

CARDINAL SINS  
LITERARY MAGAZINE

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*Cardinal Sins*

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# all from the tree of knowledge

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## In the Hopes for Something Green

It was the room of a dead woman.

A dead woman's room. Sally's room. With only two windows, one facing west and the other facing north, her two re-potted ferns wouldn't grow. At least not next to the window facing north. And before them, she had tried geraniums. Still nothing. But I hated the smell of geraniums anyway. It was better that they died.

"Leave it alone." That's what she told me. She wanted a green thumb and that was obvious. But some things can't be, I guess. That's why they make plants out of silk, that's why they have 'how to' books. She had tried practically everything with plants. Classical music. Nat King Cole. There was a two week period when she played Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues" continuously. Morning to dinner. Then, a good five times before she fell asleep. Sally played Johnny to her philodendrons at the time.

But they died, too.

"Maybe it depressed them," I told her, "try disco. Not every plant is susceptible to a country twang. A country twang about prison, no less."

"Johnny ain't that bad." Johnny was singing the first night she got laid by a man named Frank Derby in the back of a rusty Vega. I've never met Frank, but she talked about him once in a while to her geraniums when Vegas or holey underwear were on her mind. Seems, Frank thought she was left some money after her father killed himself. She thought he had the ass of the century. After lending him two hundred and fifty dollars, maybe in hopes he'd buy some new underwear, he took off. Somewhere.

She wanted to try spider plants next. She tried something new with them. She began talking to them. To the one spider plant, within the first couple days, I heard her recite an excerpt from the *Merchant of Venice*. And to the other spider plant she carried on about the ice storm of '75 and her hernia operation.

They were dead within a month.

"They held out all right," I said.

She continued to talk to them. They continued to die.

I felt sort of bad about this because it was me who suggested talking to the plants in the first place. Grandma, at every watering, would gently lift their leaves and greet them.

Good morning, little ones. Thirsty? Drinky-uppie.

I remembered this. So I suggested it.

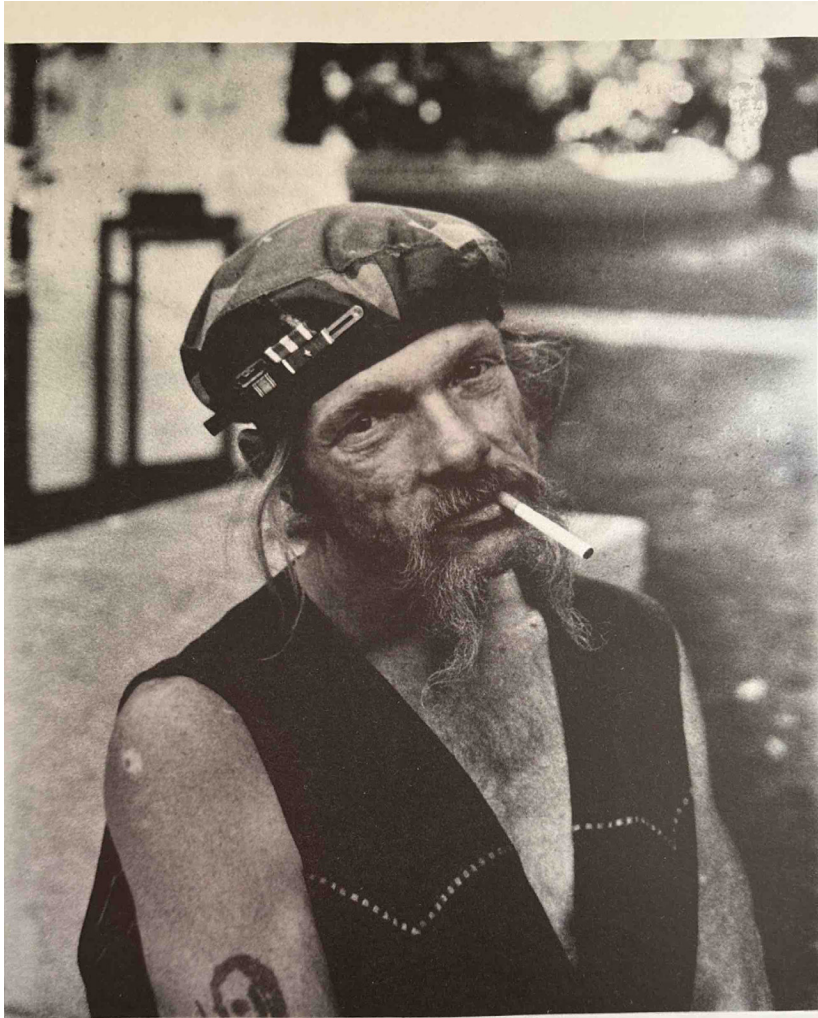
She carried it too far maybe. She had skipped right over Grandma's baby talking and into ice skating on country roads, buck-toothed nurses named Janice and hairy feet. I walked in on her after the first ten minutes.

"I think you might be talking to them too much."

"Leave it alone. Buy me some violets."

She talked to the violets, too. Before she watered them. While she watered them. After she watered them. They died too, eventually. But they lasted almost as long as the spider plants.

The violets heard Sally give her sales pitch for sterling silver jewelry and their daily horoscope. She'd move closer to them when she read the horoscope for Pisces. Violets, she claimed, couldn't be anything but Pisces.



Wandering Vet

Jeff Foxx

The geraniums heard more horoscopes (Sally considered them Leos) and they also heard about Rodney's bad case of tonsillitis.

Sally didn't read the horoscope section to the ferns. She couldn't decide if they were Libras or Scorpios. If she read them anything, it would be out of the editorial page of the Free Press. But that was usually on Sundays only. The rest of the days she'd babble about the snake charmer from the circus and hitching rides with nothing but a pack of Marlboro Lights and a flimsy backpack.

The violets and the ferns and the geraniums and maybe even the spider plants got the best conversations.

Not me.

Not Aunt Rena.

Her best conversations were with the plants. Which was irritating to me as her cousin. More irritating when I thought about it.

Less irritating when I listened.

Listened by the banister, outside the door.

Which, coincidentally, faced south.

The spider plants lasted about a month. No plant food sold at Meijer's could have saved them. They were up against hairy feet.

Her reoccurring nightmare was of none other than feet. Hairy feet. I didn't know this before she told the spider plants. Although I knew she shaved her toes. The big one, because her big toe was absolutely huge and puffy, took two strokes. Two good strokes. She told me this before. She also offered to shave mine.

Hairy feet came to her in her dreams before she even started kindergarten. Usually brown and rough hair which covered about a size ten foot. A man's size ten foot. Sometimes bigger. But they were usually about a size ten before she started kindergarten.

