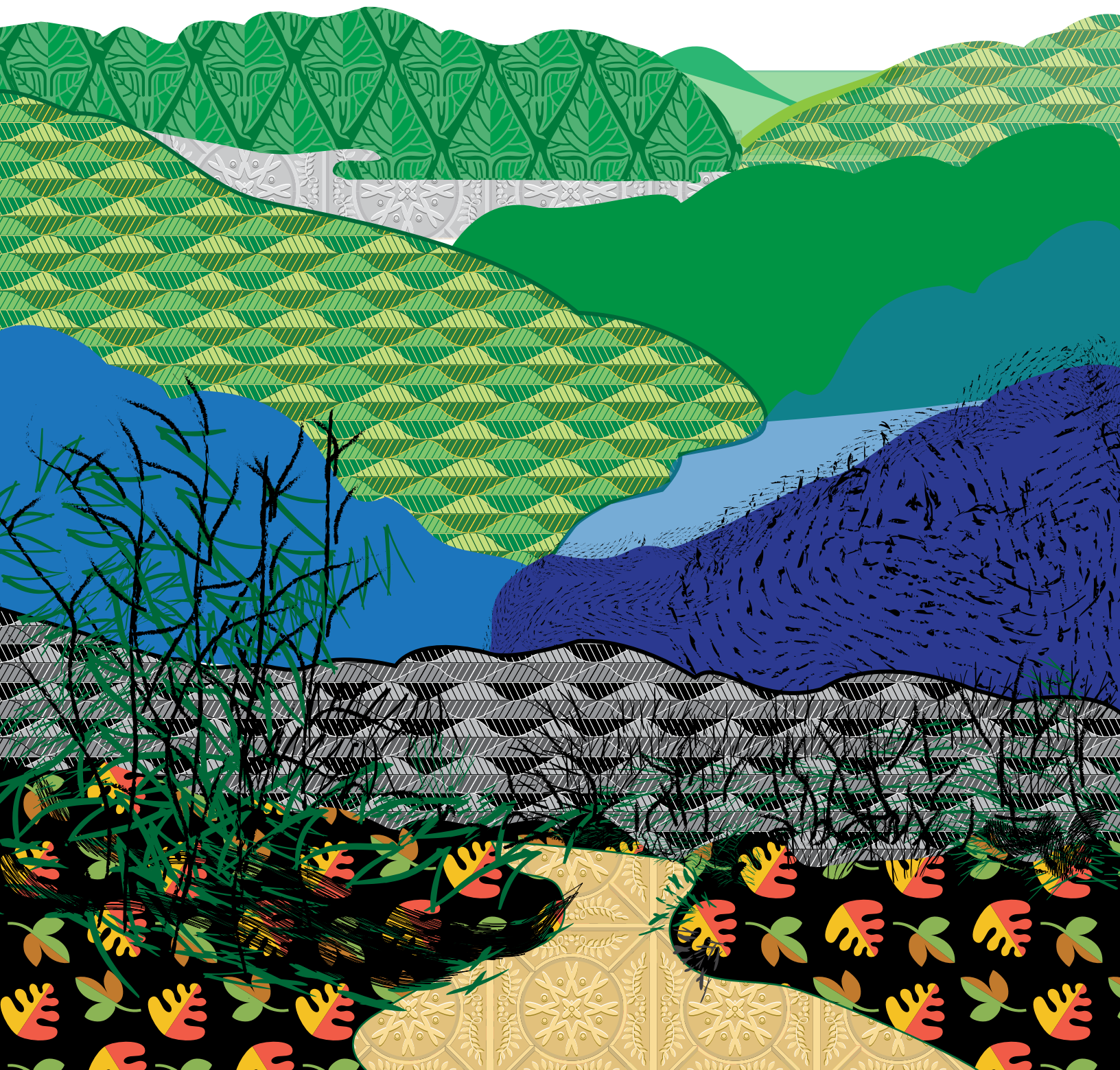


THE FALL LINE

PIEDMONT VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

SPRING 2014, VOLUME VI



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THE FALL LINE Spring 2014, is the sixth volume selected, edited, and produced by Writers Unite, the PVCC Creative Writing Club.

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FALL LINE (noun)

1. The natural boundary between an upland and a lowland marked by waterfalls and rapids.
2. An imaginary line along the eastern United States between the Piedmont and the Atlantic coastal plain.

Special thanks to the PVCC Copy Center for printing **THE FALL LINE** and to John Kingsley and his Communication Design II class for designing this edition.

This year, in addition to our submissions, **THE FALL LINE** is publishing the winners of the Writers Unite 3-Minute Horror Story Contest held in Fall 2013, as well as the winners of the college's QEP (Quality Enhancement Plan) Essay Contest.

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Mother...American Heritage Dictionary,

noun

- I. A female that has borne an offspring.

She gives birth. It was in February, on the first. I hear it was in a snowstorm. My grandfather, flies a small plane to Charlottesville to see me, excited about my birth. My father is an architect. She once worked in New York on the runway. Tall, stunning, and beautiful.

I am a teenager.

Her closet is filled with sweaters, shelves and shelves of sweaters on the left. The walk-in closet is white wood paneling, real wood, not the cheap plastic wood.

Bags of dresses on the right in which evening clothes are enshrouded like butterflies, ready to shed their cocoons and take flight.

Sacred dresses.

I never touch them.

On the evenings when she went out, she always started in the bathroom, putting on her eyes and red lipstick. Sometimes I would sit and watch her ready herself for the evening. I could only dream about ever looking like her. I felt so plain and boring. I didn't wear makeup and I hated wearing dresses. Most of the time I was in jeans and at the barn.

After her face was done, she would go into her bedroom and shut the door. I would sit down and wait for her to emerge. She would come out of her room bearing an aroma of rich flowers, slightly sharp around the edges, and looking more than beautiful.

Bedecked in gold and either diamonds or pearls, she looked like a queen. Before leaving for the evening, Dad would drape either her fur stole or fur coat around her tall, slim body and they would leave for an evening of sophisticated entertainment.

It all sounds so wonderful, so *normal*.

It's not.

It never was.

Always a drink in her hand.

Sophisticated entertainment was a party with friends.

Lots of booze and a little bit of food.

In time, she skipped the beautiful dresses.

Parties were free booze.

Dad doesn't go.

Pictures in the hallway tilted helter-skelter.

Asleep on the toilet

mothered

1. to give birth to; instigate and carry through

She instigated, and she carried through;

Three girls

A lifetime of division, friction, anger, hurt, pain

2. to watch over, nourish and protect

No watching over

Controlling

No nourishing

Feeding

No Protecting

Punishing

3. A woman having some of the responsibilities of a mother: a house mother

I went to Villa Maria in seventh grade, a Catholic boarding school.

Sister Anna was our housemother

More like a house witch.

Long bulbous nose with a hair growing out it.

Flat out mean and ugly.

*"Sister Anna is really mad!
She's been mad since yesterday.
She isn't paying any attention to us!
Every time she comes in a room, it becomes silent
'cause everybody is scared they're going to get into trouble!
It snowed and we didn't have school."
-February 1, 1972*

mother(2)

n. a stringy slime composed of yeast cells and bacteria that forms on the surface of fermenting liquids. It is added to wine or cider to start production of vinegar. Also called "mother of vinegar". [Probably from MOTHER, partly from association with afterbirth]

Mother is the bottom gunk in non-filtered vinegar. It makes more vinegar. When I lived in Switzerland, there was a jug, made of grey pottery. The mouth of it was quite wide. The liquid inside was dark and aromatic. Whenever we had leftover wine, it went in there. The mother made it into vinegar. I have always wanted a mother, and to make vinegar. Now I have one, a mother for apple cider vinegar. The organic, non-filtered apple cider vinegar sold at health stores, Trader Joes and Whole Foods, has a mother. But I still need a mother.

Vinegar, bitter, acidic, not drinkable

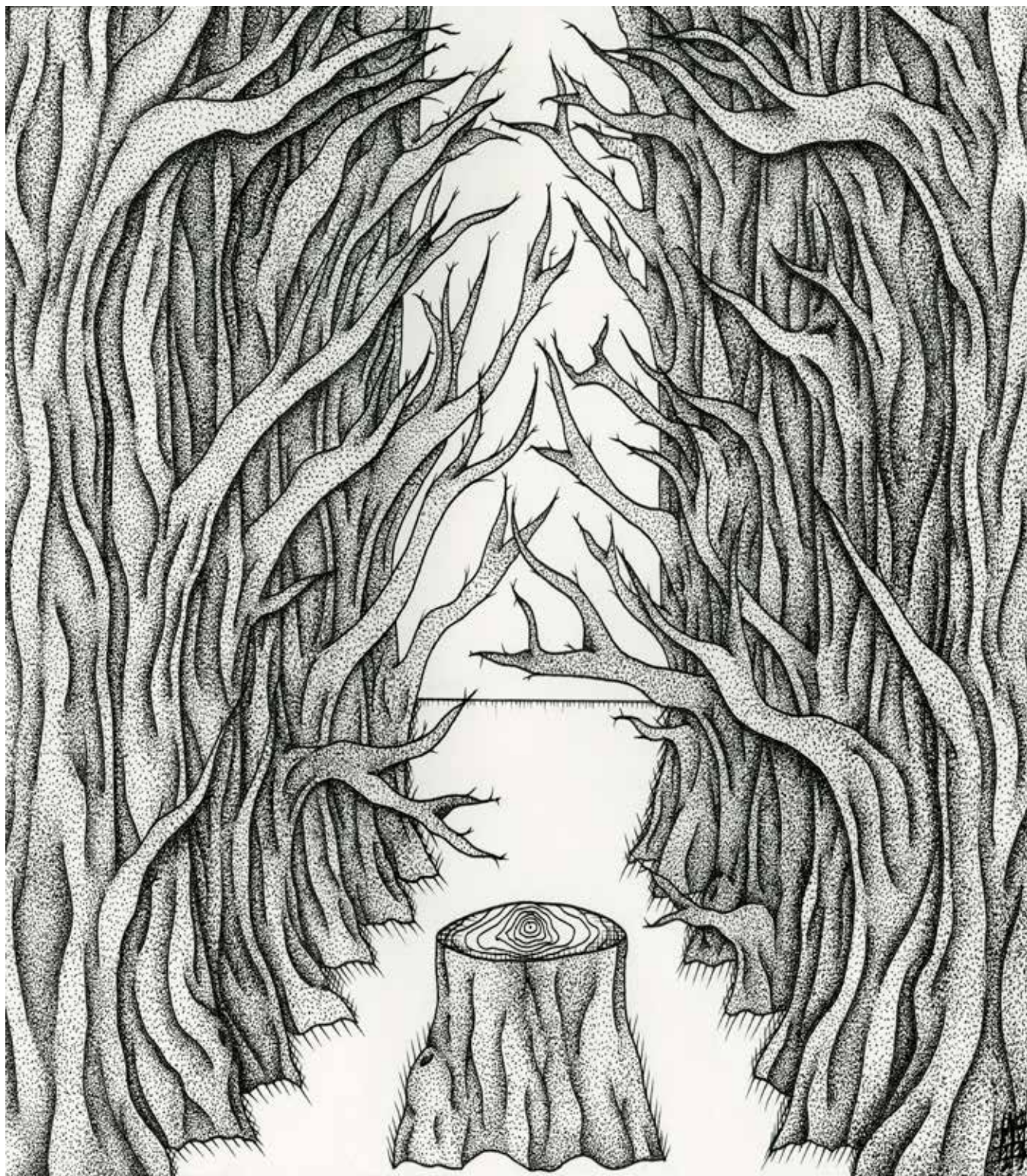
Slimy, bacterial fermenting

Starts the vinegar

Mother

Yes, she was our mother.

We are the vinegar. ▲



Drawing Solla 6

When I blinked awake, my first thought was something along the lines of arson and homicide, as was typical of the average pre-teen when woken before noon. Luckily, due to my receiving less than ten hours of sleep, I was too lethargic to act on these aggressive urges, and instead rolled out of bed with all the grace and charm of a dying antelope.

The thin, tattered carpet barely clung to life beneath my feet, which was enough to remind me that I was in my grandparents' apartment—a fact that roused me from slumber far more effectively than the bracing chill of the early morning. Stumbling to the kitchen—as per protocol in any Italian household—I found a slice of fresh bread and chewed languidly, watching the shadows of the city cast dancing figures on the tiles.

It was 6 a.m., which was an ungodly time for anyone to be awake, but I was excited. The pot that stood, tall and proud, upon the surface of the stove promised what I'd been yearning for since I was old enough to walk and complain at the same time: the family sugo recipe.

I'd been stirring the gravy and ducking the spoon since I could remember, but I'd never known how to make it myself; the wafts of fresh tomato and basil and garlic would billow around my face, and it always felt like home, no matter whose home it was cooking in. To be able to make it wasn't purely a question of age or skill; any fool could throw tomatoes in a pot and stir, but a test of the heart.

(Cooks are born, not made. Of course, one can *learn*, but only a true cook can *make*. That's what separates food and sustenance.)

My grandfather lumbered in, a great big wall of a man with meaty hands and a beard like a forest. He spared me a smile—*my* smile, the one where his eyes crinkled at the corners and his mustache twitched up in a parabola—and waved me closer: “You don't make gravy by sitting on your ass.”

Sleep was still heavy in my stomach, melting through my heels and rooting me to the floor, but I was nothing if not stubborn. He set me to work chopping the garlic (an age-old task of great skill and prestige) and began a long line of instructions that I struggled to memorize. The kitchen quickly began to fill with that fragrant steam of tomatoes and spice, and I hurried to finish before I was soaked.

Eventually, he directed me to fetch the fan from the dining room and I did, struggling under the weight of the ancient device. Its blades were slow dinner plates coated in what I suspected to be the same amount of dust located beneath my bed, and it cut on with a grinding noise that foretold of the Great War of Sin and Vice, as was written.

