

Point of View

Table of Contents

Literature

Victoria Harres Downs

30 Memories of the Forsythia

T. W. Fuller **

12 The Story of the Bad Little Girl

6 The Story of the Good Little Girl
(after Mark Twain)

Heidi Gotz

28 Have You Eaten Your Dead?

37 The Story of Peter and Wendy

Bryant E. Stuckey *

4 Man and Grease

27 Smiles in the Oil

27 Stones

David Sussman

19 Always Crying

Kayteé Thrun

17 Canopy of Tree Street

11 Straws for Earrings

Art

Stacey Collins

18 Self Portrait in Spatula

Kevin Dillon

29 Never Alone

22 Self Portrait

13 untitled

Jeff Doles

33 Don't Take Life at First Glance

Victoria Harres Downs
16 A Breeze of Solitude
36 Tio

Brenda Eubanks
22 untitled
25 untitled
33 untitled

Sam Farchione ***
10 Rex
5 Jen #2
29 Jennifer

Kristina Gregory
26 Thread Born
9 untitled
10 untitled

James Haydary
16 untitled
31 untitled
31 untitled

Brad Lenze
18 untitled

Sharon Linder
15 Stoneware Box

Tim Medema
9 untitled

Rich Mueller
13 Deco

Sharon Viland
39 untitled

Winner of the *Point of View* Award *
Winner of the Vivian Steward Award **
Winner of the Ray Mills Award ***

Man and Grease

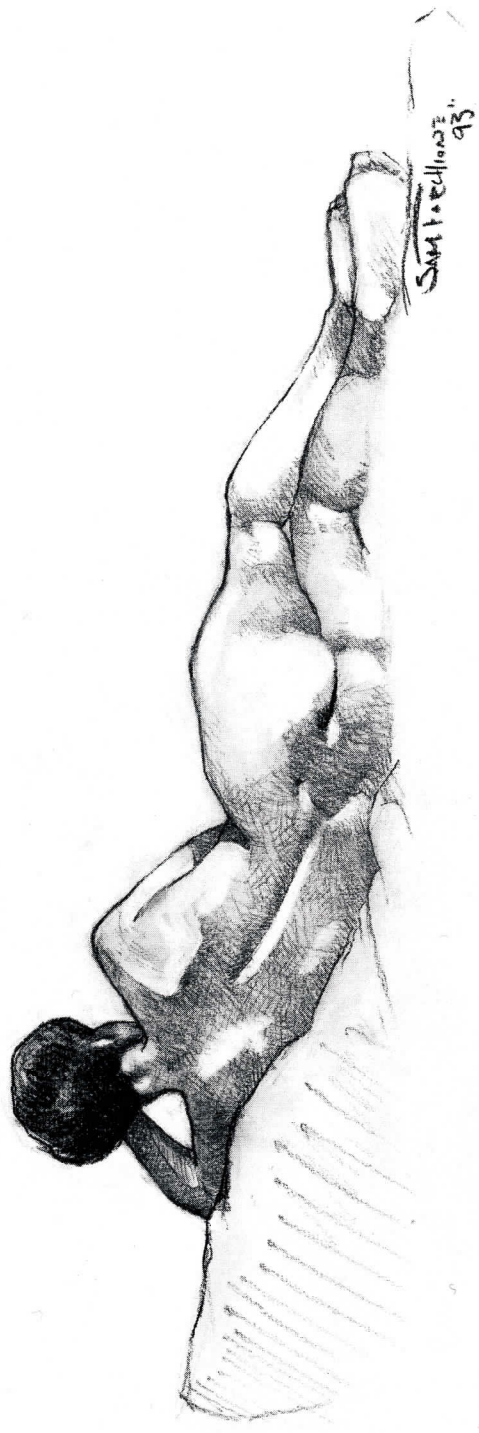
Bryant E. Stuckey

In the pink crevice
of the blazing sunset,
The man with iron foot
and rusted leg
snaps and cracks
a harvest through a field toasted beige,
like blond baked hair. . .

. . . and as he reaches down to
straighten the blades
his fingers slick the grease,
and the light twinkles on
a cracked thumb
sticky, sopped.

On the city sidewalk
where streetlights and windshields twing
like cheap rhinestone
and the panting sewers
release their sighing fog
to the dripping taxis overhead,
The man with cashmere trenches
and angled suits
slurges and scratches his way across a
street spilled with shadows
dingy like old sock. . .

. . . and as he looks for his wallet
the chapped old woman
slides her oily fingers and hands along the man's green lapel
staining black.



Sam Farchione
Jen #2
Conte

The Story of the Good Little Girl

(after Mark Twain)

T. W. Fuller

ONCE THERE WAS a good little girl whose name was Harriet Tilman. She would always honor her parents wishes, even when they would tell her to go stand in a corner for a week and not to move for any reason; and this good little girl knew the Bible most by heart, and she was always the first to sunday school, and always stayed an hour or two afterwards to talk with the sunday school superintendent. She would never think to play hooky, even when some of the bad girls put knock out drops in the school master's coffee and everyone knew he would not wake up for a long time and so they all left, but not Harriet, she stayed and continued her studies. The other girls never understood Harriet; she was most strange. She would never lie, even when she knew her parents would severely whip her when she broke the sugar bowl and had an opportunity to blame it on the cat who was sitting on the table and moving its tail back and forth. She just said lying was wrong, and that was good enough for her. And she was the most honest person in the world, it was outstanding. Even the time when somebody said she was the one who found old Widow McCradle's dog, and would have received 500 dollars reward, for the old lady was rich. But this good little girl spoke right up and said it was

not her that found the dog, and so she didn't get any money. But one of the bad girl's did.

This good little girl named Harriet believed in the Bible and everything that was good and thought she would have a prosperous life on account of it. But somehow this was just not so. Everything seemed to go wrong for her. Like the time sunday school let out and she was walking home and passed by the lake and saw a bunch of bad girls skinny dipping. Harriet went up to them and said it was not decent or moral to swim without anything on, and especially on a sunday. The other girls got out while Harriet started to recite scripture, and one bad little girl motioned for her to sit down on "this log over here" and they would all gather around. So Harriet did this, thinking that at last she had finally done something right. But when she went to sit on the log, a bad girl picked up a dead porcupine she had recently killed and placed it on the log, quills and all. And when Harriet went to sit down she sat down right on the porcupine's quills and she let off with a howl as the other girls laughed and laughed and said what a neat trick it was. And poor Harriet did not sit down for a month.

