trucks that swished past us, it seemed like we were all by ourselves out there. Every once in a while, we'd pass a brick house or a trailer sitting in the middle of a soybean or cotton field. Mom's little car was crammed so full of stuff that we couldn't go very fast, but we just keep chugging on down the road.

It was past midnight when we pulled into the parking lot of a motel. I was half-asleep, but I opened my eyes wide enough to see the words, Vacancy and Pool.

"Where are we, Mom?"

"Memphis. We'll spend a couple of nights here, and then we can look for a place to stay."

Mom and I slept until nine o'clock the next morning, and we ate breakfast in a room just off the motel lobby. I'd already spied the pool, and I kept whining and begging to go until Mom finally said, "Okay, get your suit on."

No one else was at the pool when we got there, and I made as big a splash as I could when I jumped in. As I tunneled my way through the water, I thought my lungs might split open. I didn't know whether or not I could make it all the way across that pool without coming up for air, but I kept going. I wanted Mom to see how far I could go before I came up for a breath. When my hand touched the lip of the pool, I raised my head out of the water and took a big gulp of air. I twirled around and waved to Mom. She smiled and gave me a thumbs-up. Sitting in that blue and white chair with her long legs stretched out in front of her, she looked like the high school girls who came to the pool to work on their tans back in home in Kennerly. Mom's figure was way better than any of those girls'. Most of those girls didn't wear make-up, and even if they did, they didn't know how to put it on right. Mom's face looked like the faces of the women whose pictures were on the covers of magazines. I shaded my eyes from the sun and stood looking at her until I could catch my breath. Then I pushed off the side and began swimming back toward her, trying to keep my eyes open so I'd swim straight.

Except for a man who'd scooped out bugs with a net on a pole, we'd had the whole place to ourselves all morning long. He'd been gone a while when a man and two kids, a little boy and a girl about my age, opened the gate and came inside. I stayed in the shallow end and watched them, hoping they had something else to do that day and couldn't stay very long. The boy was red-headed and freckled. I could tell by looking he was the kind of kid who liked to call a lot of attention to himself. He yelled at the man to watch him as he jumped up on the diving board and ran across it, cannonballing himself into the pool with a splash so big a few drops of water hit my face. The girl was right in behind him, but she walked across the board real slow, her long pigtails swinging from side to side. She put her skinny arms out, her waist bending like a swan's neck, until she plunked into the water. For weeks, I'd been thinking this was going to be the summer I went off the diving board.

"Hey, Mom!" I said, winching myself out of the pool and heading toward her. "I think I'll go off the diving board."

"I don't think that's a good idea, Crystal. There's not any lifeguards here, and you know I can't get you out."

I knew Mom had never learned how to swim, but I felt like I was a strong enough swimmer to get myself out of the water without anybody's help. I pulled a petal off a wilted pink rose poking through one of the holes in the chain link fence behind Mom's chair.

"Okay," I said, crushing the petal between my forefinger and thumb until it became a tiny damp ball.

When I turned to walk back to the pool, the boy was standing on the diving board with his arms stretched out in front of him and his head ducked between them, aiming his body at the water until he fell into it.

"Hey, watch this, Mom," I said.

I jumped in the pool, and Mom got up from her chair. I shoved my hands and face into the water and brought my scrawny brown legs straight up in the air and held them there for as long as I could keep my balance.

When I came up, Mom said, "That's so good, Crystal. You're doing so good."

My heart swelled with pride, and I went under the water again.

After she watched me for a while, Mom went back to her chair, and I waded over to the other side of the pool. A shiny penny glinted inside a sunlit circle of blue at the bottom. I picked it up with my toes and held it in my hand for a second before tossing it back into the water. Pretending I was diving in the ocean for lost treasure, I dipped into the pool, scraped the penny off the bottom, and tossed it back down again. It wasn't long before I got tired of that game, and I decided to try a flip. I pushed my hands down in the water extra hard and lifted my feet in the air. Unfortunately, I forgot to take a breath until my head was already under. As I took in a big swallow of water, I felt my legs turn to one side, and I came up coughing and spitting.

"You all right, Crystal?" Mom called.

"I'm okay," I said when I could stop coughing.

When I looked up, Mom was standing beside the pool, and the man I'd seen earlier was standing next to her. He was wearing a black bathing suit that was way too tight for him, and his hair was all slicked back.

"Is she okay, Debbie?"

I felt like a balloon that was leaking air when I looked over at the place where Mom had been sitting. The chair next to hers had a white motel towel draped across the back of it, and there was a puddle of water underneath it where the man's bathing suit had dripped. Smoke was rising from two cigarettes in the ashtray on the table between the chairs.

"I'm all right," I said, tilting my head from side to side and shaking the water out of my ears. "Just forgot to take a breath before I went under."

