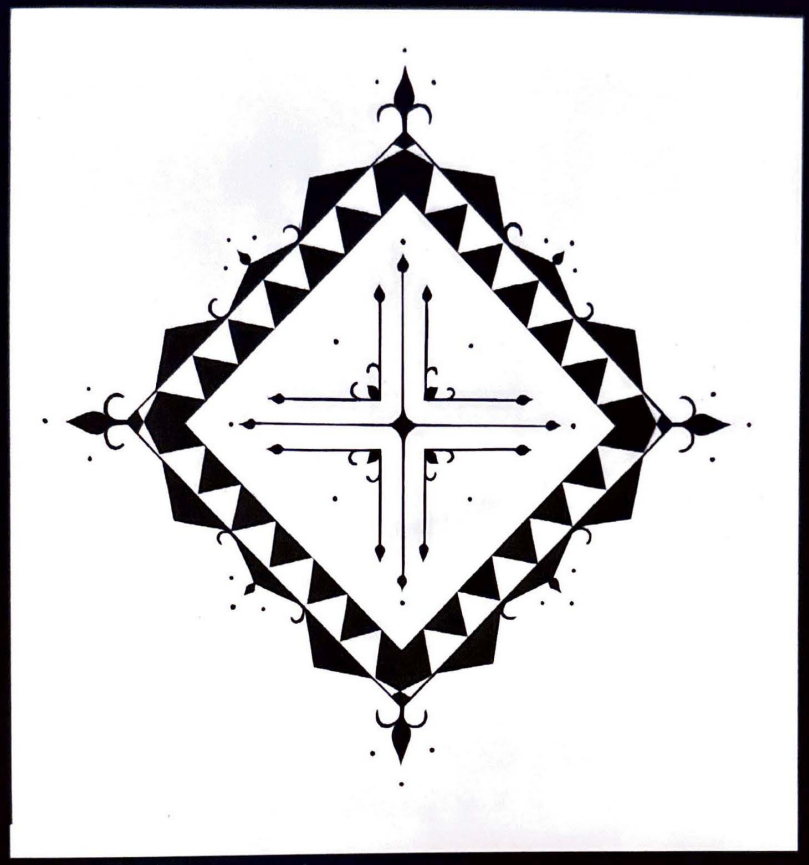
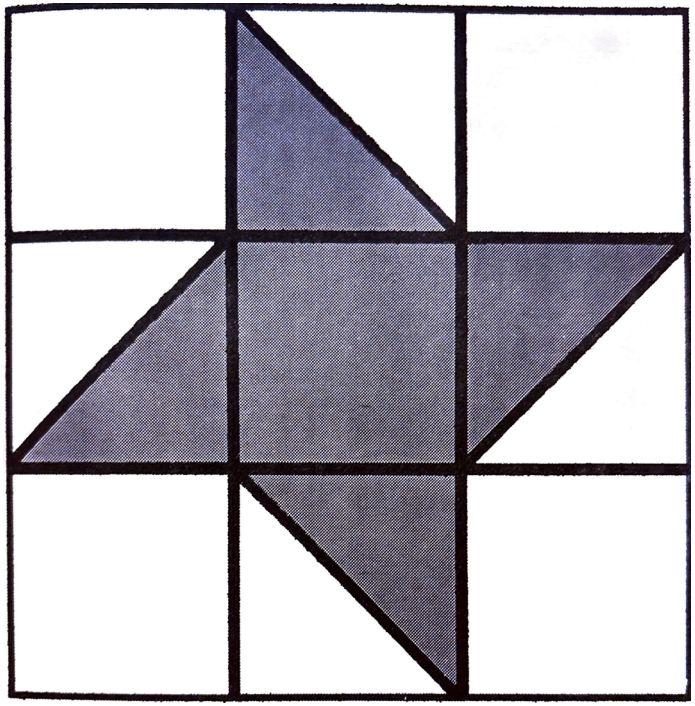
CARDINAL SINS



FALL 2000

Cardinal Sins
Art & Literary Magazine



Fall 2000

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Fall 2000

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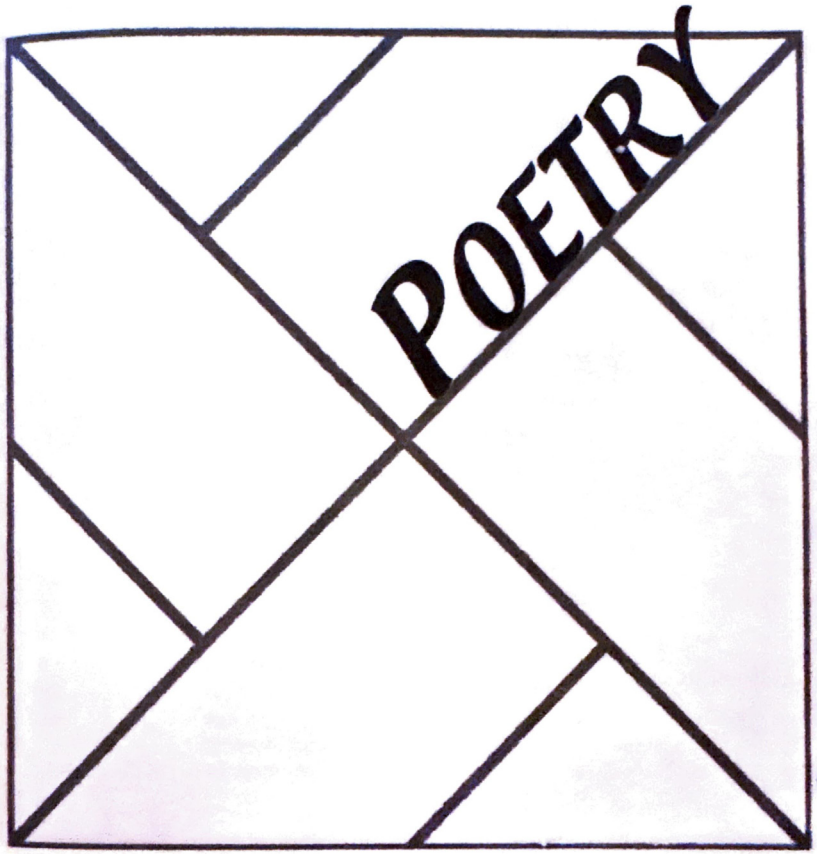
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* Congratulations to ***Adrienne D. Lewis***, ***Gabe Sauvie***, ***Erin Binochette***, and ***Laurie Rich***, winners of the poetry, photography, artwork and short story awards.



