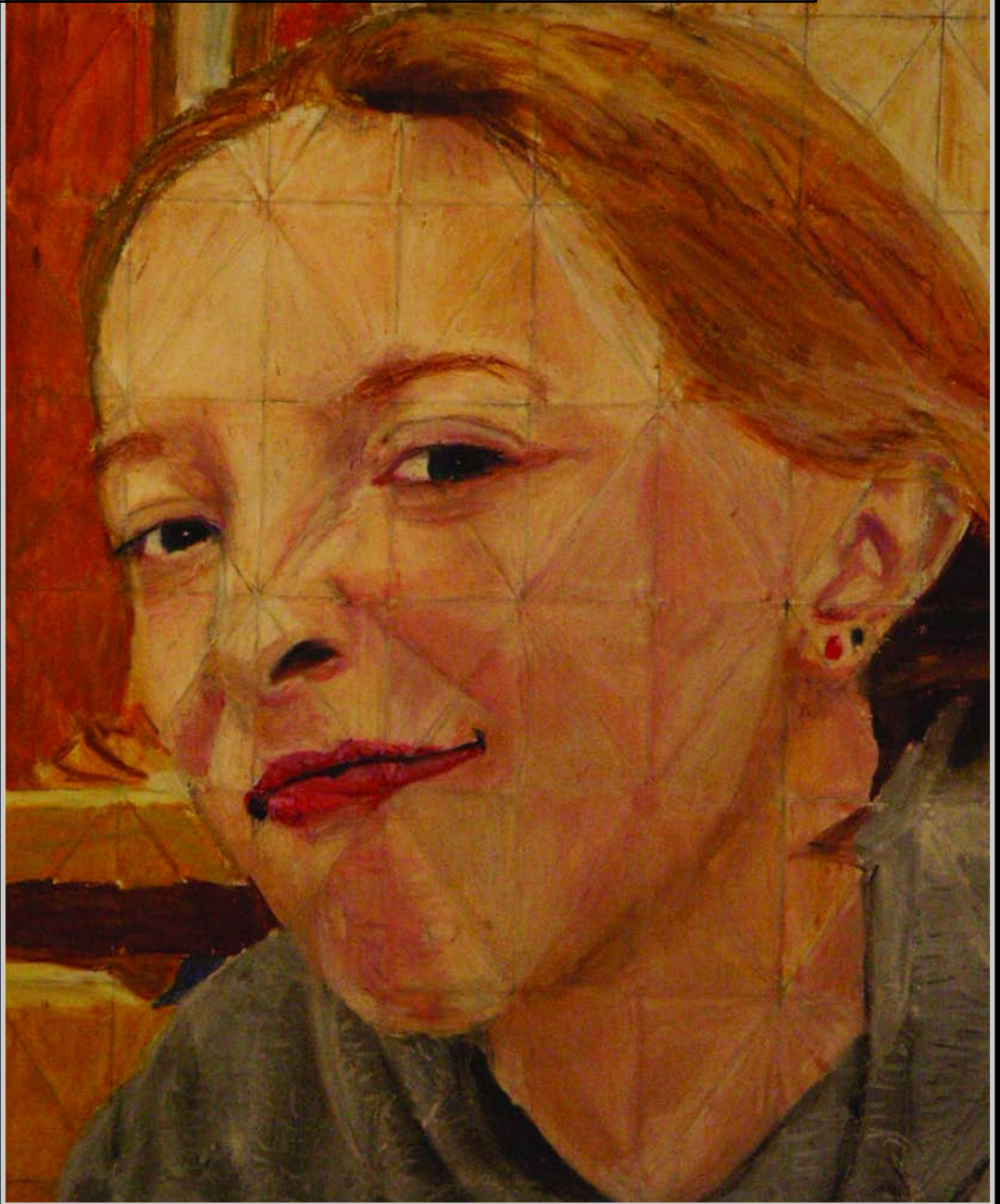


# CALLIOPE

THE STUDENT JOURNAL OF ART AND LITERATURE



VOLUME III  
SPRING 2006

ANNANDALE CAMPUS  
NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**calliope** *kal<e>i:opi*. U.S. [Gr. Kallioph]

(beautiful-voiced), the ninth of the Muses, presiding over eloquence and heroic poetry.

1. An instrument consisting of a series of steam-whistles toned to produce musical notes, played by a keyboard like that of an organ.

2. *attrib.* calliope hummingbird, a hummingbird, *sellula calliope*, of the Western United States and Mexico.

Oxford English Dictionary



# Calliope:

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***Calliope***

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Students interested in joining the ***Calliope*** staff should  
contact the editors at the address provided above.

~~~~~  
The 2006 ***Calliope*** Committee and Editorial Staff include NVCC faculty members Julie Green, Yuemin He, Karen Murph, Eric Nielson, Ray Orkwis, Robert Ricci, and Susan Sharpe. Student interns who assisted with the production of this year's issue include Ashley Conklin, Majdah Gama, Lyle Fanelli, and Eric Webb.

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The sky faded violet, and I ventured downstairs.  
Dust had settled around his slippers, the carpet  
scrunched under my shoes. I surprised a pencil.  
It rolled off the printing press and left a  
silhouette in the dust. The saw and the stethoscope  
leaned toward the stairs, they  
wanted to see me.

I carved grooves on the handles of the  
hammers and screwdrivers, marked with blue  
and yellow electrical tape. I swept the film  
off the textbooks in his office and found titles  
underneath. *Anesthesia*, that's right,  
he used to tune heart rates.

Under the desk were the 16mm and 8mm films  
preserved, I took them upstairs. He would remember  
what life had been like.



## Smoke

*MAJDAH GAMA*

How did I begin?  
in the Eighties

when it was good for  
the figure to have a smoke.

(you've come a long way baby)  
15 years hadn't gotten me

too far why not start  
killing time, I had time

to kill. I had one choice  
to make: Marlboro Lights

or Marlboro Reds.  
Reds made me vomit

I was a tough lightweight.

Quitting time, 25. No  
too busy smoking to put

it out. Ashtray after  
ashtray full of smoldering

cinders and punched out  
butts. Me, I learned to pinch

my burning filter between  
middle finger and thumb

snapping it outwards to hit  
targets like cars and people.

The world was my ashtray.



How does it end?  
It hasn't yet.

Some mornings I can't  
take not having a cigarette

(James Dean style) wedged  
in the left hand corner

of my lips. There's that  
Clint Eastwood squint

when my eye takes a hit  
of smoke. I invested recently

in a 1920's red lacquer  
cigarette holder. I've

used it once. I have time  
on my hands you see.

And I can take the burn.



SECOND PRIZE - FICTION  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006

It rained on the day of the old man's funeral. The mourners stood in the gray morning drizzle, their umbrellas like black full moons held up to the sky. They placed themselves around the casket remarkably, as if the old man himself had come down to stage his own service.

To the right of the coffin were the Pretenders. These were a few old ladies breathing through the black lace of their veils, letting soft cries escape from their lips in a somewhat dramatic competition. A few of the townspeople from the business section were represented here, somber eyes peering from spectacles, their newspapers tucked under their arms. Joe the butcher came. He was a Pretender and looked curious without his apron and bloodied hands. He'd known the old man fifty years, expected him around ten every Sunday to walk briskly to the counter and mumble the same order – half pound of beef – never making eye contact, careful to count out the exact change, even more careful to avoid touching as he dropped the coins into Joe's hand. The Pretenders saw him like this, pretended to know the full extent of his character in those short glimpses where he was callous, cold, silently bitter. They paid their pity to the old man meticulous in dress – this was how they knew him – his perfectly ironed suit, all his ugliness leaking from his sleeves.

To the left of the coffin were the Believers. It was not their fault – the Believers – they really believed they knew him, had seen him, (if only for a moment) do something so out of character, so unusually kind. Hazel the landlady from upstairs stood in this group. When she heard the old man was dead, she had quickly calculated in her head the lost income that would result, then guiltily forced herself to find some memory of the old man to grieve over properly. Finally she remembered. Some years ago, it was the worst winter Massachusetts ever had. Pipes were frozen, streets iced over, Hazel was laid up in bed with pneumonia. One night she woke in a cold sweat, tossing, turning, coughing until morning and a knock on the door. It was the old man. He'd come with some soup, put it in her pale hands, left before she could say thank you. The Believers saw his ugliness, didn't even appear to like the old man, but they knew there was something more beneath his scowl, his polished shoes, his dark, empty eyes – something almost warm.

It is significant to say here only some dozen (if that many) mourners were present. It is even more significant to say that only one in that dozen could be a member of the last group – the Knower. His name was Ira. He worked for the old man's law firm, was the old man's assistant. Ira was not surprised when he got the call at three in the morning. He'd rolled away from his still-sleeping wife and dressed in the

darkness. When he reached the small two-room firm, the doctor led him into the office, then left Ira to pay his respects alone. The old man sat slumped at his desk, the pistol he used still gleaming from the floor near his foot. He had left no note, no explanation for killing himself. So this was how you wanted it, Ira had thought. He knew the old man – his defenses, his insecurities. He'd seen the old man every day in his cloud of pipe smoke, watched him drink his cup of coffee black, read poetry hidden inside legal briefs. And the old man knew Ira saw all this. Here was some softness. The old man still kept Ira.

Months after the funeral, the will was finally read and the old man's last requests were made – with one glitch. In a scene much like the funeral, they all gathered at the firm, stood in their respective groups, and waited. When the lawyer appeared, (Ira had not wanted to be involved in the legal matters) there was a moment of silence. Then the lawyer cleared his throat, spoke. It seems, he said, that one of the old man's possessions had not been accounted for – he paused – surprisingly his most valuable possession... When the lawyer ended his long-winded discourse, there was commotion. The Pretenders began to argue about the lost treasure, then the Believers threw their voices in. Only the Knower was calm. Ira stood, like the eye of a hurricane, with a faint smile on his lips. He knew.

When he had gone to say goodbye to the old man and was left alone by the doctor, Ira had not only seen the old man folded over his mahogany desk, the files of unfinished cases strewn around his head, the silver barrel of the pistol on the floor... but something else – his valuable possession. The old man held a small book in his lap, Emily Dickinson's poetry. It was the original – the only – copy of this poetic collection. The old man's fingers, like two human bookmarks, were placed on the first and last pages of the book. Ira had opened the book to the first page and read:

My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun -  
In Corners - till a Day  
The Owner passed -identified -  
And carried Me Away -

Before he turned out the office light, Ira slipped the book of poetry into his pocket.