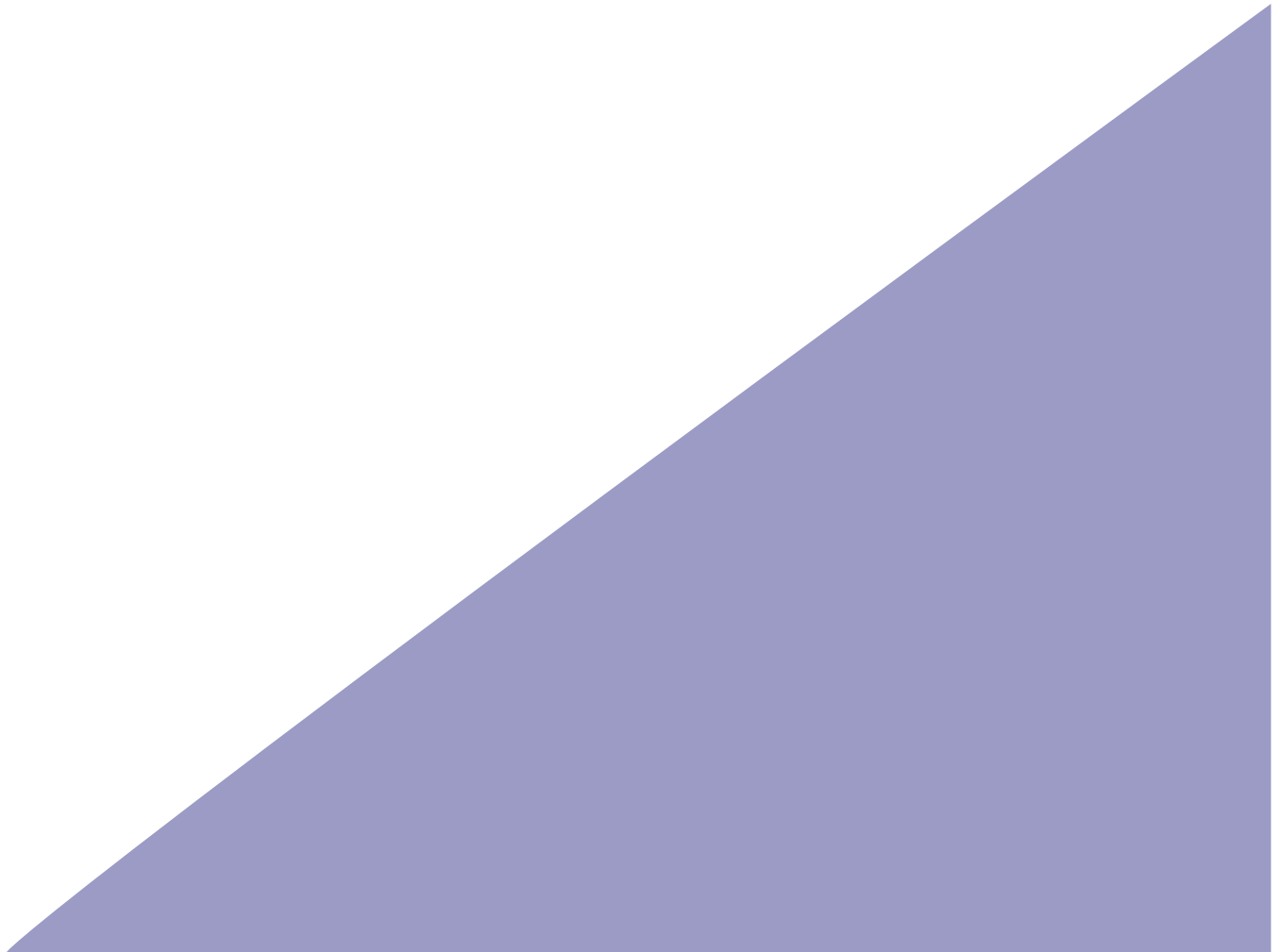
Demonic appliances aside, I was finding my niche. I was small enough to avoid getting underfoot, but nosy enough to manage being mildly annoying, which balanced rather nicely. Once the spices had been sufficiently added, the gravy was set to simmer until we added the meat. “The trick to a good sauce,” Papa said, punctuating his words with a jabbing finger, “Is

to give it time. Nothin' special about my recipe, it ain't hard, but you've gotta let it cook. That's the problem with jar-sauce. People rushing, rushing, rushing. Don't wanna give it time to be good."

So we gave it time and waited by lolling on the maroon couch, eating good bread with olive oil and watching the Food Channel. "Problem with her," Papa would begin, "Is she uses too much. You don't need all that for a good steak, yeah? You got to let the meat speak for itself." And when the time came to add the meat, we did: browning it, letting it sing its own song.

That's the thing about cooking—it's raw and natural. You don't need to dress it up or make it pretty. Good food doesn't just keep people alive; it brings people together, makes them laugh and talk and yell. Good food simmers on a stovetop and lets you stick your finger in when the old people aren't looking and brings you home after a terrible day. Good food, more than anything, comes from good people.

Some people paint. Some write. Some sing and dance and understand calculus. And some—the ones that are very lucky—cook. ▲



A GREYER BEARD THAN LAST YEAR

By Dana Rigg

I'm sitting at the bar in our kitchen watching my dad make beer. He siphons the dark malty mixture out of the metal pot on the counter, and it rushes through a clear hose into a glass bottle the size of a child. He dips a bit of the liquid out into a beaker, and then floats a bubbly glass measuring device in it. He mutters numbers to himself. I don't say anything, and he doesn't say anything.

I like watching my dad do things he's good at and knows a lot about. I get the same feeling when we're in the car together, and he starts explaining Middle Eastern politics for half-hours at a time.

"Look at it clarify already," he says, without glancing at me. "If the whole batch ends up that clear, it will be good."

"I was noticing that," I say. Even though we're speaking, the silence isn't broken. ▲



Gabby S011

As a child, I climbed trees,
pressed lips to branch,
peeled back bark

to expose
pale wood-flesh.

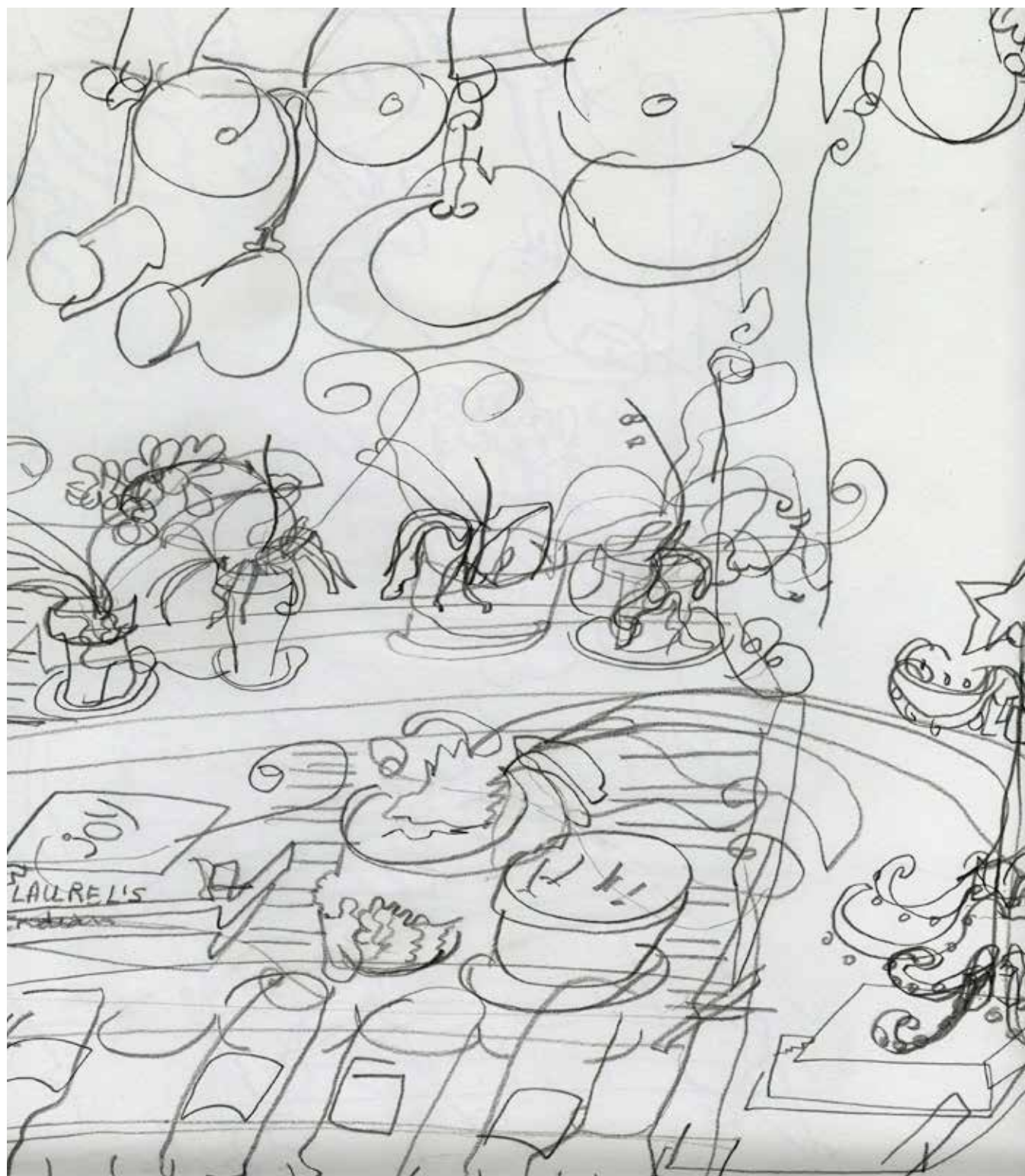
My mother, the realist, would watch me
cradled by chinaberries
dangling one-armed
and she'd tap windows to draw me down;
she did not trust the earth,
not like a child can.

I stripped boughs for swords
to fight off bees
and ants, the monsters
of my primal flesh memory.

I buried my feet in sand
and asked, of course,
for tallness. I wished for branches
and birds' nests and

I whispered to dead leaves,
gave them each names
(these repeating often,
as there were billions)
and gave them sanctuary
under my bed,
on the windows

and when I grew older,
I scattered them all across Florida,
as much a mother to them
as their own. ▲



Sally Humes, Blind Contour 014

LOVE SONG

By April Oliver
QEP Essay Contest, Honorable Mention

I can still see her sitting on the top step of that old house's antique porch, head bowed in shame, posture slumped in hopelessness and despair. The warm air swirled around her as if to embrace her in a badly needed hug and the smell of honeysuckle filled her nostrils as the hot July sun scorched the nape of her neck. It was summer now and school was out of session so the thrilled voices of children playing in a neighboring yard echoed in the air. They seemed to be enjoying their day while hers was falling apart. Sorrow flooded her eyes, spilling over like a gushing waterfall trying to find its way, creating a pool of wetness upon the shirt she used to bury her face in. She was only fifteen. A child trapped in a woman's body, facing adult circumstances. The sting of life had crept upon her and was bound to change her forever.

I can still feel that little girl as the emotions raged within her, too many to decipher at the time. She was afraid but excited, defeated yet somehow persevering. She was heavily burdened and confused, searching for some light in a world of darkness. Who could she talk to? No one seemed to understand. Instead of lifting her up and offering reassurance, people beat her down and bruised

her already broken spirit with the foulness of their words. They engraved her memory with the looks of disgust on their faces when they noticed the bulge beneath her shirt. It was at this time that her self-image was altered. It was during this time that she made a promise to herself that no matter what the future held, she would endure with patience and long-suffering. She would be more than a just a mere survivor, she would be a conqueror, withstanding all the turmoil that pursued her dreams.

Yes. I remember that young lady so vividly, whose innocence had been stolen by the bitterness of past wounds. Within her formed a blessing, breathed on by God, that people would try to make her believe was a curse. She sat there as if in a trance, rehearsing how she got to this point. Late nights, sweet talk, naïve giggles and a young man so charming she couldn't help but be enticed. He was her Mr. Right, or so she thought, fulfilling all of her unspoken desires, giving her all of the attention she'd been longing for. She was in heaven, having no idea that this heavenly realm was really a mirage induced by infatuation. She spent most of her days with him and eventually some nights, too. She was thirteen and he was sixteen, both allowed entirely too much freedom.

They continued on like this for two years strong before things began to change. Arguments became physical and she acquired new habits to deal with the pressure. Soon she began skipping school just to be with him every moment, and even though she knew she was messing up, she just couldn't seem to stop this downward spiral. She was in love and just refused to let it go, dedicating all of her time and energy into making it work.

Eventually, she became pregnant, and while she thought this would bring them closer together, he decided that the stress was too much and disposed of her, leaving her to fend for herself. Once again she was alone. Her family began treating her like a failure and parents withdrew her friends. For now she was considered to be a "bad influence" and, who knows, this pregnancy thing just might be contagious. She was treated like an

infectious disease, isolated by the embarrassment she had brought to her family. She soon became a master of disguise, learning how to hide all of her pain, and living each day became a challenge.

Then one day she met Love. Love came to her in many forms: women of wisdom, divine intervention and the new life that had formed within her. Love became her companion and delivered her from herself. Love picked her up out of that dark place and taught her that she was not a problem but that she was a solution. Love taught her how to laugh again. Love taught her how to trust again. Love taught her that even though she hurt right now, she would be a testimony to the other young women that were enduring similar circumstances and that she was being conditioned for something greater. Love put a song in her heart. I was that young girl and love taught me to overcome. ▲

OH, NELLIE

By Jo Ann Moore

I am driving through the beautiful countryside on my way to Charlottesville, Virginia. It is a cool crisp morning in December and the sun is shining on the barren trees. This is not my first trip to Charlottesville; I have been here twice before with my friend from New York, Adah. Adah Anita Lotti is a medical student at the University of Virginia. She will be graduating next spring and she will be the first woman to become a doctor at UVA. We are old friends, and she is quite a remarkable woman. So remarkable that I have found myself moving down here. Even if nothing develops between us, we will still always be friends. Moving down here is a good decision either way because I have a job and an apartment waiting for me. On one of my previous trips, Adah and I visited a local speakeasy, The Town Club. That's how I met Nellie, the owner of the club and the drug store that is the legitimate business upstairs. Nellie and I became instant friends and she offered me a job as the bartender in The Town Club. Nellie is the type of person that makes you feel warm and welcomed as soon as you meet her. When talking to Nellie it feels like she's giving you a big warm hug. I don't know if it's her smile or the way she looks at you, but it seems to come from deep inside. I'm looking forward to the change; it is time for me to leave the city.

I park my car on Main St. and I see several locals sitting out front of Miller's Drug Store. Some of them are down on their luck, and Nellie makes sure they don't go without food and that everyone has a warm place to stay. It is a comfort

to them, sitting outside her store. I think the feeling is mutual between them and Nellie. She is well liked and respected by everyone in town, but you can tell she is a lonely soul and helping them brings joy to her already big heart.