I did a handstand, and Mom and the man who already knew her name laughed and went back to their chairs. I kept playing in the water, but every once in a while I'd glance over at Mom and Mr. Slick Hair. She was talking, and he was looking at her the way I'd seen other men look at her. She flung her long blond hair over her shoulder and leaned close to him, her finger pointing in his direction like she was getting on to him. I knew she was just talking and being friendly, but I guess that kind of stuff was what drove my daddy straight up the wall.

I knew it wasn't Mom's fault, and maybe it wasn't the men's fault either. Seemed to me like they just couldn't stay away from her. She was tanned and filled out in all the right places, so unlike the

mothers of my classmates back in Kennerly. Mom didn't dress like other mothers either. She wore short shorts and tank tops in the summer and tight jeans and low-cut sweaters in the winter. It didn't matter how early she had to be at Big Chuck's Diner, she always got up in time to put on her make-up and fix her hair.

I figured Mr. Slick Hair was the diving board kids' daddy, probably divorced from their mother. I crawled back to the shallowest part of the pool and leaned my head against the edge, letting my legs float out from under me. I closed my eyes and watched sparks from the sun go off behind my eyelids.

I hoped Mr. Slick Hair wasn't going to try to start something up with Mom. This was supposed to be our fresh start, and I didn't want anything or anybody messing it up. I thought about how Mom always told me the most important thing for a girl to be was smart and wondered how I could be smart enough to get things going good for us. I knew I was never going to be pretty the way Mom was. My hair was brown and as scraggly as a water-soaked Brillo Pad. My eyes were the same color of blue as Mom's, but mine were smaller and too close together. Mom was prettiest woman I'd even seen and that included the ones on TV, but I was afraid she might not be all that smart. Maybe that's why she thought it was so important for me.

When I couldn't stand to think about it anymore, I stood up so fast it made me dizzy. As soon as I got steady on my feet, I glanced over in Mom and Mr. Slick Hair's direction. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed this woman locking the door of her room on the second floor balcony of the motel. She was wearing a bikini that showed off her flat stomach and big boobs. Underneath her sturdy-looking arm, she had two plastic inner tubes. The minute she turned around and waved at the girl in the pool, it dawned on me that this woman was bringing the inner tubes to those two kids, which meant she was probably Mr. Slick Hair's wife. She was cute, but kind of mean-looking. I could just imagine what a woman like that might do if she caught her husband flirting with Mom, but Mom and old Slick Hair kept talking and laughing like they were in their own little bubble. They didn't even notice she was coming their way.

I lifted myself out of the pool and took off running, yelling, "Look, Mom! I'm going off the diving board!"

Mom and Mr. Slick Hair stopped talking and got up from their chairs.

"Crystal! Wait!" Mom yelled.

But I was already past her, and I never looked back. I concentrated on the slapping sound of my feet pounding against the wet concrete. As I stepped on the rungs of the ladder that led up to the diving board, I felt like thousand tiny birds were flapping their wings inside my chest. Before I had time to back out, my feet went skittering across the little bumps on the board. There was a splash, and the water stung as it gushed into my nose. As soon as I was under water, I opened my eyes. Everything seemed to be cloudy and moving too slow. I didn't think I was ever going to make it back to the top of the water. I just kept going down.

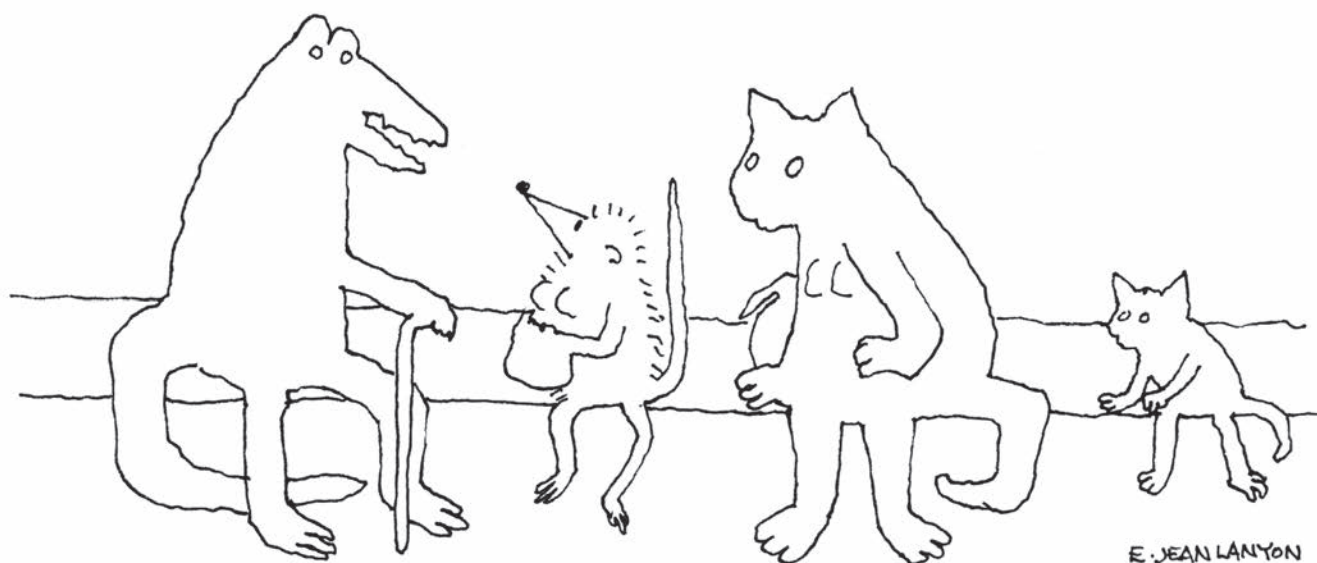
Finally, though, I started coming back up. Once I made it to the top and shook the water out of my eyes, I saw Mom kneeling on the side, looking at the place where I'd surfaced. The instant our eyes met, she flashed me a smile as big as the sun.