When the funeral was over, the mourners dispersed rather quickly. Most of the Pretenders were eager to get to work, glancing at their watches importantly. The old ladies talked of "catching their deaths in this rain," scattering like geese through the cemetery gates. The Believers left swiftly, their thoughts now on grocery lists, their children, the electric bill. Only the Knower stayed. Ira stood by the coffin for a long time before he pulled a book from his pocket, flipped it to the last page and read the poem in the morning rain for the old man:

This is my letter to the world  
That never wrote to Me -  
The simple News that Nature told -  
With tender Majesty

Her Message is committed  
To hands I cannot see -  
For love of Her - Sweet - countrymen -  
Judge tenderly - of Me

When he finished reading, Ira opened the coffin and slipped the book into the arm of the old man's coat, smiling at a wrinkle the poetry made in the old man's sleeve.



I Remember

*ALICIA DEL BARRIO ESCRIBANO*



*FIRST PRIZE - POETRY*  
*CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006*

An endless writhing snake of green, dingy trucks  
slowly slithers into the incinerator  
A thick fog of confusion pours out of the smokestack  
But three young boys, their faces dripping with sweat,  
carry a blue crate of bottled water for sale  
and we can still see the bluish waters of the bay

Traffic flies all around  
An ambulance screams for help, or was that a car alarm?  
50 Cent drums out his anthem from a parked car  
But three young boys have bottled water for sale  
today it's just one dollar each, as their tired voices tell us,  
and we can still hear the ducks on the bay

The jolting potholes are being filled  
we know from the odor of tar and smoke  
mixed with a novice worker's sweat  
But three young boys have bottled water for sale  
and the workers will have none  
but we can still smell crabcakes by the bay

The little bakery has just opened for the morning  
but a young man chomps into a dusty, sweet blueberry muffin  
and, with a wince, hurls it at a retaining wall  
But three young boys have crisp, pure water for sale  
as they share brassy, salty Cheetos all around  
and we can still eat ice cream by the bay

Our shirts stick to our backs  
as the July sun beats down, our feet are breaking  
here in Pigtown, summer hunts us down  
and unlike the tourists, we don't have cars  
But three young boys have cool, refreshing water for sale  
as they stand under a shady, sheltering overpass  
and we can still feel the breeze from the bay.



## Untouchable

*KATHERINE GRACE LEENHOUTS*

the door  
the rules  
the linoleum  
the nurse  
the room  
the cuts  
the grief  
the words

the lock  
the code  
the desk  
the needle  
the friend  
the siren  
the bracelet  
the time

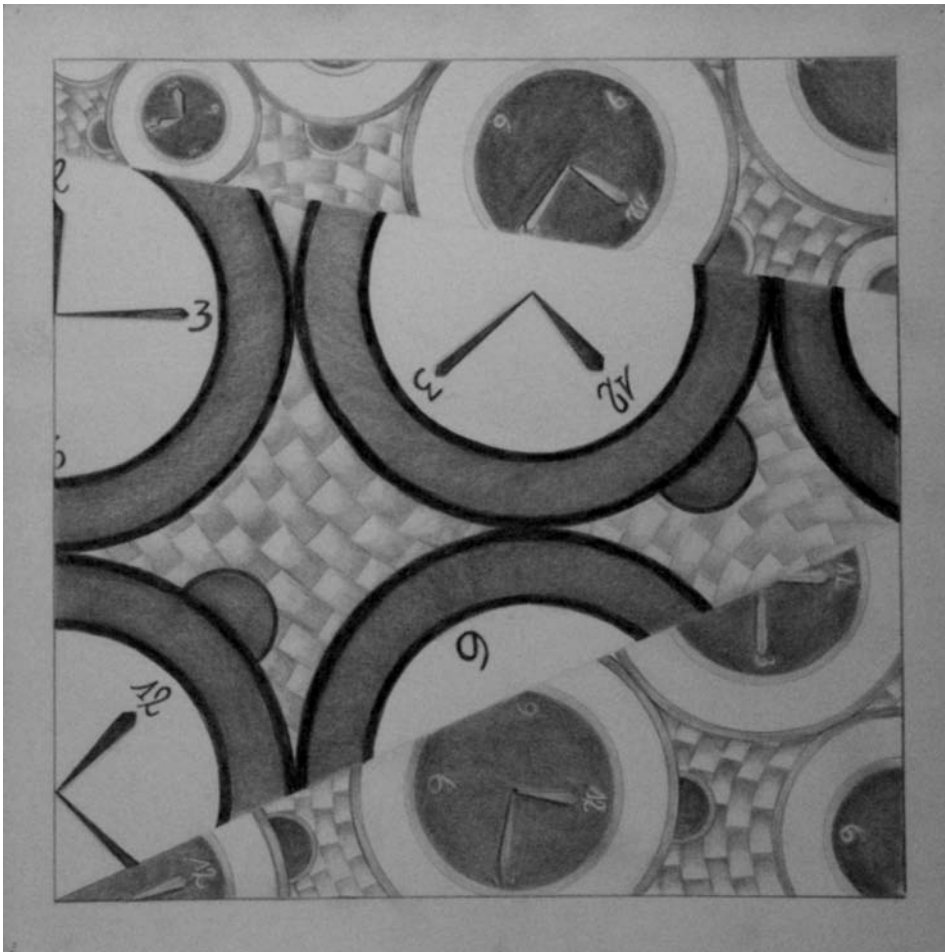
the question  
the door  
the pills  
the railing  
the TV  
the scars  
the blood  
the pain

the shoes  
the locker  
the stench  
the drugs  
the window  
the voice  
the blood  
the end



## Crossing Time

*MARZIA MOTTA*



*FIRST PRIZE - ESL*  
*CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006*

In Afghanistan most houses are made out of dirt. The roofs are flat and are very easy to access. Many people can spend their entire day on the roof. It is a very fun place to spend time. Many times my parents were very angry with me because I would miss meals. They called me to come off the roof and I told them I was not hungry. I had so much fun that I did not mind forfeiting food, even *shorwaa*. We would make this soup with lamb, beans, and other vegetables at home. Then we would slice up bread and mix it in. The bread was made fresh, hot, three-foot long in the tandoor clay oven that gave it a unique taste from the burning wood. The *shorwaa* smelled delicious but I was busy playing on the roof.

The roof gave me and other city kids access to the open skies. I had pigeons that I could fly high into the sky for hours and with a move of my hand, I could get them to come back to the roof. Birds were not the only ones flying high in the sky. Kite flying is a very popular pastime in Afghanistan. The roof was a good place to fly my kite and a prime location to catch other kites. If a neighbor's kite flew over your roof, there were several ways to cut their twine and take their kite. The most popular ways were using a long, sharp stick to cut the twine attached to the kite, or to tie string around a rock and wrap it around the neighbor's twine and then lasso the kite down.

Activities involving the roof are part of Afghan culture and take place all year round. During the spring, women get together on the roof and wash dishes and clothes. They comb each other's hair, gossip across rooftops with other neighbors and drink tea while hanging their clothing on the clothesline to dry. In the summer, people lie under the sun to get vitamin D. The weather is very hot but dry so at night people take out blankets and mattresses to sleep on. In the fall, the men prepare the roof for the cold weather ahead. They mix dirt with straw and spread it all over the roof to keep the roof strong and to prevent leaks. During the winter the roof had to stay dry since it was made of dirt. Everyone in the neighborhood, including myself, did a lot of snow shoveling. We could not allow the snow to melt there, so we shoveled before there were any leaks. My friends and I would make big piles of snow on the side of the house and jump into them from the second story.

Recently, I was digging my car out from under a foot of snow getting ready for work. I think back to those days I spent on my dirt roof and remember how it all worked perfectly.



## The Road Less Traveled

*DENISE CORCORAN*

“Be kind to everyone, you never know what connection you will have,” my grandfather would always tell me when I was a little girl. Sitting in his workshop behind the carport, I would sit and watch his talented hands turn a plain sheet of wood into a beautiful piece of furniture. He would tell me stories about people he had met and how they had impacted his life. Even seemingly brief encounters with acquaintances may change the direction of your life and you may not even realize it’s happening.

Years later, hitchhiking in Wisconsin with my photographer friend, we took a ride with a young medical intern. He was on his way home, so he invited us to join him for dinner. It was early evening and we had been on the road for a couple of days already, sustained only by apples and water, so without hesitation, we gladly accepted his generous offer of a hot meal.

We ended up staying for several days.

The young couple opened their homes to us. After we ate dinner, we sat on a hilltop that overlooked rolling meadows that were alive with wild flowers. Vivid purple, yellow and red summer blossoms grew amid the luscious thick green grass. The serenity and calm of this majestic scene was interrupted only by the frequent call of native birds. We spoke about where we had been and the beauty of things we had seen. I made my living as a waitress, but creating art was my passion. My traveling partner paid his bills with a bartending job, but was a landscape photographer at heart. We would work a couple of weeks for cash and set off on an adventure together. We had just spent the last few days camping at Lake Superior near a waterfall.

We watched the red glowing orb of the sun sink slowly and effortlessly beyond the horizon. Our hosts talked about the long hours spent at Medical School and the responsibilities of running the farm. They worked the land in exchange for living in the house. He had tuition payments due and still had his residency to serve. They were strapped and struggling to make ends meet. The cold dew glistened in the moonlight as we shared stories of our young lives.

The intern’s wife was an aspiring potter, so we spent the next few days sharing techniques and ideas about our craft. She had an old kick-wheel that she was having trouble using, so I helped her balance the flywheel and make it easier to use. We threw bowls and mugs, plates and vases and agreed that there is nothing like the feeling of wet clay between your fingers and the exhilaration of forming a lump of mud into a functional vessel of beauty.

While we reveled in our craft, my friend, who had worked as a machinist in his past, was helping the intern with some farm equipment repairs.



We left the farm a few days later; we had to get back to our jobs in Grand Forks. We had set out a week earlier to go to Chicago, but had been so content in Eau Claire, we had no reason to go on to the windy city. A lonely truck driver took us all the way back home.

We went on other trips and adventures, and met many new people, but none were as special as that one. We didn't share addresses or phone numbers with each other, so we never spoke to each other again. I don't even know my photographer friend any more. I think it would have taken some of the mystique of the experience away and made it less exceptional. It was a moment in time when four people came together and harmonized.