Her father walked a lot. He was some ranch hand of sorts out in the Dakotas before he met her mother at a middle of nowhere truck stop in Iowa. He had walked to the Dakotas when he was fifteen. Walked. Sometimes hitched. But mostly walked. And he still walked after he came back to Michigan with his pregnant wife. Willy's feet were callused and rough. And after pulling his end of the line in the shop, he'd stretch those bare feet out. Knead the carpet, sing some old cowboy lullaby, down his can of Black Label.

"Goddamn, I've got me some feet. Feet made for dancin." Then, when it got to that point, Will would dance with his daughter. Pull her from her kid-sized wooden rocking chair and dance with her. Her feet upon his big, hairy and blistered feet. Stepping in time to whatever he was bumming, tripping through the shag carpet. He taught her to two-step. He taught her bow to polka. Before he could teach her to waltz, though, Willy's feet got soft. To harden them up a bit, Willy walked again, taking only his beat up work boots bought at Sears two years earlier.

The work boots and his clothes were sent back from somewhere in Oklahoma with a note when she was in third grade. The note read: Will was a good man. Buried him here on the ranch, his wishes. My condolences. Taught my son to two-step. God loves a two-stepper above all else. Cray McDonall.

The feet she claimed were her father's, got bigger and even hairier in her dreams. She said they made her wet the bed. And she started shaving her own toes.

She talked about how the feet eventually grew a mouth and tiny chiseled teeth. Before going into Junior high the teeth usually appeared yellowish, as if they smoked and sometimes the feet with less hair would have little tattoos on their knuckles. This was all before high school. All before high school she was being laughed at and taunted by hairy feet with unbrushed teeth.

Sally hated hairy toes and feet. She loved them too.

Sally had danced with bare, hairy toes and feet before she turned six. Sally told this to the spider plants in her room.

By the time they heard this, I noticed they were beginning to droop. Droop farther than spider plants normally do. Willy and hairy feet got them started. All that dancing and all that smiling that she told them about. Sometimes she would go as far as to dance for them.

"Don't dance for them, Sally, this room is too old for that. The floors creak too much. That'll make them droop even more."

A few days later, after I told her not to dance for them, she was dancing with them. And in the afternoon, I dumped the remains of the sagging spider plants on the garden.

Then the violets came. Mrs. Tulden gave them to her. I arranged them around Sally's room, one on each speaker and two on the coffee table. The two on the coffee table were smaller, dainty little runts. I pointed this out to Sally.

"For a little extra help, bring them mineral water. Mineral water from France."

This might work. I thought it just might work. I've seen pictures of French gardens before and pictures of cafes where flowers sit on every table, out every window. Maybe it is in the water. Plain French water, no bubbles.

So from the Evian bottle to the helpless violets, Sally would pour. Pour and talk. Talk and pour.

Pouring, talking and spilling over the violets. For days and days it went like this. And I'd clench my fists outside the door as Sally goes on, sometimes even in a mock French accent, but only when the Evian bottle was full.

When he stripped for her, he took everything off except for his maroon beret. It was always like this and Sally hated it. So when Sally stripped for him she took everything off except her socks. It was always like this, even after she moved in with him. Everything would come off except for a maroon beret and a pair of socks, which were sometimes holey.

When Mark bought her the pair of black leather gloves for Christmas, she took off the socks and the left glove, slapped him and asked for his beret. He wouldn't do it for Sally. He left it on.

But he took it off for Maria in the apartment directly above them. And Sally left.

Sally's good at leaving. She used to do it more when she was younger. She was hardly ever around when I was growing up. Only postcards and collect phone calls to Aunt Rena. That's what was around when Sally wasn't. For Aunt Rena, that wasn't enough.

For me, I wanted more than a color coded postcard. I wanted Mickey himself.

I never saw the postcard she sent from France after she left Mark. But I know she sent one because she told the violets about it. And I never saw the miniature Eiffel tower she bought from a gypsy either.

Josefina mixed love potions. Probably the best love potions. But that wasn't all Josefina could make and do. Josefina took Sally in her apartment, which was three smug blocks down from the Seine and fattened her up, hemmed her jeans and read her palm. She even got her a job selling sterling silver jewelry to wide-eyed tourists under the Eiffel tower.

The gig was this: the jewelry came from South America, hand made and elegant. A rare tribe created them. Good price for rare beauty.

The truth behind the jewelry was this: it came from Hong Kong and there was nothing rare about a factory with underpaid laborers in the eighties.

So when Sally offered the gig to Jens Boetzle, it didn't go with him. And he sold a different gig to Sally about work in Amsterdam. Sally didn't find another Josefina in Amsterdam who would hem her jeans and boil water for tea. But she smoked some great hash from the cafe in the Red Light district where she worked even after Jens gave her some truth and left.

Josefina saw this in the beginning. She read it on her left hand two days after she and Sally met. Sally thought it sounded romantic and she still does. Even as the violets were beginning to wilt and fade, palm reading on the left hand was romantic.

"God's will." That's what she told the violets.

Destiny, fate. God in your left hand. God's written will upon your left palm. Nearly every day during the violet's last week of life in Sally's room she would mention this again and again.

And I told her, after I dumped the young and strangled violets in the trash, what is God's will and Amsterdam to wilting plants. Nothing.

Nothing but wasted mineral water.

## Litany of the Dead

"All rise for the recitation of  
The Litany of the Dead...,  
US 10."

"two raccoons."  
(one was young)  
re: "Unto God, we commend thy soul"

"one left shoe."  
(the right lives on)  
re: "Unto God, we commend thy sole"

"one small deer"  
(a healthy fawn)  
re: "Spirit rise to thy worthy place"

"one house cat"  
(with a collar on)  
re: "Spirit reside in that lofty space"

"three tire treads"  
(the glue didn't hold)  
re: "From fire (stone) and brimstone to the heavens above"

"two o'possum"  
(both looked old)  
re: "Arise to heaven and again be one"

"one exhaust system"  
(the muffler was gone)  
re: "Arise to heaven and again be one"

"one small skunk"  
(the smell lingers on)  
re: "Arise to heaven, your time on earth done"

"one bag of grass"  
(it fell off a truck)  
re: "God, scatter thy essence to blow as the wind"

"one abandoned car"  
(a sign of bad luck)  
re: "It isn't the owner, but G.M. that sinned"

"The litany of the dead...,  
US 10.  
Please be seated.)