I get out of my car, walk up, and nod good morning to the gents. They nod back. I wonder how many of them know what's going on in the cellar of the drug store. As I walk into Miller's, I see the stairwell that goes to the two apartments to the left just in front of the main door. That's where I will be living, on the second floor; the third floor apartment is vacant. In the drug store I am met with a variety of fragrances that are overwhelming my senses. I can't distinguish the perfumes from the soaps. On the left is the counter and behind the counter is Nellie. I have never seen her in the daylight before, but she is still a striking woman for her age; she must be in her early fifties. She has not had an easy life; her husband died of influenza just six months after they were married. That was thirty years ago and she has never remarried. She has no children. The only thing her husband left her was this drug store and a lot of debt, but that didn't stop Nellie. She is a fighter who has done everything to survive, and she has done it well. Behind the staircase that goes up to the apartments is a broom closet and when you open the door you see the mop, bucket and brooms that are used to clean the drug store. You would never see it unless you knew, but if you push past the cleaning supplies and knock on the wall in a special way; one slow, hard knock followed by

three fast, tap, tap, taps, the back wall miraculously opens and you walk down the steps into another world. This other world is not available until later in the evening, after the drug store closes and the streets are empty. She opens every day but Sunday because Nellie would never open The Town Club on Sunday; after all, she is a good Christian woman. She goes to services every Sunday at the First United Methodist Church and spends the rest of her Sundays helping at the church.

Nellie sees me come in and comes around the counter to greet me. She throws her arms around me and gives me a great big bear hug. "Boy am I glad to see you, but you must be exhausted

*"Yes ma'am," I respond,
both out of respect and
just a little fear.*

after your long trip. Why don't you take today and go get settled in? Take your time and relax; I don't need you to start work until tomorrow night. It's Friday and the drug store will be busy. Come down at 5:00 and you can help me close up while I show you around." She gives me a wink, and I know that not only am I helping her close up the drug store but I am working downstairs and starting my new job. Let the good times roll.

I unpack quickly; I only have one suitcase and one box. I decide to take a walk around the town and have dinner on the corner near the university. After a much needed good night's sleep, I wake up in the early afternoon. After all, I am a bartender, and I am used to being up until the wee hours of the morning and sleeping most of the day.

At least now I am back on schedule for the new job.

I get dressed in my best black pants and a new pressed shirt. I want to look good, and it doesn't hurt with the ladies or the tips. I go down the narrow stairs and walk into the drug store where Nellie is again behind the counter. The druggist has left for the day so it's just me and her. Millers is a long narrow store with tile on the floor, a long wooden counter on the left and wooden shelves all around the room filled to capacity with pills, bandages, soaps, lotions, liniment, and what seems like everything else you can imagine. Nellie is in her usual attire, a muted gray-blue dress that is modest and unflattering. "Well hello there," she says, "I thought I may have lost you; haven't seen you since you got in yesterday."

I respond, "I was just taking it easy and getting ready for tonight."

"Well I will be done here shortly and then I will show you the ropes. Why don't you give me a hand and sweep up the place. You know where the broom is, don't you?" She gives me a big knowing smile and I get busy.

At 6:00 pm on the dot, Nellie and I walk out and she locks the drugstore door behind us. The apartment door and cleaning closet are on the other side. She takes a quick glance up and down the street and we disappear into the broom closet. Inside she pushes past the brooms and there in the top left corner is a keyhole. You would never see it if you didn't know it was there. She unlocks the door and hands me the key, saying, "from now on this is your job, every day except Sunday, same time. Okay?"

"Yes ma'am," I respond, both out of respect and just a little fear.

"Don't call me ma'am," Nellie snaps back at me followed by her big smile. I respond with a smile but make a mental note not to do that again. We descend down the dark stairs and when we reach the bottom, Nellie reaches up and pulls the cord to the light.

The room is big, long like upstairs, but much wider. The basement must be the length of three buildings on the street. A good place for a good time, as I see it. As I look around the room, I see it is not fancy. It has a wooden floor with ten to twelve tables and eight wooden chairs around each table. There is a big dance floor and a good size stage with an upright piano. On the walls are hung interesting paintings of buildings and scenes from around Charlottesville. I recognize a painting of Lee Park because the park is right around the corner. Along the left wall is the bar which is about half the length of the room and looks similar to the wooden counter in the drugstore upstairs. Behind the bar is a big mirror and a small ice box. I walk around behind the bar and start pulling out everything I will need for the night. "We open at 7:00 pm but it doesn't start getting busy until around 9:00. If you are ok, I will be back later."

"I'm fine," I answer, "I know my way around a bar."

"Good," says Nellie, "Oh, I almost forgot: the guys will be here in about a half hour with the liquor. Their names are Kermit and Sam. They're a little rough around the edges but they are good guys. They are coming from Franklin County; just listen for their knock at the door upstairs. It's the only way in or out. The money is in the cash box

under the counter."

"Don't worry, Nellie; I'll take care of everything."

I continue to work, polishing glasses and putting out what I will need for the night and before long I hear the infamous knock at the door: one slow, hard knock followed by the tap, tap, tap. I run up the stairs and unlock the door. Two big burly guys are standing there wearing overalls, big heavy coats and hats, and they have a dusting of snow on them. The taller one steps forward and introduces himself, "Hey, I'm Kermit Shifflett and this here is Sam Coles. You must be the new bartender from New York City that Nellie was tellin' us 'bout." He sticks out his hand and gives me a great big smile, a genuinely warm and friendly smile even though three of his front teeth are missing.

I shake hands with Kermit and offer my hand to Sam, "Nice to meet you both," I say to them. Sam smiles warmly but doesn't say anything. "Well come on in; it's cold out there and it looks like the snow's coming faster."

Sam finally speaks, "Let us get this stuff in here, there is nobody on the street now, just leave the door unlocked and we'll bring it down." I do as he says and go back to work. Sam and Kermit bring in six wooden crates of quart jars that all contain what appears to be the same clear liquid. Right behind them stands another fellow that introduces himself as the doorman for the evening and a woman who is to be the waitress. She is a pretty young thing, thin with a twinkle in her eye. I bet she can cause some trouble given half a chance. Working behind bars for the last ten years you get to know people and you have a sixth sense about them just by looking at them.

I offer the envelope of money to the men and Kermit quickly reaches for it and puts it in his pocket without counting it. They both have a seat at the bar and order a drink of their own 'shine. "Nellie don't charge us nothin'," says Kermit. I don't doubt him but I will check with Nellie when she comes in.

Looks like this is going to be the easiest bartending job I have ever had. We only have three things to serve, moonshine, moonshine with water or moonshine with Coca-Cola. Not like in the New York bars with all those fancy 'cocktails' and the ten or more different liquors we could get from the mob. At least here I won't have to worry about those gangsters anymore. I think I'm going to like it here.

He thinks all those women in his church that belong to the Temperance Society are just wound too tight and don't have anything better to do with their time.

Around 9:30 the knocking at the door is getting pretty steady and the crowd is getting bigger and louder. Not long after, Nellie comes back and she is all decked out for the evening. She is looking good for her age; shoot, she is looking good even for a younger woman. Dressed in a bright red dress and high heeled shoes, her face and hair are all done up. She walks up to me and I give her a long slow whistle. I ask, "Something special going on tonight?"

Nellie ignores that comment and says with a wink, "You don't know me well enough for that, young man, and what would my fellow say if he heard you whistling at me like that?"

I respond, "I think he would agree with me,"

and we both laugh. Before it starts to get busy the waitress tells me about Nellie's boyfriend who is the pastor of the new Methodist church on the other side of Lee Park. No wonder she spends so much time at the church. Pastor Robert Deloy was born in Delaware and raised the son of a drunk. He had a hard childhood and left home as soon as he could and eventually went to seminary school. The Methodist church sent him to Charlottesville about three years ago to oversee the construction of the new location of the church that opened last month. Nellie has been a member of that church before they began construction and started seeing Pastor Deloy about two years ago. Methodists don't mind drinking; they just don't always do it out in the open. Pastor Deloy is 'wet' by nature and he

thinks this whole prohibition thing is a farce. He thinks all those women in his church that belong to the Temperance Society are just wound too tight and don't have anything better to do with their time. Of course if they ever found out Nellie owns a speakeasy, and he is a patron and her beau, they would probably have him run out of town.

As the evening progresses the crowd is steady with a wide variety of people. There are farmers still wearing their overalls with mud on their shoes, townspeople, professors and students from the university and my dear friend, Adah. By day, Adah is an earnest, conservative student. She has to be or she wouldn't be taken seriously by her professors and the other male students. She has what it takes to make it. She works hard all day

and most nights, but when she gets a Friday night off from school and the hospital she takes the rare opportunity to let loose and unwind. When I knew Adah back in New York, before medical school, she was young and wild. A real roaring twenties flapper. She brings that other side of her down here: her dress, hairstyle, and make-up stand out and adds more variety to the already eclectic clientele.

A bunch of guys have come in and set up instruments on the stage, from what I can see there is a guitar player, banjo, mandolin and fiddle. Pastor is sitting at the piano; I guess he has many talents. They started playing some bluegrass music and I can feel the crowds pulse surge with the music as I continue to pour drinks and collect the money. The dance floor is full on the first tune; I have never seen dancing like this in the city, but everyone is having a good time.

Kermit and Sam have been sitting at the bar the entire evening and Kermit has really been putting down the 'shine. It should be ok; I'm sure Sam will look out for him. Nellie walks up to the bar, "How's it going on your first night?"

I reply, "It's going great Nellie, nice group of people."

Kermit turns to her and says, "Hey Nellie, how about a dance?"

She looks at him cautiously and says, "Ok, but just one, Kermit." They take off for the dance floor just as the group of musicians change. Now there are three different guys on the stage playing a guitar, a sax and drums and now they are playing jazz. Pastor is still hanging in there on the piano. Adah is sitting at the bar and starts talking to Sam. He has had a few drinks but he doesn't appear

drunk. Sam seems like a real southern gentleman from southwest Virginia. Before long Adah and Sam are headed to the dance floor. For a moment it feels like I am back in New York watching Adah dance in her flapper outfit to the jazz music, but then I look around the room and there is no doubt I am in Charlottesville. The jazz gives a buzz to the atmosphere of the joint; the place is jumping as the night goes on. The smoke in the room is getting thicker and the people are getting drunker. This moonshine is some crazy stuff; we don't see it much back in the city.

Nellie dances several songs with Kermit. I don't think she does it because she likes it; she does it because it's good business. Keep your suppliers happy and keep your supply coming and your prices down. I look over at Pastor once or twice and he doesn't look too happy about it. There isn't much he can do because he is here but he has to keep a low profile. He isn't the only one in the place having to keep a low profile; I see the mayor and the president of the university in the crowd. The customers here are from all walks of life, from rich to poor, and they are all here for one reason: to have a good time and a little drink.

It is a little past midnight and I hear shouting on the dance floor. I guess Pastor has had a few too many after all and Kermit is getting a little too free with his hands on Nellie. Next thing I know the Pastor dives across the dance floor and lands his fist right in Kermit's nose. Kermit is not expecting this and is taken back for a minute (him being so drunk doesn't help), but he is a good ole country moonshiner and he can handle his liquor and take a punch. He responds within seconds and gives one right back. Before you know what's happening every man in the bar is throwing punches.

I don't think they care much who they hit; they are just caught up in the moment. Most of the women are huddled up at the end of the bar except for Adah; she is by my side, and Nellie is on top of the bar yelling at the top of her lungs for everyone to stop fighting and sit down. At this point no one can hear her over the roar of the fighting.

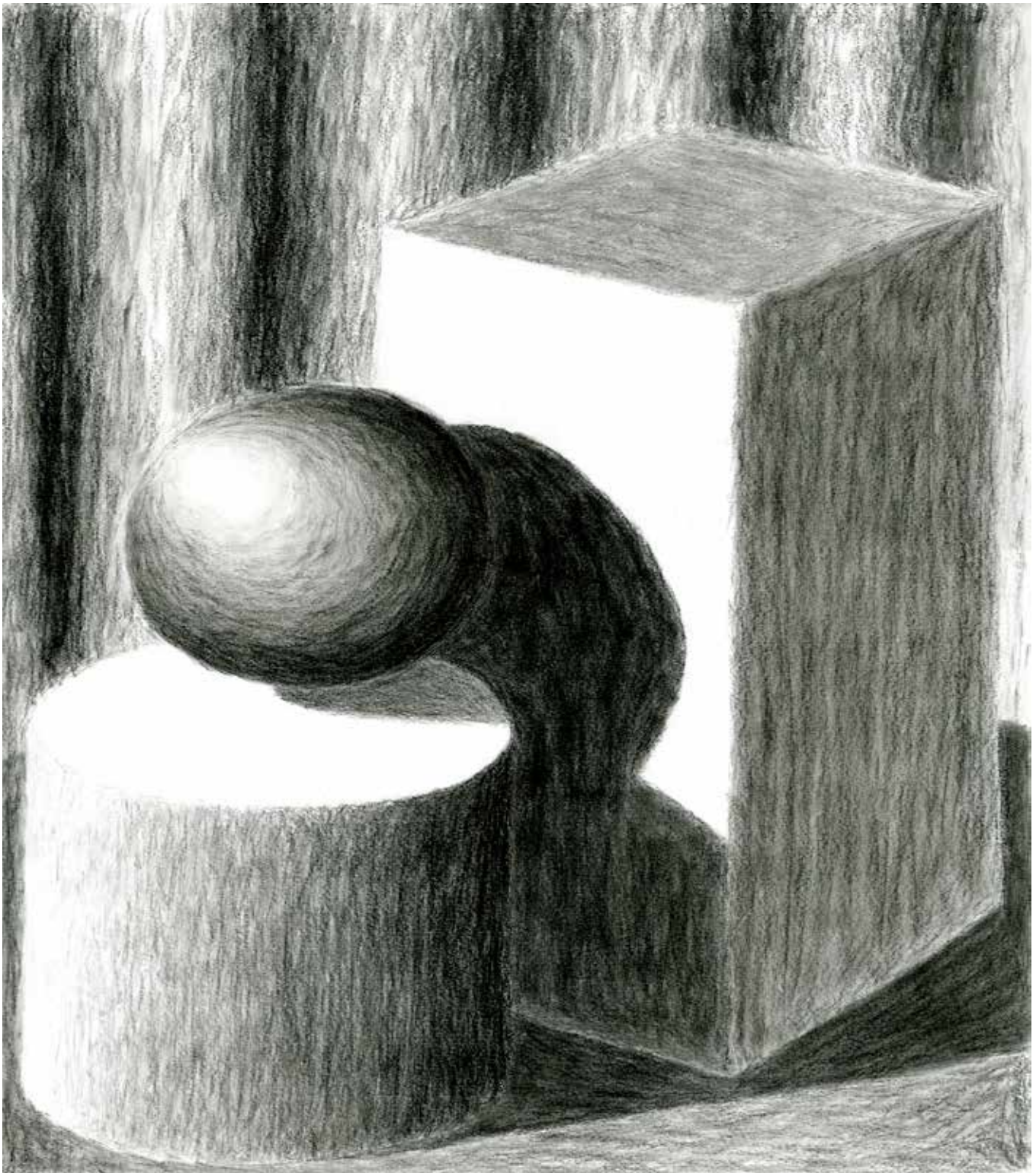
Sam has been sitting at the bar this entire time and finally says, "I guess I better get Kermit out of here before he hurts someone." Sam moseys over to Kermit in the middle of the crowd and grabs Kermit's arm and out of instinct Kermit turns around swinging and lands his fist right in Sam's eye. Before he can recover, Sam gets punched by two other guys. As some of the people start to leave, I see the mayor, the university president, and a couple of local cops take off. No way are they going to get caught up in this.