As I look back on this experience almost thirty years later, I wonder what made the medical intern stop and invite us to his home. His generosity, kindness and trust gave us shelter, food and friendship. I realize now, that we returned the kindness with companionship and hope. Our stories of adventure and freedom rescued them from the rigor of daily struggle and were refreshing and appealing. We were happy to help with the chores, and I have since discovered the ceramic art world to be a sharing community of knowledge and skills and endless experimentation.

I have always appreciated the beauty in nature, but when I am stressed I revisit that hilltop in my mind, painting every wild flower amid the bright green grass. The grass and flowers flow in the breeze to the slowed rhythm of my breath. It takes me back to the carefree feeling of my youth and the kindness of strangers.

Two generations later, my granddaughter sits in my basement workshop watching my hands with wonder shape soft clay into a vase. "Be kind to everyone," I repeat, "you never know what connection you will have." I tell her stories of my travels and the people I have known, and I add to my Grandfather's message, "never turn down an adventure, you never know where it will lead you."



I rip open the letter  
Eyes peeled for a secret  
It reads much better  
With the ink discovered

*“Death camp, the rest deceit,”  
it starts, and I have a fleet  
image of death and hate.*

It says, “From the night of  
the witch hunt: they chase me  
through mud, trees, snow, and blood.  
And I left them behind.  
I ran to be free.  
Now I am free and I choose  
to fight this war and win.”

*“Death camp, the rest deceit,”  
it starts, and I have a fleet  
image of death and hate.*

starvation on the inch of bread,  
the spoon of broth,  
the contempt and torture;  
dig the grave pits  
and gas, stack the kindling;  
and fire and fire.

The newspaper arrived . . .  
“K is fulfilling his  
mission,” it adds cryptically.  
“We will do what we have to,  
to take care of business.”

*“Death to the camp, Nazis,”  
he shouts, and my heart freezes  
at the image of hate on hate.*

The last paragraph in  
the message requests “Signal  
pistols, camera, invisible  
ink, death tools. Urgent.”

*It ends: “The time has come, the kettle is boiling.”*

Inspired and parts taken from an article on AP Newswire, “Beneath Love Letter, a  
Message of Resistance in Invisible Ink” on 2 Nov, 1997.



The Woman

*HARI JUNG*



The rain soaked through my jeans as I ran toward the car. A sharp tailwind blew in gusts from the west, which helped to lift my legs and carry me forward. The vehicle’s details began to emerge through the fall of raindrops. American sedan, late-model, Chrysler? No, it was a Mercury. Probably wasn’t going to start.

My vision focused on the sticker on the left side of the bumper. I resolved to run until I could read it, although I had a feeling it wasn’t going to be a good one. I pushed my legs and my lungs were set ablaze. The pack grated and chaffed my back with every step.

“God Bless The Whole World, NO EXCEPTIONS.”

I stopped dead in my tracks, no longer caring about the rain. I pondered the bumper sticker as I strode up to the car. God had blessed the world indeed, but I was afraid that there may have been exceptions. Late-model burgundy Mercury Marquis. Bible beaters, no doubt. People who bought American and said their prayers.

The driver’s side rear door was unlocked so I opened it and tossed my ruck in. The driver’s seat was vacant, and the driver’s door was unlocked as well. There was someone in the passenger seat. I opened the driver’s door, and took a look behind me. The worst of the storm was yet to come, as dark clouds converted the afternoon into a gloomy twilight. The grass in the plains lay down in waves as the wind fled the approaching storm.

I plopped into the seat, still having to inhale deeply from the run. “Where ya headed?” I asked between breaths.

The woman in the passenger seat was most likely fifty or so. She was sitting more or less upright in her seat. She offered no reply, and I gave a friendly smile that I don’t think she saw. The cloth upholstery gave off a musty fungal odor with a slightly acrid undertone. The interior displayed the past year’s unchecked deterioration through dry-rotten consoles and a moth-eaten headrest.

“I guess it doesn’t really matter where you’re headed now does it?” I inquire further, but the woman remained silent.

I continued anyway. “I’m headed east. I guess maybe I’ll make it to DC sooner or later. There’s no hurry, though. I just want to see what’s there, but I’ve already got a pretty good idea what it’s gonna be.”

Her head is turned to look out the window toward the south. The rain taps out a hypnotizing rhythm on the roof of the car. I further absorbed my surroundings. There was a purse behind the woman’s calves, which I wasn’t going to touch. Her left ring finger bore a wedding band, but there was no sign of a husband. A faded

yellow Christmas tree hung from the rearview mirror, having long lost its fresh lemon scent. No doubt it got its workout in the bad months.

There was a newspaper in the back seat, brown and brittle with age. I reached back and grabbed it. "What made the headlines today?" I asked. The question was rhetorical. I read the front page in the last of the gray light.

*Wichita Eagle*, February 2nd 2007. "President Bush's Location Unknown as Flu Continues to Spread Unchecked."

I thought back to that week, which was approaching two years gone. There weren't many more newspapers printed after that headline. The president's disappearance displayed to the nation that now was the time to start panicking. My daughter had been dead for one week, and my wife had one week left to live.

I reminisced aloud to my companion, "I still remember how she looked at me from her deathbed. She never said it, but her eyes betrayed her feelings. She wanted to know why I wasn't getting sick. Everyone was sick by then. Except me. I never said it either, not out loud. You better believe that I was thinking it though." The woman continued staring to the south in silence.

I continued in disregard toward her silence, "It was a weird feeling, waiting around to get sick and die. I think my wife hated me as she died because I still wasn't sick. That was in her eyes too."

I looked at the keys dangling from the ignition. I reached down and turned them to the start position. The car did absolutely nothing, as expected. "Next time buy Japanese," I said with a small laugh.

Plenty was going on that week in February, as the world came to its ultimate realization. That was about the time that everyone quit calling it bird flu, and it was simply the flu. Those who were healthy enough to loot did so, and those that were sick died grotesquely in place. The hospitals were long rendered useless by overcrowding that indirectly led to the doctors' contraction of the flu.

"I'd never had the regular flu before, so I don't know why I thought it would be any different with the bird flu," I explained to her. "I wonder if they could have made a cure out of my blood, maybe if I had realized earlier that I wasn't gonna get it. Oh yeah, and if the doctors weren't all dead."

The night had crept in while I had been conversing, and we now sat in a darkness that was complete. I reached back and moved my pack so that it was behind the woman, then reclined my seat as far back as it would go.

"I guess it's all water under the bridge now," I said as I turned and lay on my left side, facing away from the woman. In the dark she continued to vacantly stare to the south. I closed my eyes and let myself succumb to sleep.

That night I dreamed the only dream that I have anymore, where my wife and daughter and the rest of the world want me to save them, and I am in bed and don't want to be bothered, and they all die, and I can't get out of bed to help them anymore, and their corpses join me in bed, and now I want to get out of bed but can't. It doesn't even wake me up anymore.

The sun was emerging out of the eastern horizon, which was still capable of waking me. I resumed the upright position, with an unfathomably stiff and sore neck. The storm had blown past in the night and the sky was solid cerulean blue which told me that autumn was coming. I had quit trying to keep track of dates and months, as well as time of day for that matter. Seasons were still important, though, as I had been caught in the Rockies last winter and almost died of exposure.

"Better get back on the road. I hear that those Midwestern winters can get pretty nasty," I said to the woman. She continued to look out her window. I exited the Marquis and opened the back door to remove my pack. I sat it upon the trunk of the car, and took out some jerky and a granola bar.

The bumper sticker caught my eye again, and I thought it over as I ate. We were all blessed indeed. I threw on my pack, and walked past the vehicle heading east.

There was a human skeleton on the shoulder to the front and right of the Marquis. A man's skeleton, which I assumed to be the missing husband who had been driving his wife to some destination forever to remain unknown. The skull was shattered from the self-inflicted gunshot that the man had chosen over the flu, or perhaps in place of living without his wife. The bones of his hand still grasped a revolver that now glowed orange with rust.

I stood over him, and then looked back to the car. The woman's mummified remains stared at me with hollow sockets through the passenger window.

"I get it now," I said to myself, then bent over and shook the revolver free from his skeletal grip. "No exceptions, right?" I asked him. He didn't have anything to say either.

I placed the tip of the muzzle to my temple and squeezed the trigger, only to be answered by a dry click. I looked down at the gun, tried to manipulate the cylinder, and decided that it had long been rendered useless by the elements. I flung the firearm out into the high grass, as though trying to conceal a dirty secret.

"Oh well, I guess one exception will have to do for now. You shouldn't leave your wife alone in the car," I said, then turned on my heels and continued east.



## When Can I Skate Again?

*BENJAMIN THOMAS ROGERS*

October 3rd, 1999 started off like every saturday in high school. I met up with my friends Jaimie and Rob at the Springfield metro and headed downtown. All we loved to do was rollerblade. We got off at the L'enfant Plaza stop. I found a ledge roll to gap I wanted to try. The ledge was about 20 feet high at the top and sloped down with the staircase, kinking out flat for a foot at the end. Below the end of the ledge was another set of 8 stairs. I wanted to roll down the ledge and 180 over the stairs.

I stood at the top of the ledge and dropped in. My wheels caught on a gap between the concrete where the ledge kinked. I put my arms out to block my fall as I was about to go head first into the ground. My momentum made my back bend the wrong direction and my whole body contorted before I collapsed on the pavement. I knew something was very wrong. It felt like someone was taking a bat and bashing me across the back with it.

I couldn't move my arms without the pain being unbearable. All I could think about was getting home and sleeping to ignore the pain. I walked about 3 feet and threw up. I realized I was dying, but kept heading toward the metro. My friends thought I was fine and headed out to skate as I boarded the train.

The metro ride was the worst part of the day. Every bump, stop, and shake of the train sent horrible pain throughout my body. I kept yelling at everyone to help me. People would just stare and get off the train. I saw a woman filming me, but couldn't do anything about it. The train got to Springfield and I hobbled to the pay-phones. I told Rob's brother it was an emergency and he drove me to their house. When my mother arrived, she said something was wrong and raced me to Fairfax Hospital.

After getting there I went to the bathroom. Nothing came out except bright red blood. Telling that to the people at the counter gets you moved to the front of the line. I was rushed onto an operating table where doctors started jamming tubes and needles in me. They said I was dying, but didn't know why. The next thing I remember is waking up with various machines monitoring me. I lifted up my gown and saw 30 fresh staples and a big scar going up my stomach. I had fractured my kidney, meaning I had ripped it open, almost in half. The first words out of my mouth, to the horror of the doctors and my family, was "When can I skate again?"