## Negotiations

"I'm not Lebanon, or Northern Ireland, I'm not even the United Germanies, I'm a living, breathing woman, so just stop it." Cheryl says this to me in her tap-tap voice. She smiles at me, but only with her mouth. I want to tell her how ugly that is, but I don't. I never do.

Cheryl's my wife. I don't know how she feels about that. My name is Peter Martin. Two first names. I feel cheated. I teach International Relations at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. There are about 5,500 students. The academic life suits us. Cheryl's a poet. She has quite a following. I don't understand her work. She says it's because the boundaries are ambiguous and that gives my soul a heat rash, and then she laughs. That laugh.

All this remembering. I don't know if it's good for you. She reads me a poem, then looks at me. I feel picky all over, like the only nine year old who doesn't know fractions. No, that's not precisely right. What I mean is that when she looks at me, I feel frozen at nine, just like I always did with my father. And I'm thinking, just like I did with him, "What's the question?" Since I don't know what to say, I tent my fingers and nod. She folds up the paper in fours, creasing it with angry nails. I'm still nodding. Her lips are taut.

One of my courses this fall is International Terrorism. When I teach, I feel as if the room is empty. Maybe you shouldn't be that comfortable. Maybe I'm just substituting countries for names. I'm good at what I do and I try not to wonder why. I am tenured, I publish incisive articles regularly in the best journals. I enjoy the respect of my colleagues and my classes are always full. Cheryl has an older brother, James. He works for a secret arm of the CIA, International Terrorism. When he says it, he looks at me as if I'm not entirely trustworthy. They talk in a code I can't break. In fairness, he does tell great stories. He can get you lost in Iraq or bitten by a tsetse fly in the Congo. His tales are fantastic, often funny. Cheryl adores him. I am jealous. When he's done dazzling us, he points a question at me. I discuss the raised situation seriously, historically. He takes a turn at nodding. Cheryl's eyes glaze.

"I have to take out the trash." That's how it started. It was our first serious fight. Cheryl and I had just started living together. It was in the early 70's. We say we were living in San Francisco. Actually, we lived in Oakland. The two cities are separated by more than the bridge, but San Francisco sounds romantic.

We were watching dust particles float down to where we were on the brown carpet. The afternoon sun sliced through the blinds. You can actually see the pollutants. In the sun, they look like little comets. It was after sex and strawberries. We had picked them, wild. Then Cheryl melted some whitening chocolate from an old Easter bunny. We dipped the berries, sucked, bit them, moaned at the perfect combination. I drizzled chocolate between her breasts.

Cheryl makes love the way an expert wood craftsman fashions something precise and unique. She tells me that my body is all ropes, slides, pointers for her. She takes me, then I take her. When we are done, she lets me hold onto one breast. Even after the leavings of lust, her body amazes me. She says she doesn't want to have children because her perfect beny nipples will tum brown and large.



Rosita Lugo

Inner Music  
2 Color Silkscreen

“What do you think?” she asks me.

“I have to take out the trash,” I say, pushing up, but not quick enough to dodge the ashtray. It spins into my bony shin. My eyes tear.

“You are a conscientious objector to life.” She says. Those were relevant words in the 70’s. I bobble, naked and hurt, to the refrigerator for ice. She stamps, naked to her manual Royal to write a poem. I forget the garbage. I’m thinking that we should have a baby. Or get a divorce. I’m thinking that we’re at that point in our lives.

I rub an ice cube over the tender red spot and listen to the pounding the Royal is taking, Cheryl spends her fury in free verse or Haiku then emerges, still naked, from the study and apologizes for firing the ashtray. She reads me her poem. I do not understand, but have figured out not to tent my fingers. I shake my head, and search for a noise that says “you really captured the essence.” I do not tell her that she reminds me of my father.

I learned about terrorism when we all do. At home. I learned about high-powered miuiles, covert and overt operations and hand-to-hand combat from my parents. They fought at regularly scheduled intervals. When I think back on it, I think they must have negotiated their own Geneva Convention; a dance with agreed upon steps. My father, fists pinned to his thighs, neck chords bulging, bellowed and stomped, making the house rumble. My mother, bent at the waist, hands on hips, hissed insults, advancing on him in a pendulum motion. They looked like exotic birds in a complicated mating ritual. He never hit her, though she would slap at him. He merely blocked the blows. I figured it was one of the rules.

The choreography had a rhythm. When all targets had taken hits, there would be a moment. They glared at each other, dared each other. Then my father would raise his palms, slowly shake bis head, then pound out of the house. Mother would cry, wail and run, sobbing, to their room.

I cleaned up the area, picking up things thrown and sweeping up broken glass, righting the phone, until I heard my mother’s call to come upstairs. She patted the bed beside her. I sat down and that always started her crying again. She pinned me to her chest and said over and over that I was “her perfect little man.” My father would usually return within a few hours, stalk past me and go to their room. I could hear muted voices, then nothing. I watched Tom and Jerry or the Three Stooges. After awhile, they came out. She was always patting her hair, smoothing her dress, humming. As he passed me, my father would cuff me on the back of the bead and say “Well?” And, that’s the point, he always said “Well?” I would stare at my tennis shoes, right toe tugging at left heel. Mute, always. I didn’t know what to say.

But once, when I was eleven or twelve, my father broke the rules. He didn’t block the hailstorm of blows from my mother. She pounded, closed fist, on his chest, reddened his face with slaps and scratches. The action stunned us all into wide-eyed mutes, looking from one to the other. Nobody had words. He left that day and didn’t come back. I waited for his reappearance, even prayed for the cuff on the back of the head and the inevitable “Well?” They divorced. My mother’s “perfect little man” was promoted to man of the house. I was all wrong, my arms were too long, my ears stuck out and my voice cracked. My mother married her attorney. He was gentle with her, never raised his voice, never did that dance. I think she hated him for that. He wore rubber soled shoes. She said he had no class. I liked him.

Cheryl and I met at college. Ohio State. She was a long-boned, beautiful English Major with walnut colored hair and her own car, the back of which and sometimes the front, we used to mutual satisfaction. The summer we graduated we headed west. We landed in Oakland, which became San Francisco in the telling. We decided to marry. We made the pilgrimage to Atlanta so that I could meet bes parents. They lived in what could only be described as a mansion. I was intimidated and felt dizzy from the opulence of the air of “old money.” But I was determined. Looking back I see how young I was. So young.

We were married in the largest living room I had ever seen, by a Georgia Supreme Court Judge. He was a family friend, of course. Cheryl was a vision of perfect beauty, perfect breeding. She descended the long circular stairway, passing gilt-framed portraits of Civil War heroes. She wore an ivory dress that swayed with her hips, and a floppy hat. I think my mouth was open.