MAKING ARRANGMENTS

Adrienne D. Lewis

"Close the casket,"
my father tells me.
We discuss plans for his burial.
"I don't want people crying
over me, saying what a good guy I was."
It is my responsibility
to keep the lid down
and keep it simple; only family.
He has given me a copy of his will.
My fingers grip the document
like a treasure map.
A few years ago
he announced his desire for a wake.
He didn't want anyone crying then either;
instead we were supposed to toast
his life.
Now, as he grows older
and closer to the day,
he just wants simplicity.
The deaths of old friends and relatives
have changed his plans.
A quiet day on a country plot
is his ideal way of entering eternity.
He doesn't understand.
Nothing about this day could be perfect.
Nothing in all the world could prepare me
to lower the casket,
let alone its lid.

PUSHING AIR
Adrienne D. Lewis

Standing next to the phone
holding the receiver
I'm watching you
and feel as though I'm floating
Pushing air beneath my wings,
like an angel
hovering above reality,
I try to think, to dial,
but there is only the image
of your face trying to drink
in the breeze I'm creating;
swallowing hard.
Your father's grip tightens
on your stomach,
like your hands
on that amusement ride two summers ago;
pink flesh turning bluish-white.
Fear stretches across your faces,
like a rubber band flung across the room
it knocks me from my perch.
Dial tone in my ear
I punch the numbers in
as your father hugs you good-bye
one last time
and suddenly, you breathe.

RED EYE OBSERVATIONS
Gina Mezanno

Decipher the faces on the wall:
too big eyes, upside-down mouth,
thin faced girl;
the negative has been reversed.

Holey brick wall
Falling crusted mortar
Red dust on the floor
Tin can fly whirling
Ceiling fan spins
Oblivious

Gray window-whale, a new breed
made of old wood with its mouth
gaping,
ready to feed on the words said
tonight.
Heavy sandals knock the floor.

Three dollars, all dimes,
drops into a glass pitcher

BURN
Gina Mezanno

the lines of his palm
almost match the ridges and plains
surrounding him.

in the devil's backyard,
he sits on his bedroll
watching the sun move down in the sky.
as the sky turns color,
the sun illuminates an ochre backdrop,
the desert mountains.

his feet are sore and blistered
from a day started at first light;
even with the comfort of thick-lined boots
a twelve-hour day plays Hell with rugged souls.

GREEN POINT
Gina Mezanno

Ankle deep in snow,
camera in hand,
we plod along an invisible trail.
There is no wind, no footprints
but ours.
The atmosphere is light and cold, but
the sky is overcast.
We hike following arrows on signs
not knowing north, south, or any other
cardinal direction.
We march on as the snow covers our boots
and dampens our pant-legs.
The air starts to bite at me, but I laugh
and run ahead screeching
about the beauty and harmony of nature.
It is we
who are off key.

Autumn
Gina Mezanno

The scent of leaves:
cinnamon rain
on my tongue.

GUN
James Huddleston

This nine millimeter
Negro depleater
located in the car beneath the passenger seater

This flesh penetrator
Life devestator
Pointed to domes of most recreators

Mr. Make a mama cry
Mr. Watch a nigger die
Mr. Lock away a nigger with no alibi

You Disperse the biggest crowd
History of being loud
But just one whisper from your voice and police are all around

Black man's back bone
Make a timid man's mouth foam
When you're gone the spineless mouth stays sewn

You change a brother's stride
Give courage to jack rides
And quick to speak your mind if somebody loses pride

You window breakin'
Father talkin'
Mistake made by Satan

Stay out my family
Stay out my city
Stay out my life

MEYOKE IS NO REGULAR MEOW
Mary Renko

Meyoke is a cat thick and dark like charcoal
He lurches at churches and can walk sideways
along branches
Eyes glow green with the emotion
He carries that certain potion
that makes him float
A masterpiece of fur and bloat
Cool stripes, thick coat
Pimp-daddy cat

A CHINESE TRYST
Robert Clemens Schollmeyer

A wandering vagabond over mountains and meadows
Rests for noon-time luncheon:
Dried tangy fish, white soft rice, green tea.
Contemplatively, yellow rocks bed his frame
To wonder the love of his life.
Beautiful hair black, red, gold, green
Adorns the crown of her brow;
While blazoned upon cheeks from the sun
Soft red-colored roses glow;
Sparkling eyes of azure blue
Vaulted heavens reflect
Snow white skin pure and smooth;
Gentle breasts ebb and flow
In the contours of her folds
Garbing her majestically.

Rising, smiling, pointing,

Time to meet love refreshed.

ICE FLOE
Melissa Seitz

Rows of spotlights
high above the hockey rink
illuminate
the operating room of titans.
Milk-white ice
marred by arteries
of blue and red lines,
and corpuscles of red circles.
The arena fills with expectation
as spectators pressed together
on cold wooden benches
watch from behind Plexiglas.
The players frozen
as they await the opening face-off
spin into action
as the puck drops
they begin to weave
forming a surgeon's knot.
Their blades
thick needles
puncturing the ice.
Their hockey sticks
scalpel-like
sending the small black puck
screaming across the ice.
In need of anesthesia,
I am not breathing.