Sam is raging mad after getting hit three times and he pulls a pistol out from his coat and points it at some guy in front of him. "Get outta my way. We're leavin'," he says, but before he could get out the last word, two guys see the gun and jump on him trying to get it away.

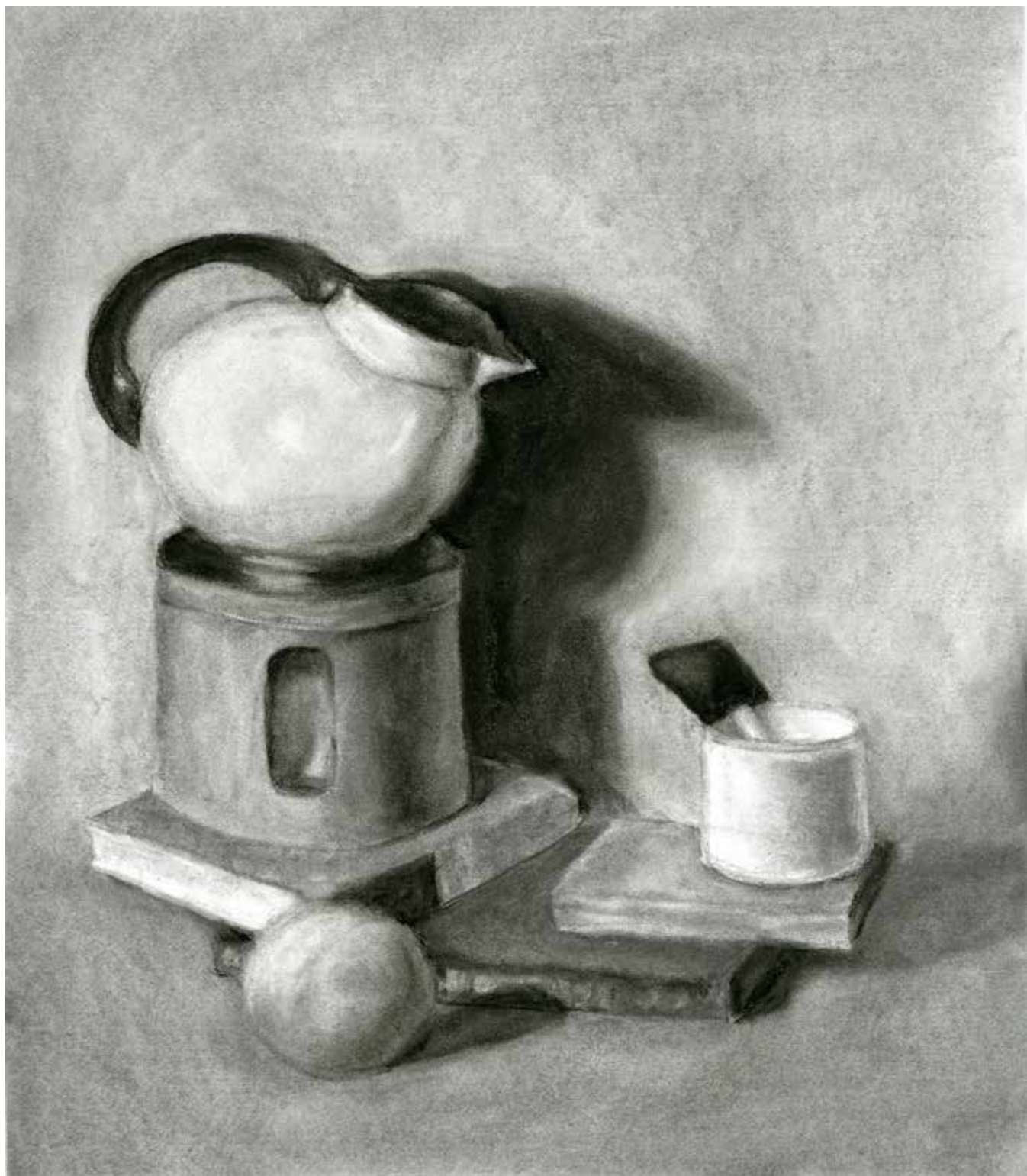
The gun goes off and everything stops. There is total silence. The men start moving away from the dance floor one by one. When the floor is cleared there is one man lying in the middle of the floor, face down in a pool of blood. It is Pastor Deloy. Nellie jumps down from the bar and runs over to him crying and screaming. She falls to the floor sobbing and lies down next to him. Adah comes from around the bar and kneels down on his other side. She feels for a pulse and then looks at me and shakes her head. He is dead. I come around and kneel next to Nellie. I try to get her up

but she would not let go, she grabs onto his coat and would not release her grip. I don't want to call the police; it would be the end of Nellie. The customers that are left are mostly locals and friends of Nellie. They think it would be best to move his body down the street and into the alley. It would be best for him and for Nellie. The church will never have to know where he was shot. Several of the men and I cover him up, then we lift his body and take it outside into the cold night air. One of the guys' checks around outside and there is no one around so we proceeded to carry his body down the alley. We lay him in the dark alley next to a bunch of trash cans. The alley is hidden on both sides by brick buildings. It will be late Saturday morning before anyone finds the body.

As we lay him down one of the men says, "We should take everything out of his pockets so it looks like a robbery." That is a good idea but everyone turns and looks at me. I don't bother to protest; I just want this to be over and done. I kneel down and go through his pants pockets and remove his wallet, keys and some change. I check his coat pockets and there is nothing else. "Don't forget his inside coat pocket," someone says. I reach inside his coat pocket and there is a small box. I pull it out and open it. Inside is a diamond engagement ring. This is the night that Pastor Deloy was going to propose to Nellie. ▲



Taylor Wright, Charcoal Shapes



John Merkle, Charcoal

SIMPLE SOCIETY

By Quincy Wright

A world smothered in ignorance, a land where man weds wealth
Where greed runs rapid and affection is unfelt

Uncaring for others, for our fiancé is finance
Betraying our brothers to dwell in society's trance

Modern marvels and prehistoric prejudice
Racist bigots and biracial president

Redundance in essence though true in our time
Sins by nature though unpunishable crimes

Change a cliché'?... or an unattainable goal?
President position of power or puppetry role?

Questions asked but unanswered, though were'nt meant rhetorically
Expressing unrelentless effort, but is there hope for me?

Or for you, or for she, or the next to read?
Will Katrina be repeated for the next in need?

Will Obama's death to Osama cause that era to be forgotten?

Or will another attack and excel and success to Bin Laden?

We bloat as the best nation but don't mention the China men

As we strut in the shirts and jeans they've put the linen in

Resembling gullable gazelles, because CNN says its true

Blinded we believe, thinking the newsman wouldn't lie to you

Racists compare our president-elect to a tree-dwelling monkey

An ape in this nation represented by an elephant and a donkey

Who decided these two symbols should rule the masses?

Maybe a metaphor for overfed egos and deliberate asses

People judge though why that's the job of our heavenly Father

Expressing thoughts onto paper and you ask why do I bother?

Because I once heard of a man and that man had a dream

That dream was his thoughts and those thoughts had a theme

He wished me equal to you and you equal to another

That race would be irrelevant as I state you my brother

And this should be in this time we live

And in this time we must forgive

For he who bore the whip no longer breathes

And he who felt the whip no longer bleeds

And he who longed for freedom no longer needs

Those before us, they were the seeds

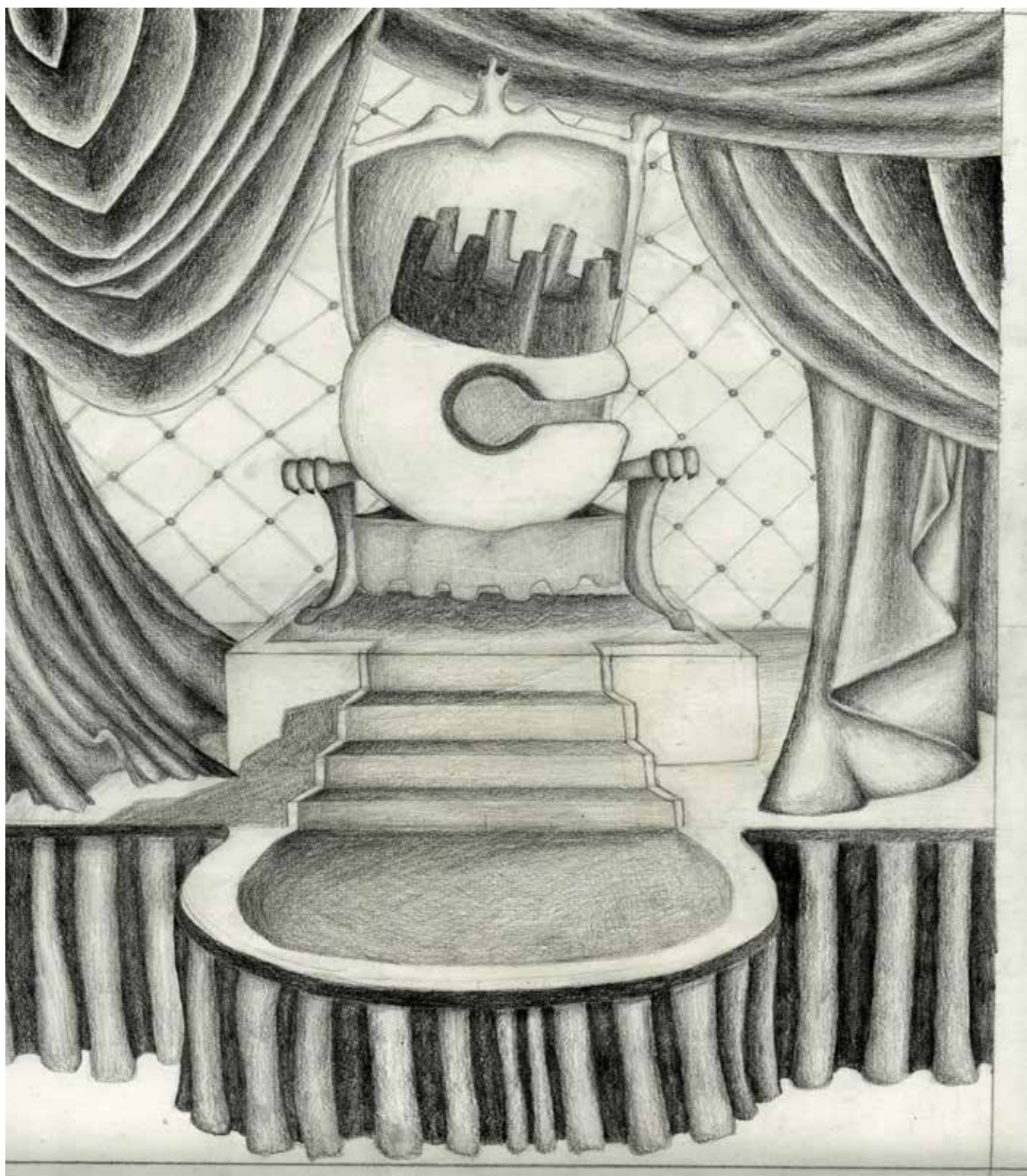
And us here now, we are the trees

Great grand trees that none could smother

Results of the work of our negroe others

Take heed these thoughts of a young black brother

And do as I in hopes of inspiring another. ▲



Emma Vreler, V010

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF NATHAN POLK

By Avie Thacker

Three-Minute Horror Story Contest, 2nd place

Sherriff Breaux stood outside the Polk residence, a small home deep in the heart of the bayou. This was his third visit in a single week, and he still wasn't sure what he was hoping to find. He knocked on the door, knowing that Mrs. Polk and her elderly mother were home. The sweet smell of home cooking wafted through the breeze.

Abigail Polk cracked the door open. "Well, good evening Sherriff!" she exclaimed in her sweet, southern voice. "Would you like to come in for a bit?"

He nodded and removed the well-worn hat that sat upon his graying hair. "Thank you kindly. I'd enjoy that."

Breaux stepped inside. Abigail's mother was seated at their table, and gave him an acknowledging nod. The old woman never said much.

"Would you like some pork gumbo, Sherriff?" Abigail asked brightly, stirring the pot. For a woman whose husband was missing and presumed to be dead, she had sure been upbeat over the past few days. Not a tear ever fell down that lovely cheek. "Pull yourself up a chair."

"Thank you for the offer, Mrs. Polk, but I don't think my wife would appreciate it if I spoiled my dinner." He smiled, trying to keep things friendly. He knew that Abigail was weary of him prying. "We're still trying to find him, ma'am. No one's seen or heard a thing. I was hoping you had."

Abigail's demeanor changed. It was slight, but Breaux had been doing this long enough to recognize it. She didn't smile quite as brightly, and her eyes turned cold. Word about town was that Mr. and Mrs. Polk didn't have the best relationship. Nathan Polk was a vicious, cruel man, especially to his wife. Everyone was surprised that Abigail had put up with him for years. Now he was missing. He'd left the bar last Saturday night, and no one had seen him since.

Abigail claimed he never made it home. Breaux knew better.

"Haven't heard a thing. But you'll be the first to know when I do." Abigail began pulling dishes out of her cupboard. "Is there anything else, Sherriff? I'd like to feed my mama her dinner."

"Of course, ma'am." Breaux glanced around the room while Abigail busied herself in the kitchen. No signs of foul play; everything was as it should be. Breaux had no doubt that Abigail hated Nathan enough to murder him, and if she didn't do it, then she told someone to. And most men in town would have been eager to hurt Nathan.