My mother and step-father came. Mother twitched, and dug at straps. My step-father wore rubber soled shoes. My father didn’t come. Cheryl’s father was a mobile mountain of fat. After the ceremony, and all the introductions, he escorted me up the stairs. I remember that he was daintily carrying a small china plate with petit fours. He used a pastry-slick finger to point at each portrait and he explained in stultifying detail the Civil War history of each of the relatives. He assumed that I understood the righteousness of the South. Cheryl’s mother wore something flowery. She said she was happy to meet me. She asked Cheryl why she wanted to re-define the Southern woman in her poetry and looked wounded. The day was hot and jerky.

We went back to Ohio State. Cheryl worked at a donut shop, I worked at a lumber yard and we both went to school full time. We lived in places with wavy linoleum and worn carpeting. Cheryl got over her fear of cockroaches. I decided to find my father.

I called my mother and asked questions about his whereabouts and what my mother called “his situation.” She began to hyperventilate and handed the phone to my step-father. They were still living in the house I grew up in, outside Lima, Ohio. My step-father asked for my number and said he would call back as soon as he could get “mother calmed down.” She must have calmed down eventually, because later that night he called back and said he had only an idea where I could find my father. He gave me the name of a restaurant. He said when my father was really drunk, he’d call collect from there. I guess both he and my mother needed an abuse fix from time to time. I called the number and asked for the owner. He asked more questions than I did, I figured he was used to deflecting bill collectors. On my next Sunday off, I drove to Cleveland, found the worst section of the city and “Red’s Bar and Grill.” My father didn’t seem surprised. I slid onto a stool beside him. Without looking up, he said “Well?”

My face was hot and my words were tripping on each other. I clicked my heels on the rungs of the stool. I told him that I was married, that I was going to get my Ph.D. in history. He ordered another beer. I guess I had forgotten why I had come. After a time of sipping in silence, I said I had to get going. He said to keep in touch.

I told Cheryl. For some reason I thought she understood how shamed I was. She wrote a poem. It was published in the Georgia Review. I congratulated her heartily and tamped down my feelings of humiliation at being naked to all her readers.

After mid-terms, my step-father called. Mother had had a heart attack he said. He was sobbing. Cheryl and I left immediately. My father came to the funeral home. He was wearing a shiny blue suit and a wide red tie. He walked over to me, reached up, and cuffing me on the back of the head said:

“Well?”

“Well enough,” I said.

“Oh yeh?” he said, looking down at his shoes.

We’ll probably have that baby. Maybe the divorce.

## “Old Enough”

I seem to be reaching the age

when

my life is coming together

(goals being met,  
feeling content with my lot,  
being respected in my profession,  
being valued as a friend  
getting my belongings organized,  
making clear choices more easily,  
knowing I am appreciated)

and my body is falling apart.

## The Sandbox

(after William Matthews)

I make the bestest roads  
with my blue plastic shovel.

I play good.

Mom stays in the house,  
melting wax on the stove.

She's making candles.

I run in the house, coated with sand.

Mom yells.

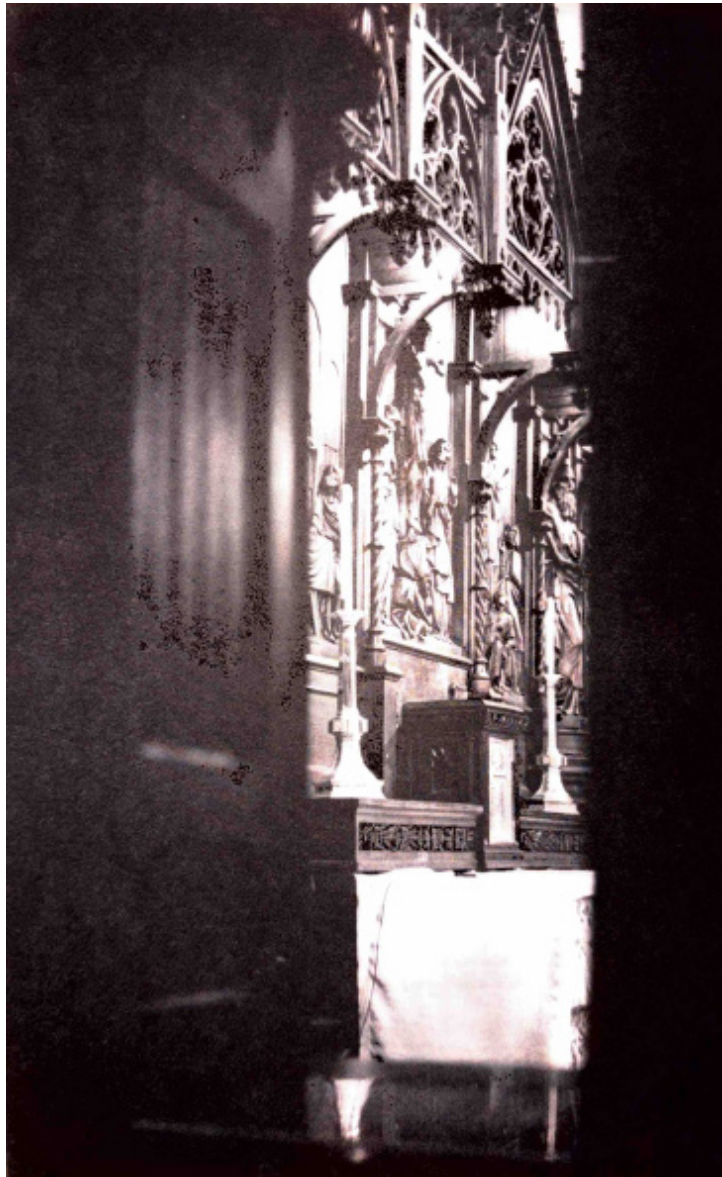
She hands me the old wisk broom,  
pushing me out the door.

I clean up and have  
a bologna and mustard sandwich  
cut into sailboats.

Mom gives me a dish of cottage cheese,  
we listen to Paul Harvey.

She laughs at jokes I don't understand,  
but it doesn't matter,

(I make the bestest roads.)



Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones...

Valerie Aikens



Evolution

Linocut, 6" x 8"

Ryan Buysens

## White Lines

I eased my truck in slowly between the smashed up trash cans and Spur Riley's old Chevy. I figured that Spur was probably working off last night's whiskey and wouldn't notice me or wouldn't care. I could see the church's side door perfectly from my spot in the alley. I sunk down behind my steering wheel and lit a cigarette. Rita would be looking for me soon.