The woman in the bikini was letting herself inside the gate, and the two kids were standing behind Mom, all bug-eyed and looking scared. I looked around for Mr. Slick Hair, but I didn't see him anywhere. Then I felt somebody grab my arm, and there he was, his wet face so close to mine I could see the brown specks in the whites of his eyes.

"You okay, hon?" he said, breathing hard like all the air had been snatched out of his lungs.

"I'm fine," I said. "Just fine."

I stretched my arms out in front of me and swam away from him. At that moment, I knew being smart wasn't going to be enough. If I was going to protect my beautiful mother from people like Big Chuck's wife and old Slick Hair and his wife, I was going to have to be brave, too. I took in a big breath of fresh air before planting my feet on the bottom rung of the ladder. It took all the strength I had, but step by step, I pulled myself up out of the deep end of the pool. ♦



Sometimes a simple vase is all it takes to soothe a troubled heart.

White Crest

Kathleen Point

Despite her best efforts to stay asleep, Emma woke at sunrise on the day of her father's memorial service. She parted the beige blackout curtains and looked outside. The sky was heavy and grey, like wet dryer lint, and the ocean had the dull shine of an unpolished silver tea tray. She sighed and sat on the edge of the unfamiliar bed. She had hoped for a clear autumn day so she could hold the service on the small stone patio, but now, she would have to set up the sandwich and cheese trays inside in the bright, white kitchen.

The rental house looked like most Cape Cod homes from the outside—grey, weather-beaten shingles, faded blue shutters, a screened in front porch—but the inside was renovated and modern. All the walls were white and angular and the furniture had hard, unforgiving surfaces. When Emma was a child she and her parents rented this house, which sat on a steep bluff overlooking White Crest Beach in Wellfleet, almost every summer until she was 16. Back then the house was tastefully out-of-date in a shabby New England kind of way with its farmhouse dining table, overstuffed couch, and heavy drapes. But the middle-aged New Hampshire couple that Emma's family had always rented from had sold the house in the 25 years since their last visit. The new owners removed several walls to open up the first floor and installed stainless steel appliances and pale granite countertops. Emma supposed this made the house more attractive and marketable, but to her, the house now felt both empty and oddly stifling.

Emma's husband, Daniel, was still asleep, curled on his right side facing away from the window. Not wanting to wake him, Emma grabbed Daniel's hooded sweatshirt from a chair next to the bed and slipped it over her knee-length nightgown. Then she pulled on a pair of his grey argyle socks, opened the door, and tiptoed down the hardwood stairs.

The kitchen had a white and chrome espresso machine. The kind with little knobs and dials that seem to serve no other purpose than making the contraption look complicated. Emma spent several minutes trying to figure out how to turn the machine on before it finally purred to life with a sound similar to a dishwasher running in mid-cycle. She couldn't find any espresso cups so she placed a white ceramic mug under the nozzle. The machine sputtered out a small amount of dark brown liquid, barely filling the cup a quarter full. Emma opened the sliding glass door adjoining the kitchen and stepped onto the small deck that led down to the stone patio. She used the sleeve of the oversized sweatshirt to wipe water droplets from one of the plastic deck chairs and sat down.

The air was chilly and damp so Emma resolved to go through the day's to-do list quickly so she could go back inside. This had been her morning routine when her father was alive and living with them during his last several years of life. No matter the weather, Emma would drink her coffee on their covered porch in her pajamas, sometimes also wrapped in a blanket, and tic off the tasks out-loud. The list was always long: "get dad's pills from the pharmacy; call

his doctor to check on blood work; grade end of semester exams; call exterminator; buy coffee filters and toilet paper." And on it went. Occasionally, she would pause after a mundane item like "buy toilet paper" and feel angry at herself for going three days using pocket-packet tissues. "What the hell is wrong with you; get it together," she would mutter aloud.