But there was no body. It was as if Nathan Polk had disappeared in a puff of smoke.

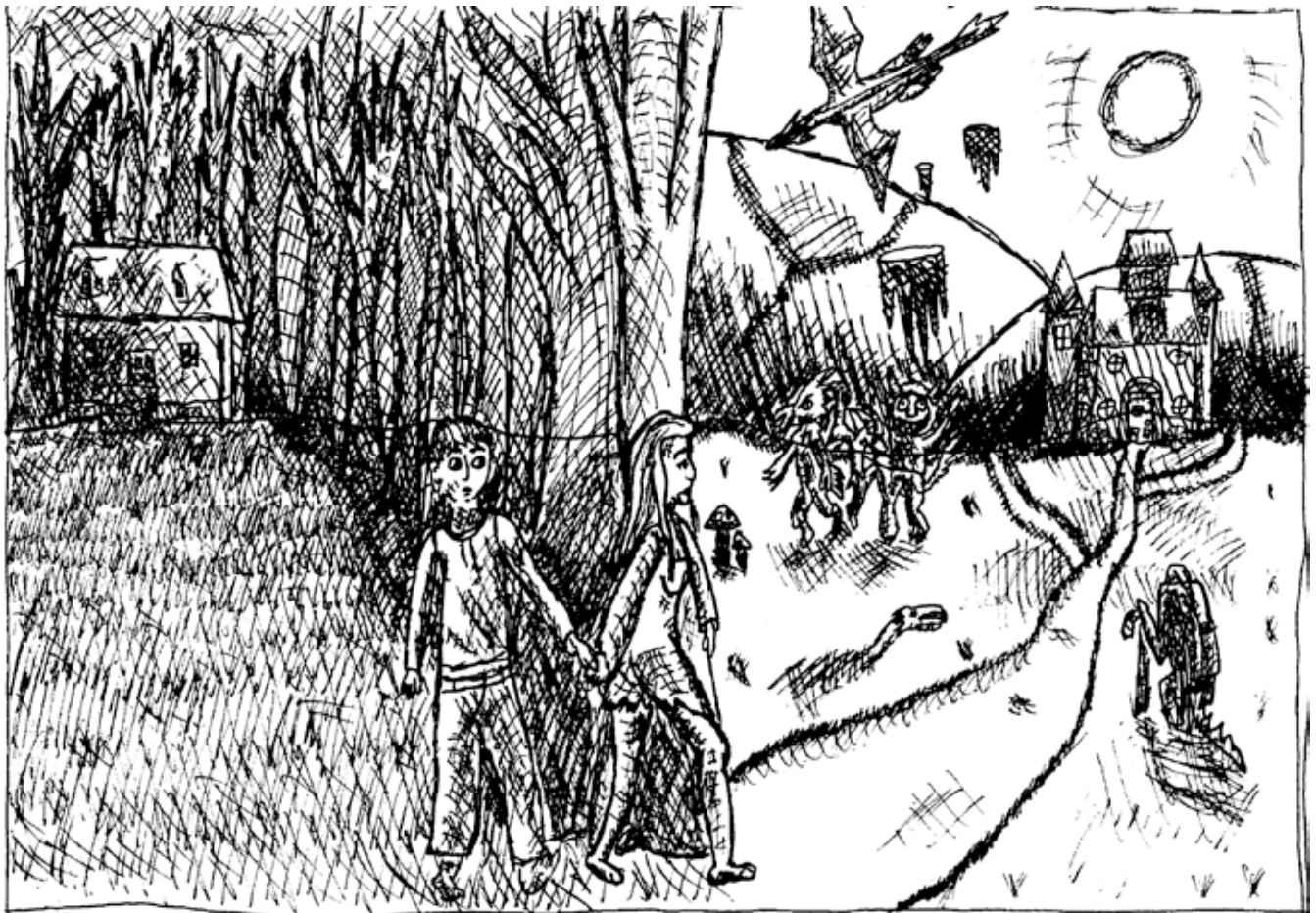
Breaux's gaze met Abigail's mother. The old woman was scowling, and clearly wanted him out. According to rumor, her husband, Abigail's good-for-nothing father, had abandoned them. This was years ago and miles away, but word traveled fast and people in small towns remembered such things. She didn't like or trust anyone as far as Breaux could tell.

"I'll see myself out. Thank you, ladies." Breaux stepped out into the cool night, and the door shut behind him.

Abigail spooned gumbo into a bowl. "Mama, I bet old Breaux would have a heart attack if he knew what he was looking for was right in front of him on the stove the whole time."

Her mother nodded. "Just a few more bowls and that sorry man will be gone for good." She took a bite. "I think he tastes better than your father did."

Abigail laughed, and the women ate their dinner. ▲



Joseph Holsapple, *New Life*

My cellmate, Mark King, was missing an arm. He asked a lot of questions. And despite being away on a three-year bid, he was notorious on the tier for being upbeat, positive, always cracking jokes. On my second night, we lay in the dark, fantasizing about being out, about eating comfort food and choosing our own clothes. The silence spread and filled the cell, and then he whisked it away.

“Hey man, whatchu do on the outside?”

“Me? Oh, I’m a cook, bro.”

The answer was simple, rolled off of my tongue and was accurate. But something about the way he’d asked made me think.

What do I do? Is this the kind of person I’m going to be from now on?

My lawyer stared at me from across the table in the sad downstairs cafeteria. It was full of pumped-in cold AC air, but not nearly as cold as jail was. I knew from all the times before.

He assured me when I came back to him for my third DUI, he’d try and secure me the best felony deal he could. Get me as little jail time as possible.

I hadn’t even served my time for the second yet.

What he said scared me, and that was his goal. He wanted me to wake up. To take stock of all the good things in my life, and realize I was drowning it all in the bottom of a bottle of cheap vodka.

I had a beautiful, whip-smart, funny girlfriend. I had a good job in an industry in which I’d already spent 8 years. I could have my freedom, if I wanted it and worked for it.

And so, from inside that Prince William County cell, laying on a flattened foam mattress that still held the shape of the last inmate, I decided to take control of my life. I stopped making excuses. I took personal responsibility.

I got out on a rainy day. Some people would look at that as a bad sign, but rainy days are my favorite kind. I'd never seen my girlfriend look as beautiful as she did then, until our wedding day. When her father walked her out on grass I'd cut myself, down the aisle past our families and friends, when I told her daughter I'd always be there for her, I'd be her dad if she wanted it, when I put a hundred-year-old ring on her finger.


She had on my favorite pair of shitkicker boots. She had her hair down, fine and auburn and radiating the joy that split her mouth into a beatific smile. I stepped outside and wrapped her up like a boa waiting for an exhale. I knew I could never put her through it again.

I told her I loved her for the first time that night. Laying in a bed that didn't smell like disinfectant. Holding her close and laughing and whispering. We still lay close in our bed, laughing, whispering. I hold our daughter and son in that bed. I am content in that bed.

I chose to get sober, and remain so to this day. I put in the time and the effort. I don't shirk my responsibilities, and I own up to my mistakes. I take each day as a challenge. To be the best version of myself as a grown man as I can. I relish the opportunities afforded me that Mark King couldn't grasp.

He's probably getting out about now. He's stepping out of the jail, onto the wide, slick concrete steps at the front of intake. Maybe his wife is there. Maybe one of the several girls he corresponded with while inside are there. Maybe no one's there, and he's got a bag over his shoulder, headed for a bar or a bus station or a friend's house to surprise them. No one has to help him, of course. King was always proud, and capable, even though he was missing an arm. He was the best basketball player in the cell-block. He ran the myriad trade schemes that took place during meals better than anyone. He was making his choices and doing the best he could, with what he had.

And now, on the outside of a jail cell, no third DUI, no more troubles or hiding from what I'd done, I was making my own choices too.

I have my freedom. I wanted it, and I work for it every day. 



Levi Houk



Eric Valtierra, Birdy

SELF-PORTRAIT

By Ryan Harris

Here is an old truth:

there are hordes of me.
I crowd every doorway.

In dreams,
 I dance in a circle
 of my brothers.

Let's refer to this as:

disassociation
divinity
delineation

 or, to delineate: augury.
I must be naked,
 all of me,
 to be seen,

or else descend into dirt,
 nestle maskedly
 into the nests of rabbits

to prepare for the winter time.

Here is an old truth:


I wish that I could lose my body.
I would love indiscriminately,

having, of course,
nothing to give.
I would soak myself out
and sleep such sleep.

But you must know this: there is no sleep anymore;
 all these things are trampled
 in the day,
 made naked and wanting
 and bloody. Exhale

And inhale. Within,
I am a whirler;
I am a runner;
I am a field of

startlingly
yellow
daffodils –

petals unfurling,
stems undone. 

At nine years old I never thought that anything could drastically change my life or my outlook. I didn't know anything about life or what it meant. I still don't. I knew that I loved summer camp and capture the flag. I knew that multiplication tables were irritating and writing cursive was fun. We were children. Nothing was unfixable, the school days were spent too long and our minds were sponges ready to absorb knowledge, and above all else, summer was our favorite season because it meant sunshine and freedom.

One day that summer my dad drove us to the beach. We stopped on the way and got a cherry milkshake. He let me try some. It was pretty good, but it wasn't my favorite. We would arrive at the beach and I would jump from the car burning my bare feet as I ran across the hot sand. When you're nine years old everything is new and interesting. The pieces of shells lodged in the sand aren't fragments at all, but merely the wreckage of what were once masterfully crafted masterpieces, worthy of topping a sandcastle.

The day went on and the waves grew with the increasing wind. The light faded to a warm glow, and I sat on our blanket watching the waves crash on the rocks. I heard some louder voices to my right and watched as their beach umbrella began to tumble down the shore with surprising force. My mom suggested that I catch the runaway for the owner, so I started running after it.

I positioned myself almost diagonally to catch it as it tumbled by, although this probably was the worst thing I could have done, because the last thing I saw was the umbrella whip around with enough momentum to thrust its wooden pole into my eye and send me flying through the air for a few feet. I landed on my back and all the air left my lungs. I heard screaming and wondered where it was coming from. Then I realized it was coming from me. Immediately I could feel the blood running down my face and the pain was sharp and unrelenting. I heard the shouting voices and the feet kicking up sand as they ran to where I had landed to roll me over. Someone was cursing and I heard sand kicking up as someone else was running to a phone to call for an ambulance. The EMTs arrived after what seemed like an eternity. They dragged me across the beach while I protested the entire way. The man in the ambulance said they were going to open my eye when we reached the hospital. I informed him that under no circumstance would this ever happen.

After another eternity we arrived at the emergency room. I could hear the voices and the doors opening, felt myself being lowered from the ambulance and the stretcher hit the pavement with a jerk. The man from the ambulance told me I had been very brave. I disagreed. He gave me a small green bear.

The radiologist said they were going to put me through the giant doughnut-shaped machine. I had a ruptured globe and I needed a cornea

transplant, a new lens. I could hear the continuous murmuring continued between the distant voices but wasn't able to decipher any words. When the radiologist addressed me again she told me I was going into surgery. I didn't like that too much, Not at all actually. They wheeled me around some more, and when they stopped a younger man said he was going to give me a shot. I felt the sharp sting in my arm, and then everyone was gone.

When I woke up I tried to open my eyes, but it hurt too much, so I gave up. My parents were asking me if I wanted anything and I said no. I was still wearing my bathing suit from the day before under the hospital gown and the elastic was beginning to dig into my leg now. The doctor came in after a little while and asked me to open my eye. I refused the offer. With the help of a few extra people to hold me down and some coaxing I finally opened my right eye, my parents were sitting in a few chairs placed across the room looking at me and there were a few nurses standing around the bed. The room didn't look at all like I'd imagined it. I closed my eye again and they went away. I fell back asleep.

Finally they let me go, and wheeled me out in one of their chairs. I was too disoriented to walk. When I got home my dad made me eat. He would walk me to the kitchen, and then back to my bed. He brought me different things for me to hold and guess what they were. My mom would read to me from my large stack of library books. I listened to books on tape and my dad's Huey Lewis cd.

I returned to school for my fourth grade year with sunglasses and a withdrawn attitude. But still they looked. Eventually they got used to it and stopped staring, and my sunglasses were replaced with an artificial eye and I felt normal again. I didn't have to explain my

sunglasses anymore, but I still had to wear eye protection for physical activity involving flying objects. My mom kept saying how I wasn't normal anymore, that I couldn't live my life like a normal kid. I never really figured out why she said that. Sometimes parents are just wrong.

I still have that green bear the man in the ambulance gave me. When you look at it you can see how small and cheap it is, the artificial but softly crafted material, the black beady eyes, the little bow attached to his neck. To me it means a lot more than a stuffed animal. Conclusively there's really only one thing I could name as a positive consequence of that loss. I would have to say that things happen, whether they be dynamic or not, and they change you're outlook. It was a freak accident of sorts, but it made me realize how lucky I am and value everything so much more. Everything you have is so valuable, and we take things for granted. I think it really did change who I am; I wouldn't have the amount of appreciation I do had it not happened. ▲



Emma Vreler, Inquiry



Chris Williams, Hopper Study

He has spent a lifetime crafting his own hidden world in the shadows of old promises and grinding teeth, tucking secret after dog-eared secret on shelves that grow dust like a garden.

Sometimes he perches against the towering stacks and the silence plays on, as silences are wont to do, until his skull's accompaniment ceases to waltz along. (One two three, ONE two three...)

He is a perfectionist. Both a logician and an artist, he is built of carefully constructed contradictions, and he adores sculpting them in his own hidden paradise, there between those shelves.

His best books are the ones created in the shadows of people; he adores them, always has. They come and go, milling quietly and respectfully through the shelves of his haven, and he thinks them beautiful.

Except.

Except the ones that aren't.

—

He doesn't much care for the mess.

(There's enough of it on the news, every morning for a week after the hunt. The mothers like to cry, pupils vibrating like the moon on the waves. The fathers do it too, and sometimes they even swear, spittle framing their foul words and broken pleas.

He'd find it amusing if it weren't quite so distasteful.)

After all, he is an artist. This is why he prepares his ingredients with such finesse, and this is why he executes his brush strokes with such delicate precision; what few necessary drops that have scattered are scrubbed away so that his canvas may be perfect.

It's a simple form of poetry, really, to see something so raw and spread before him, half-bent and bursting at the weathered seams.

(Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. He sees what most lack the courage to look for.)