THE SPACE ABOVE A TREELESS LAND

Melissa Seitz

How do you like to go in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?
From “The Swing” by Robert Louis Stevenson

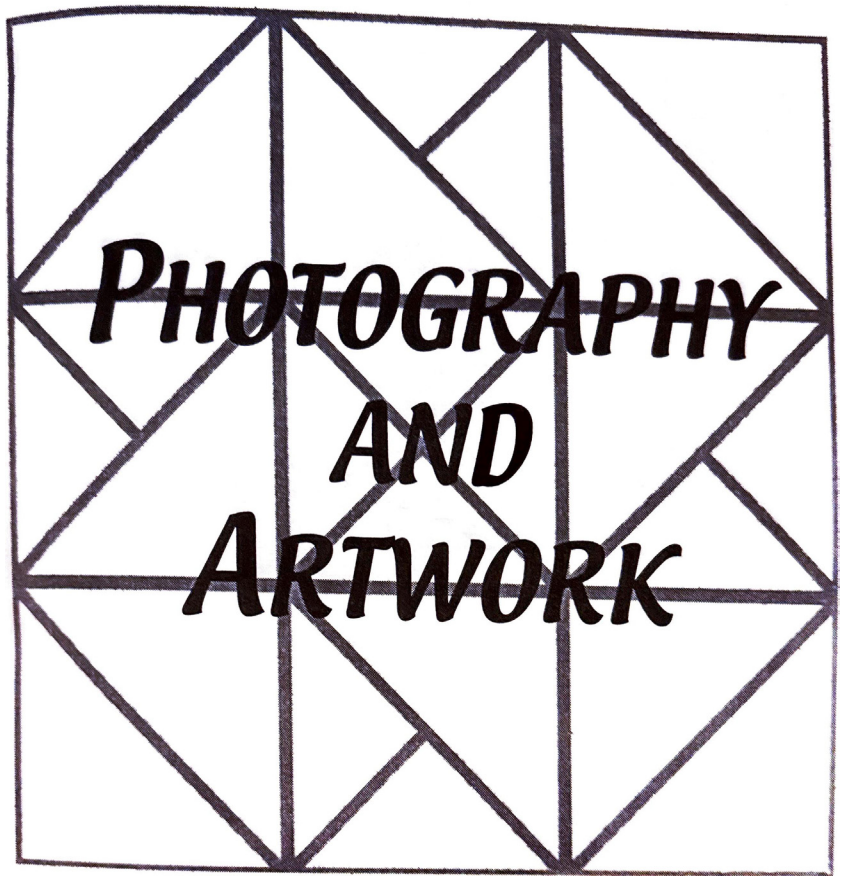
She could fly in that swing
No one touched her
There she became invisible
Became infinity
Blue sky, swallowing
Then spitting her out
Temporarily invisible.

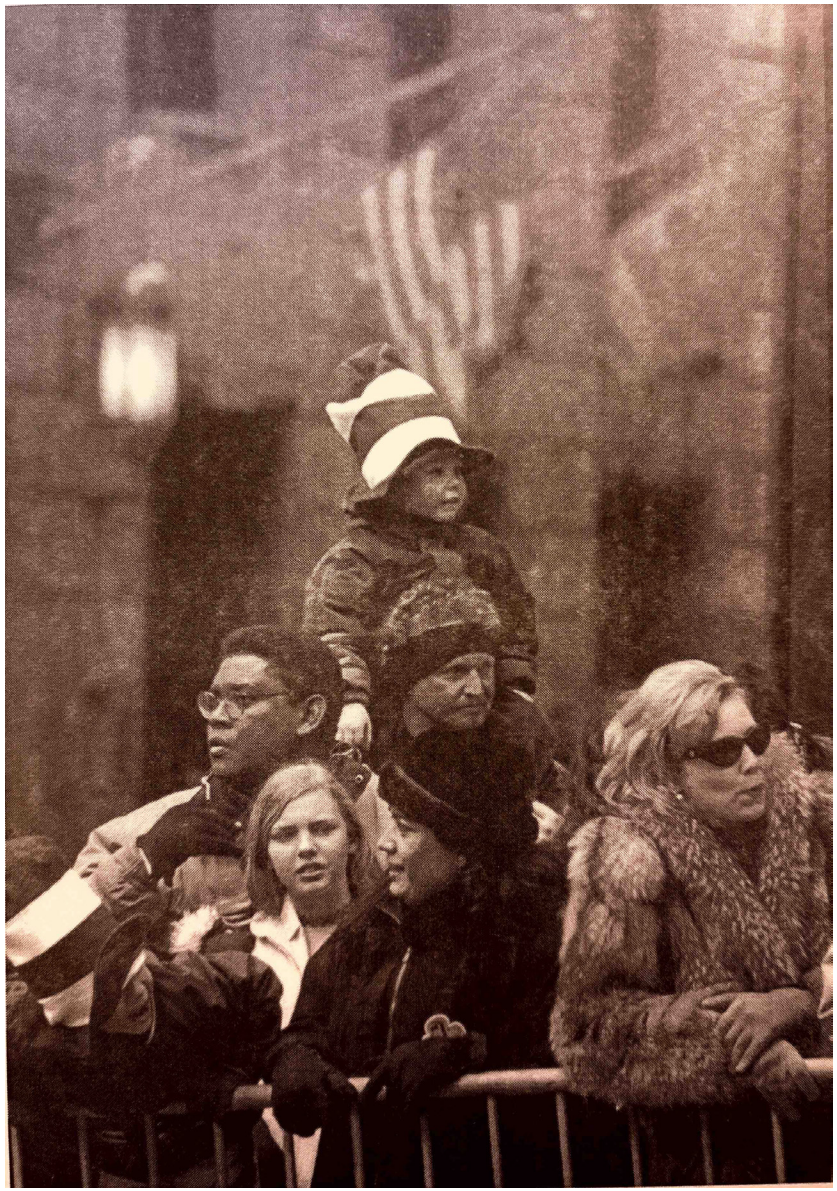
She could fly in that swing
Surfacing at the point
Of no return.
Legs thrusting dagger-like
Towards the white-hot Kansas sky
Unable to fight
The reversal of motion.