Emma tucked her knees up to her chest and pulled the nightgown over her bare shins. Then she started the list: "Pick up sandwiches and paper plates; stop at the liquor store; buy black pantyhose; put sheets on bed in mom's room; fold programs." Emma stopped. There was something else she wanted to do, but she couldn't remember what it was. The clouds were parting a little and a swath of sunlight illuminated the narrow beach below. Emma stood and leaned over the railing to get a better view, thinking back to the hours she spent on the beach during her family vacations. Emma loved tanning herself on the shore and wading into the cold New England water, but she always hated walking down the sandy trail that led from the house to the beach. Emma remembered hugging the crumbly wall of the path, which cut diagonally into the bluff like a runaway truck ramp, as she inched down toward the shoreline below. She was terrified to get near the edge, where ground and sky were separated by only a rickety wooden fence. She always felt such relief when they finally made it to the bottom with their beach chairs and blankets, only to be stricken with fear halfway through the afternoon at the prospect of having to climb the cliff at the end of the day.

Emma's father had never really liked coming to White Crest Beach. He grew up in Philadelphia and spent his youth "down the shore" at Wildwood, where most of his extended family and friends still vacationed. But Emma's mother grew up in Boston and had fond memories of renting rustic cottages on the Cape. Her mother hated the Shore, with its overcrowded beaches full of tangled brown bodies and the way the hotels and t-shirt shops pushed right up against the edge of the sand. Since Emma's mother had agreed to live in Philadelphia instead of Boston, where they'd met as graduate students, it was understood that she would always pick the location of their summer vacation.

They began renting the house on the bluff when Emma was eight. But it wasn't until Emma was eleven that she began to notice how much her father disliked these trips. Her mother relished the quiet and the sparsely populated beach, but the isolation made her father anxious. He was an outgoing, sociable man. The kind who could be found on a given night drinking a beer with his neighbors on their South Philadelphia stoop, or holding court in their tiny living room, TV and radio running simultaneously in the background. But he had another side to him, one that only Emma and her mother were privy to. In moments of solitude, with no friends and distractions around, a kind of darkness took hold of him, causing him to be consumed

with fear, anger, and sputtering, irrational thoughts. He felt that they didn't have enough money, that he was a failure, that somehow everyone but him had the keys to a successful life. The quiet Cape house bred these moods. During each beach trip, he alternated between explosive anger and withdrawn resentment. Yet each year—until the summer of Emma's 16th birthday, when her parents split—the three of them returned to the cottage blindly, as if the last tense trip had been an aberration.

After her father died, Emma found a letter tucked in the green metal fishing tackle box where he kept his important documents. It was dated five years earlier; around the time he received the Alzheimer's diagnosis. The letter, written with a black felt pen in her father's sloped handwriting, requested that Emma spread his ashes on the bluff above White Crest Beach. Emma always knew that her father wished to be cremated, but they'd never discussed where to place his ashes. After she found the letter Emma felt angry with herself for not bringing up such an important issue. She had been so preoccupied with the complicated logistics of his care, her work, and her incessant need to order the details of all the lives around her that she never thought to ask her dad where, or if, she should scatter his ashes. Now, looking down at the beach, she wished she'd sat down, held his pale hand, and asked him this question. Maybe then he would have explained to her why he wanted this beach—a place he'd seemed to hate so much—to be his final resting place.

"Flowers," Emma said aloud. She suddenly remembered what to-do list item she'd forgotten. She wanted to place several bouquets throughout the room to soften the impersonal décor. "I need to buy flowers for the party." Emma walked across the damp deck and slid open the kitchen door. She stepped onto the doormat and peeled off her socks, leaving them in a little heap on the tiled floor. She left the mug on the kitchen counter and walked noiselessly up the stairs.

Daniel was still asleep when Emma entered the bedroom. "Babe, wake up for a minute," she said softly. Daniel rolled onto his back and exhaled through his nose. "I'm running out to get the stuff for the party."

"Mmmhh, okay." Daniel pushed himself onto his elbows and yawned. Daniel was not handsome by conventional standards, but he had striking features that had held up to middle age—a wide chest, prominent jaw, and greying auburn hair that curled around his ears. "What do you need to get? Just the sandwiches and booze, right."

"Yeah, I need to pick up the sandwiches and wine, but I also need some stuff from Walgreens and flowers." Emma moved to the window and opened the curtains with one swift motion, scraping the metal grommets over the brass curtain rod.

"Why do you need to get flowers?"

"To make this place feel less...less," Emma couldn't think of the right word. "Less clinical," she finally finished.

"What are you talking about? This house is fine. Stop stressing yourself over nothing."

"It's not fine," Emma said curtly. "It doesn't even look like the same house we used to rent. Dad wanted to come back to this house; not someone's investment property."

"Emma, calm down," Daniel said, flopping back on the pillow. "Your dad would love this place now. I know he would."