Such romance can only be treated with great care, and he pairs his conquests with the finest wine- a butterfly binding in the colder months, he thinks, with a lovely red. It's rich, dark, clouded like her eyes had been in his parlor just moments before she understood where her path was leading. He adores that moment, just as their hearts

are undone; their eyes black as pitch, skin taut and tense and poised to flee. It is only then that they discover their true form.

And he's careful not to lose the wee piglets, you know. He's a clever butcher in the end, and he curves the tracks that lead to him so that he may truly enjoy the moment they see the blood.

—

This is how he binds his books:

He pricks his fingers - for clarity, you see - and then he pricks her throat. Her life bleeds out like a hurricane, in leaps and bounds and then in a peaceful stream.

(She'd been very rude to be so loud in his sanctuary, but a librarian must always respect his patrons. That last, lingering plea remains on her lips and he thinks it so poignant, so raw, that he must preserve it forever.)

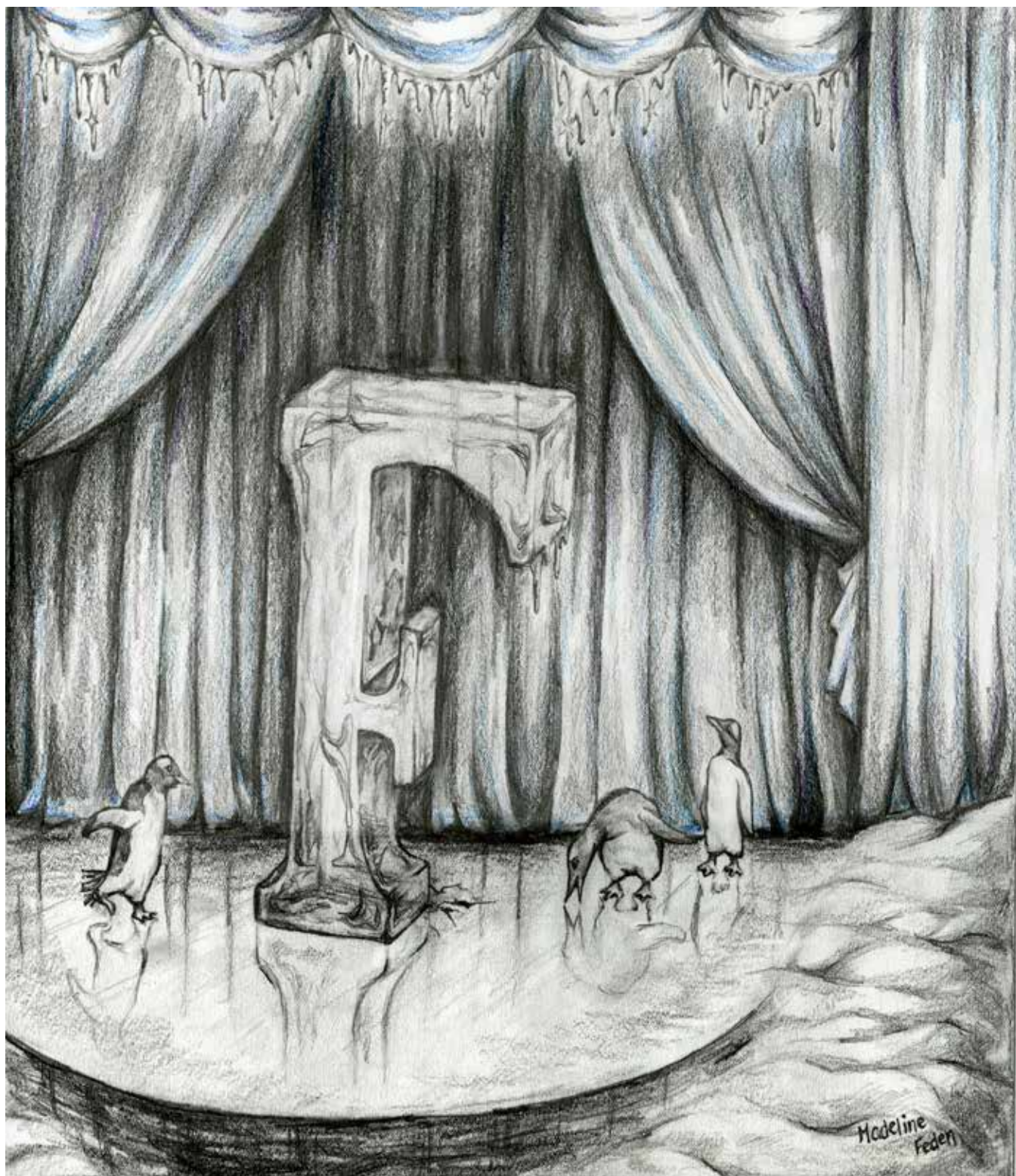
There is twenty feet of maze that tells its own story, but it's trapped in her gut and he has the pleasure of releasing it, remaking and refolding it into treble clefs that will sing of wars and symphonies. The blood will fade, but she'll stay with him.

His fingers play the binding like a violin, and so do hundreds that come after him, until one day someone thinks to ask why the book is falling apart, and his true beauty will be recognized.

(Because everything has its time, and he is no exception, and neither is that elegant butterfly stitch taken from Ms. Eliza Plumblings.) ▲



Sally Duinn, Inquiry



Maddie Faden, Zapped

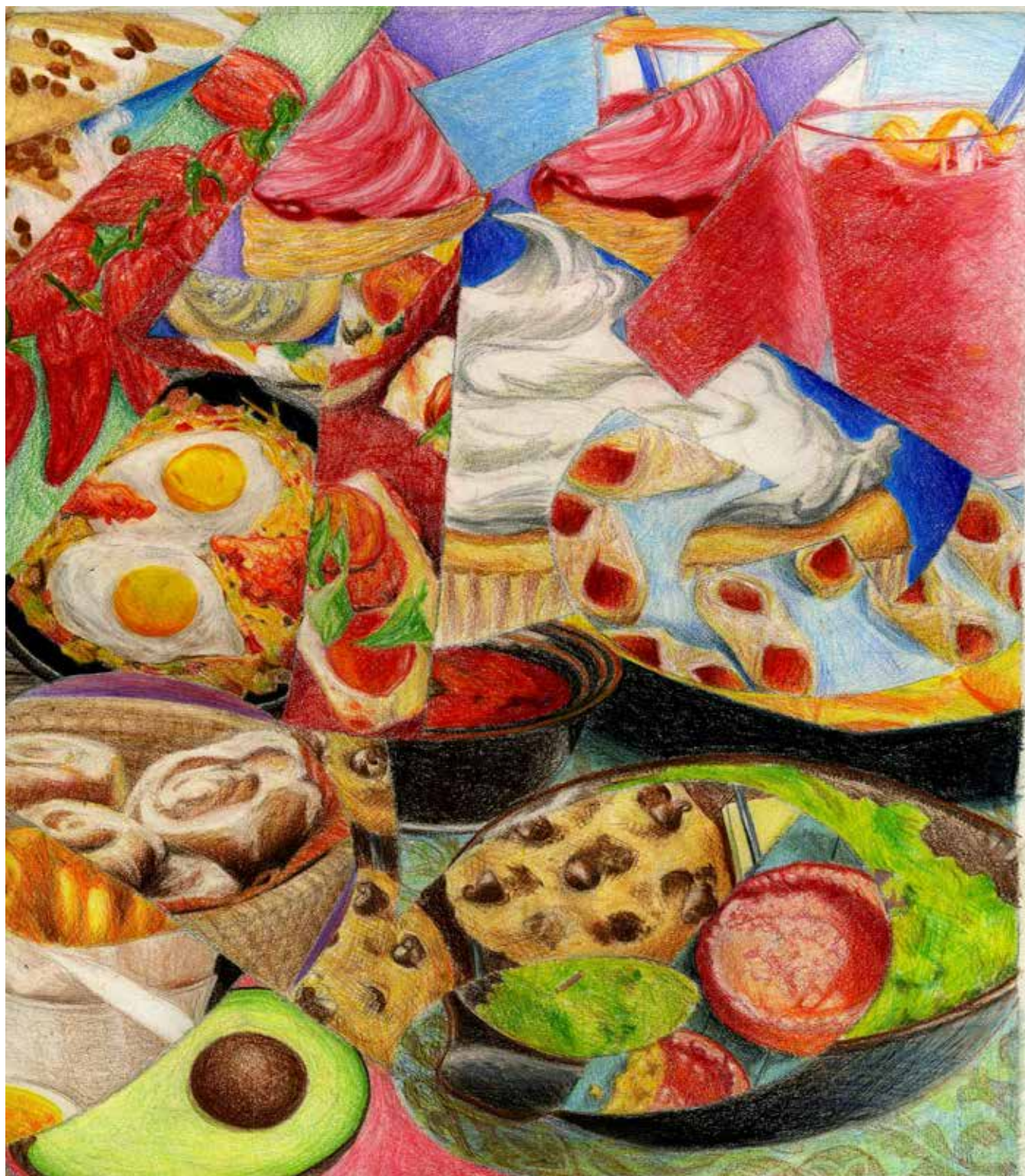
EKPHRASIS

Adele Bloch-Bauer's Portrait - Gustav Klimt

Hannah Ho

Haloed in gold –
breathing, diffusing –
gown stitched with countless
kohl-rimmed eyes
gliding across milky skin
exposing blue-tinged collarbones
a necklace winks with gems.

sunset lips, barely parted, murmur
luscious secrets
and taste of shimmering. ▲



Gabriella Streit, Inquiry

China and the United States are not the best of friends. Their relationship status reads: “mutual dislike and spying”; not exactly the stuff of great friendships. They are two shipwrecked passengers – each clinging to the other in a turbulent and shark-infested sea while at the same time scheming to drown the other.

I did not quite get that as a kid in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. I was in second grade, in Mr. Netty’s classroom. A kindly, if elitist, South African man, he engaged us in a number of intriguing classroom activities. One such activity involved learning greetings in a new language every week. We started with English, until, on a blustery October day, we got to Chinese.

I mouthed the words with the enthusiasm of a seven-year-old, tasting them. When Mr. Netty was satisfied, we moved on. Fall ran on with blustering winds and crinkling leaves until winter snows turned into grimy slush on the streets. Finally, the snow began to melt. I forgot about Chinese and Ni Hao completely. They fled in the wake of the prospect of T-shirts, light jackets, and shoes other than my clunky boots.

While my parents and I were out walking down a nondescript gatve lined with restaurants and shops, surrounded by the aromas of gourmet Baltic food and a central Asian spice shop, I noticed that my parents had stopped mid-amble to talk to two other adults.

They were Asian, definitely older than my parents. They wore sleek, shiny leather coats that

carried even the smell of expense, and expressions that painted a painfully polite landscape – brows crinkled ever so slightly, mouths stretched into tight, fixed smiles.

“How nice to see you here! We were just out for a walk. Our son is out with some friends, but this our daughter – Katya.”

My mother introduced me to the couple – the Wenlins – and pressed me with a look that I was well acquainted with after a year of crash-course charm school. Her lips formed a thin pretense of a smile, with her brow furrowed and her teeth clenched. Her expression was enough to give anyone lockjaw. It was her ‘please-don’t-do-anything-embarrassing-in-front-of-the-important-people’ look.

Suddenly recalling Mr. Netty’s odd and preclusive side-lessons, I blurted out, “Ni Hao!”

It was rushed and bereft of anything resembling a proper accent. Looking back now, I’m certain that I butchered it as much as you can butcher two simple syllables.

I didn’t have time to think about that though, because just as suddenly as I had greeted them, the Wenlins launched into a string of Chinese that was completely incomprehensible to me. They eventually gleaned from my dumbfounded face that “hello” was the extent of my Chinese. It didn’t faze them at all though. They lingered and talked to my parents for far longer than courtesy demanded. They bent over and leaned-in close enough for me to suffocate on their colognes, and

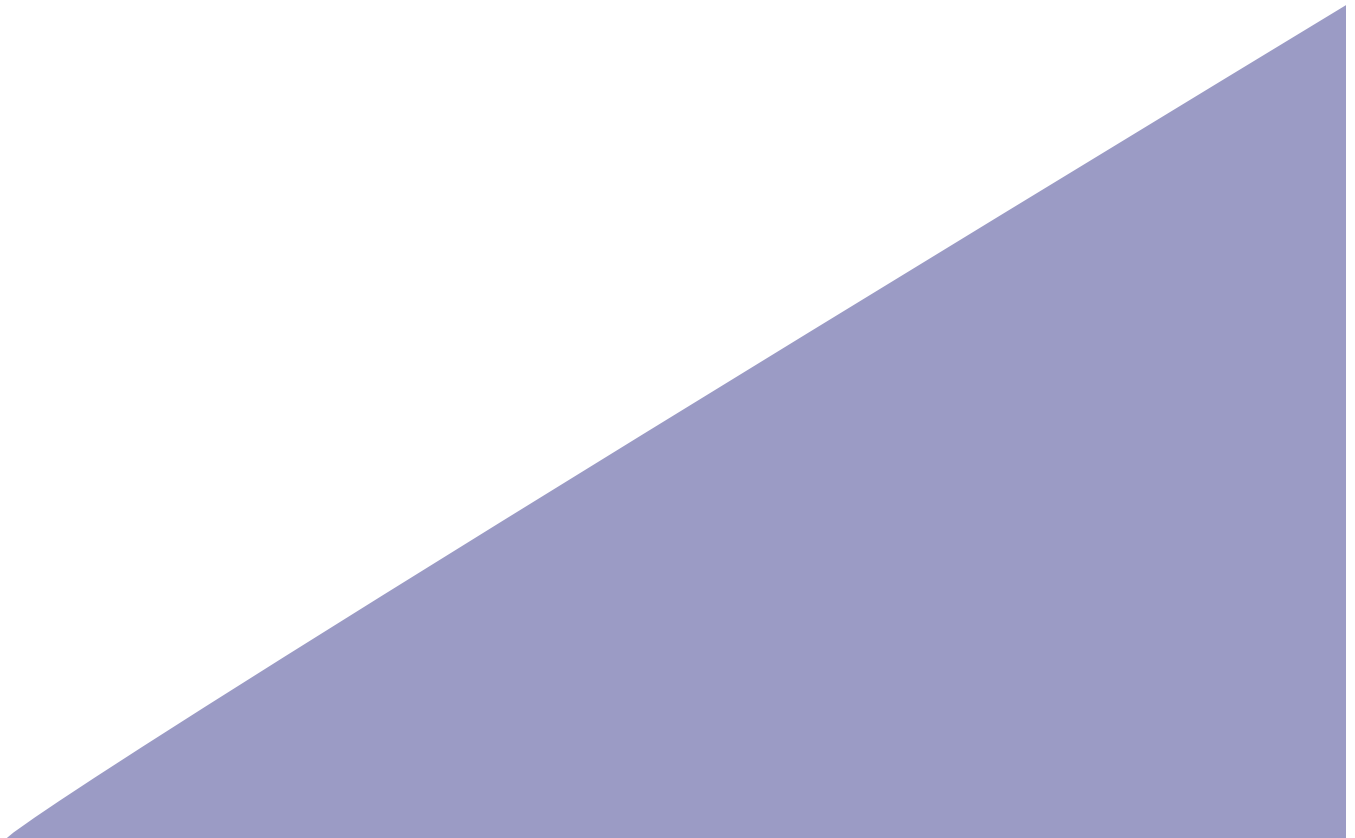
finally, after what felt like forever under my parents' flabbergasted scrutiny, they bid us a farewell that was much friendlier than their welcome.