I wouldn't be leaving the hospital for a month. The only thing I could digest was crushed ice. I had a tube that went into my stomach which was pumped full of a diet shake 3 times a day. I had blood drawn twice a day and was on a morphine drip. The pain was horrible but the morphine gave me a detached, floating feeling.

Rob came to see me for the first time and burst into tears. He felt horrible for not calling an ambulance. A lot of people from my family's church came to visit, which infuriated me. They would bring baskets full of candy which I couldn't touch.

Everyday I became more bitter. I had grown weary of seeing commercials for food, tired of nurses making noise at all hours of the night, fed up with having tubes jammed in my body, and sick of being in crippling pain.

By the third week I had lost my mind. I would have dreams where I was in the same room talking with someone. I would wake up and ask my dad where they went and wouldn't believe him when he said they were never there. My tolerance for the morphine was so high they had to switch me to something else, but had to switch me back because it wasn't working. The morphine started messing with my head a lot, giving me nightmares.

After a month I was cleared to go home. I still had a feeding tube coming out of my stomach which I had to hook to the machine 3 times a day. I couldn't eat anything but could drink chicken or beef bouillon. They took me off the morphine and prescribed Percocet. I went through withdrawals from the morphine, which was unexpected. I would wake up after having a horrible dream drenched in sweat with intense pain in my back. It took several weeks for this to go away.

After a few weeks I could eat again, and I was slowly able to move around. One night I was watching tv and started getting sharp pains in my back. It kept getting worse until I couldn't take it and I was headed back to the hospital. I learned I was having back spasms. Being bed ridden for so long, many of my muscles didn't get used and suddenly they were getting worked again. I had to start moving around only a little everyday. It seemed like nothing but frustration after frustration as the days went on.

Six months after the injury I was allowed to skate again. I was overcome with joy and burst into tears when I put my skates back on for the first time. Skating always gave me an indescribable feeling. When I was skating it didn't matter that things were rough at home, or that I was in trouble at school, or that my girlfriend left me. I was just there with my friends with skates strapped to my feet having the best moments of my young life. Skating let me transcend whatever hardships I was going through and made me feel alive, and there is nothing better than that.





## Red

SARAH KHAN

Like the Chucks that he loves  
Like the hem of her dress  
Like the flush in his face  
Like the sound of her laugh

Like the Queen on her card  
Like the drink that she spilled  
Like the snakes in her hair  
Like the lip that she bit

Like the smell of five grand  
Like the lights at the show  
Like the heat of her hands  
Like the arch of her brow

Like the lust in his lungs  
Like the feel of crushed glass  
Like the skin on his fist  
Like the knot in her throat