"No, you don't know him the way I did."

"Okay, okay," Daniel said. He covered his face with his hands, muffling his words. "I know this is a really hard day for you. I'm just saying... you should, you know, take it easy on yourself today. We don't need flowers."

"Well I'm getting them." Emma opened her suitcase and pulled out a pair of jeans. She slipped them on under her nightgown and then took the nightgown and sweatshirt off together. She tossed the bundle of silky fabric tangled in rough cotton onto the bed and stood naked from the waist up, hands on hips. Her breasts were small and pale with faint triangle tan lines still visible around the edges. "I'm just trying to make this all work."

Daniel looked up at Emma standing over him half-naked. "I know. It's going to be okay. I promise."

Emma grabbed a loose black turtleneck sweater and walked out of the room. At the bottom of the stairs she put on the sweater, picked up her purse and keys, and walked out into the morning frost.

Emma returned from her errands an hour and a half later. Daniel must have been waiting for her because he came out of the house as soon as she pulled up the gravel drive.

"The liquor store barely had any wine to choose from," Emma said as she got out of the car. "I should have brought a few bottles from home. Especially those red blends that mom likes so much. I can't believe I didn't think about it until now."

"I'm sure your mom will be fine with whatever we have," Daniel said. He carried the hexagonal shaped sandwich trays into the house; Emma followed with a box that contained six cheap bottles of merlot, gin and whiskey, and a large bouquet of orange, yellow, and pink dahlias.

Emma set the box down with a heavy thud on the granite counter and then removed the liquor and wine bottles, setting them neatly along the edge of the sink. Then she took the wine glasses from the cabinet one at a time and arranged them in a triangle shape next to the row of bottles. Finally she removed the green cellophane from the flowers and carefully cut the bouquet's stems at an angle under running water.

"Shit," she said.

"What," Daniel asked, "What happened?" Emma could tell that he was trying hard to sound overly concerned, overly patient.

"I don't have a vase for the flowers." Emma began yanking open the cabinets and drawers looking for a vase or tall container.

"I told you," Daniel said, his voice calm and slow. "We don't even need the flowers."

"Yes, yes we do!"

"Everyone is coming today to celebrate your father. No one is going to care about flowers." Daniel stopped laying out the plates and napkins. His face was tight, his voice soft.

"You don't know. You weren't there when he was dying. No one was. It was me—just me—cleaning up his shit and piss and holding his hand in the end. Just me." Emma moved to the other side of the granite island, putting space between her and Daniel. "So yes," she said, her voice so quiet now that it was almost inaudible. "We needed, I need, these flowers."

"Emma, I know it was hard..." his voice trailed off. "I'm so sorry you had to go through that. But you were never alone. I was right there with you." Daniel reached his hand across the counter but Emma did not accept it. She kept her eyes cast down on the granite, noticing how the stone looked like bright flecks of light trapped in a hard gloss. After several silent moments Emma walked past Daniel, up the stairs, and flung herself onto the bed.

Emma had not slept well the night before so she closed her eyes and tried to fall asleep. But she couldn't. She kept going over the details of the afternoon service in her mind. Had she remembered to pack her shoes and the seamless bra that went with her black sweater dress? Had she thought to call her Uncle Eric with the directions to the house? But even after she addressed each of these worries she could not sleep. Each time she was close to drifting off a memory from their last family trip to the Cape floated through her consciousness. Finally, after half an hour, she stopped trying to sleep and thought back to the memory that was gnawing at her.

It was the second to last day of their trip when she was 16—their last visit to the Cape house. Emma remembered sitting propped up by her elbows on a red lobster towel, the one that matched the color of her red and white-stripped swimsuit. It was late afternoon and the shade of the bluff was encroaching behind her. Soon, she would be enveloped in a cool shadow, but for that moment, it was sunny and warm and the ocean was unusually still. She remembered looking out at the placid water and feeling calm and in control. But as soon as the first lines of the bluff's shadow hit her shoulder blades an unidentified worry overtook her. She recalled looking up at the precarious path that led back to the house. She did not want to walk up it; she did not want to feel the fear. So instead she dragged her towel closer to the water, where the sun still reigned, and lay on her stomach facing the ocean. Her parents did the same, moving their woven, aluminum framed beach chairs next to Emma's towel.

Emma drifted off facedown on the towel long enough for the shadow to reach her ankles. She remembered waking to the sound of low voices. The feeling reminded her of falling asleep on the couch and awakening in the middle of the night to the television.

"I don't know what you expect me to say anymore," her mother whispered. "You say you're going to change, that things are going to be different. And they never are."

"But what do you want from me? We're barely making it. And I'm doing the best I can," her father's voice was strained and sorrowful.

"No. You know that's not what I'm talking about. I appreciate everything you do for me—for us. It's your attitude. It's the way everything is so dire, so negative. And the way you think it's all on you."