The one thing Harriet really wanted to do was turn all the bad little girls into good little girls by talking scripture and getting them religionized. But it never turned out that way, no matter how hard Harriet tried, it always turned out wrong.

Once Harriet saw a bad girl stealing grapes from old farmer Sill. And she went up to her and said that there was a commandment against stealing and to put the grapes back and she might be saved. But instead the bad girl

laughed and squashed the grapes all over Harriet and ran away just as old farmer Sill himself came back to the farm and spied Harriet and took her and whipped her severely for stealing from him, and when she told farmer Sill it was not her but another girl, he whipped her again, for he thought she was lying. And then when Harriet came home and her parents saw the state her clothes were in they both took turns whipping her severely and then threw her in scalding hot water to teach her a lesson; and Harriet cried and screamed, but she forgave everybody that did harm to her because that was her way.

Once this good little girl saw a crippled woman standing at the edge of the street and was peering down at the other end, but didn't seem certain she could make it because there were many carriages and horsemen riding along the street, and Harriet remembered hearing that good deeds do not go unrewarded and so she walked up to the woman and pulled her across to the other side of the road without any trouble at all and smiled at the woman and said, "There now, you are safe and sound." But when she expected a pat on the head and for the woman to say what a good kind hearted little girl she was, instead the woman pushed her down in the horses trough, for she had no intention of going to that side of the street at all, and now she would have to wait until traffic cleared once more. And when Harriet came home she received a severe whipping for ruining her dress.

But perhaps the one thing that really bewildered Harriet the most was the time she was in church and she saw a fly land by her on the pew, as did the girl sitting next to her. Harriet went right on

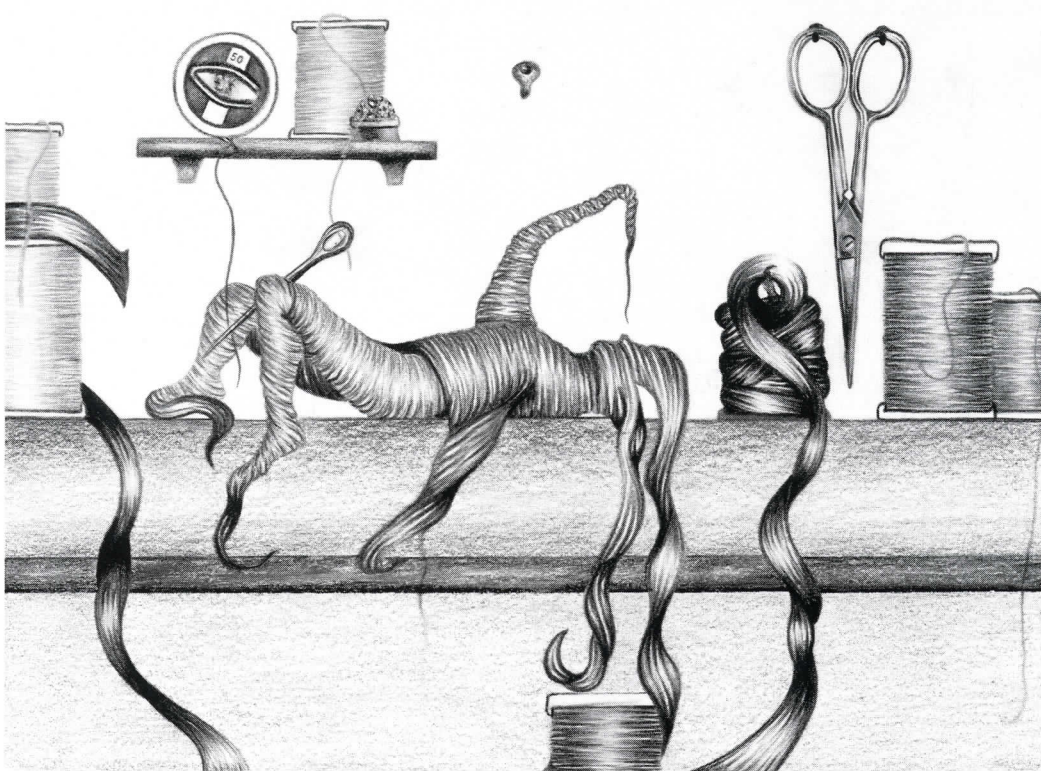
listening to the preacher preach his sermon. But not the other girl. She slowly inched her hand towards the fly, getting closer and closer, until her hand was just about to reach the fly. Harriet noticed this and got scared, and wanted to do something but was frozen in her seat, for she knew that if the girl were to catch the fly in her hand while the sermon was still going on, that girl would get struck by lightning, and Harriet was sure to catch some of it to. And finally the girl cuffed the fly in her hand, and at that very moment Harriet jumped out of her seat and started running around the church yelling, "Watch out for the lightning, the lightning, it's going to strike." But it never did, and Harriet was humiliated in front of the entire congregation, and her parents were so embarrassed that they took hold of the screaming child and brought her up to the front of the church and they took turns whipping her. All the while they were doing this, Harriet wondered why the lightning did not strike that girl when she caught the fly.

Once when Harriet was out in the woods on a lovely Saturday afternoon reading the Bible as she sat under a tree, she heard voices coming her way, and so she set down her Bible and listened until the voices were very close and Harriet could see a bunch of bad girls coming her way. Harriet was happy, hoping she might be able to religionize at least one of them. But when the bad girls came nearer, Harriet noticed they were drinking and smoking and chewing tobacco. Harriet, gaily, went up to them and started talking scripture to them about the evils of smoking and drinking and chewing and how immoral it all was. But these bad girls only laughed and called her

names, and then one bad girl got up an idea to pour liquor down her throat and make her chew some tobacco. And so they all took hold of Harriet and did just that until she was drunk, and then the bad girls took a big piece of tobacco and forced it into Harriet's mouth, and poor Harriet had no idea how to chew tobacco and so she ended up swallowing all the juice and much of the tobacco itself, and if that wasn't enough it even roasted out her bowels and Harriet was very sick. And so when Harriet finally came home and her parents found her in such an awful state they threw her in the outhouse and locked her in there until she was done being sick. And Harriet spent three days in that outhouse sitting and kneeling down to make herself better, and when she was, and her parents came to get her, they both severely whipped her for getting drunk and chewing tobacco, and also for losing her Bible, for she was so sick she had forgotten about it.