She could fly in that swing
Watching the witches of Front Street
Cackling in the suicidal twilight
as they practiced sorcery
Over coming-of-age boys
The nameless fucks
Defying vertigo.

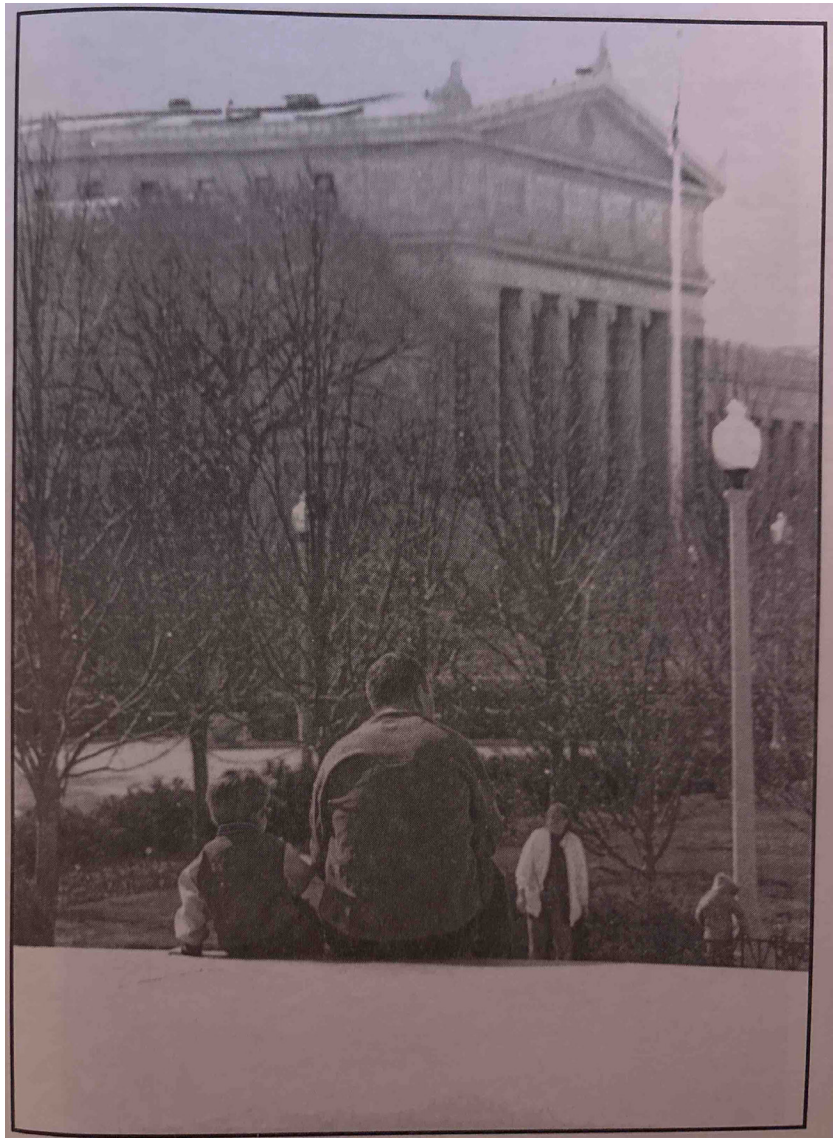
She could fly in that swing
Above a treeless land
Street talking smooth-faced boys
Whispering to her earth-bound dog
As he watched her pull voodoo
Out of the chains
to fly higher.

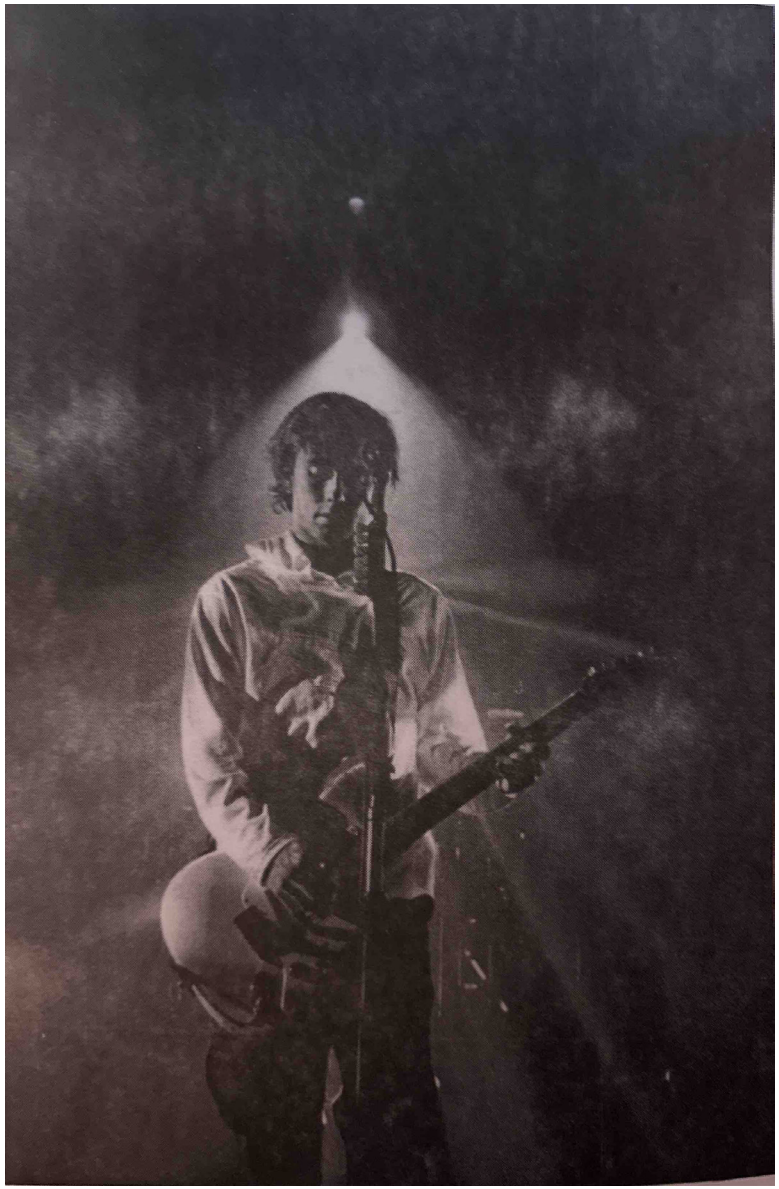
She could fly in her swing
Down through the air so blue.