"I'm just telling it as is," he said defensively.

"Oh, please," her mother said. Her voice was uncharacteristically authoritative. "Stop it with the hero crap. You blame everyone for making you suffer and complain that the burden is all on your shoulders. You never recognize how I'm suffering. Or, for Christ's sake, how we're in this together."

"We are in this together," Emma's father said pleadingly. "I just don't understand how you want me to be."

Emma's mother sighed. "I don't know how to explain it to you anymore. I'm tired of talking about it. Let's just have a really good rest of the vacation, okay?"

A few months later, during the fall of Emma's junior year in high school, Emma's mother left her father. She stayed close in Philadelphia until Emma graduated, but as soon as Emma left for college in Chicago, her mother returned to Boston.

Emma alternated visiting her mother and her father on her school breaks. In the summer she would spend four weeks with each of them. It was always odd visiting her mother in a strange city and strange house. Nothing made sense to Emma because there was no context to the pieces of this new life. But it was even stranger returning to her father's brick row home, which he'd hastily rearranged to accommodate for the missing furniture Emma's mom had taken with her when she left. The sparse chaos in the rooms made it feel like a house in the midst of a move, or that the home's owners had been forced to abandon it unexpectedly. Visiting the South Philadelphia home—even a decade after the divorce—always left Emma with a peculiar sense of dread and discomfort that took days to shake.

So when her father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's when Emma was in her mid-30s, it was a relief to move him out of his tomb-like home and into her own. She and Daniel had been discussing having children for years and the move also provided a convenient excuse for Emma to bow out of the endless should-we-or-shouldn't-we debate. After several tense conversations Emma was able to convince Daniel that caring for her ailing father and having a child—let alone children—would be too great a strain on their teacher salaries.

Once the decision was made Daniel stopped bringing it up, but Emma knew that he was secretly holding out hope. After Emma turned 40, which was just one year before her father died, Emma could feel that the hope had finally dissipated. But it left a salty residue on their marriage, like the taste of evaporated seawater on sunburned lips.

Emma looked at the clock. She had just an hour until the guests arrived. It would be a small gathering: Emma's uncles and a few of their children, Emma's mother, who was driving from Boston, and

a handful of close acquaintances. Emma sat up and was about to get out of bed when the feeling of forgetfulness—similar to what she'd experienced that morning when making her to-do list—overtook her. "What is it?" she said aloud. She looked out the window at the water. It was calm and still like it had been that day on the beach, the day she tried, and failed, to outrun the shade. And then, she remembered.

A month before her father died, as she was rushing around the house trying to get him comfortable for the day so she could get to work, her father had reached out and grabbed her arm.

"That house, that place," he said. "It's where I had the chance to make everything different, and I didn't. I didn't do it because I was scared, and because I didn't know how."

"Oh, dad," Emma had said, trying to twist delicately out of his grasp. "I know you miss your old house. But we agreed that this is the best place for you now."

"No, no, no. Not that house. The other house. The beach house."

"You mean Uncle Eric's house in Wildwood?"

"No, the other beach house," her dad said, his eyes wild. His Alzheimer's ruined his memory on many days and Emma had grown accustomed to him mixing up times and places. "The house where I had a chance to make everything different. I should've just figured out how to be happy, like she said."

"Who said?"

"You know, that woman."

"You mean mom?"

"Yeah. She tried to get me to see. But I couldn't then," he said. His eyes were moist with tears. "Promise me, Emma, you will figure it out? You will be different?"

"Of course, dad. I'll figure it out."

Sitting alone in the unrecognizable bedroom where Emma's parents slept during their Cape vacations, Emma suddenly understood that her father meant this house. The Cape house. This is where he'd lost his chance to make things different. This is where he'd lost his marriage.

Emma sprang from the bed and jogged down the stairs. She opened the coat closet and retrieved a plain brown cardboard box. She marched past Daniel, who was reading on the couch, and opened the sliding glass door. She walked across the deck, the stone patio, and the scratchy, damp grass in her bare feet, finally arriving at the edge of the bluff. Emma knelt on the ground where the grass and sand met. She looked down at the beach and thought back to the argument between her parents, and then the argument she'd had with Daniel that morning about the flowers.

Emma lifted the lid off the box cautiously and set it next to her on the grass. She picked up the base of the box and knelt forward, until she was leaning over the edge of bluff. She tilted the box and let the ashes spill out onto the sand in measured heaps, like she was gradually adding sugar to a mixing bowl. Then, she stood and began shaking the contents of the box into the wind. She watched as flecks of gray and white dipped, swirled, and then disappeared over the dunes.

Then she stood, the empty box still in hand, and looked out over the water. It was dark and cool, like a slab of grey granite. Emma picked up the lid and walked slowly across the grass. Her feet were cold and her knees were sandy and wet, but she didn't mind. When she got to the steps she saw that Daniel was watching her from the living room window. His mouth was drawn into a line and his eyebrows furrowed. Emma opened the door and wiped her feet on the mat.