Nothing Harriet did ever came out just the way she wanted it to, and she never quite understood it. Finally, when Harriet was out singing the Lord's praises, she happened to come across some bad girl's building a camp fire, and they were ripping out pages of the Bible to make the fire grow big and strong. Harriet wondered why such an act like this did not send down lightning and fire upon these girls, for destroying such a book as the Bible was surely some act of devilment, and should have caused the sky to open up and do its worst on those girls, but for some reason it didn't, and so Harriet was quite puzzled. Nevertheless she went up to the bad girls and told them they must be possessed by demons, for nobody would destroy the Lord's

book. The other girls only laughed and told her to go away before they tore *her* up and used her to keep the fire going. Harriet did not listen, but instead recited her scripture in hopes of enlightening the girls and making them all good religious people. But then a big gust of wind came forth and blew the fire in Harriet's direction and her dress caught on fire and she ran and screamed, then fell to the ground and burned and burned until there was nothing more left of her but ashes, and the wind took and scattered them all across the country, and poor Harriet Tilman, that good little girl, though she never did get to religionize anybody through scripture she really spread herself.



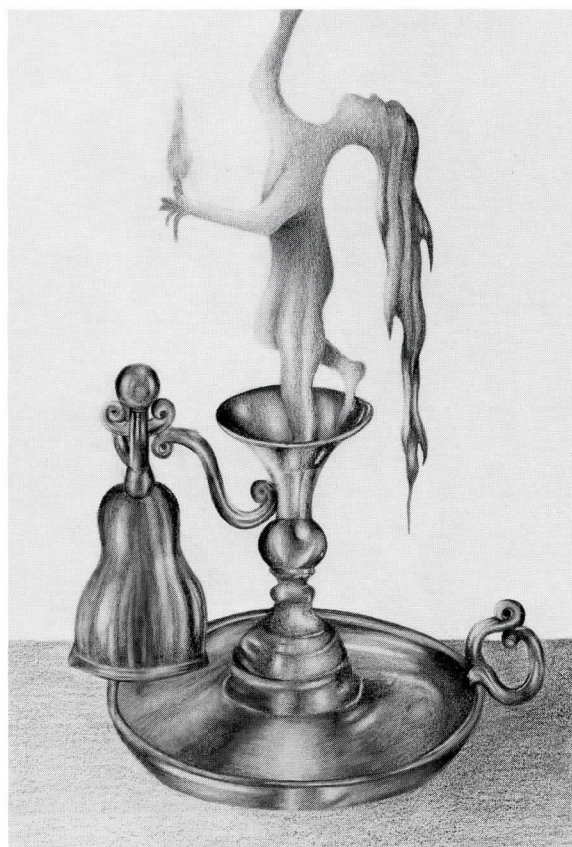
Kristina Gregory
untitled
Color Pencil



Tim Medema
untitled
Pen and Ink



Sam Farchione
Rex
Charcoal



Kristina Gregory
untitled
Color Pencil

Straws for Earrings

Kayteé Thrun

He was Void
like a blank space in time
a mystery unfolded
in the pages
you stuck together
as a child
tightly pressed
with Elmer's Glue
if you rip them apart
you destroy and create—
that was he
underneath a skirt
straws for earrings
up from New Orleans
or down from everywhere
voice accenting
from a place you have never been
and through him
all the things
someday you will do,
live through,
hurt,
or part with—
still sit
bent on the curb
wind rushing by
flesh peaking out
from clothing tears
showing bones
muscles creased
under folds of skin—
through purity
is damage-
and meat
does not fit
through a straw. . . .

The Story of the Bad Little Girl

(after Mark Twain)

T. W. Fuller

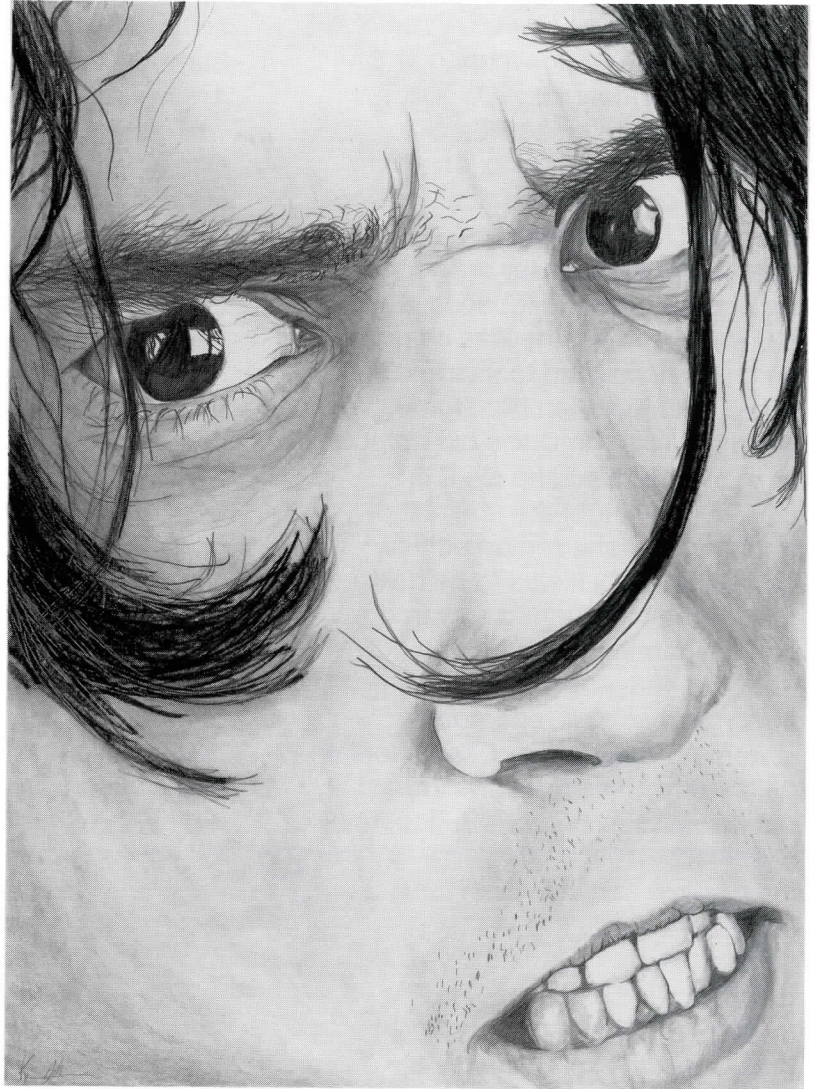
ONCE THERE WAS a bad little girl by the name of Annie, and she was the baddest of all the bad little girls that there were, and she was happy to be so.