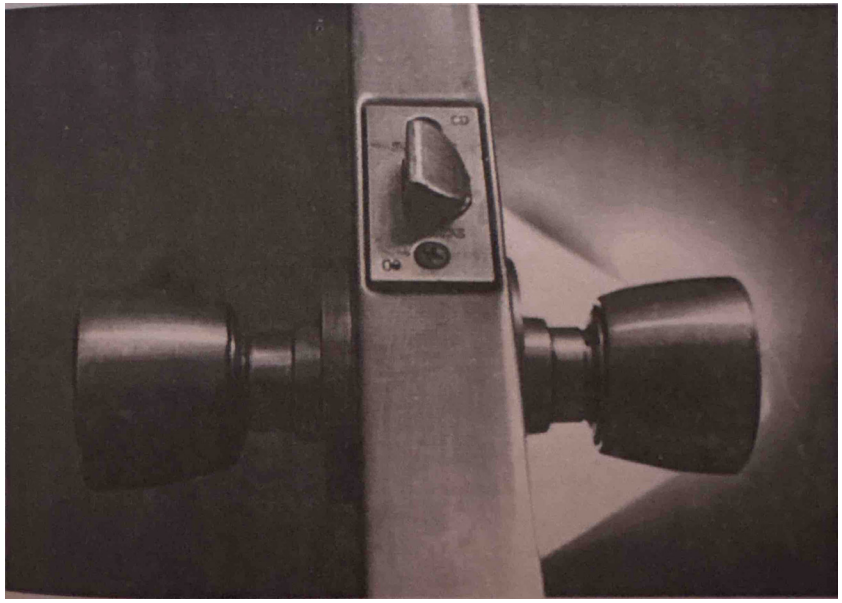


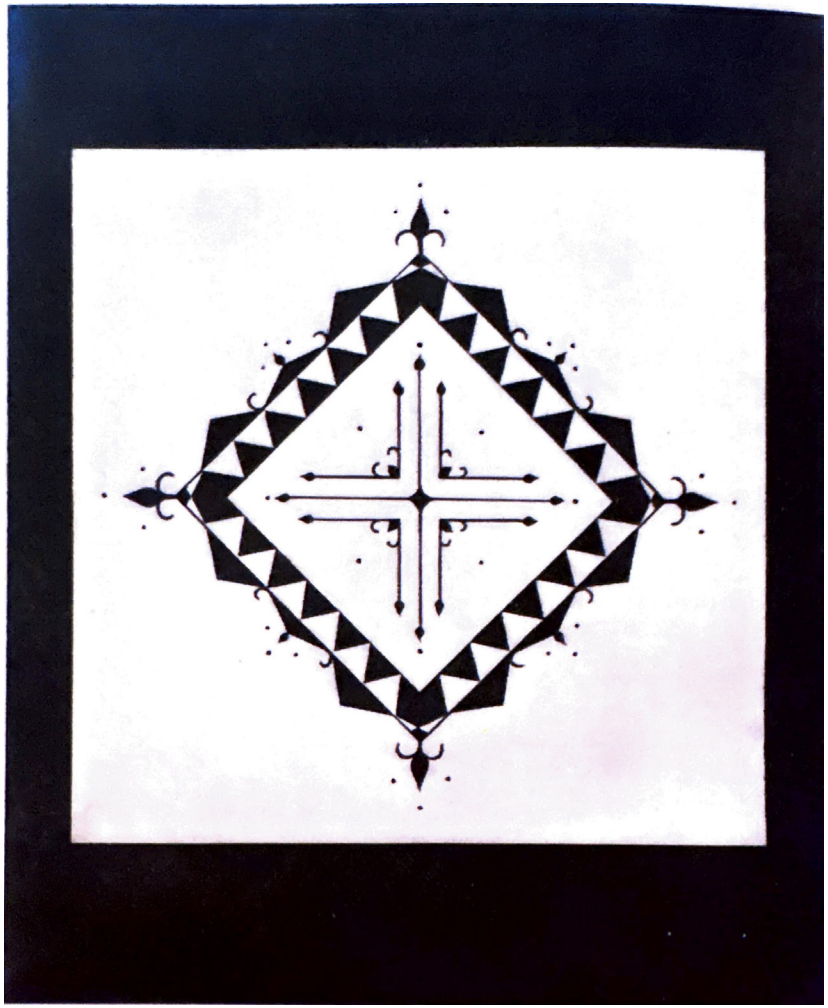




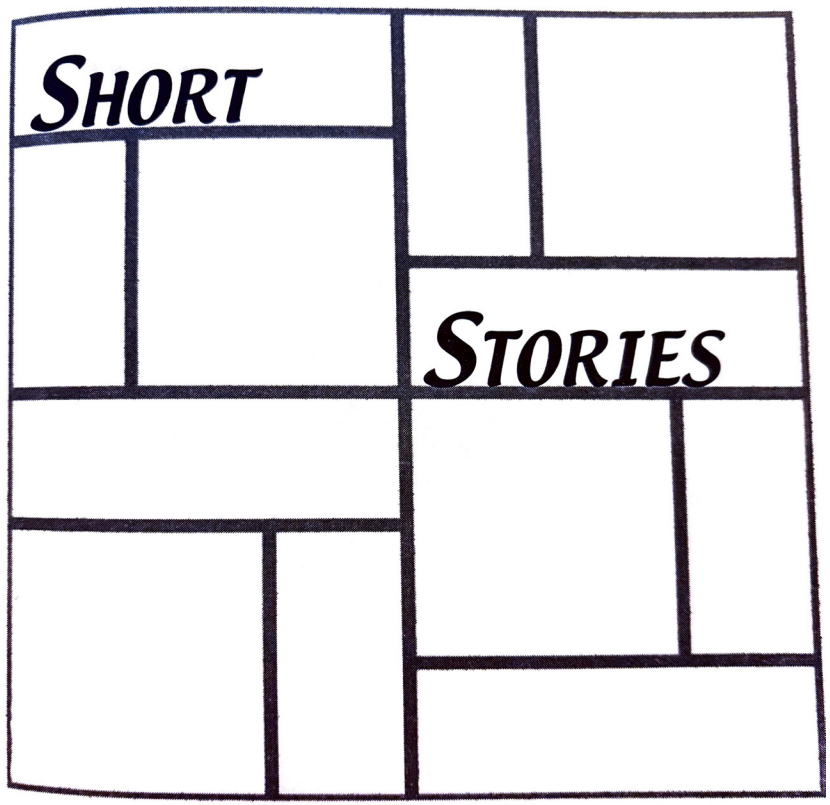











SHORT
STORIES

PETER AND LILY

Laurie Rich

A door slams.

"Peter? Is that you?" The voice is soft, tender, from a woman who is, perhaps, too gentle to live. She's curled up in the corner of the worn, green velour sofa, rebraiding her hair after a shower. It almost hurts his heart to watch her, lips curled into a smile. Simple, pure joy at his presence. It was a gift he never took for granted.

"It's me. Scootch." He waves his hand so she will move over a bit, give him room to settle in the corner of the couch and draw her close. Her body was just the right size to settle into him, just small enough that he could rest his chin on her head and thin enough that he felt like he'd break her.

"How was today?" She asks, running her fingers across the stubble that's only just begun on his chin, scratchy yet soothing to her fingers.

"I got the loan. We'll break ground in a month. It's going to work, Lily. We're going to do it. All your idea, you know that, right?" She makes a soft sound of dismissal, and he shakes his head. "All yours. I'm doing it all for you." Another sound, dismissal and perhaps laughter.

"I'm glad you're home. I was lonely." Her eyes slip closed, and he just holds her. It's always this way with them.

A masquerade party, soft laughter and talking. He covers her eyes with his hands.

"Peter? Is that you?" The voice is trembling, a little afraid, until he releases her sight and pulls her very close to him, protecting her from nothing and everything all at once. He blames himself, you see, for all that's happened.

"It's me. May I have this dance, Lily?" A soft, girlish giggle escapes her, and he sweeps them onto the dance floor. It causes quite a stir among the guests. No one expects a woman that young and lovely. No one expects a man so vibrant and alive. No one expects the two of them to shimmer so brightly in the dim light of the hall.

They've always been on the outside, looking in. No, that's wrong. They've never really bothered to look in. They're on the outside, looking further out. Dreaming.

They came into this world, together, or so it seems. They both appeared at the doorstep of an English woman seventeen years ago, Lily shivering, both of them staring at the sky. Both dressed in rags.