"Hey," she said with a smile. She left the dusty box by the door and walked toward her husband.

"Hey yourself," Daniel said, his lips still pursed with concern. Daniel had turned on the gas fireplace while Emma was asleep. She looked around the room, noticing how the firelight softened the harshness of the white walls and décor. The layered shades of white, cream, and beige now had a textured, iridescent glow.

"Were you dumping your dad's ashes?" Daniel asked.

"Yeah. I scattered them at the top of the bluff, just like he wanted me to."

Daniel's face had relaxed a little bit but now his arms were crossed over his abdomen. "I thought you wanted to wait until everyone got there. You bought that fancy urn and everything."

"Oh, right, the urn!" Emma went over to the closet and pulled out a heavy object wrapped in tissue paper. She tore the paper away and filled the urn with water at the sink. Then she placed the dahlias in it, fluffed the bouquet, and set the arrangement on the counter next to the wine glasses.

"There," she said. "Now everything's exactly as dad would have wanted it." ♦



E. JEAN LANYON

A Big Black Cat

George Stewart

Is that your cat?

Fancy that! Fancy THAT!

A big black cat! What's its name?

Let me guess it; I bet I can.

It must be "Midnight"! No?

hum,ooKayy, then, well, O.K.

Let me try again.

A big black cat...

I know!, it's "Coaldust"!

"Shadow?", "Raven?",

— This is hard —.

It isn't "Tenebrous"?

(I didn't think so.)

"Ebony"?

— I'll get it yet —

How 'bout "Shadow"? (Oh, I've said that)

"Dusty"! "Sable"! "Jet"!

Wrong? Again I'm wrong!

Oh, I guess I give it up then, what's its name?

"Jack"!?! You named him "Jack"!?!

What an odd name for a cat!

Fancy that. You named him that —

a big black cat named "Jack"!

Thistle Field Fence

Maggie Rowe

I stand at a fence for a thousand years,
my hand through the wire while I look away.

The stallion which has been watching me
from trees at the far end of the field

thunders past, snorting, and stops, pretending to eat around thistles.

I don't look. He chews his way over to me

and raises his great head to smell my hand quickly,
noisily. The soft wrinkles of his nostril are so close to my skin

I'm in heaven. His muscled skull

brushes my hand, so that the world sways and stops,
ignites, and thunders off.

The horse

thunders off, igniting

the world, which sways and stops and brushes my hand
with its muscled, heavenly skull,

the soft wrinkles of its noisy nostril close to my skin.

It has raised its great head to smell my hand quickly.

I wasn't looking as it chewed its way over to me.

It pretends to eat, then thunders away through the thistles, snorting,
to trees at the far end of the field,

where it watches me like a stallion.

I keep looking away, my hand through the wire.

The fence and I stand for a thousand years.

What scarlets

Lindsey Warren

What scarlets mercy day into twilight,

what skeletons, what tendons of cloud

usher their roughs into the lighttheater

to relieve, in spectacle,

the blue hour upon the snow.

In the blackenings of the branches,

see me; in the greenaching, the gold-icing-

over, the purpling, the metabolizing, the dazzle-trafficking,

you cannot; the horizon hushes under;

and I become every color of angel as

the mobile of cometstuff grasped within me

twirls its embers, throws

its shapes against these walls, this cave cast

in night, in beginning.

He Gave Me Something To Write About

Kino Shani

sitting at my son's
mini pool table
tryin' to figure out
something
to write about
just mopped
the kitchen
and bathroom floors
feel like i
did a little
something
tonight
heard a thump
wonderin'
what could've made
the mop drop
sneakin' thru
the house
'cause
it's just
me and lil kev
the mop didn't
drop
kev was
still on the bed
ended up
back at the table
continuin' figurin'
at the same time
being nosey
as to
what's happening
outside

then Red
sees me and says
"Cornelius shot
hissself in the
head.
He's dead."
can't believe
this
we spoke
about
45 minutes
in the past
you can see him thru
the window
sittin' there
head hangin' down
legs spread apart
sorta like
in a comfortable
sleep
but
his shirt is
red
blood is
dripping
out his mouth
and
he ain't
wakin' up
not tonight
not tomorrow
he's not

the sight of
him
made those
big ass
rough ass
cops
the woulda
chased his
crack sellin' ass
down
a couple weeks
ago
shake their heads
one had a tear
all asked why
he is so
young
they don't know
just 18
no one knows
his last name
i think
it is jones
but i'm not
sure

our landlord
(i hate that word)
will be here
soon
he should have
that info
the apartment
is in his
trainers name
he was a
really good
boxer
people are outside
laughing
what is humourous
right now?
folks were
viewin' the
body
thru the window
like it was a
peepshow
my stomach hurts.