This bad little girl did not have any sick mother, not after she put poison in her coffee and watched her drink it all up and then gasp for breath as she fell to her knees. And then suddenly a thought did not cross Annie's mind that this was sinful. And then there was not a light that came and she did not drop to her knees and pray for forgiveness. No, indeed not. This bad little girl was glad to be rid of her mother.

Once this bad little girl stole the key off the liquor cabinet from her father while he wasn't looking. And suddenly he did not look down and see that she was doing this and take her and whip her, and tell her that it was wrong to do this. And so, Annie unlocked the liquor cabinet and took out a bottle of the strongest whiskey, and as she poured the whiskey down her throat it did not create such a tremendous heat that it roasted out her bowels. No, instead it went down easy as pie and it was so good that she decided to have another. But after her second bottle of whiskey Annie did not get sick or drunk and go find a wash basin to end her troubles. Everything about this girl was curious.

Once she went skinny dipping on a Sunday morning when she was supposed to be in church learning about all that is good. And while she was having fun the water did not begin to get extremely hot and boil this girl alive. And when she got to the middle of the lake a big cramp did not bring itself upon her and make her drown. No; in fact the water was just perfect and Annie had a good time of it.

Once she stole the teacher's chain watch and when she was afraid it would be found in her possession and she would get whipped, she slipped it into Julia Barlow's pocket—poor Widow Barlow's daughter, the moral girl, the good little girl of the village, who always obeyed her mother, and would never lie, and loved and adored her lessons, and was always the first to Sunday school. And when the teacher discovered the chain watch was missing, and when he ordered everyone to empty their pockets, Annie watched as Julia brought out the chain watch, and poor Julia lowered her head and her face got all red, and the heart stricken teacher blamed the theft on Julia and hauled her up to the front of the class by the ear. And when that switch was just about to come down on her, the holiest man in all the world did not appear at the door and say, "Let this little girl be—for there, sitting way in the back corner is the guilty one. I passed by the window when she was in the act, and I saw the entire thing." And then Annie did not cry out in shame and that holy man did not take Julia by the hand and say such a girl should be honored, and tell her to come wander the world with him and spread good all around. No; no meddling old rot of a holy man came in to screw everything up, and so



Kevin Dillon
untitled
Pencil



Rich Mueller
Deco
Pen and Ink

the model girl Julia was whipped and Annie was good and proud of it, for Annie looked down upon and despised model girls.

Once this bad little girl named Annie wanted to learn how to chew, so while her father was out she went into his bedroom and opened up his dresser drawer and took some chewing tobacco, a very big wad. And as she was chewing on it she happened to swallow the juice. And just then her stomach did not get queasy and she did not feel at all sick, and so she went on chewing it without the least bit of trouble. And she remarked how god-damn bully it was to be doing this, and after she had sworn a bolt of lightning did not come down from the heavens and strike her down, and so she repeated her statement again, and cursed herself up a storm. And then she looked out the window and saw a good girl passing by and so Annie jumped out the window and ran up to the girl and spit tobacco juice all over the good girl's dress, which happened to be a new dress and cost a lot of money. And when Annie did this the earth suddenly did not open itself up and swallow her whole and let her fall forever and ever. No; so this bad little girl watched as the other girl ran home crying to her mother and Annie said it was a great day.

But perhaps the most strangest thing that ever happened to Annie was the time she started a fire behind the little church on Easter Sunday while everyone was inside. And the wind blew towards the church and it caught on fire and everyone in that church was screaming and running for their lives. Annie opened the back door to the church and saw a girl on fire and a thought did not come across

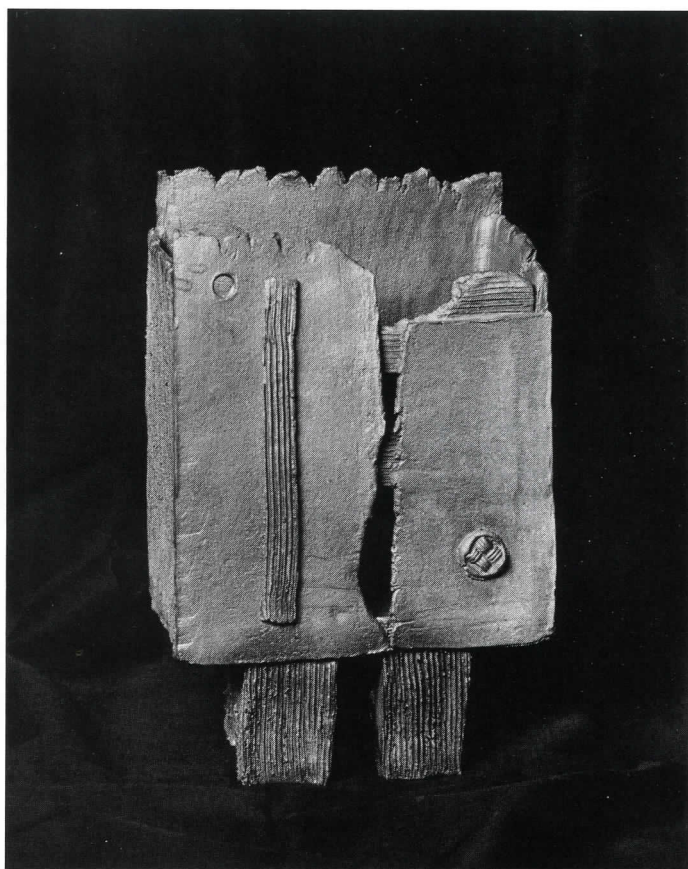
her mind to help this girl, so Annie just watched as she burned and burned. And then without noticing it Annie was surrounded by fire and it was getting ever so hot. This bad little girl did not hesitate but walked right through the fire, and when she did this and the fire touched her skin you better believe that fire did not inflict any burns on her at all, and so she came out all safe and sound. And the church came tumbling down and many people got knocked unconscious. And just as Annie was about to reach the church door and be safe the church ceiling did not fall right on her head and make her dead. No; she made it out without any scars.