Now, as Caesar and Cleopatra, they sail across the dance floor, lost in each other, lost in some world no one else quite seems to understand. The costumes are perfect, of course. Both of them with fiercely tan skin, burnished to gold, bright eyes, easy steps. He owns this whole place; he owns half the world, so it seems. His employees regard him as a god more than a man. And his wife...

The music slowly winds its way to the end, and another piece begins. He releases her only to bow low, painfully aware of all the eyes, eyes she never seems to take notice of.

"May I have this dance Lily?" The simple question makes her eyes light up, makes his heart stop, makes her breath catch in her throat. "May I have this dance?"

"Of... of course. Every dance, Peter, every dance." It's just the sort of thing that she should say to make him feel better. And they both know it. They know this game. It's always this way with them.

A library. The smell of old books filling the air. He carries a huge stack -- astronomy -- over and sets it down next to her.

"Is that you, Peter?" She looks up at him with bright but weary eyes, having stared at book after book, page after page for what seems like a year.

"It's me Lily. C'mere." He sits in a chair, pats his knee, and she comes to sit with him so they can whisper, pour over the star charts, the older the better. Reading the myths that go with them... trying to see... trying to... there. The second one.

"Which way is left?" She whispers to him, urgently, and he shakes his head.

"I don't know, Lily. I can't remember." The same answer, every week. And as every week, she starts to cry and he puts a soft hand on the back of her neck and tries to keep his own tears in. It's happened so often the librarians don't even look up as Peter packs up their things, lifts her carefully into his arms, and carries her out as she clings to him, desperately.

He grits his teeth and makes soothing sounds into her ear.

"I'll figure it out soon, Lily. I know I will." No one bothers to take pictures of her crying anymore. They know he'll come after them with teams of lawyers, pirates of the worst kind, and hurt them dreadfully, in ways only he knows how.

She clings. He comforts. It's always this way with them.

A knock comes at the door.

It's a house in London, like any other... rather large, that's its only distinguishing characteristic. And an older woman comes to the door, pushing sixty, her hair silver, and a smile on her face. Warm, welcoming, like a mother to her children... if a mother looked to her children for support.