It has a need  
Like some waking infant  
Wailing with a hunger  
On her lips, in her eyes  
So 2 AM I stagger  
From my bed sheets and kneel  
In the half-lit hallway, writing  
Down my dreams

Sometimes  
It is too much  
And I hide from its flashes  
Of eye, the curls of its mouth  
Dripping ink, alone  
I watch it take, reveal  
The sounds of my cry, the crazy  
Silence of its thyme rocking  
My body, a tiger  
In the mind  
Is vicious on paper

Still there is this gentle lilt  
Of voice, it speaks in colors  
At the motion of my hand  
And I live  
For the song of words that greet  
My morning, like flower bulbs  
They sit on my fingertips waiting  
I cannot keep  
It under the skin, its need reflects  
My own-  
To sing out the crescendos  
Of the soul, the song of my existence  
So I believe I am real, pulled  
Back into the earth  
Like some anchored vessel

I applaud the poem  
The captor, the liberator  
Whose glints of teeth  
Will eat  
And eat the insides, but leave  
My bones  
Untouched.

Great Falls

*MICHAEL BALLADARES*



Fishy, Fishy, Fishy

*CARLA BRADY*

*THIRD PRIZE - ARTWORK  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006*





The Chef

*MICHAEL BALLADARES*



Peace

*RICARDO E. CAMPOS*



JENNY PEREZ

Still Life





Plant

*BIGUUN ZAYA BADRAKH*

*SECOND PRIZE - ARTWORK  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006*

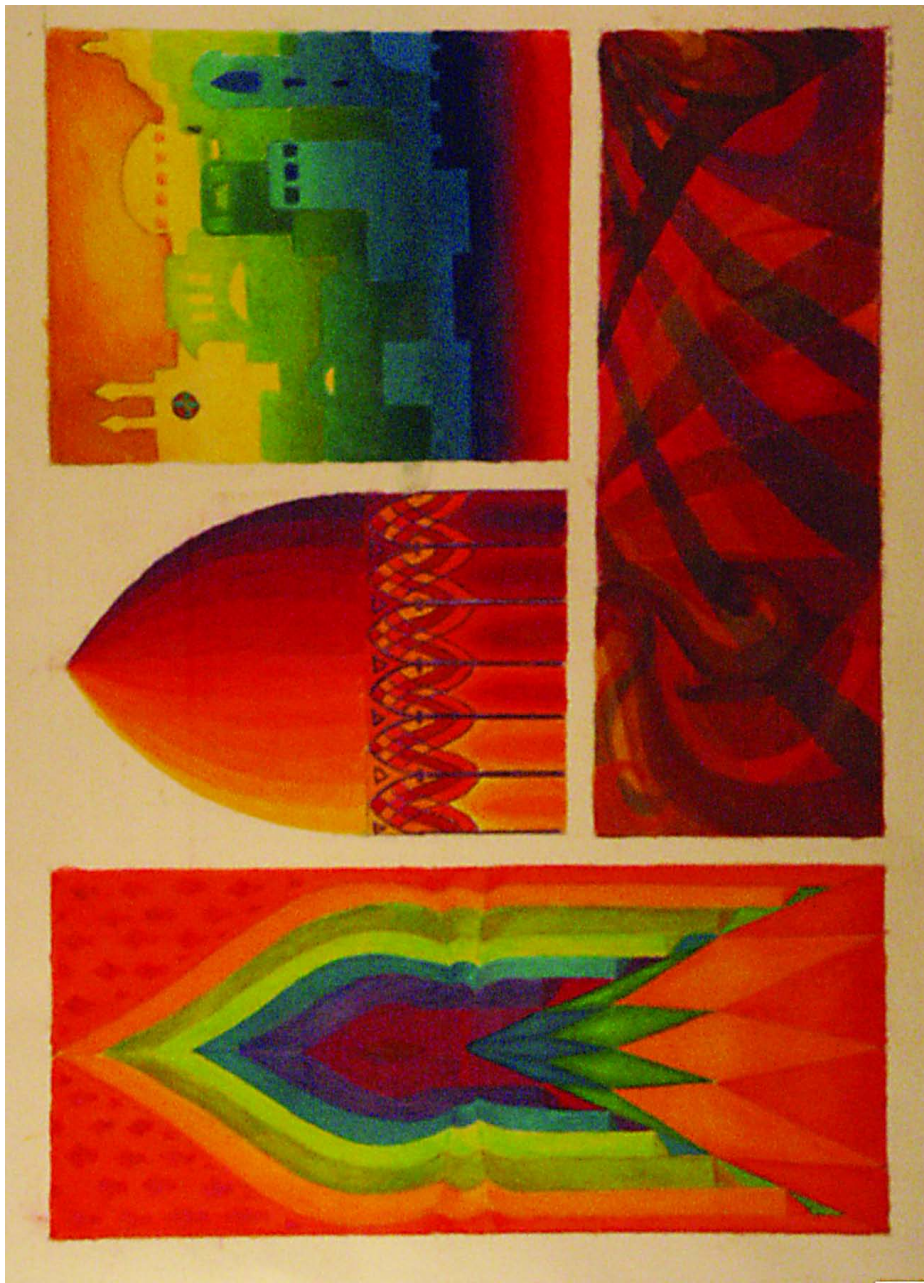


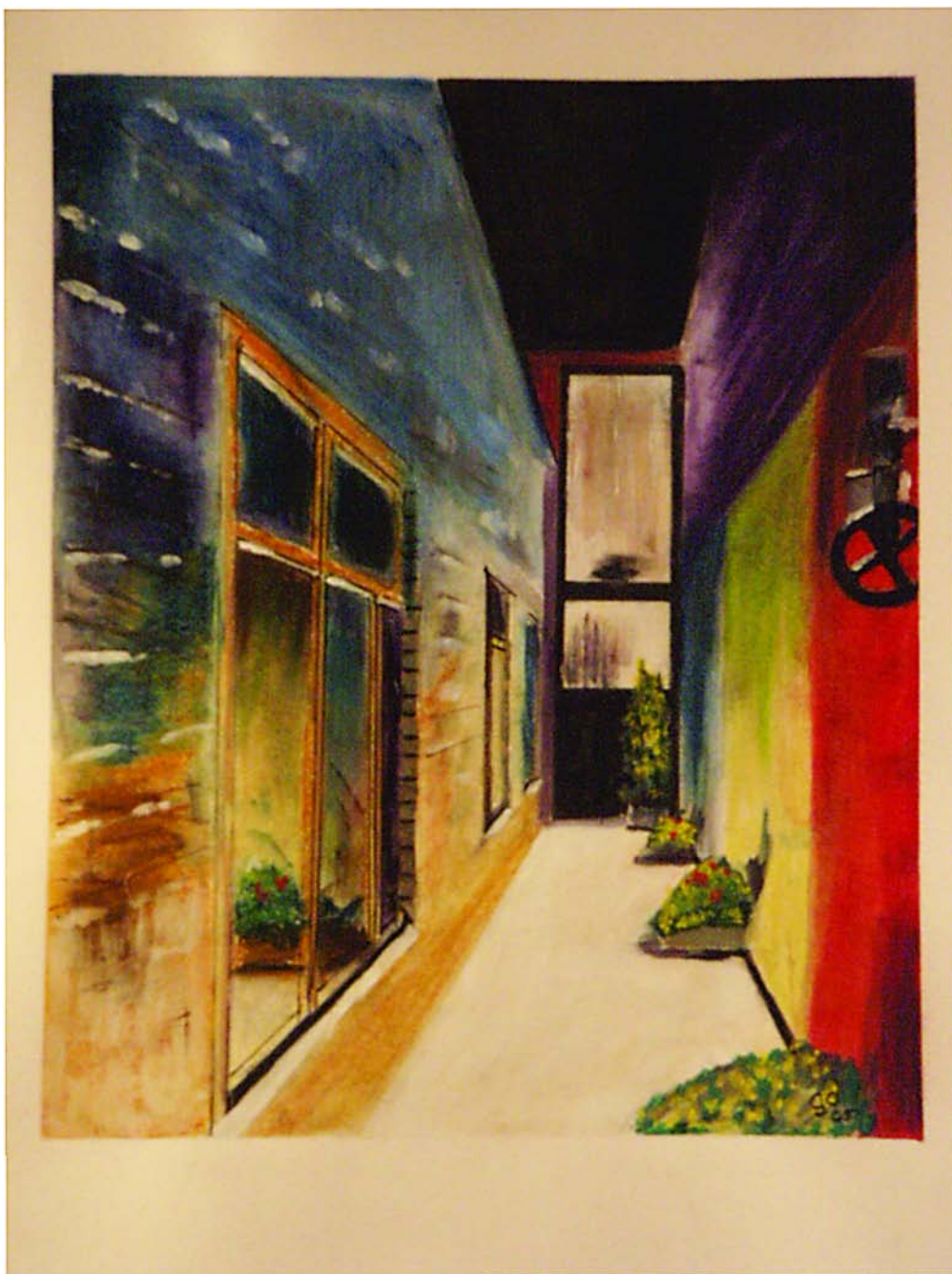


Reflection

*BIGUUN ZAYA BADRAKH*









*African Sunrise*

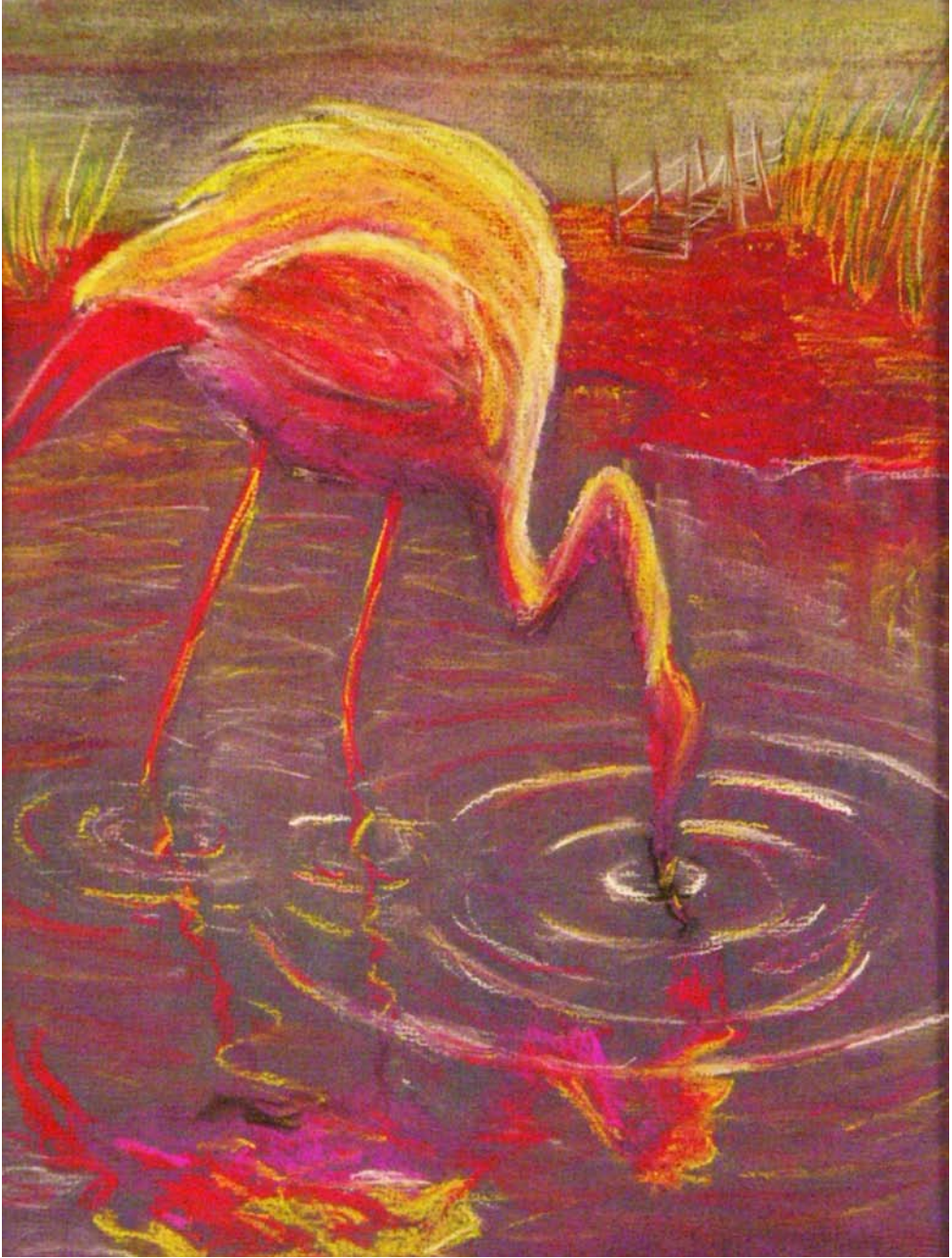


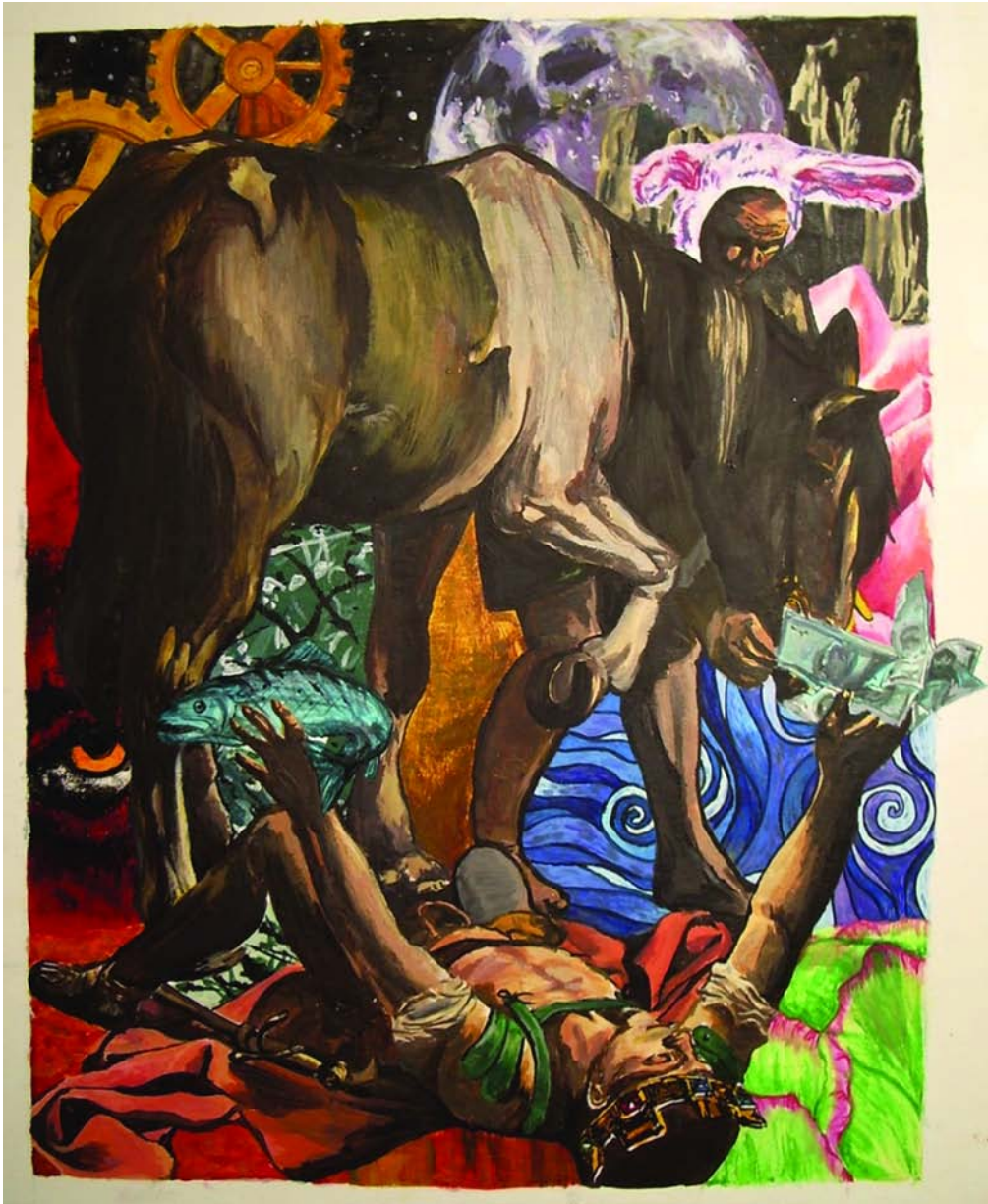
*LESLIE HALL*

FIRST PRIZE - ARTWORK  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006









SECOND PRIZE - POETRY  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006

I sit at the bar alone,  
drinking my American beer,  
smoking my Turkish cigarettes...  
Perfume wafts  
on the false breeze across  
my nostrils and I  
am in seventh grade again.  
In the middle desk  
in the middle row,  
the best way to avoid attention.  
In front of me, afloat  
in a desk sits a girl:  
long sable hair, a soft *sfumato*  
face, small ears and nose,  
and ice-blue eyes that see  
everything but me and she  
wears that perfume.  
Doesn't even smell that great,  
but it's on her neck,  
under her hair;  
I can think of nothing else  
until the teacher  
asks me a question,  
"What?"  
"Would you like  
another beer?"



Dear Mrs. Hopkins

HYEWON YANG

*FIRST PRIZE - FICTION*  
*CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006*

Dear Mrs. Hopkins,

I am sorry about what happened to your beautiful home last Friday. Please understand that it hurts me even to mention the unfortunate incident. I wanted to explain to you how it all started because it is vital that you know the real reason that caused the fire. I spoke to Jake yesterday and was appalled to learn that you have not received any apologies from his friends who were present at his party that night. I did hear that you grounded Jake for the rest of his life. Of course, that is only until you send him to a good college. Jake has mentioned some schools in Florida. I do not enjoy the beach myself, but I suppose I could learn to swim if given an opportunity.