This Annie led a very pleasant life. Nothing could hurt her. Even when she entered a bear's cave and found a big ferocious grizzly inside. And that bear was mighty hungry and so he picked her up and held her close to its mouth and did not eat her, but instead threw her to the ground, for this girl smelled something horrible, even to the bear, because she never washed and she always wore the same clothes and she never waited to use an outhouse, but instead would go where ever she was and not think twice about it.

And she finally grew up and left the village and went out to be a bank robber and stole hundreds of thousands of dollars and killed many people in the process. And she was never caught because she was disguised as a man and nobody thought it was a woman, and so she gambled all the money away and the people who won the money were charged with the robberies and hanged.

Years later Annie returned to the village and found it deserted and so she went to the old widow

Barlow's mansion and put on the loveliest dress there ever was and then a man came and asked if she was the owner of the house and Annie said yes. And it turned out that there was a considerable amount of oil on the land and so he bought it from her for ten million dollars and now she is one of the most richest and respected people in the country and is said to have married a President of the United States, but if she did, I don't know which one.



Sharon Linder
Stoneware Box
Ceramics



Victoria Harres Downs
A Breeze of Solitude
Acrylic

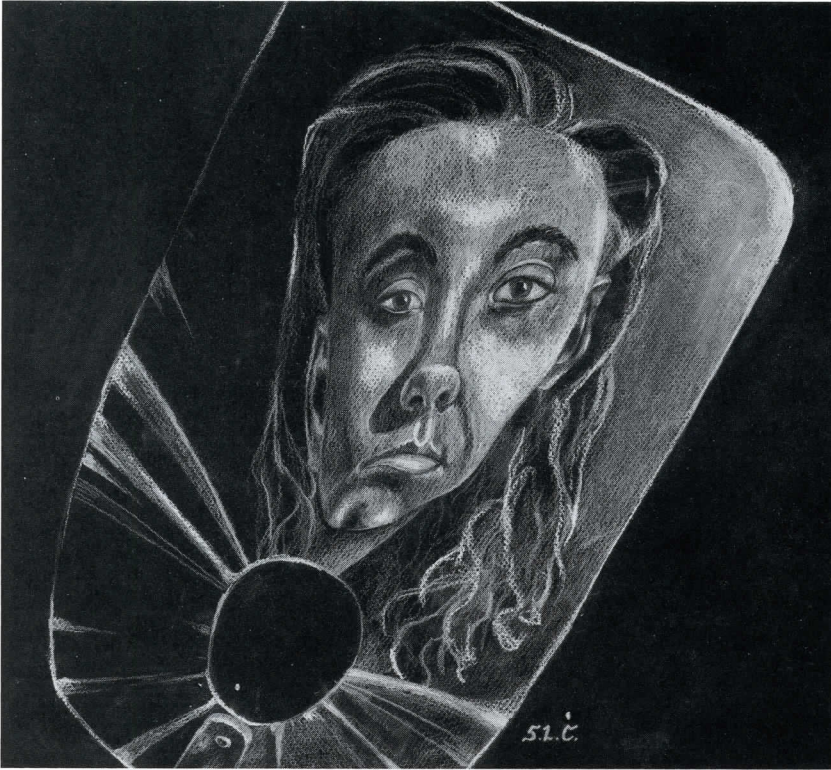


James Haydary
untitled
Photography

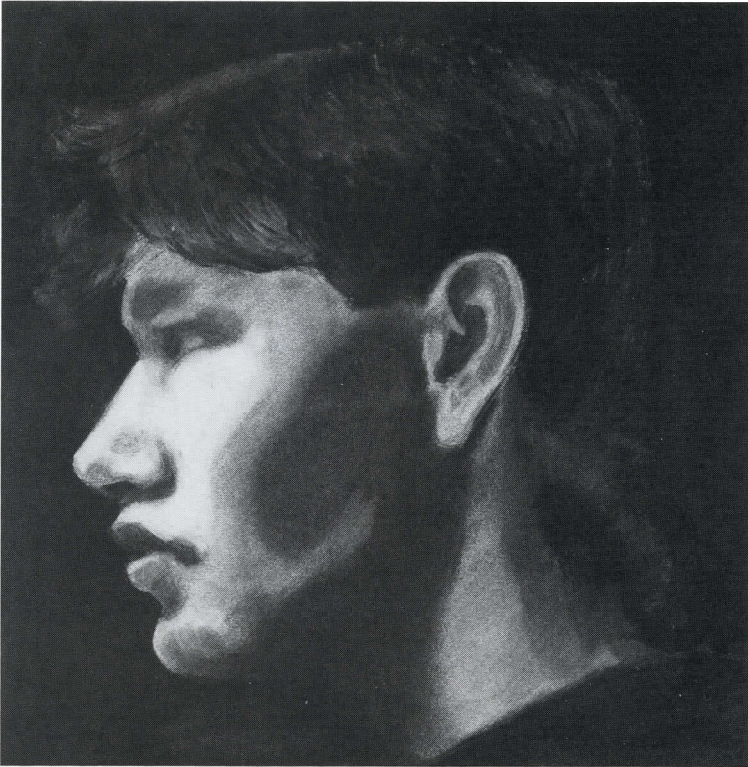
Canopy of Tree Street

Kaytéé Thrun

The car door opened
cracked and popped
from breaking frost—
he led me to the street,
and the curb
was lined
with trees that shook,
leaves that fell,
forgotten—
and ones still hanging
like tiny silver spoons—
he took one
and slid it into my hand
it glistened
as it melted
into my exposed pores
my skin left ashine—
he touched one to my lips
and left me bruised
but the frost falling
from the break
cushioned the pain—
and I sank
beneath the trees—
bones replaced branches,
veins replaced roots
motionless
as the leaves dripped over us
and covered the ground
in spoons
and in the snow. . . .