DREAMSTREETS

ART IN WILMINGTON 1970 – 1990

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Dream Streets: Art in Wilmington 1970–1990, on view from June 27 through September 27 at the Delaware Art Museum, focuses on the powerful visual arts created in Wilmington during these two decades of great social and artistic change. To pay homage to the equally innovative dance, film, and literature produced in the city at the same time, often in collaboration with the visual arts, the Museum is hosting numerous programs and events during the run of the exhibition. For more information, visit delart.org

Dream Streets Creative Chat (FREE)

Wednesday, June 10 | 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. | Networking and light fare: 5:30 pm – 6:00 p.m.; Presentation: 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Chris White Gallery | 701 N. Shipley Street, Wilmington, DE

Hosted by Wilmington Renaissance Corporation, this Creative Chat will feature Margaret Winslow, the Delaware Art Museum's Associate Curator for Contemporary Art, who will present an overview of the history that informed the exhibition *Dream Streets: Art in Wilmington 1970–1990*.

The presentation will be followed by a moderated conversation between Michael Kalmbach, Executive Director, Creative Vision Factory; and artist Rick Rothrock about the motivations behind the founding of the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts and the New Wilmington Art Association.

Creative Chats are free and open to the public. Light fare and drinks provided. Cash bar. Free registration is required by June 5. Space is limited. Register at <https://wrc-cc-2015-6-10.eventbrite.com>.

Workshop: Clay Printing with Mitch Lyons

Saturday, July 11 | 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. | Instructor: Mitch Lyons
Delaware Art Museum | 2301 Kentmere Parkway, Wilmington, DE
\$100 Members, \$120 Non-Members. Pre-registration required.

Guest artist Mitch Lyons will demonstrate this unique art form that combines printmaking with ceramics techniques using colored clay and slips. This workshop is presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Dream Streets: Art in Wilmington 1970–1990*. All supplies provided. All levels.

Wilmington Artists Gallery Talks (FREE)

Third Thursdays, July – September | 6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Delaware Art Museum | 2301 Kentmere Parkway, Wilmington, DE

Discover the creative energy and trends of Wilmington's artistic community during the 1970s and 1980s with gallery talks led by artists featured in *Dream Streets: Art in Wilmington 1970–1990*.

July 16	Photography with Norma Calabro, Terence Roberts, and Flash Rosenberg
August 20	Painting in the 1980s with Mary Page Evans, Robert Straight, and Stephen Tanis
September 17	Abstraction in Delaware with Margo Allman, Mitch Lyons, and James Newton

The Choreography of Debra Loewen (FREE)

Saturday, July 18 | 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Delaware Art Museum | 2301 Kentmere Parkway, Wilmington, DE

Debra Loewen left her mark on Wilmington when she taught at the University of Delaware in the 1970s and founded her first company, New Space, which specialized in site-specific performances in buildings, public spaces, and natural settings. Loewen is the founder and artistic director of Wild Space Dance Company in Wisconsin and returns to Wilmington with choreographies that use the Delaware Art Museum's spaces as settings for exciting movement and creative exploration. Performances will be led by dancer and educator A.T. Moffett and ensemble.

Dreamstreets: A Literary Reading (FREE)

Saturday, July 18 | 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Delaware Art Museum | 2301 Kentmere Parkway, Wilmington, DE

Dreamstreets was the seminal arts and literary journal of Wilmington from 1977 to 2006, publishing experimental poetry, fiction, and artwork by Bob Chartowich, John Hickey, Suzanne Michelle, Lew Bennett, Diane Wolf, e. jean lanyon, Steven Leech, and many others. This reading will feature the original *Dreamstreets* authors as well as works by Wilmington's newest literary stars.

Wilmington Film Festival with George Stewart (FREE)

Thursday, July 23 | 6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Delaware Art Museum | 2301 Kentmere Parkway, Wilmington, DE

Film was an important area of experimentation for Wilmington artists of the 1970s and 1980s. Hosted by noted Wilmington filmmaker George Stewart, this one-night festival will screen classics of Wilmington avant-garde cinema, including Flash Rosenberg's legendary *Pulse of Desire*, *Courage* by Mark Marquisee and Jerry Millstein, and Stewart's own *Thoth*, which will feature live musical accompaniment by Paul Woznicki.

Art is Social: Dream Streets Festival (Free for Museum Members, \$5 Non-Members)

Friday, September 18 | 7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.
Delaware Art Museum | 2301 Kentmere Parkway, Wilmington, DE

This after-hours event celebrates the last weeks of *Dream Streets*. Join us for an outdoor festival featuring throwback hip-hop and breakdancing performances by Wilmington artists and musicians, libations and eats by local food vendors, and more!



2301 Kentmere Parkway | Wilmington, DE 19806 | 302.571.9590 | delart.org



CONNECTING PEOPLE. CULTURES AND IDEAS.
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