As soon as they were out of sight and earshot, I was faced with a frantic interrogation. I explained as simply as I could that all I said was hello, and that I had absolutely no idea what was said after that.

My parents were impressed, but more relieved that I had not managed to insult one of my father's counterparts in the span of two syllables. None of us thought about the incident again until my parents started getting more invitations to Chinese Embassy functions than the prerequisite two-a-month. In turn, they extended more invitations to the Wenlins. But the impact of what I had done didn't really hit us until the Wenlins arrived for an

event hosted at our house and presented my parents with the customary gift of domestic liquor, and handed the artistic, expensive gift of a genuine Beijing Opera mask to me instead of my mother.

The gifts piled up over the course of our tour. Among the complete set of Beijing Opera paraphernalia and accessories were invitations to formal dinners where children were not usually welcome. At that age, all I understood was that I was getting cool, pretty stuff, and my parents were spending more time with people that made other Americans at the embassy uncomfortable. Of course, when I look through my trunk full of Beijing Opera masks, calendars, plates, and antique tea boxes, I could never have guessed what an impression two broken syllables of Chinese would have. ▲



I am not an animal lover, but in the last eight years, by virtue of my marriage, I have mourned the loss of six animals (five dogs and one cat). I fell for an animal lover and I have paid the price in sorrow.

When I married on a bright summer day in 2005, I received two dogs and a cat in the bargain, each of which my wife had had for more than a decade. Despite my inclinations, I embraced these animals as my own, even if only by my own standards. Within two months, though, the eldest dog, Oliver, became sick and within the space of a week died. The vet could not give us a satisfactory explanation, but suspected a nasty, tropical virus.

Nearly a year later, a different vet diagnosed Tyler, the younger of the two dogs, with gastric cancer. After two long weeks of chemotherapy, when we had pushed both him and ourselves to our limits, it became more painful to watch him hold on to life than to let him go.

Before we learned of Tyler's cancer we picked up a second dog out of a laundry basket in the parking lot of a Food Lion. The woman from the newspaper ad came with her kids and four rambunctious puppies for us to choose from. We picked a small black and white puppy, the daughter's favorite, and dubbed him Simon. He taught me about caring for something that cannot care for itself, particularly when it needs to pee at 3am or when it needs guidance on proper choices for chew toys. He provided great training for fatherhood, which came eight months later. Four years later, when Simon died suddenly and mysteriously

on the way to the vet, it hit me the hardest of any of our animal losses.

The cat I received with my wedding vows, Kermit, seemed to degrade into a dirty mess, tracking wet kitty litter throughout the house, until we took him to the vet and learned he had diabetes. For nearly two years I, the non-animal lover, gave him daily insulin injections, before a sickness and honest questions about his quality of life forced us to let yet another pet go.

When we moved to the Charlottesville area in 2010 we picked up a dog from the SPCA to be Simon's friend. Her name was Rosie and she was a devil of a dog, pooping in the house and eating everything in sight, such as lengths of carpet fiber, and, well, let's call it recycling things she left in the house.

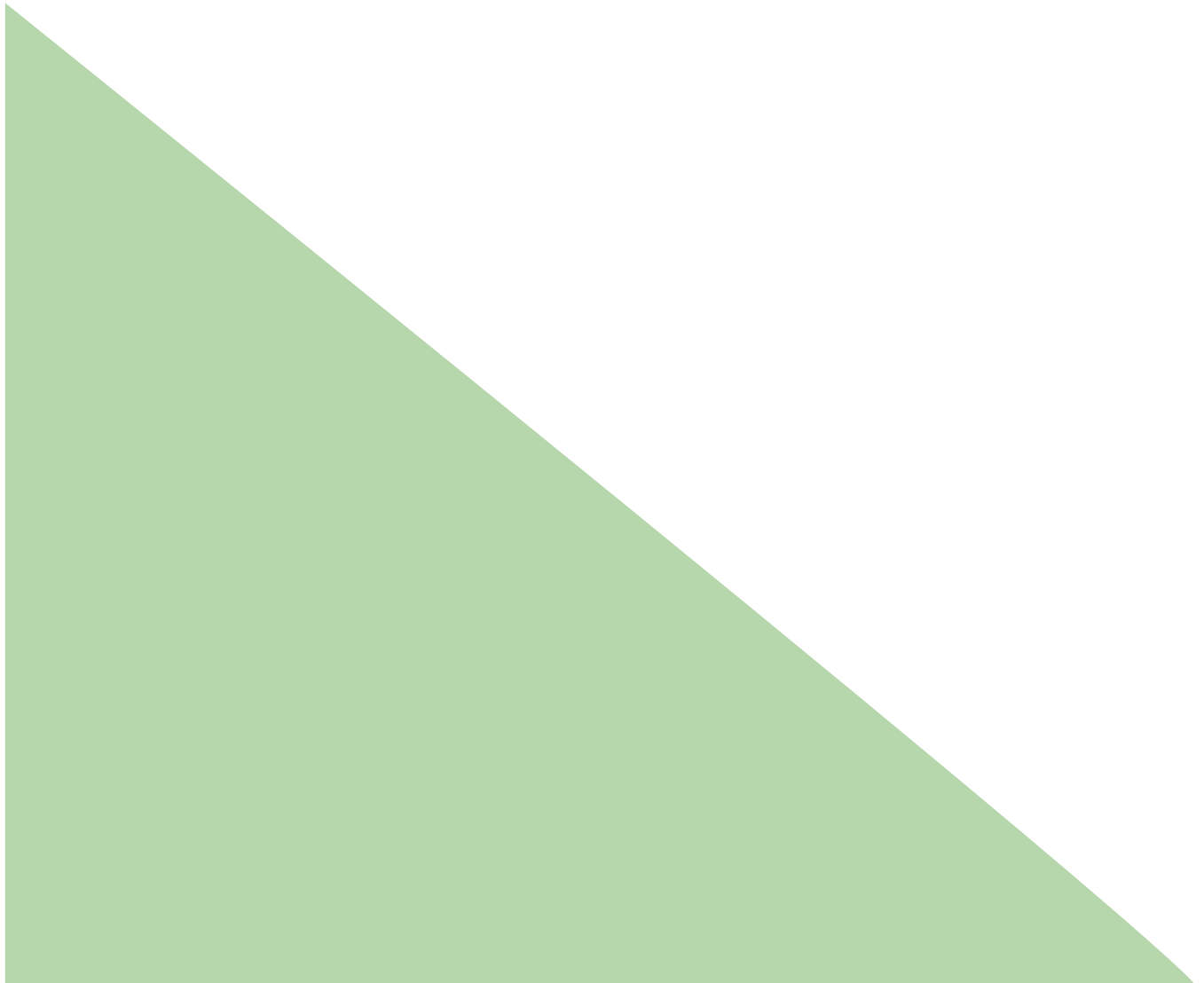
But we stuck with her and trained her and loved her for three years. She did not shed all her problems, but when she got lymphoma, we made her as comfortable as possible and helped her live out her days with as much joy as we could give. As the lymphoma grew, putting pressure on her respiratory system and increasing her pain we took her to the vet one last time. The vet found a chocolate donut for Rosie to enjoy and we sent her off to heaven with a sugar high.

A month after we adopted Rosie, my wife talked me into fostering another dog for a "month" while the SPCA had their floors repaired. Gloria, a hound mutt, used to sneak up behind me and howl at the top of her lungs. The month came and went without an adoption or a return to the SPCA.

After a year of putting up the foster facade, we adopted her. We had her for another year before she got necrotizing pancreatitis, which sounds terrible and deadly, and it is, but after a lengthy vet stay she beat it. During her recovery, however, she developed blood clots. One went to her brain and that was the end.

These six animals have caused more hardship, financial turmoil, and heartbreak than I can say. I have been asked to make decisions that weighed

life and death, that asked whether an animal's care was worth more money than we had, or if a life of pain and suffering was better than no life at all. I began by saying I am not an animal lover, but, above all else, I love my wife. And whatever pain and tempest may come from that choice, be it physical, emotional or financial, I will meet it gladly and still more, I will welcome it, for that is what it means to love. ▲



Billy knew he was not alone in the brush. All around him, black branches and poison-green leaves from countless bushes reached for him like so many hands. A cool, weak wind whispered through the trees and shrubs as scattered rustling could be heard about. He looked back up the embankment that he had slid down, through the hole in the chain-link fence from which he had crawled. The sounds of his fellow classmates playing on the blacktop drifted down to where he sat in the expansive ditch next to it.

How he hated them. “Aren’t you a little old for a teddy bear?”

“Billy’s a baby!” All they did was taunt, judge and condemn. Never once did they try to understand.

“What are you going to do without your bear, baby?” The biggest one had sneered. Billy could still see his obnoxious yellow shirt outlined against the white box van parked beside the playground as he threw Billy’s bear.

Now his bear was over the fence, in the brush that no one ever went into. Or at least that no one ever returned from, according to his peers.

“Don’t let the monsters get you!”

“Watch out, Billy! There are dragons down there!” They jeered as he crawled through the fence and slid down the bank. Now he regretted his decision.

Standing up and dusting himself off with trembling hands, he scanned the brush. No luck. The greenery was a wall, obscuring the grey sky itself. Steeling his 5-year-old resolve, he walked forward and was promptly swallowed by the brush.

Five steps and he was lost. All around him was green and black; pushing against him, grabbing at his clothes, and clawing at his face. Every step he took was followed by rustling and more rustling. He tried to run, to escape the chaos that surrounded him, but the brush inhibited his every move.

Plowing through the brush like an underpowered tractor, he burst into a small semblance of a clearing. His visibility limited, he failed to notice the clearing was occupied before he entered.


A black mass exploded before Billy, equipped with a hideous beak and long, sharp talons. The beast beat Billy and the brush with its wings, making a guttural hissing noise. Billy screamed and fell back,

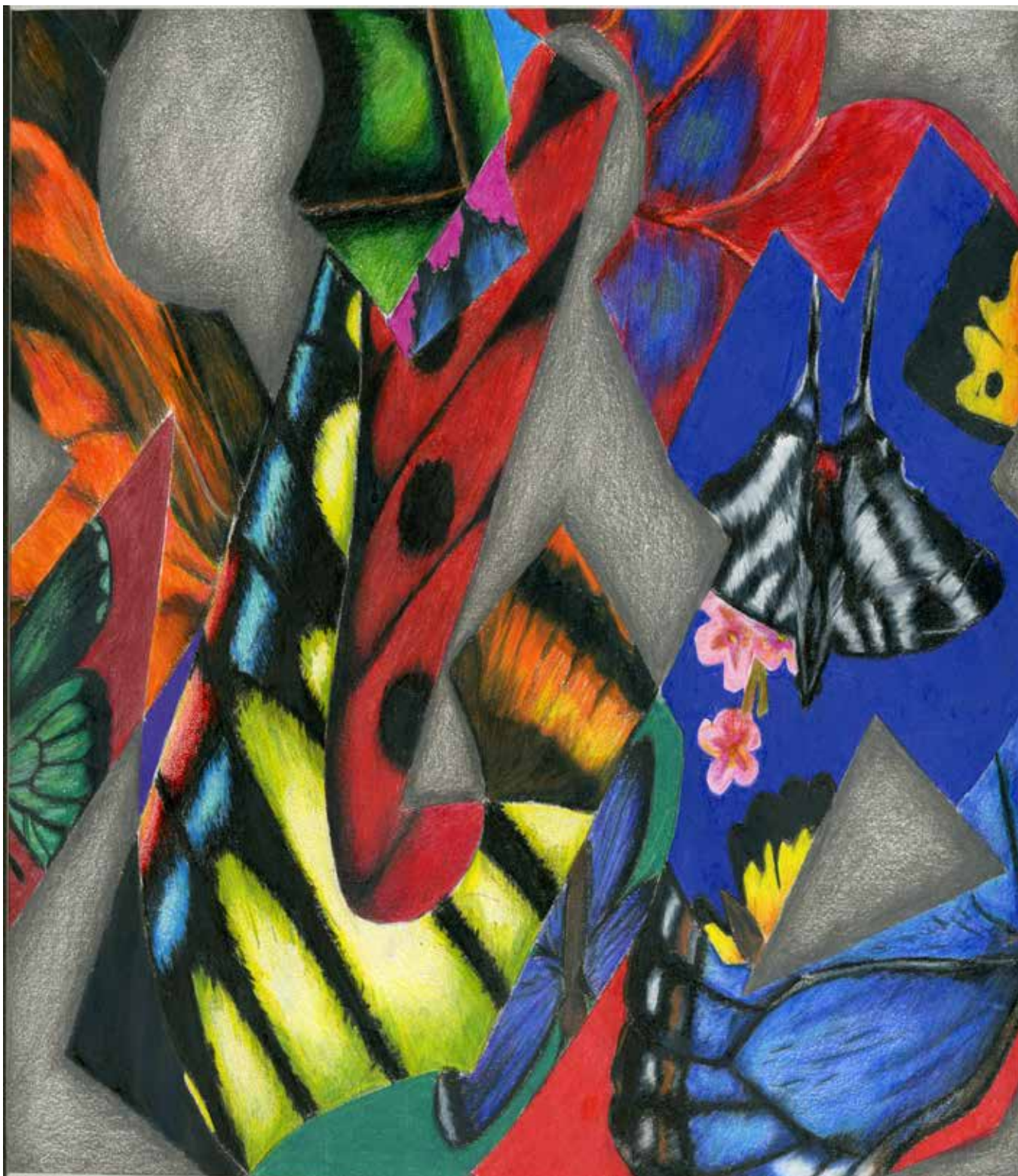
his heart a pounding jackhammer. But the brush would not yield, holding him in the fury of the beast.