I inhaled and watched the smoke slide around in the truck. I rolled down the window to let some fresh air in. I felt sleepy after the three hour drive. I should have gone to the folks' house to freshen up but didn't feel like being interrogated about Charlie. Someone opened the church side door. Rita stepped outside and glanced up and down the street. She waved at someone I couldn't see and then shut the door.

I stubbed out my Marlboro. I tucked my bra straps back under the thin shoulder straps of the ugly pink bridesmaid's dress. The dress had some pretty nasty wrinkles. I shouldn't have worn it in the truck, but I couldn't seem to help myself. I thought if I wore it that I might get used to it by the time I got to the wedding. A pink dress with matching high heels. Rita's worse off than I thought. Things were great the first time she walked the walk. Rita married Billy Osborne on the fourth of July in 1973. For her first trip down the aisle, the bridesmaids wore blue party dresses with matching cowboy boots. Billy and Rita married at the rodeo grounds since Billy rode bulls for a living and Rita had a keen eye for adventure. I would have cried, but my dress was too tight.

The ceremony went fairly smooth. The reception afterwards is still talked about. The Pott County Pork and Bean Band played and the bar didn't close until five a.m. The night air smelled of livestock and whiskey. I had ordered a beer at the bar. I was having a pretty decent time when I turned around and stared into the dirtiest blue eyes I had ever seen. Black shoulder length hair snaked down under his grey cowboy hat. He wore a grey suit with black cowboy boots. For the first time in my life, I was speechless.

"I'm Billy's cousin Charlie from Wichita. Would you care to dance?" he said.

That was the beginning for Charlie and me. We've been together for so long and Rita and Billy didn't make it two years. I wonder where Billy is now. Rita kicked him out in '74 or '75. Over a tattoo. She said he was obsessive about bulls, but I never figured out how the tattoo played into their troubles. I had trouble of my own then. Charlie had begun stealing.

There is a knock on my truck door. I sit up and turn to see Susie Dillinger with a huge grin on her face. The same grin she used to use when she was a baton twirler in high school. The only reason I could even tolerate her is because she once knocked a guy out by hitting him over the head with a Boonesfarm bottle. The guy was drunk and being really obnoxious at a party. Susie's still grinning.

"Where in the hell did you come from? You scared me to death."

"What 'cha doin' in the alley here Carla Jo?"

"Just resting before the wedding."

"How ya been? Charlie out of jail yet?"

"He's been out for a long time. Why are you here Susie?"

"Didn't 'cha hear? I'm singing at this one."

"You're singing?" I asked. Susie had been a drummer in high school. The thought of her singing made me giggle.

"Yep. Rita wants me to sig that "Ave Maria" song for luck."

"Don't they sing that at funerals?"

"Beats me. Hey, I've gotta go warm up the pites. I'll tell Rita you're here."

"No. Don't. I'll go in a few minutes."

"Whatever. Nice seein' ya."

I watch Susie walk towards the church. I remember something. It can't be.

"Is Tommy coming?" I yell at her.

"No, honey. He's loading the trucks today."

Thank God. What was going on? Tommy had been Rita's second husband. I lit another cigarette and closed my eyes.

Rita and Tommy married in 1975 in a church filled with two hundred people. The bridesmaids wore yellow dresses. We went barefoot and carried baskets of flowers. Charlie watched me from the back pew. He winked at me so much that I began to believe he had something in his eye. He was stealing on a regular basis then.

Things went well for the first few months of Rita and Tommy's marriage. Tommy drove in demolition derbies so he wasn't home much. The problems began when he took up painting when he was home. He painted every room in the house green (the color of money). He painted all of their wooden furniture red (the color of love). I thought their house looked like a weird Christmas nightmare. Rita threw him out after he painted "Rita" in big, black letters on the doors of her car. She admitted to me that she was afraid of him. Either Susie wasn't scared by a man with a paintbrush or Tommy had changed his ways.

I open my eyes and check my watch. I look toward the church. A man stands by the door. I haven't met the future groom yet (he's from Colorado), but this man looks familiar. I've seen that backside before. He's wearing blue jeans and a T-shirt. He knocks at the door. Rita opens it halfway.

She screams. I sit up straight. This could be a problem. My God, it's Jack. Is everyone showing up today? Why is he here? Is he going to cause trouble? Should I get out of the truck? Too late. Rita slams the door and Jack stomps off. This is too much.

I try to make some sense of what I have seen so far. First of all, Rita's second husband's present wife is singing at the wedding. Now Rita's third husband shows up prior to wedding number five. What does he want? A reconciliation? Now? Jack-in-the-sack wants back in the saddle. I can't take it and start laughing. Poor, poor Jack.

Every girl in Tucker used to dream about Jack the bartender. Back in 1977 when Charlie was in jail for a felony theft conviction, I came to Tucker to spend a night on the town with Rita. Jack tended bar at Bob's Roadhouse. Rita booked him without much of a struggle. He named a drink after her: Tequila Rita. They married a month later. It was a church wedding again, but we wore flowered dresses with platform sandals. Rita and Jack divorced two years later. Rita blamed it on the fact that Jack named everything. It had driven her crazy.

"He watches TV all of the time. When he's not glued to the tube, he's nam-

-ing the furniture. He named our bed Gilligan's Island." I had no answer to that.

There is a bee in the truck. I can hear it. I hate bees almost as much as spiders. No, actually I hate snakes more than anything. I'd better get out of the truck and let the bee wear himself out. I'm not ready to face Rita yet. I'm stuck with the bee. I want to kill it, but I can't. I know it would sting me first. It would be ugly. Death of a bee. Death of a husband. There, I've thought of it. The only man Rita might have kept died an ugly death.

Stan had been the love of Rita's life. They married in 1980 and had ten beautiful years together. The wedding was spectacular. I was the only bridesmaid. I wore blue jeans and a lavender halter top. They married on top of the only hill in Tucker. When Rita and I were in high school, we used to drive up to that hill to watch the sunset or if it was tornado season we'd go up there and wait for one. We never did see one. We learned a lot about each other up there. I remember wishing Charlie was with me the day of her and Stan's wedding. He was still in prison.

At about midnight on August 14, 1990, a half-dead cottonwood tree crashed through Stan and Rita's house during a violent thunderstorm and flattened him. He'd been in the kitchen looking for a flashlight. Rita had been in bed. The bedroom didn't suffer a scratch while the kitchen and dining room were totally destroyed. Rita went into hiding after that. She stayed at her mother's house for an entire year. Charlie finally got out of prison.