It all started with Jake's seventeenth birthday and you going out of town on the weekend. He was ever so excited. A party was inevitable, Mrs. Hopkins. My friend, Suzie, had this wonderful idea of baking a cake for your son. Could there be a better present? They had been going out for two weeks, and Suzie wanted to do a nice thing for him because Jake was a real romantic. Romantics are rare: If you find one, you'd better hold onto him like the last pair of jeans on a seventy-five percent off sale.

Suzie nearly failed algebra last year but she is not a dumb girl; she knew who to ask for help on baking a cake. I was so glad when Suzie came over to my house on Thursday afternoon. I was there for her because Suzie and I were best friends. I was lucky to have a friend like Suzie; she's like a star, always attracting people. Suzie and I were inseparable when we were younger. Once we got to the high school, we saw each other less and less. Suzie did try to hang out with me, advising me to dress right and wear makeup.

I did not own any pretty clothes like she did, you see. My dad didn't make that much money like you or Suzie's parents, so I could not afford what Suzie recommended to me. You probably noticed Suzie had a beautiful smile. I wish my teeth were like hers. When Suzie's braces came off and she started wearing mini-skirts to school, Jake and every other boy in our school noticed her. Ever since middle school, I had been telling her all the great things about Jake and how much I admired him. Well, perhaps that is why she picked Jake. I only wish I had the courage to tell Jake what I thought about him beforehand. Jake deserved the prettiest and nicest girl. I do not wear makeup, and I cut my hair short, keeping everything simple. My dad tells me I should be modest. He objects to teenage girls going out so late at night, but he doesn't have to tell me that because I never get dates. I always stay home on weekends.

There were already about two dozen people at your house when Suzie and I arrived. Jake really liked the cake. I had decorated the top with blue icing in various shapes of cars. I know he's obsessed with automobiles; although I don't drive, so I cannot imagine. Suzie took all the credit for the cake. She looked surprisingly ugly in her red halter top. On the contrary of being ugly, I loved your house, Mrs. Hopkins. You placed Jake's pictures everywhere; he looked so cheerful and handsome. He must get a lot of attention from you, him being the only child and all. I am also an only child. My parents and I got along so well until my mom passed away. My house became silent ever since.

It was a real live party, everyone was talking and laughing. Some of Jake's friends brought beer. Suzie drank a lot that night. That perhaps explains why she tripped over my foot later. When Suzie strayed off to the kitchen to get the cake, I walked over to Jake to say happy birthday. He recognized me but did not remember my name. Mrs. Hopkins, perhaps your son suffers from long-term memory loss. I was his science lab partner in sixth grade and let him copy my math homework twice in middle school—you know I used to get straight A's. Jake is a kind person. When I returned to school after my mom's funeral, he said sorry. I think we'd bond if he only got to know me better.

It was time for the cake. Suzie told me to light the candles on it and I did. Then I turned off all the lights and she brought the cake to living room. Jake was happy, and he suggested that we light more candles around the house. Your living room looked so peaceful. I pulled Suzie aside and asked her if she could just mention that I helped baking the cake (well, practically did all the work). She laughed, drank from her beer can, and told me that it did not matter. She said that it did not matter because a guy like Jake would never notice me anyway. As she turned to leave, she tripped over my foot—oh, clumsy her. Suzie got up and pushed me to the floor. I knocked over some candles as I fell, and the curtain was caught on fire. I fell hard, and was still on the floor while drunken friends of Jake were yelling and pointing at the fire. Mrs. Hopkins, you should really keep a fire extinguisher in the house. I have one in my garage. You never know what to expect. Some ran for water but they were not quick enough. The fire already spread to the couch. The smoke and flame really scared everyone and they all ran outside. No one remembered to call 911 until a neighbor did.

The firemen were so quick and managed to save your house from total burn down. I saw only your living room was burned. The police came too. You know the rest. Only one good thing came out of this mess. Jake finally broke up with Suzie.

I know you feel awful about the whole incident. Do not blame yourself for assuming your son is mature enough to handle one birthday party without adult supervision. Very unlike me, most teens my age are clueless. Jake should know better not to have beer and candles in one place. I am sure you will talk to him about that.

When I am feeling down, I write. Don't think about the content or penmanship; just write whatever comes to your mind. Grab a pen and express your feelings. It works for me; you will feel better. You must have insurance, so it wouldn't be a problem to make your house look nice again. Perhaps you should buy more colorful furniture this time. You can brighten up the house in pastel tone. That's what I'd love to do to mine. Maybe you could invite me for a cup of tea, and I would be happy to give you advice to redecorate.

Mrs. Hopkins, please do not punish Jake so much. He is not the guilty one. As for Suzie, I have not spoken to her since. Our lives are so much better without Suzie. You want someone caring and kind for your precious son.

Sincerely,

Meredith Collins

P.S. I left my jacket in your home that evening. I believe it's gone now. I should not ask you to replace it, but it was my favorite. Perhaps we can talk about that when we meet. I look forward to that cup of tea.



There Is No One Like You

ANEEQA SARWAR

*THIRD PRIZE - ESL  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006*

You are my mother and my friend,  
Which is unusual.  
Somehow our characters must blend:  
Your wisdom and my will.  
I turn, and you are there for me;  
I speak, you understand.  
I feel cared for, but also free;  
You lead but don't command.  
I'm fortunate that I was born  
To someone just like you;  
I love you, not just as my mom,  
But for what you are and do.



Resting

ELISA BANKS SWAIN



## Paradigm Shift on the Number Two Train

KATHERINE GRACE LEENHOUTS

SECOND PRIZE - CREATIVE NON-FICTION  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006

There are three hundred and eighty stations in the Paris Metro system. The places that have changed lives (the Sacre Coeur, Eiffel Tower, Louvre, Notre Dame, Champ d'Elysses, Arc de Triomphe,...) are all within walking distance of a station. I saw all the sights, I walked through over fourteen stations, but it was the ride between Gare Montparnasse and Pigalle that changed my life.

I was visiting Paris with one of the girls I worked with in England. She was the free spirit and I was the planner, which worked great when we were working, not so much when traveling. My friend left and I found myself alone on the Number Two train with an assortment of people (a woman in a green suit with a cell phone, a busker playing the accordion).

I felt the plastic seats and imagined they were DC's Metro seats. I wanted to be home, where I could sit at the kitchen table and cry, tell my parents how hard it was to earn enough for rent and utilities, how I still (after five months!) occasionally woke up and wondered where I was. I wanted to be around Americans who weren't such obvious tourists who spoke loud in museums and rolled their eyes when the street vendor near Notre Dame didn't speak English.

I pulled out the journal I had tucked in the outside pocket of my backpack and started making a plan. I wrote in terms of hours, when I would get up, when I'd read, the hours I'd eat lunch, how much I'd spend, when I would leave for the airport (very very early. Not early enough). And there, while I was writing my plan to the tune of an accordion, resigned to being miserable, I saw myself at the kitchen table telling my parents how it had been a terrible trip to Paris, not a wonderful one. The train stopped and the man in brown trousers across from me snapped his gum. The doors closed, we pulled out of Gare Montparnasse and into the tunnel and I saw, like a train about to choose between one track or the other, that I could choose how my trip would end.

I could choose to stick to my plan, which mostly involved sulking in a hostel within walking distance of the site of my favorite scene from *Amelie*. Or I could choose to be at the kitchen table in a month telling my parents ...and all I wanted was to go home. But I chose to stop wallowing. I visited the Sacre Coeur, and the canals, and I went to Notre Dame again. I had a wonderful time.

No one else on the train noticed – the man was still snapping his gum; a new passenger tapped the beat of his music onto the silver pole near the door; the woman in green was on her cell phone again – but my life had changed.





## Outside the Café

SARAH KHAN

Watch the busy people with busy lives, all  
playing their parts, coffees firmly in hand  
He strides out, with a slip of paper, not  
suspecting the wind would snatch it and

run. It flew over me; he tried to push past  
We struggled, like dance partners until the wind  
slipped that slip down a storm drain at last.  
He sat down, staring after the trapped scrap.

I knelt down, saw his face. He spoke like a dead  
man: “you’ve just killed me.” I almost laughed,  
but saw not a trace of humor; instead I gaped,  
words beaten and left for dead in the back

alleys of my throat. Took in the bluish blooms  
lining his eyes, the hectic pink in his cheeks, the inky  
hair, the threat of unwanted tears that loomed.  
And without knowing why, or for whom, I cried.



Spring Snow

*L.J. KING*

*THIRD PRIZE - POETRY  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006*

The snow slows to a flutter  
Hissing snowflakes splatter  
In playful pizzicato

The dogwood draped  
In silent white  
With burdened branches  
Waiting, waiting for spring  
Pink flowers curled  
Bursting to blossom  
But not tonight



Change 1

*HANAN BOU AKL*



THIRD PRIZE - CREATIVE NON-FICTION  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006

In a glance of my child's eyes I see promise for the future, potential to cross cultural boundaries, to cure all diseases, and an undeniable innocence to cure all the ills of the world. But I know that as she gets older, she will look into the eyes of the world and be forever changed.

A child so sweet and innocent, she hasn't even seen a peek of the spoils in this world. She calls "Mommy" in the middle of the night and knows I will soon appear. In her short existence, death is not known, so she thinks that Mommy will always be there to tuck her in every night. She doesn't know that in life things will change. I want to protect her and keep her blind to the evils of what lies outside the front door of our home. Not knowing the meaning of prejudice, how will I teach her to be selective in choosing friends without choosing those who are no good for the young lady that I've dreamed she would be?

She looks forward to the Three Little Pigs always escaping the clutches of the Big Bad Wolf; she knows that Little Red Riding Hood will get away from the Wolf, and that Goldilocks escapes from the bears. How will I be able to explain that not all fairy tales will have a happy ending? Sometimes the real wolves in our life could very well be our friends and family.

How do I shield my daughter from the dangers that are beyond my control, without causing her to fear everything that goes bump in the night? In that same token, how do I keep her sense of adventure at levels that will allow her to experience the thrill of playing with the big kids at the park or to enjoy the excitement of the Chucky-E-Cheese the mouse, while at the same time leaving her with a sense of awareness that she is not to talk to strangers when Mommy is not around?

I want my daughter to have and experience everything in this life and give her all that I have. I also want her to understand that not all things are worth having. She should know that all people who are rewarded do not always deserve it, and that those who work hard may unfortunately never be rewarded. That's life and though life is not always fair, she must always work hard and always know that nothing is impossible.