Stacey Collins
Self Portrait in Spatula



Brad Lenze
untitled
Charcoal

Always Crying

David Sussman

I
THE YOUNG MAN, the young woman, and the baby had just finished having their portraits taken at Mitchell Photography. The young woman felt that things had gone fairly well. Fairly well, that is, except for the fact that the baby cried the whole time.

The baby always seemed to be crying.

The photographer told the young woman that the portraits would be ready in two weeks and said that he'd call the *instant* they were ready. The young woman said "thank you", and with the baby in her arms, she headed out the front door with the young man.

Carrying the baby against her hip, the young woman walked through the dirty ice and slush of the parking lot towards her car. The young man walked quietly alongside. When they reached the car, the young man finally spoke. "Well," he said, "I guess I'll be on my way then." And with that, he started to walk away.

"Hey Jake," shouted the young woman. "Jake!"

The young man stopped, turned around, and started walking slowly back towards the young woman. He looked solemnly at the young woman's face. "What is it?" he asked, tiredly.

The young woman shifted her feet a bit and turned slightly so the wind blew across her back instead of her face. After

readjusting her baby's position, moving the baby from her hip to her shoulder, the young woman spoke. "Well," she said, "I was just wondering if . . . well . . . I don't know. I was thinking that maybe we could go out to dinner or something. Maybe?"

The young man let out a deep sigh and ran his hands through his dark brown hair. "No, Claire," he said. "I really don't think that's such a good—"

"Please, Jake," interrupted the young woman. "I know that you think that it won't work. But, I mean, my *God*, Jake. Joey's almost a year old. I mean after all, he is—"

"For *God's* sake, Claire! I can't. When you called last week, you said fifteen minutes. *Fifteen* minutes! *Remember?* Well, I've done my part. I came here like I promised and now I'm done." The young man paused for a second. "I don't owe you a thing. Not one damn thing, Claire. It wasn't my decision. It was your decision. *Jesus!* I did a favor by coming out here today and you're not even grateful." The young man opened his mouth as if to continue speaking but stopped himself. He simply turned around and walked away again.

For some time, the young woman stood watching the young man walk away. She seemed as if she were in some sort of a trance. She simply stood still and stared, frozen, the baby resting against her shoulder. Then, suddenly, the young woman waved her right hand—the free one—in the air. "I'm sorry Jake," she shouted. "I really am sorry. Please. If it was because the baby cried the whole time, he isn't like that *always*. Jake!"

II

SHE SPOTTED HIM in the corner of the supermarket where fruits and vegetables were sold. He was fairly attractive, and, after noticing him in the canned goods aisle, Claire Morelli decided that she might as well try. There's no harm in at least trying, thought Claire. With Joey sitting in the child's seat of her shopping cart, Claire strolled up alongside her target who was busy trying to pick out a decent head of cauliflower. Claire looked around awkwardly, and then suddenly, almost instinctually, she grabbed a handful of broccoli, and proceeded to run the vegetable through a number of endurance tests, secretly giving the man beside her the once-over out of the corner of her eye. After some seconds, Claire gathered up the courage to speak. "I see you like cauliflower," she said.

The man beside her didn't respond immediately. Like words traveling along radio waves, there was a short delay. "I'm sorry," he said, "Did you say something?"

Claire felt a little flushed in her face. She really didn't want to repeat her question. "Well," she said, "I was just noticing that you were looking at the cauliflower." Claire cleared her throat before continuing. "I mean, I was just wondering if you liked cauliflower, that's all."

The man looked at Claire puzzledly. "Well," he said, slowly turning his cart around in the direction of the checkout lines, "it's alright, I guess."

The man had almost completely turned away when Claire spoke up again. "So, what are you doing for the holidays?" she asked quickly. "I mean, are you going to

visit family? Or, are you going to spend the holidays alone, like me?"

The man looked back at Claire and paused briefly before speaking. He seemed unsure if he should answer the question from a stranger. "I'm going to visit my parents back East," he said finally. "I only see them once a year." The man paused again, and then added somewhat cynically: "One time a year is the most I can stand actually."

"Oh, you shouldn't say that," said Claire. "You shouldn't say that at all. You should be glad that you've got family. Really! I'm *serious*. I mean, take me for instance. I've got practically no family. My Dad took off when I was eight and I haven't seen him since. I mean, he just *took* off. But, you have to understand, I was quite an emotional child. I really was. I was always crying and stuff. And my mom, she lives way the hell out in Sacramento and there's no way I can afford to fly out there. She's there living with this guy name Mort. *Jesus!* What a character! She met him about six months ago at some crazy—"

Claire stopped herself short and started to blush. She suddenly realized that she was speaking a bit too loudly, revealing a bit too much. "You should be glad that you've got family," she continued softly, "at least you're not all alone."

The man looked at Claire and then looked down at the baby drooling in his seat in the shopping cart. "You're not all alone," he said.

Claire looked down at her son. "Oh! You mean Joey?" she said. "I didn't mean alone in that sense. I meant *alone* in a different sense. Do you know what I mean?"

The man was still looking at the baby. The baby was staring back at him. "Yeah," answered the man. "I think I do."

Turning his attention away from the baby, the man picked up an avocado and started to examine it nervously. After turning the vegetable over in his hands several times, the man ventured a glance back in the direction of Claire's shopping cart.

The baby was still staring.

The man placed the avocado back in its pile and stared down at his shoes. "I've got a kid," the man confessed with a deep sigh. He looked up at Claire. "A girl. She's two. Lives out in Nevada with her mother."

"Oh! That's *wonderful*," said Claire. "That's *absolutely* wonderful. You know, you look like a father. No kidding! That's the first thing I thought when I saw you. I said to myself: 'that man's a father'. I mean, talk about coincidences. You like cauliflower; I like cauliflower. You've got a kid; I've got a kid. Strange! Isn't it? So, what's your daughter's name?"

"Sara," the man mumbled.