The door of the church opens and Rita pops her head out. I imagine she's worried about me by now. I hope this guy from Colorado is alright. All Rita's told me about him is that he's a musician and that she's moving out to Colorado Springs with him. She met him when he played at a little supper club in Kansas City. As I reach around to grab my purse, Spur Riley waves at me through the back window. Damn. He caught me. I get out of the truck.

"Hey Spur, what's up?"

"Hi Carla Jo. Any reason you're parked here?"

"Hope you don't mind if I leave it here. I've got a wedding to go to and this seemed like a good spot away from all the traffic."

"Sure honey. Say, you wouldn't happen to have some extra smokes would you? I ran out and I'm a little low on cash."

"Here. Keep the pack." Still the moocher.

"Say, how's that man of yours doing?"

"Charlie's great. He's working construction now. It's a good job. We're putting a pool in."

"Not ever moving back to Tucker are you?" Spur asks.

"No. Charlie and I like it in Wichita. I've had my job at the airport for almost fourteen years. I love it."

"Don't you miss it here?"

"Sometimes. I can always come for a visit. What about you Spur? You left Tucker once. Why did you come back?"

"I tried to make it in Texas. Really did. Worked my butt off. Wife wouldn't move done there though. Said her roots were here. Said the kids belonged here. Funny now isn't it?"

"How's that?"

"Wife passed away and the kids all moved on. I'm still here."

"And I keep coming back," I answer. We both laugh. "Well I guess I'd better get inside the church before the wedding starts."

"Nice dress," he says.

"Thanks Spur." I wave at him and walk towards the church. He's wrong about the dress. It's as ugly as sin.



**Roadrunner**  
Block print, 4" x 6"

*Rosita Lugo*

## every dog has his day

lucky dog, lucky dog  
 i 'm a happy dog  
 a happy-go-lucky dog  
 i can do whatever i want  
 i can jack-off in public  
 i 'm a lucky dog  
 i can lick my balls  
 i'm a lucky dog  
 alarms do not bother me  
 i sleep all day  
 i'm a lucky dog  
 people love me  
 and make me wear silly sweaters  
 and talk to me like babies  
 i lick and smile  
 now i know for sure  
 i'm superior  
 i'm a lucky dog  
 i eat anything  
 because society cannot constrict  
 my appetite  
 i'm a lucky dog  
 i can be any color  
 or size  
 or shape  
 or form  
 or sex  
 or ethnic background  
 and people still see  
 just a dog  
 don 't you wish you could do that  
 i'm a lucky dog  
 i have no need for speech  
 instead i see and smell and hear  
 i am natural  
 i'm a lucky dog  
 i can spend all day  
 thinking  
 and no one can tell me  
 i'm wrong  
 or what is right  
 i cannot understand  
 today's jaded society  
 i cannot hear  
 the bad news  
 i'm a lucky dog  
 i have the most freedom  
 in the world  
 too bad i cannot give it to others  
 too bad people don't want to  
 i'm a lucky dog

## Behind?

Is it you  
     or someone else  
 who everyday exists,  
 different worlds or  
     universe, say  
 no the cocky  
     physicist.  
 Falls down here----->  
 falls down           <-----there  
 must be true  
  
                     <-----everywhere----->

Can't chase down

light

moves too *fast!*  
 If you could (can't! can't! can't!)  
 Einstein says you'd  
     have infinite  
         MASS.

Too bad!

    Too bad!  
 'cause size 9  
     doesn't fit  
         that *size*  
             Behind!

<-----Caution, Wide Load----->

## Some of Shelley's Blues

March sounds of winter ice breaking, then sliding from the pine trees, slipping down each branch, breaking and crashing on my rooftop then colliding with the frozen grass. In all of my years living in this house, as I have watched the woods change moods with every season, March remains the month I lock the door, and pour myself a small glass of scotch, and settle in to read Paley or Caiver. Noises from the street disappear as I add another log to the fireplace. I sink into the sofa and listen to the wind as it seeps in through the tiny spaces around the windows and the patio door.

My mother stopped by on Thursday wearing mink and pearls, full of suggestions, on her way to a luncheon at the Country Club. The day was dark, a deep twilight color filled the sky, so that even with the lights on in most rooms of the house, we spoke in hushed tones as if the grays and browns in the corners of the room were taking over, replacing the whites and yellows. I followed her into my bathroom.

"Did Morgan call you yet?" she asked as she inspected her face in the mirror.

"Now what?" I sighed. I knew that a phone call from Morgan meant that he had found yet another man he felt could save me. I imagined that Morgan saw me as lifeless. Or incomplete. Static. Dinner for one.

"There's a lawyer at work he wants you to meet. Lance Anderson," mother said. Her smile reminded me of her high school yearbook photo taken of her when she was named Ice Queen for the winter carnival. "I'm busy." She ignored me.

"His ex-wife was a real bitch."

"Did you know her?"

"Well of course not. Morgan told me. Shelley, the poor man is lonely," mother said

"Maybe he should buy a dog."

"You're incredible," she said as she pointed her fingers at me. I watched the red painted nails as they swooped in circles. The charms on her gold bracelets made me dizzy. "You're going to regret being alone when you're my age. What would I do without your father?"

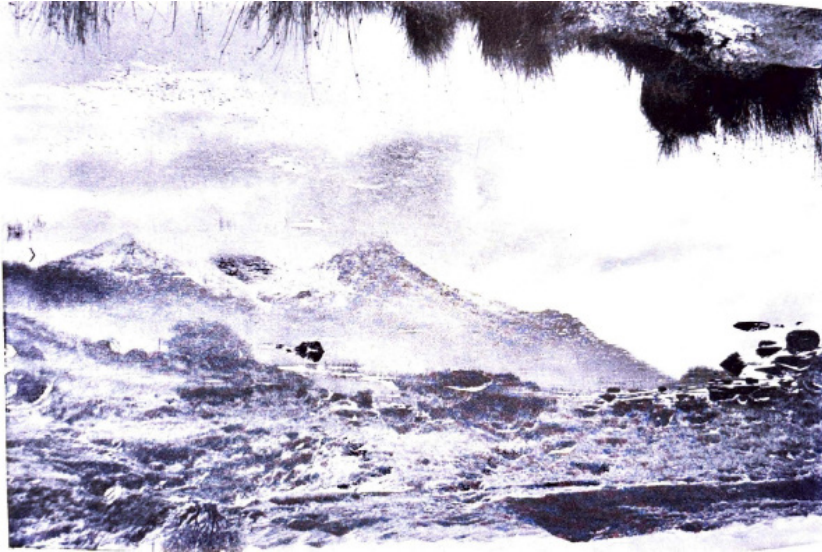
I wondered about that often. Did she mean my father or his money? She spent her spare time pretending to play bridge while she and her friends gossiped over Bloody Marys. Father spent his summers golfing and his winters walking the track at the For Men Only Health Club north of town. He did his daily hour's worth of walking. He ate lunch with the other retired men. They discussed pensions, the stock market, and who needed lessons from the golf pro in the spring.