I want her to understand that when I tell her no, sometimes I want to say yes, but we have to be considerate of others. I have to teach my daughter how to share, yet to keep some special things in life only for herself. I want to teach her how to say yes to living, but no to those things that will kill her spirit.

It is important for her to know the art of compromise, but not to compromise the values and standards that she's been taught. She should always be honest and fair, but also know that she will not always be right. I want her to know the difference between fighting for what you stand for and standing for those things that deserve a fight. But most importantly she must know that patience is a virtue and that not every battle is meant to be won.

I want her to be like me, yet different. I want her to have own voice, but to always remember my lessons when she makes difficult decisions in life (when I'm not around for her to ask for advice). I want her to always remember that when she gives her all, to keep some for herself, so she is able to live another day. She should also know that I will always love her unconditionally, even though I may not always agree and support all the decisions she will make. Although she will make mistakes, she must try, try again and know that if she didn't come in first, that when she gave it her all, she was first place in my book.

I want her to know that regrets are a part of life, and not to dwell on the past and forget to live for the future. What really matters is that you give your all and that you never stop living even when life gets you down.

So as I tuck my daughter in, turn on her night-light, and kiss her good night, I think: She may not learn all these lessons tonight, but I will try to make sure that they will be learned throughout the years. Hopefully these life-lessons will be passed along even if only through whispers in the shadows of the night. So between fairy tales of Little Pigs, Red Riding Hood, and Wolves, she will discover that the lessons of this life will be with me by her side as her biggest fan and all a mom could ever need.



## Stolen Emotion

*BRITTANY L. DARNER*

A trip to the grocery store  
once or twice a week  
I bring my large black purse  
Empty for the occasion

I glance at the ceiling and  
check for cameras  
I find an empty lane  
and grab a can labeled  
Self Respect

In the same aisle  
Trust and Honesty  
are on sale  
I make sure no one is around  
and I take them too

My purse is nearly bursting  
I make a retreat to the nearest exit  
Nonchalant and Normal  
I get in my car and drive home  
to unload my newest treasures

I flip my bag upside down  
dumping out the content  
Loathing, Fear, and Deception  
roll onto the counter...  
I am a no good thief



*FIRST PRIZE - CREATIVE NON-FICTION  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006*

I am going into surgery today. I have a benign tumor under my right nipple. I have known about it for weeks, felt it one day after a shower. I was embarrassed to tell my family – breast lumps are a girl’s problem. I told my doctor eventually and he felt for it. Once he had found it, he took my hand and hauled me into the blood lab. I remember him saying “Scheisse” under his breath.

Three days later and I am lying in a hospital bed in some private clinic in Germany. Tubes and facemasks dominate my sight and sterile omniscience cloud my sense of smell. It all reminds me of my early childhood, those frequent stays and procedures that fixed what was congenitally wrong and improved my quality of life. I was barely a toddler then. I am fourteen now. The surgeon asks me to count backward from ten...

My eyes reopen as I realize that I am bounding across the recovery ward toward the toilet. The acrid vomit splashes in the bowl, then my stomach continues to demand the expulsion of nothing at all. After the retching subsides I can see a red stain on the front of my gown. I look down the garment’s neck. I am leaking blood and a pale liquid. My father lifts me up from under my arms and helps me back to bed. A nurse reattaches a drain and plastic receptacle below the aureole where the inside of my body is open to the world.

It was the size of a golf ball, they say. It was benign but large enough to cause me problems later, they say. I hear them but do not feel the words. I feel only the sick suction of the drain drawing out the refuse of my living corpse.

I begin to heave again, vomiting air. I begin to sob between ghastly croaks and gulping breaths. I ask the nurse why I am dying. Eventually I sleep.

Later, I awake again in a small, private space. A grey wool curtain separates me from the world outside. My parents are squeezed into the restful cubby, both are reading. I do not move. I do not speak. I return to sleep.

Once more my eyes open. The grey curtains are black; it is dark outside now, and there is no moon. My cubby’s lamp is off, my father is asleep in his chair and my mother absent. I will myself to speak, I croak past parched vocal cords.

We are home now. I am on the couch in front of the television. I eat shrimp-salad sandwiches and watch movie after movie, game show after game show. Occasionally I replace the receptacle at the end of the meandering tube inserted into my chest. It constantly sucks, always reminding of the piece of me that was carved

out: The tumor, my body's attempt at suicide.

I heave again. I hate morphine.

Convalescence, I say, is its own kind of madness: The boredom, the omnipresent clockwork Sun and the shadows it casts converge upon a feeling of remorse for one's state of unhealth. The Sun, that glaring, hateful orb of light, tortures you with its brightness, shining in with ill-minded humor to mock your invalidity. The days always seem sunnier when you cannot go outside.

The children across the street are playing, rejoicing in the rare temperate Dutch day. The birds are without, broadcasting their vivacity for all equipped to hear. Pierce Brosnan and an attractive Indian woman are reenacting Phinaeus Fogg's journey across the globe. I feel none of their adventurousness, none of the joy in new horizons presenting themselves in the myriad Earthen cultures.

I am darkly satisfied by the collision of a bird into the window, of the moment when Fogg arrives an hour too late to win his bet. Then I am shamed by the bird's resolute victory over disorientation and its return to flight, by Fogg's stoic acceptance of his loss and his showing up at the gentleman's club to pay his debt – only to discover that his journey across the time zones has skewed his sense of *temps* and that he was not an hour late, but several hours early.

It is true what the religious say: There are “signs” everywhere. Attribute them to Whomever you will, but there they stand. Just as the blind cannot read the placards decorating roads, so do the narrow-minded miss these signs. Myself, I do not consider the stubborn avian or the fortuitous choice of programming a message from God. It is more reassuring to my intellectual ego to believe them to be simply serendipitous coincidence.

Either way, the shame in my own bleakly dark resignation and my commiserate joy in seeing another suffer propel me into true recovery: I vomit still, but imagine it to be the steady purge of that which ails me; the receptacle does not again need to be replaced, save for when its contents need cleaning out; I am able to get a haircut in preparation for my reentrance into the world.

The day I go to get the last stitches removed, the Sun is shining, welcoming me back.



raw improvisation circa 12.06.05

*JONATHAN NTUK*

This  
Mind of Mine  
what will I  
do with you?

Troubl'd thoughts and  
anxious rumination are  
your special tea

you drink them  
roll them across  
your synaptic teeth  
then  
    swallow thoughtfully

Why can't I  
turn you off?  
Because,  
Because you make  
my heart beat.

    storing them  
in your mnemonic  
    gut.





you are white  
eyelet slips and flowered skirts  
and old lace up boots  
scuffed at the toe,  
you are James Taylor  
with fire and rain in the grays  
of your eyes,  
you are soft hands  
and wry smiles  
and empty stares that seem  
to search for something  
you lost,  
you are words  
careful and colored  
snatches of secrets spilling  
out your pockets  
and living in the ink  
of the journal in your lap,  
you are evenings  
and the burnt bottoms  
of cranberry muffins  
and wishing you'd stay  
but never  
saying,  
you are a guitar  
leaning your shoulder  
against the wall  
you settle in the corner's shadow  
singing and aching  
and needing  
you strum your nylon strings  
and half-hidden  
hopes



I first looked into his eyes when I was 17 years old. From that moment on I knew my life had changed. It wasn't the kind of change that you see in movies; hot, flashy, fast and quick. No. This was something more. This was a binding of souls. This was an under current of understanding. With one look his way, I knew exactly what he wanted. With one shift of my body, he knew what I was thinking. It didn't surprise anyone when we married two years later. We had grown too close not to. Our lives were no longer two separate ones. We had become one. Our souls were now locked together because that is what happens to people who are in love. A month later I was pregnant. We rejoiced in the news, planning everything step by step. We were now going to have someone to share our love with. We did not have much, but it was enough. Thus we lived in glorious contentment, never aware of what we did not have.

It was night when they came. The house was pitch black when I heard the glass shatter. I woke up with a start to see a man wearing a gas mask pointing a rifle at my face. Screaming, I looked around and saw dozens of men, all with masks, all with guns. His hands were on his head; his feet spread apart, three guns shoved at him. He looked at me and mumbled something I could not hear, but that earned him a blow to the gut. I did not open my mouth for fear of punishment. They gestured toward the door with their rifle points.

The moment I stepped outside I knew what was happening. He was led toward a line of shady figures. All of them were men. Each had their hands behind their heads. The line was long. All the men from town were there. I was pushed and fell forward on my face. I felt a kick at my leg and struggled to get up. A hand threw me roughly toward a group of huddled women. There were many soldiers and I could see the shapes of a number of armored trucks surrounding the area.

We all stood silently as more families were led out of their houses. The soldiers occasionally barked orders, but other than that there was no talking. We all stood there quietly, all knowing what would happen, no one really quite believing it. When the soldiers were done lining up the men, we heard the click of a gun...then a gunshot, followed by a second and a third. And so on and so on. Each gunshot was accompanied with a thump as a body fell to the ground. I began to hear the moaning of the women around me. My ears took in the silent sobs. A baby began to cry and another shot was fired.

I looked for my husband, trying to find him in the long line. Tears streamed down my face as I struggled to make him out in the dim light. The next shot was fired and the morning sun broke through the clouds, allowing the dawn to break free. At that moment I spotted him. He was next in line. Our eyes met. He smiled. The shot was fired. I died that day, died right there as I saw his lifeless body fall to the ground, blood pouring out of his head.

I didn't notice the line shorten. Didn't realize when it was done. I no longer heard the wailing that surrounded me. I no longer tasted the tears on my face. I didn't feel what they did to me that night. My body was numb. All sensation was gone. I lost the baby that night. They tell me they found my body in the dirt that night. They tell me I was covered in blood. They tell me I was one of the few survivors. They tell me I should be thankful.



The Fertile Crescent

*MARZIA MOTTA*



The man is outside, below, on a street she  
has thrown her beloved slippers upon. His fury  
(the guttural dialect rising to the girl mourning  
velveteen churned into Alexandrian mud)  
is dulled by the resonance of inner sound,  
a bleating, then a stillness.

Earlier, in the Mediterranean drowse (which  
calms even flies that swarm upon beggars  
who sense pity and cling, with cupped hands,  
eyes crawling) a visitor came to the family floor.