"Sara? Hmmn. That's a pretty name. My dad liked pretty names" Turning her back on the man, Claire plucked a single grape off of a stem and popped it into her mouth. She then plucked another grape from the bunch and handed it to the baby. "My mom almost named me Nancy. Isn't that just awful? I don't think that's a pretty name at all. Do you?" The man was about to respond when Claire interrupted him. "Anyways, my mother didn't name me Nancy. My dad didn't like it. She named me Claire instead. Isn't that a much prettier name?"

The man nodded in agreement. "Listen," he said. "I don't mean to cut you off, but. . . ." The man delicately pointed at the watch around his wrist. "I've really got to be go—"

"But you haven't even told me *your* name yet," Claire responded rather loudly. "You have a name, don't you?"

The man let out a deep sigh and said that his name was Walter.

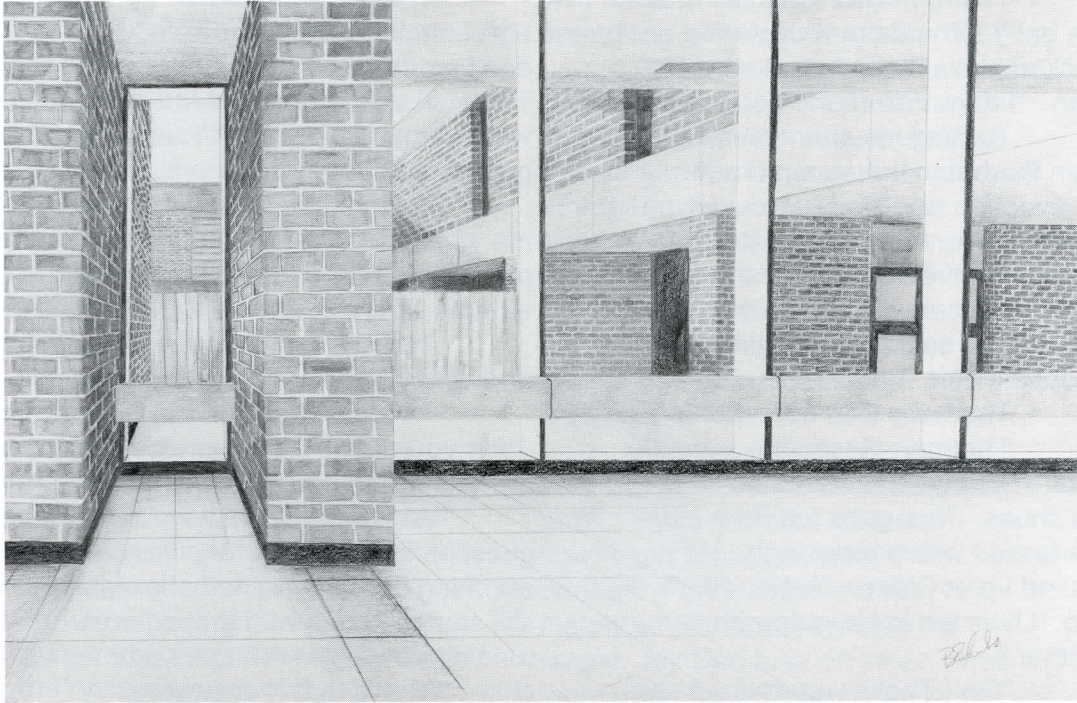
"Well, Walter," began Claire, "Will your daughter be at your parents' when you go to visit?"

Walter didn't answer Claire's question immediately. He was busy watching the baby. The baby was still staring at him with grape juice running down his fat fingers and chin. "What's that?" answered Walter, turning his attention back towards Claire.

"I *said*: will Sara be at your parents' place when you go to visit?"

"No," answered Walter. "I'm afraid I won't be seeing her."

"That's too bad," said Claire. "That's really too bad. But I'm sure that you're a very busy man. You look like a busy man. Believe *me*! I know what it's like to be kept busy with Joey here and my job and all. You see, during the week, I work as a receptionist at this doctor's office. He's kind of a specialist, so it never gets too crazy or anything. But I'm kept pretty busy. I really am. There's usually plenty for me to do. You see, I have this tray of things to work on and it's usually pretty full with form letters, file changes, insurance information, stuff like that. But *sometimes*! Sometimes, I'll be at my desk and I'll have just finished whatever it was that I was working on and I'll look over at my tray and it will be completely empty. I mean,



Brenda Eubanks
untitled
Pencil



Kevin Dillon
Self Portrait
Pencil

completely empty. So, I'll just sit there because there's nothing to do. It hardly ever happens, but sometimes it does. And when it does, it's pretty depressing. It really is." Claire paused to catch her breath. "I mean, I know that this may sound *crazy*, but, sometimes I wish that my tray was always full. I mean *always* full. I wish it was so full that I'd never have to leave the office. I mean, when five-thirty would finally roll around, I'd just stay there at my desk. I wouldn't have to go home. I mean, I wouldn't have to go home or anything, because the office *would* be home." Claire looked down at Joey and let out a small chuckle. "Of course, that would be impossible. But it would be nice if my tray was always full. That's all I'm saying. It would be nice." Claire ran her tongue across her front teeth and looked up at Walter. "So, what are you doing for New Year's?"

"I'm not sure exactly," said Walter. "At least, not at this moment. Listen, Claire—"

"You're free?" responded Claire. "Because, you know what? It just so happens that I'm free as well. What we could do is, we could maybe do something together, maybe?"

Walter didn't know what to say. "Well, I don't know. I didn't say that I was free. I might be go—"

"You could come over to my apartment," said Claire. Her cheeks were becoming flushed. "You could come over and I could make this wonderful dinner and afterwards, maybe, we could play cards and drink champagne. Wuddaya say?"

Walter looked at the baby. The baby was no longer staring at him. Walter let out a sigh of relief. He looked back at Claire. She was waiting nervously for his answer.

She was biting her lower lip. "Well," Walter said, "I mean, if it's just to play cards, well, I mean, I don't see the harm in it. I'll tell you what. If you give me your phone number, I'll give you a call."

"There you go," said Claire. "We'll have a blast. I know it." Claire started rummaging through her purse. "Oh, Jesus! I don't have a pen." She looked up at Walter. "Do you?"

Walter shook his head. Claire let out a sigh. "Well," she said. "If I tell you my phone number, do you think that you can remember it?"

Walter nodded.

"I'm *serious*," said Claire. "Will you remember it?"