"Mother," I finally answered her choosing to ignore a discussion about my father and trying to diffuse the issue of my singleness, "I'm fine. Really. I'm bogged down with work right now. I just don't have time to start a relationship."

She ignored me and pointed one of her red-painted fingernails at my wicker baskets on the floor. "How can you live like this?"

"Like what?"

"With all of this. These baskets all over the bathroom."



Reflection

Adrian Johnson

"I need someplace to put my lipstick."

"No one needs this much," my mother said. She shook her head and walked out of the bathroom and headed towards the living room.

"I can't find the perfect shade," I said as I glanced at the hundreds of tubes of lipstick. I was hoping she might even laugh. But laughing was not in her repertoire when the subject was me.

"Morgan told me that you had a date last week."

"It wasn't really a date. I just went to a hockey game Harrison was coaching."

"So, are you planning to see him again?"

"I really don't think so. Aren't you going to be late for lunch?"

"What? Oh dear. Why didn't you remind me of the time. I've got to get going. Call me if you need anything."

I waved goodbye to her as I slowly shut the front door. I watched as she tucked herself into her Cadillac. Feeling a chill, I turned up the thermostat to 72 degrees and decided to make some tea. As I waited for the water to come to a boil, I stared out at the street and thought about Harrison. I had bumped into him at the bookstore. Between the poetry and the fiction. I smelled him first. I remember thinking of the pine trees by the lake up at my parent's cottage.

"Hello Shelley." He had black eyes and a black beard with some grey whiskers. He smiled at me. The space between us seemed to get smaller.

"Hello," was all I could manage. Who was he? Did I know him? He looked familiar. Got it. He's one of Morgan's.

"I'm Harrison Davis."

"Morgan's friend." My voice sounded like it was going farther and farther away from his lips.

"We met at his party last summer." he said. Another smile crossed his lips then vanished.

I remembered Harrison very well. Rather I remembered his wife. Probably everyone at the party could remember her. Her hair was long and blonde, the color of Michigan wheat. At first I thought her pink dress had been painted on. It had a long zipper down the front. I wondered if she had to lay on her bed to zip it up. I found out later that she hadn't been wearing that dress for Harrison's benefit. I inhaled deeply and looked up at him.

He said, "I don't know if Morgan told you, but Maria and I were divorced last fall."

Should I say I'm sorry? Do I congratulate him? I said nothing.

He looked at me and waited. I waited. Finally he said, "Do you like hockey?"

"Excuse me?" I said, wondering if I had missed something in the conversation.

"I coach my oldest son's hockey team and I was wondering if you would like to come watch the game tonight."

"Game. Tonight?" I said. My voice sounded like I was trying to talk underwater.

"Seven. Civic Arena. Can you make it?"

Was he asking me for a date? I had no idea. I stood mutely before him wishing he would leave.

"So does that mean you will come?" he asked as he brushed up against me.

"I'll try," I said and backed away. "I really have to get going," I said as I ran past the poetry, fiction, and cookbooks on the way back out.

My kitchen window faces the street. Most people who come to my house for the first time wonder about this. "Isn't it backwards?" they inquire. "Doesn't the kitchen

belong in the back of the house and the living room in the front?" Perhaps that is the way with most houses. When I bought this house, I felt this backwardness also and that is why when I walked into the living room, and saw the pines and maples filling up the empty space behind the grass and ferns of my backyard, I knew that this is where I should live. I could slip into the living room and forget the street, the life out front. If I needed to see that the world still went 'round and the neighbors walked their dog and the children rode their bikes, I could stand before my kitchen sink, wash the dishes slowly, and watch the lives of others as if I were a part of it all.

Morgan called shortly after mother had pulled out of my driveway barely avoiding the neighbor's mailbox.

"Hello," I said.

"Hi, Shelley."

"Morgan," I said, wondering what scheme I was about to get involved in.

"How are you?" said Mr. Cheerful.

"Busy."

"Doing what?"

"Nosy today aren't you?"

"Are you free for dinner?"

"No," I said. I was getting better at this all the time.

"Oh come on. We're having company for dinner. You'll fit right in."

"Why? Are you inviting other single women over?"

"Real funny. No. I have someone I want you to meet."

"Absolutely not. Mother warned me."

"Warned you? She thought you should come too."

"No kidding."

"Will you think about it?"

"Forget it. I don't want to be fixed up anymore."

"What do you want?" Morgan said. He sounded like he was ten again.

"I want a bigger bathroom." I hung up the phone.

The springs of the sofa creak as I stand up to stretch. The woods are nothing but trees and shadows. The limbs of the pine trees seem to sweep the ground as the weight of the snow presses them down. They are heavy, but I know they will not break. I think about Harrison again. I did go to the rink that night after all to watch him coach his son's hockey game.

People yelled and screamed. I thought they looked like vultures waiting for their dinner. I sat on the top row of the bleachers in the corner. I wondered what would happen if there was a fire drill. Harrison directed the skaters on and off the bench, calling for this play or that play, directing the assistant coaches, or slapping his head in disbelief when the referee made a call he didn't like. He reminded me of my junior high school director.

Before the horn sounded to signal the beginning of the third period, I had climbed down the stairs and slipped out of the arena. I remember feeling as if I was walking from my kitchen to my living room and had but a few steps left to take.

### Hey You!

Hey you! Sitting there with your Virginia Slims in a halo of smoke. You bark out with your raspy voice to your wide-eyed child "Don't Smoke," the effort of you speech sends you into a coughing fit.

Hey you! Little Miss Innocent, virtuous one. You act pure as your baby sister looks in your panty drawer and finds the crackly cellophane wrapper that reads "Ribbed for her pleasure." She asks daddy if she can have some of your candy.

Hey you! Sitting on the beach talking about the fat whale in the black bikini. Sizing people up as you stuff a Snickers, Doritos and a beef-n-bean burrito down your throat, then you finger as you gaze through watery eyes at the mildew forming under the rim.