Up the elevator cranked, halted, jarred  
(its trap door opened, the houseboy pulling  
hand after hand a rope, heaving the humid  
chamber to her door) Her father stood to receive  
a man, tall in all-white and in hand, a small lamb  
tethered to the man who stroked the head  
ears, body, then palmed the Egyptian pound.  
Through the slit of a door she heard cries, saw  
droppings, harsh tugging, a bowed head.

The skin of a mother's hand cools (no words  
needed for the pink meat in the plastic tub)  
For the *fuqar'aa*, the poor, the beggars, the lot  
of the street is eaten in the flesh of sacrifice.

The light, the heat, reaches the top floor.  
The flies begin their descent.



*SECOND PRIZE - ESL*  
*CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006*

A late, gloomy night on September 10th, 2004, he was driving home on the dark road. Working for a credit card company as a salesman, he was pleased that he had two new contracts. Yet, he was tired from the ten hour shift. Fifteen minutes down the road, he doesn't realize it, but he falls asleep. His car slammed a tree in the median and he was thrown from the car.

For an hour he lay on the dark road, losing blood until someone saw him and called the police. He was transported to INOVA Fairfax Hospital. In the Emergency Room with no wallet, doctors were forced to make a quick and difficult decision; his leg was seriously injured. There was no alternative; they had to amputate it. The surgery was successful, but his condition worsened because he had lost too much blood.

The next day, a police officer knocked on his parent's door and his brother answered. The officer said, "Your brother was in a serious automobile accident last night." His brother was shocked because he thought that his brother was asleep in his room. He quickly called his parents to let them know.

Soon at the hospital, the team doctor explained to them what happened to their son, what surgery had been done and told them that he was in a coma. He explained, "Even if he wakes up, he will have serious brain damage because of the severe blood loss." Their life in hell began. His family couldn't accept what they had heard, it was too terrible to take in; just a few hours ago they had seen him without any problems at all.

Just four days had passed since the accident and a new crisis broke out. "His hemoglobin count is too low; he could die," the doctor said. A person's hemoglobin count is normally between eleven and thirteen. Between six and seven and you're liable to feel dizzy. Lower than 3.5 and you will die. That day, his count was 2.8. "I'm so sorry to say this, but it's a miracle that he's even still alive," the doctor said. After his parents and brother heard this terrible news, they couldn't stand or even breathe. They cried, their hearts torn into shreds by uncountable agonies. But they did not give up their tiny hope and prayed, "Please wake him up even though he will be disabled or a fool. We'll take care of him."

Ten days after this crisis, his hemoglobin count gradually went up and his family grasped this last ray of hope. But they still worried about his brain's condition.

Twenty-eight days later, he finally regained consciousness, not remembering the accident or knowing about the amputation. His parents had another agony—to tell their son what had happened. Bravely, without showing deep sorrow, his father told him everything: about the month in the coma, the hemoglobin crisis. And then he

showed him pictures of the destroyed car, the accident scene. “You are okay, my son. Your head is okay, you are clean inside, but just your leg is gone. There are so many people worse off than you. Losing your leg is not a problem because there are....” He couldn’t say more. Uncontrollably, his son cried hard for thirty minutes with his father. Only twenty-one, it was too huge to accept.

It took twenty-four hours for it to sink in; he felt happy. Just as his parents had prayed, though disabled, he was alive. Heaven had answered them tenderly. He had survived the accident, the blood loss, and the coma with no permanent brain damage.

A year after, the tragedy behind him, he thinks, “I can breathe, see beauty, feel fresh air, live with those I love. And, I am here to write this, and that is enough.”



THIRD PRIZE - FICTION  
CALLIOPE BEST IN PUBLICATION AWARDS 2006

When I write, my initial intent is always to reach someone—a relative, a neighbor, a newspaper, a TV station, or even the police—but page by page, all my letters end up turning into ash and dust. That being the fate of everything on this earth, to me, it is only logical. But over time, brief and simple confessions have changed in format into lengthy and elaborate accounts. Since I find myself writing them with more frequency, I can't help but wonder if anyone will ever read them.

~

I grew up in San Antonio, Texas, in a two-level house off of route 87 in China Grove. There isn't much to say about that place except that the Doobie Brothers wrote a song about it. I could hear it playing in my father's den the day I discovered real fire. I took a small tin can into my room and stuffed it with paper and a bit of lighter fluid. I had done this many times in the toolshed outside where it was dark and I could easily see the flames. They were something beautiful to look at. It was a hobby of sorts; I experimented with fabric and paper. Once, I got the fire to change into a greenish flame by adding a bit of bleach to the mix. Soon after my thirteenth birthday, I decided to take my experiments to my room. I set a can on the windowsill. When I lit the usual mix of paper and lighter fluid, the flames were barely visible. Somehow, I knew the curtains would catch on fire. I didn't care, I wanted to see them burn. Finally, when the fire spread over the drapes, it was as intense and unexpected as a first orgasm. I'm not sure what happened afterwards. All I can remember is the heat and beauty of it all. I ended up in the emergency room with third degree burns on both arms. The doctor said I suffered from shock. I thought I was in love.

~

Through my teen years, I thought about fire constantly. Whenever I looked at the scars on my arms, I'd fantasize about sleeping in the middle of a pyre. When I look at them now, memories come back to me. But memory is a strange thing; for example, I remember getting caught and being punished for playing with matches underneath my bed when I was four or five. I called my parents a few weeks ago and they told me no such thing ever happened. It makes me wonder since that's the sort of thing a parent would remember.

For college, I moved to Winston Salem, North Carolina. After two semesters and a fire in a fraternity house I dropped out. I did what seemed logical and tried to steer this affection in the right direction. But I flunked the physical fitness test for the fire department. I got nervous climbing up a ladder while someone was screaming at me.

I was never good under fire. I ended up doing clerical work for the Fire Marshal office.

I review requisitions and bids and make sure everything the department buys gets to where it's supposed to go. I'm responsible for inventory, so I've managed to collect a great deal of safety equipment surplus. It's a boring job. Once, though, I had to respond to a third-alarm fire by driving one of our rehabilitation trailers to the fire scene. The department responded with seven engines, three trucks, two rescue units and two chief officers. I sat there in the trailer watching over bottles of Gatorade and sandwiches as real fire fighters wrestled with the inferno. I wanted the fire to win. It didn't.

I don't regret failing the test. I know I'd be utterly useless in the field. When there's nothing to do at the office, I read books, history books. I read about the things that have been set on fire: the Globe Theater in 1613, the Birmingham Church in 1902, the Iroquois Theater in Chicago where at least 600 people died in 1903—even the White House was set on fire by the British in 1814. One can't mention historical fires without mentioning Rome, though. The library of Alexandria was first burned in 50 BC, then in the years 272, 391, and 640 AD. Those Romans had a passionate affair with fire. When The Great Fire erupted, Nero viewed the blaze from a tower and started singing. He was insane. I guess it's possible to think the same of me, but I don't hear voices or witness hallucinations. I don't speak with ghosts or ghouls that tell me to start these pyres. Sometimes though, in my sleep, I witness a scene of heavy pandemonium—the entire city set ablaze.

I refuse to see a psychiatrist. They can turn me over to the authorities if they decide that I'm dangerous—and my love is as dangerous as arson. I don't believe in diagnosis or therapy. I'm not so insecure as to require a certified doctor to tell me what I already know. I have a problem, a fixation with fire that I cannot shake. It's not a problem most of the time. It's like hunger or some form of instinct. I still manage to go to work everyday. I go to church every Sunday. I do my grocery shopping on Wednesday nights—I'm only as crazy as the next guy in the check out line. But like all criminals, I spend a lot of time wondering how long it'll be till I get caught. I bite my nails sometimes. And even though I find candles and fireplaces romantic and erotic, I haven't had a girlfriend since college. Fire is my secret. I've never known anyone intimately enough to share it with. I'm afraid I never will. But everyone feels lonely at one point or another. I'm no different.

~

The fires I've started lasted anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours. They were all put out by fire squads. I planned some of them for months. The rest were impulsive acts. At first, they were all unoccupied buildings and abandoned structures. The latter ones, well—I never meant for anyone to get hurt. I just wanted to see something burn.



The old warehouse building south of the parkway, I started that fire with two cotton rags soaked in petroleum jelly and few bottles of bleach. The bleach doesn't burn, but it works as an oxidizer, giving up oxygen, which keeps the fire going. It becomes really helpful when one's trying to start fires in small places like the closet of an abandoned warehouse.

~

When the department does an investigation, the reports are marked as either electrical, natural, chemical, or unknown. That fire was filed as unknown even though two samples tested positive for carbon fuel. I don't know much about the testing. From what I hear, most of the evidence is commonly destroyed during clean-up. I'm not sure how I feel about that, so since the warehouse fire, I have never looked through the files again.

~

In Greek mythology, Prometheus is honored for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to the mortals. His sentence was to be tied to a mountain where an eagle would eat his liver, which would grow back each day—and the eagle would eat it again and again, day-after-day for 30,000 years!

I always worry about the kind of punishment I would receive. Since I work for the fire department, I've set eighteen buildings on fire. I try not to watch the news, but I know six were suspected arsons. The animal shelter on Main Street—burned to the ground. The apartment building on Monument and Boulevard—nine people suffocated in their sleep. I've also set two cars on fire. I'm not even sure those were reported. They were probably stolen. I won't even mention the number of fires that just went out on their own after a few minutes.

My pyres are like women. I remember them all. But amongst the things that I've set on fire, there's the one that I remember most often.

It was a Sunday, a few weeks after leaving the hospital. My arms were still wrapped tightly in gauze. Before the sermon, the youth group had a special meeting with a young minister from Virginia. He talked about natural urges and normal feelings that were hard to control. He said that the love of God was like an eternal flame. God would forgive us anything if we asked. He gave us all a piece of paper and told us write down our sins. One by one, we took them to the altar, lit them on a candle, and drop them in a tin container. That is still the most beautiful fire I have ever seen. I can still see the flame burning. I can still taste the incense-like smell of burnt confessions.



Persi's Koi (Carp) Streamer

*L.J. KING*

Your koi turns gently  
in cool winter breezes  
Playfully swimming  
on this brisk sunny day  
You wave Come Follow  
and join in the dancing  
But you must fly  
while I must stay.  
I wait at the window  
for your rising streamer  
Against blue sky in  
your spotted gray  
To loop and dive  
with gentle kindness  
And fill the void  
you left this day.

Note: Koi refers to the Japanese carp steamers  
flown in honor of the boys in a family.





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