"Is that you, Peter? Lily! I'm so glad you came, it's so good to see you." Her voice drops. "I was lonely." Peter blames himself for her, too, and the smile on his face is strained, so weak. He pulls Wendy close, and soothes her hair with a hand, as Lily clings to him, her arms about his waist.

"I know. I'm here now. It's me. It's all right." But it's not all right. The bond between them is strange and powerful, like the bond between twins when one is weak and the other strong. The strong one feels guilty for whatever they perhaps stole in the womb. The weak one feels guilty because the strong can't possibly protect them from everything. They both feel an overwhelming love... so strong it isn't really love at all. Here, with the two women he loves, he's angry. He'd bleed if it would help. But it won't.

"You two go sit. I'll get the bags, then tea. We'll have a drink to our health, hmm? Lots of honey." He teases Lily's cheek with a finger, kisses them both on the forehead, pulls away to leave them in the hall without him. Wendy and Lily, they cling to each other, feeling lost and awash, though no wind could touch them, much less buffet them left and right.

"Sit, yes. We should sit. Lily. We'll make it. Come sit down." The voice of someone quite world weary, one who has borne children and borne pain. A contrast, and a harsh one, to the soft-spoken woman next to her. But still, they chatter on, like the old friends that they are. And when Peter returns, he wraps his presence around them again, tries to infuse them with the life in his heart, until they all start to cry, bitter tears. They comfort each other with incoherent words and kisses. It's always this way with them.

A London street corner at night. A light flickering from a nearby broken lamppost.

This is the bad side of town, the sort of place no good people should be, and Peter, he worries after his Lily. He doesn't know what to feel. This place is so sacred to them, and so terrifying... but where? Where exactly? He runs an endless litany of direction over and over in his head as she grows hysterical with each passing word.

"Which WAY Peter? Show me which way! You know..." Different years bring different reactions. Often anger from her, beating on him with an ineffectual fist, begging. Often despair, refusal to talk for days. Today...

"I want to go home..."

Silence from him. He's straining his ears for that faint sound. Like the finest thinnest bell tinkling, ringing, jingling... a soft glow of blue light... anything that would mean...

"Where are you?" he murmurs. And looking up at the sky, he whispers the directions he can't understand anymore. It's always this way with them. Every year.

Even now she looks the girl.

Lily lies on a hospital bed, thinner than ever... near fifty. And Peter sits beside her, holding her hand, stroking the back of it.

"It'll be okay." Holds her close as coughing racks her body, plays cards, and teases, laughs and jokes to make her eyes light up... makes her tea.

And when her eyes finally close to sleep, he cries. The books are still there, hundreds here, thousands at home. Star charts. Sky maps. Fairy tales. They've practically memorized every one they could find, purchased them all with his fortune, rebuilt their world among them.

She takes a few soft breaths, each one more shallow than the last until...

And Peter cries again. And the doctors come and then leave. Leave him with his dead wife. So young... she seems still so young... not fifty, but fifteen.

He was never supposed to grow up but it was her, it was Lily that was the one always happy, she was the one... with that touch of something in her heart. Lily was the one that could have remembered... but she didn't know, Peter never showed her, and now... it had been too late. He opens a book, and stares at the sky. And he fights with age and time to remember... just once... what he was supposed to do. Where.

"Second star... but which way? Which was is right? I'm sorry, Lily..."

Something in his face changes as her skin cools with death. Even her gentle smile can't comfort him now. Now he's alone. And now, perhaps... he remembers. That way. And Peter tries to fly one last time.

It's in the newspapers the next day. Newspapers always pick up such stories. A man of high social standing, of class and taste and dignity. A pillar of community. Suicide. And all because of his wife. Who no one could deny was perfect, gentle, sweet, a child of a wife. And her name. And his name. Lily. Peter. And they were buried side by side, one cold Tuesday morning. And perhaps they went home. The graves are silent. Alone. But together.

On the outside, looking further out.

Perhaps to never never land.

It's always this way with them.

THE CELL
Laurie Rich

"Life is something that happens when you can't get to sleep." Fran Lebowitz

The cell. first and foremost, was damp.

She couldn't honestly claim it was dark. Dim, perhaps, but light constantly flickered in from the fire in what she assumed was the kitchen above. Even in the night time, the coals bathed the walls in an almost cheerful red glow.

She also couldn't claim her cell was dreary. Some enterprising soul had chipped bits of chalk out of the floor and had sketched on the walls to wile the time away. A garden, as lush as Eden must have been, finely detailed and populated with so many figures -- fantastical animals, young lovers, even the flowers seemed to converse, and toss about in a soft wind. All done in white, with shadows done in a red brown tone. Blood, most likely.

It was miraculous.

It was unfinished.

She hated to look at the drawing that was so clearly the last one the artist had done. On the opposite wall from the gardens, the man had drawn a self-protrait and hastily scrawled his name beneath. The face wasn't quite... human. She wasn't sure if it was supposed to be a caricature - or the man truly was grotesque and monstrous- but either way, it was disturbing.

The aforementioned dampness of the cell seemed to emanate from the corner near the self-portrait -- indeed, a trickle of water had cut the portrait neatly in two, and the signature was marred beyond recongition. It had been recognizable when she first arrived, some two weeks ago, but countless hours tracing her finger over and over the letters left it rather shaggy. She could rewrite it by heart, if it were demanded of her.

To be honest, she'd be more than happy to do that. She'd welcome any demands they could make of her. She'd even embrace punishment if it meant any human contact beyond the soft, unintelligible voices that filtered down from the halls above.

Tonight, there'd been more activity than usual, and more light. Heat, even. Someone must have stoked the fire above her, blazed it hot enough to melt lead for a brief time, and then let it go out - about an hour ago, when the voices abruptly stopped. It was dimmer now than it ever had been. And when it got dark outside her window, it would be nearly impossible to see the brilliant art work on the walls.