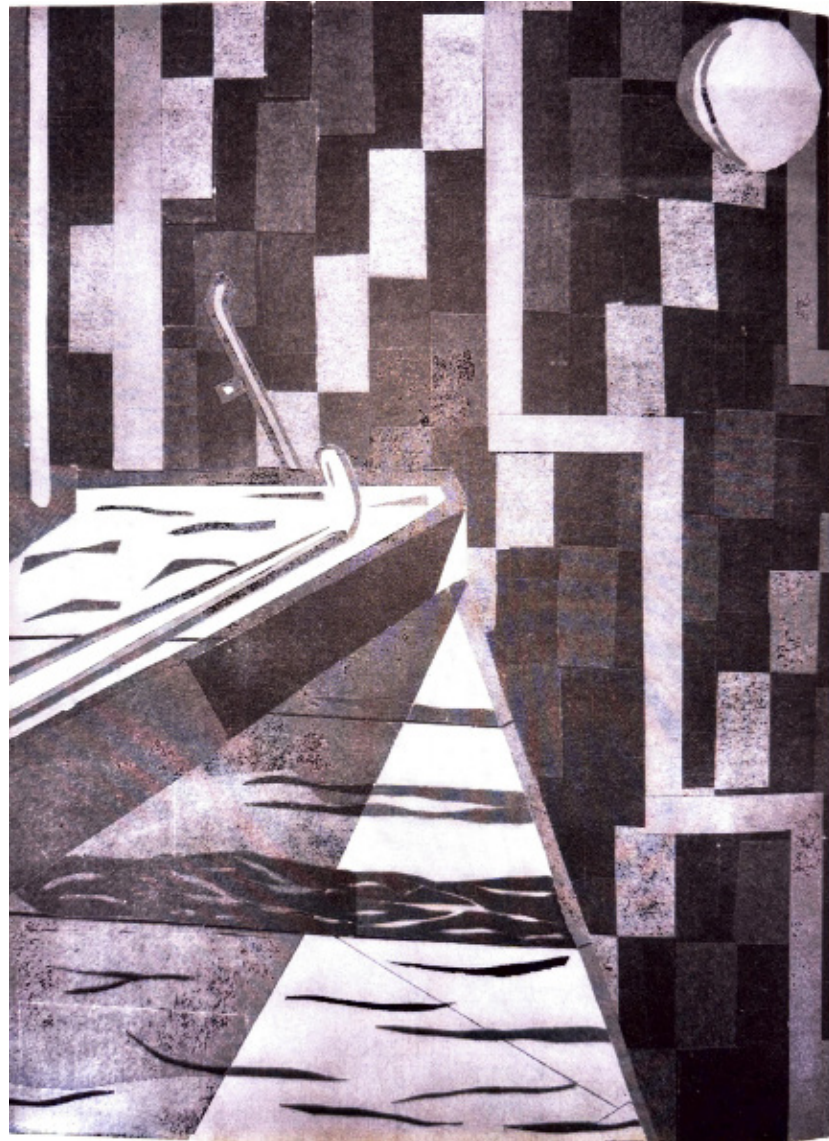
Hey you! You sit in the office with your silk striped tie making pleasantries. Your secretary gives you flowers for Boss's Day, "To the nicest guy in the world." You go home and smash the vase against the Mrs.' head, releasing all the pent-up strain of playing the nice guy.

Hey you! Loving God! Preaching to all on Sunday in you holy garb. Serenely wishing the best as they fill the basket with their faith. After, you count out the money, change your clothes and pick up a young boy on the corner, sharing your whiskey, flipping him bills and doing Devil's deeds

Hey Me! Sitting here, talking about others' hypocrisies, when I should b doing something else. Something that will make me different from them.

### Fist

I see:	a boxing ring with	round stains in the	center, sweat,
blood,	popcorn grease,	spattered pop-----	food hurled by
angry patrons in disgust at the recent performance of aging middleweight club fighter named Vinnie Proscuto. Vinnie Proscuto was KO'd by by one punch from a big black garbageman named Earlobe Willie, named Earlobe because both were bitten off in a domestic fight with his wife over Spanish rice. Rumore had it she climbed on his back and just quickly, ferret-like, ripped off each earlobe with her thick, dense, yet sharp teeth. Earlobe responded by ramming her backwards into the edge of the sink cracking a vertebrae, then shoving her whole hand down the garbage disposal and turning it on. As the tips of his ears bled profusely, Earlobe watched his wife scream and then he grabbed Mr. Coffee, showered her face with scalding java, and cooled the burns by smearing Miracle Whip brutally on her cheeks, twisting and pinching them a searing purple. He ended the thing by shoving her free hand in a toaster slot and pushing the device's lever on HIGH. Earlobe was brought up on charges of assault with intent to do great bodily harm, but was acquitted when the Mexican judge tasted the offending Spanish rice and declared unfit to eat and an insult to serve to a man. Case dismissed.			



**Stare Well**

Color Aid Composition, 11" x 14"

*Bryan Konieczka*

## Contributors

### FICTION

**Marlene Dean** is a senior English major.

**M.E. Kraus** is a junior English major. Her fiction has been published in *Cardinal Sins*.

**M. Seitz** graduates in June. She will begin working on her Master's degree in Creative Writing in the fall. Her poetry has appeared in *Cardinal Sins*

### POETRY

**Val Aikens** is a senior with a dual major in art and industrial tech. & supervision. Her artwork has appeared in *Cardinal Sins*.

**Monica Ollendorff** is the Reference and Library Instruction Librarian at SVSU.

**Bryan Konieczka** is a sophomore majoring in graphic design and minoring in psychology. Previous publication include *Cardinal Sins* and *Icons Art and Literary Magazine*.

**Matthew Hill**

**David Knop**

**Deidre Kotch** is a senior in secondary education majoring in English with minors in communications and theatre.

**Rob Arrowsmith** is a senior English major.

### PHOTOGRAPHY

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**Adrian Johnson** has been published in *Cardinal Sins*. His photograph was a latent image competition entry and received third place in the Saginaw Art Museum's 1994 All Area Photo competition.

### ARTWORK

**Rosita Lugo**

**Ryan Buysens** is a freshman aart major. This is his first publication on this planet.

**Bryan Konieczka** (see information under poetry)

# all from the tree of knowledge

for Jim and Matt

No wasted time, we're alive today  
Churnin' up th' past, there's no easier way  
Time's been between us, a means to an end  
God it's good to be here walkin' together my friend

We're livin' our dreams  
My mind's stopped achin'  
That's how it happens livin' life by th' drop.  
from *Life by the Drop*  
Bramhall & Logan/Stevie Ray Vaughan

Cardinal Sins is the student literary magazine of Saginaw Valley State University. All SVSU students, faculty, staff, and alumni are invited to submit poetry, short fiction, essays, artwork, and photography for consideration. Submission requirements are available at Evening Services.