As quickly as he had burst upon it, it was gone. The blackness had sprung wings and flown off. Only as it flapped away did he realize it had been a nesting buzzard. As his eyes drifted back down to earth, they caught a soft brown shape in the brush. Collecting himself, he rushed for it, clamoring at the bush it was caught in. Sure enough, it was his bear. Overjoyed, he hugged it close to him and forged his way back to the playground. No doubt the teachers were concerned about him.

As his hands touched the embankment to climb back up, he froze. An angry voice drifted down the embankment followed by a scream. A great roar hammered his ears and the world brightened for a moment. Fire licked the fence above him and he was knocked over. Slowly, the earth darkened as smoke drifted into the sky. Billy crawled shakily up the embankment. His classmates were gone, along with half of the school. Only a few singed outlines were left; where the van had been, only a large crater remained.

"And they told me there were monsters down there," Billy whispered to the teddy bear he was clutching tightly. ▲





Ebony Bibbins



Maddie Feden, Inquiry

I read my own palms last week

(It was a joke)

(of course it was)

I learned that I have Fire Hands

That I love too deeply, and too long

I learned that tragedy will come for me soon.

I am more superstitious than I like to admit

But I am more stubborn than you would believe

and if you think I will be quenched before my time

you do not understand what I am made of.

I am fire

and my fate is not fixed

by the doom of skin and stars.

I will burn, burn, burn

to my last ember

in the fullness of time I will rise

as ash on the wind

Having used all I had

nothing more remaining. ▲



Kate Snell Z, was Zapped Inquiry

Granny who bought that SS Monte Carlo

Oh how she purred

Relapse of Cataracts

Oh how she swerved

Into a car, tree, mail box

Granny what's wrong?

But my little old Granny was gone..

Alzheimer's lurked and Granny's forgotten me...

Me? Spoiled little rotten me?

Granny its me... The before school kisses...

The double shifts to fulfill my birthday wishes

Bikes, go carts, every gift perfect...

Nintendos before I was old enough to work it...

Come on Granny you have to remember us running through your house

Dancing on your couch, cutting buttons from your blouse

Oh do you remember the switch? That was your little side kick...

Could whip the flame off a candle with a well-timed flick...

We called you Granniana Jones just to make you red in the face...

Oh how I miss seeing that red in your face

We went to see you yesterday, it was your birthday

To tell the truth, it was my worst day

Completely blind now, you look past me

Fondly reminiscing as you look and ask me...

The same questions you've asked only minutes before...

I answer all the same, each time arranging my words with a slightly different décor

Red ash tray still beside you, faded and worn...

Rocking chair in the corner, pale and torn...

They awaken the memories, and Granz it works for me

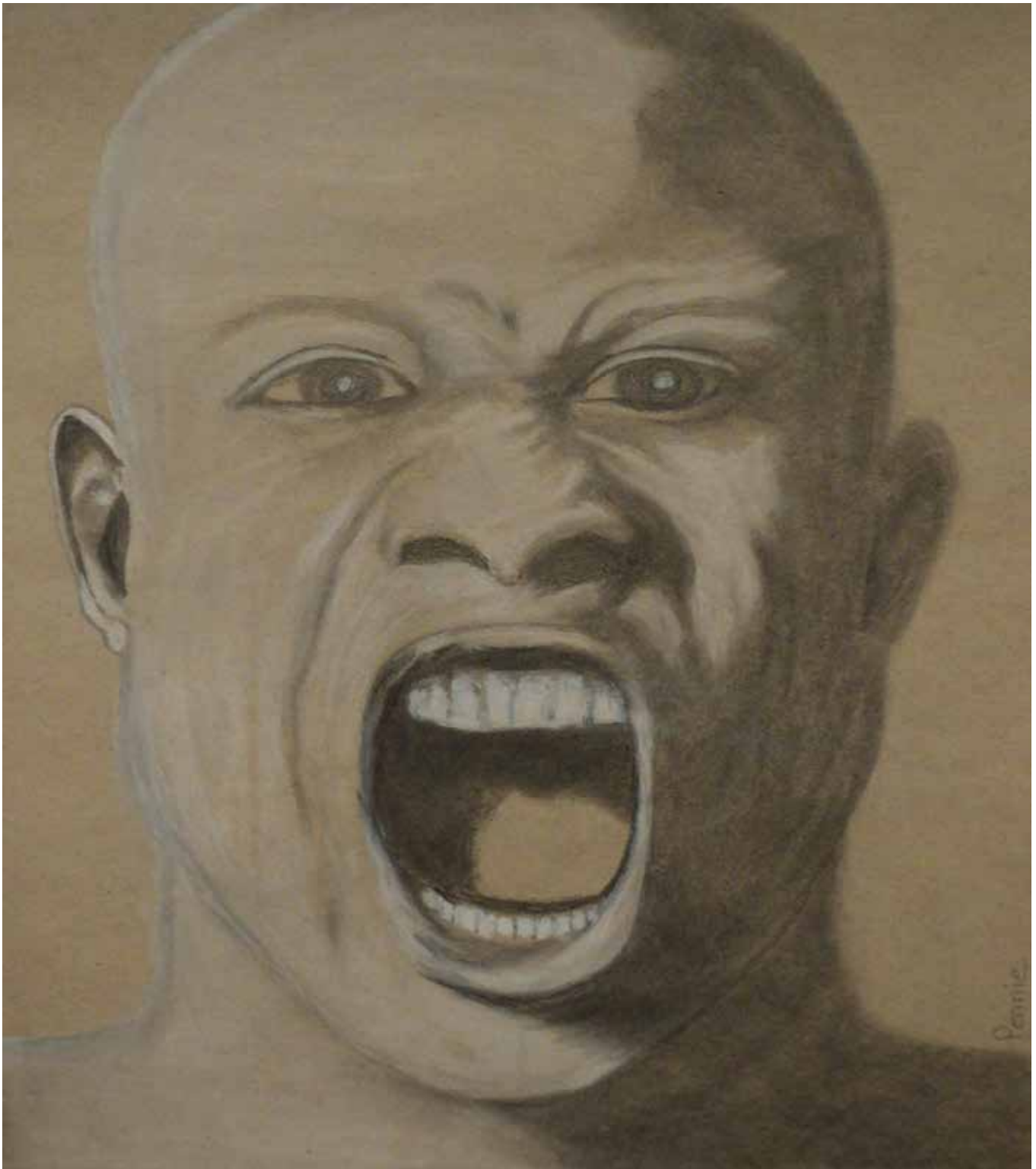
They allow me to carry on even though it hurts to see

The grey today of Mary Edda Mae

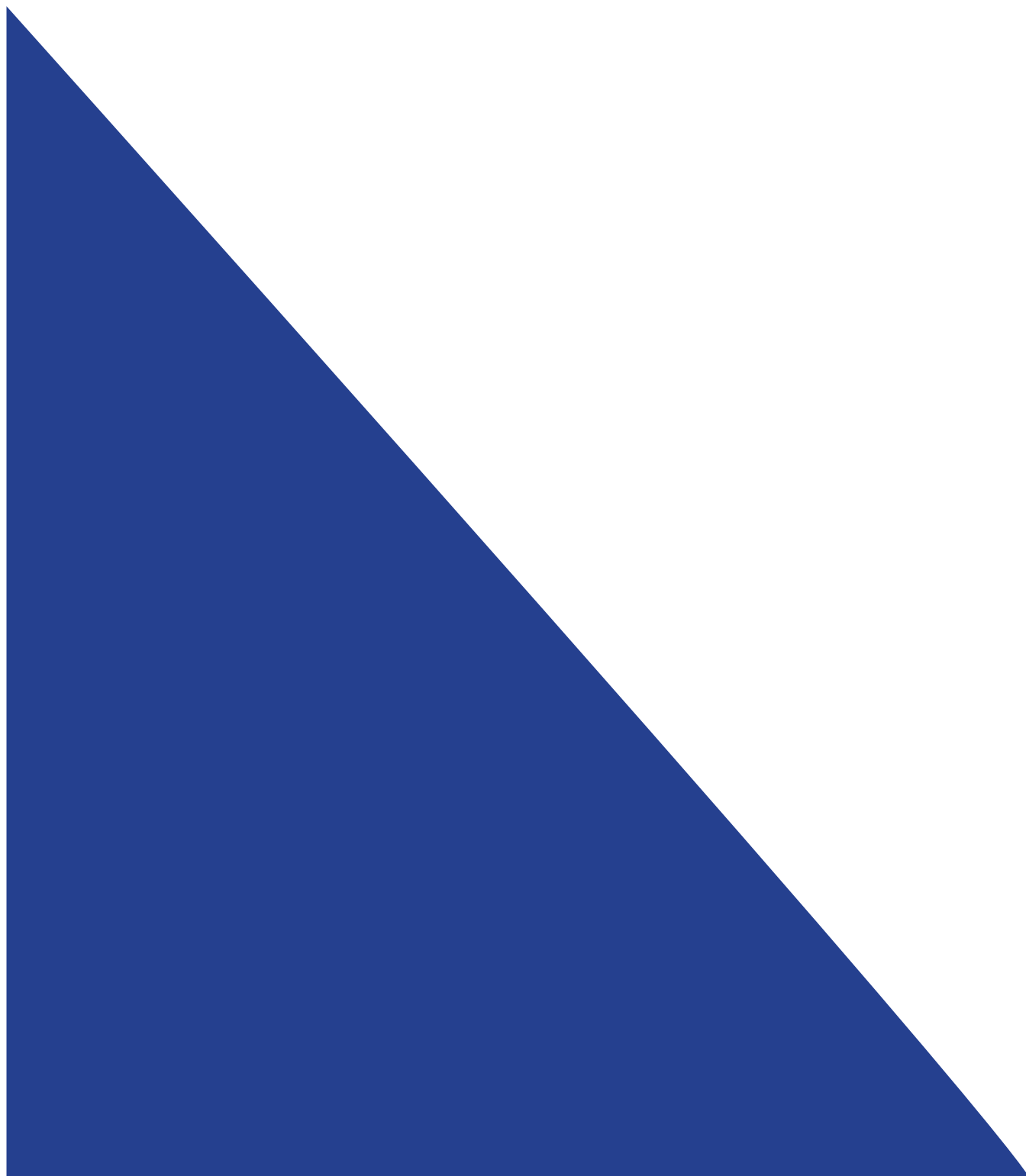
But everyday's a blessing as my Mary Edda say

I have a memory for each of your forgotten moments

And to your wishful ear, everything I've got, I'll loan it 



Pennie Newell, Graphite & Chalk



When I arrived home for Christmas, I noticed that not much had changed that year: the basket of clean clothes that lived at the base of the stairs was still there, half-filled with wrinkled white undershirts and socks; the living room table was covered in old mail and DVDs; the kitchen smelled of canned tomato sauce and garlic bread. It had been my first year away from home. My mother, hysterical, snatched my suitcase from my hands and gave it to my brother to haul up to his bedroom. She gave me a long hug, rocking me slightly. “Oh, I’ve missed you,” she breathed.

It was Christmas Eve when I arrived. Christmas had always been a strange time for my family; we were a group of irreverent consumers, but we pooled together in my mother’s house, regardless, and stood uncomfortably around the living room every year, looking at one another and feeling distant without knowing why. But it was

how to make coffee on, had been replaced by a Keurig.

My grandfather and his wife arrived a few hours after I did. My grandfather has always been one to linger in doorways; I think that he would always rather watch people from a distance. His wife sat down on the couch (perched, really) and looked me over. My grandfather, in a sudden moment of affection, tousled my hair. “What a mane. You haven’t had a single haircut this year, have you?” I laughed and shrugged, but my mother gave him a glare that immediately subdued the room. We sat, mostly in silence, while the rest of the family arrived.

As always, my grandmother brought with her several large catering pans full of food. As we carried it all in, she told me about her various ailments: “And the diabetes! It’s making me blind, Ryan. I can hardly see a thing!” I didn’t ask how she

I rocked him back and forth and hummed to him until he slept, and for the first time that I can ever remember, I really prayed. I prayed for my brother, sleeping in my arms.

early yet when I arrived, so no one but my mother and siblings were waiting to greet me. Instead, I was hustled into the kitchen, where my mother sat me down and gave me a bowl of Spaghetti-O’s. I noticed, out of the corner of my eye, that the old coffee machine we’d had, the one that I’d learned

managed to drive the sixty miles to my mother’s house. Instead, I asked her what she’d made, what we were going to make. “There’s a package of veal with your name all over it,” she promised. I feigned gagging while my stepfather pulled into the driveway.

While the rest of the family chatted in the living room, my grandmother and I made braciole, a kind of Italian roulade. I hammered at the veal with a meat tenderizer until it was thin and firm. Meanwhile, my grandmother made the stuffing and, while doing so, told me things that my mother hadn't: my youngest brother had pneumonia twice that year; my mother lost her job and was looking for a new one; Grandpa John, a family friend, died a few weeks back. As we rolled the braciole, my mother walked into the room. I noticed, suddenly, that her hair was a bit more grey and that her eyes had new wrinkles around them. She stood behind me and rubbed my back as I rolled. She sniffled and I did my best to smile reassuringly.

At dinner, no one made eye contact with anyone else. We stared at our plates and ate in silence. I wanted to ask about Grandpa John. I wanted to ask about my mother's job hunt. I wanted to ask

about the coffee machine. Instead, I ate lasagna and braciole and salad. My youngest brother coughed a wet, sad cough.

And that night, when I heard that same cough outside my door, I let him in. He was crying a little, his 3-year-old body feverish and in serious need of a cuddle. I didn't sleep much that night; I rocked him back and forth and hummed to him until he slept, and for the first time that I can ever remember, I really prayed. I prayed for my brother, sleeping in my arms. I prayed for my mother and grandmother and old Grandpa John. When, in the morning, everyone stirred, my eyes were red-rimmed and burning. We solemnly drove my brother to the hospital and had coffee and peppermints in the waiting room. Sitting there with my Styrofoam cup, I wondered how things had changed so much while I was gone. ▲



Jimmy Galano



Ashley Garner

THE FALL LINE

PIEDMONT VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SPRING 2014, VOLUME VI

FALL LINE (noun)

1. The natural boundary between an upland and a lowland marked by waterfalls and rapids.
2. An imaginary line along the eastern United States between the Piedmont and the Atlantic coastal plain.