"Srai." She was jerked out of her reverie by a voice above. Too clear to be an accident.

"Um... hello?" Her own voice startled her out of nowhere as it was, too loud to her ears even dull as it was, raspy from disuse and the occasional scream.

"Srai!" The greeting was repeated, and then a stream of that odd language came down to her.

"I don't speak your language, I'm sorry... just get me out of here, please!"

A hesitation, then a voice, gentler, kinder. More words. Then, something almost familiar - a question.

"Dhu aow spaec?"

"Ah, no. Habla espanol? Parlez-vouz frances? Do you speak English?"

"Hyrt." Clearly a negative sound. She slumped on the floor, ready to cry. The voices above seemed to conference, then call down to her, and then all was silent again. She waited - five minutes seemed like an hour - and still, the silence made her ears throb. And then she heard a soft sound... another, followed by a plaintive wail. Good god, was that her?

"I want to go home..."

Joy's Sorrow
Kathleen S. Allen

The pain intense. The darkness complete. A sharp slice with the knife. Blood drips from the wound. And, finally, release. The small silver utility knife drops onto the tiled floor of the girls bathroom. Joy watches the cut she has just made on her arm, bleed. She closes her eyes against the pain in her soul. The hard knot of panic in her stomach begins to loosen. Joy slides to the floor, her back against the cold door of the black stall. The knife is near her left shoe. She picks it up. This time the cut is on her forearm, a small wound, smaller than the other, but, sufficient. She feels better now. She makes one more cut, for insurance against future needs. Wipes the knife clean, then sticks it in her pocket. Somehow she will get the knife back to the art room. Joy stands up slowly, pulling the sleeves down over the cuts. The bleeding has already stopped. She sighs, and relaxes.

The last bell echoes through the hallway. Joy pokes her head into the art room. Empty. She takes the knife out of her pocket, replacing it in the teacher's desk with a quick motion. She shoulders her backpack before walking out of the room. A cutter. A cutter since fifteen, she is now eighteen. Stress and pain and school and divorce and being no one. A releaser of pain. Long sleeves and pants, even in summer, hides the pain from view. It was now spring. A new beginning. An ending.

At home, she attempts to do her homework. It takes too much effort. She attempts to eat dinner. Again, too much. She drifts on the couch, watching a stupid movie on TV. The Mom busy with The Sister, of two years. Hope. Hope and Joy... Hope and nothingness.

"I'm going to my room," Joy announces, suddenly weary.

"Did you do your homework? I need you to watch Hope for a couple of hours while I go into the office tonight."

"I can't watch her, I have plans."

"I have a big report due in the morning, I have to finish it. I'll only be gone for two hours. I'll leave at eight as soon as she's in bed, and I'll be back by ten."

Joy stands up. Her room is calling her. There are scissors in her room, and a razor blade. A new razor blade. Joy hesitates. Her stomach hurts. The soul writhing in agony.

"Okay," Joy averts her eyes as The Mom kisses her goodbye.

Better not see the hollow shell inside. Better not gaze on the beast. Safer not to. Joy waits until The Mom is gone, and The Sister asleep. She floats to her room.

Anticipation of wonder. She opens the desk drawer. There, in front, is Blade's box. It used to be an anordinary jeweler's box, but, now, it holds peace. Scissors will not be for today. Joy opens the box. There is Blade, gleaming at her. Showing his sharp, cool edge. She picks Him up, turning Him this way, and that, to catch the lgith that reflects off His Eminence. With this Blade, I thee wed.

Joy laughs out loud. She shivers with excitement. She has to arrange the room first. B.C. Before Cutting. She turns the lights out, and lights three candles. Father, Son, and Holy Razor. She changes into her nightgown, the just bought one with the blue ribbon on the collar. It is new. Unsullied. White. She is a bride. She seeks to cleanse. To purify. She lights sandalwood incense, inhaling the sweet smell. She drapes a white scarf over her hair. A veil. Cover your eyes before the Lord of Blades. She sits cross-legged on the center of the bed. Now she is ready to receive the Power, and The Glory. Especially The Glory. She grips Blade tightly in her left hand. The first cut is The One. Where? She lets her mind drift. Seeking. An answer appears. Left knee. First. Then, right knee. The King of Sharp bites. The cut quick. Short. Bleeding. Joy lets out her breath, in a gasp. Not enough. Blade is seeking enlightenment. Another slash. Quicker. Now. Again. The release immediate. Blade beckons. Joy raises Him above her, palms toward the sky, purposefully. Her head bent, long black hair falling over her face, she slashes with jubilation. Calves, a mass of tiny red trails, leading nowhere. Knees dripping. Thighs gathering crimson. The white snow nightgown is now streaked with red snakes. Hissing their freedom. More? Yes, they cry, more! Waves of pain flow out of her, healing instantly in their wake. Joy cuts. And cuts, and cuts. The bedclothes now stained with the blood of the innocent. Joy's dark eyes fill with glory. She does not hear The Mother scream.

She turns her head to the sound of someone in pain. She does not see, she feels. A final cut to her leg satisfies her as the blood gushes forth. A river of sins, expels from their well of loneliness. She smiles, tucking His Razorness into His Shrine box. The caul over her eyes mutes the scarlet hues. Joy grasps it loosely, pulls it off. Now, able to see. She watches it float, softly, slowly to the floor. She sinks into the pillowy sheets. Stained with the blood of the fallen. She is glorified at last. And, as she is pulled into the light, she sees the wonder of who she might have been. The soul, now whole, seeks purification. A hand reaches outward, a voice whispers her name. She must go back. To seek the truth, she must live. An angel of death must now become the angel of life. She is resigned to her fate.

She is resigned to glory.