"Yeah," answered Walter. "Of course I will. I mean . . . of course I will."

"Okay," said Claire. "I'm going to give you my number. You ready? Good! It's Three . . . Nine . . . Seven . . . have you got that part down?" Walter repeated the numbers out loud to himself and then nodded. Claire continued. "Seven . . . One . . . Fi—"

The baby started to cry. Claire panicked.

"Oh, Joey, sweetheart it's alright. There's no reason to cry." Claire's voice was shaking. "Joey. *Please* stop crying. It's ok. Everything's ok. Just *please* stop crying." Claire accidentally dropped her purse which she had been holding in her arms. The contents of the purse spilled out onto the white tiled floor. "Joey. *Please!* Jesus! Stop crying willya."

The baby kept crying.

Claire looked at Walter and offered a weak attempt at a smile. "I don't know what's the matter with him," she pleaded. "Really! He isn't normally like this. I'm so sorr—"

Joey! Please be quiet a second . . .
I'm so sorry. Let me finish giving
you my phone number.

III

ALONE IN HER KITCHEN,
Claire grabbed a soda from the
refrigerator. It was almost five
o'clock, and looking out into the
living room of her apartment, Claire
noticed through the blinds that the
sun was slowly setting. In the
shadows of the living room, off in
the corner, Joey lay asleep in his
crib. With her drink in hand, Claire
walked into the living room, flopped
herself down upon the sofa, and
placed her feet upon the coffee
table. Claire took a few sips from
her soda, placed it beside her feet,
and closed her eyes. Soon, Claire
felt very sleepy. Within a few
minutes, her chin dropped against
her chest. Seemingly, just seconds
later, her head jerked up violently.

Joey was crying.

"Oh God!" said Claire,
shaking the sleepiness from her
body, "not again." Claire raised her
hands to her head and massaged
her temples. "Joey!" she screamed.
"For Chrissake! Shut up!"

Joey kept crying.

Claire screamed even
louder. "Shut up! I'm sick of it
Goddammit." Claire's face was
changing color. She got up rather
clumsily, accidentally knocking over
her drink in the process and walked
quickly over to the crib.

"Shut up!" she hollered, just
inches away from the baby's face.
"Shut the hell up! You're always
crying. *Always!* I'm sick of it. Do
you hear me? I'm sick of it." Joey
kept crying and Claire started
screaming even louder, her voice
rising in a sharp crescendo. "Shut
up! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! . . .
SHUT UP!!!"

That's when Joey started
crying even louder. Joey started
crying so loud that Claire began to
shake. Claire began to shake and
threw herself upon the sofa. Curling
up into a ball, Claire shoved her
face into the pillow.

But she did not cry.

Claire did everything within
her ability to prevent herself from
crying.

Joey continued to cry.

After a couple of minutes,
Joey's crying had lowered itself to a
quiet hum. Claire got up and slowly
walked to the crib. "I'm sorry," she
said. "I'm so sorry. It's just that
you're always crying. I mean, you're
always crying. You cried this
morning at the portrait studio, and
then you cried at the supermarket.
My God, Joey, you cried at the
supermarket just when things were
going so well. I had a perfect
chance before you started. I had a
perfect chance." Claire brushed
some strands of hair from her face
before continuing. "Don't you know
what happens when you cry, Joey?
Don't you have a clue? People
leave when you cry, Joey. That's
what happens. People leave."

IV

CLAIRE GRABBED the
phone from the kitchen counter and
placed it onto the kitchen table.
Claire then sat down and stared at
the phone. She needed to talk to
somebody. *Anybody!* Claire
decided she'd call Jake. She knew
that he'd be angry but she didn't
really care. Claire dialed the
number and waited nervously for an
answer at the other end. After four
rings, she heard the answering
machine kick in and hung up. Claire
hated answering machines. Claire
then tried calling her mother in
Sacramento. No one was home.

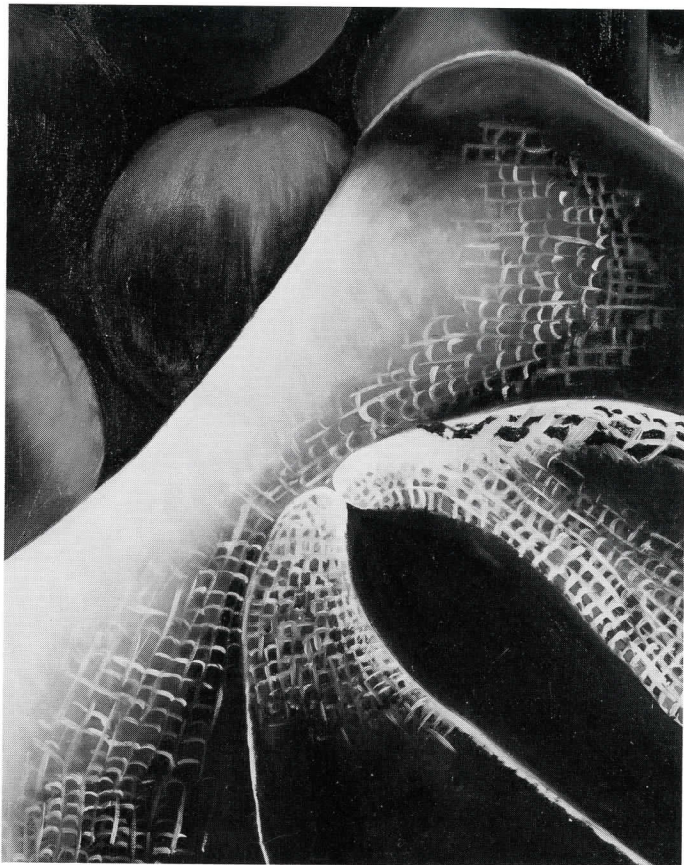
Again, an answering machine took over. Claire hung up. "She's probably out with *Mort*," Claire snickered.

For some time, Claire simply sat staring at the phone trying to think. Once, she got up to heat a pot of water for some coffee, but otherwise, she remained seated. After about five minutes of drumming her fingers on the table, Claire picked up the receiver and dialed information. "Yes," said Claire. "Can I please have the number of Mitchell Photography in Larchmont?" Claire scribbled the number down on a napkin. She then looked at her watch. It was two minutes to six. She had to hurry.

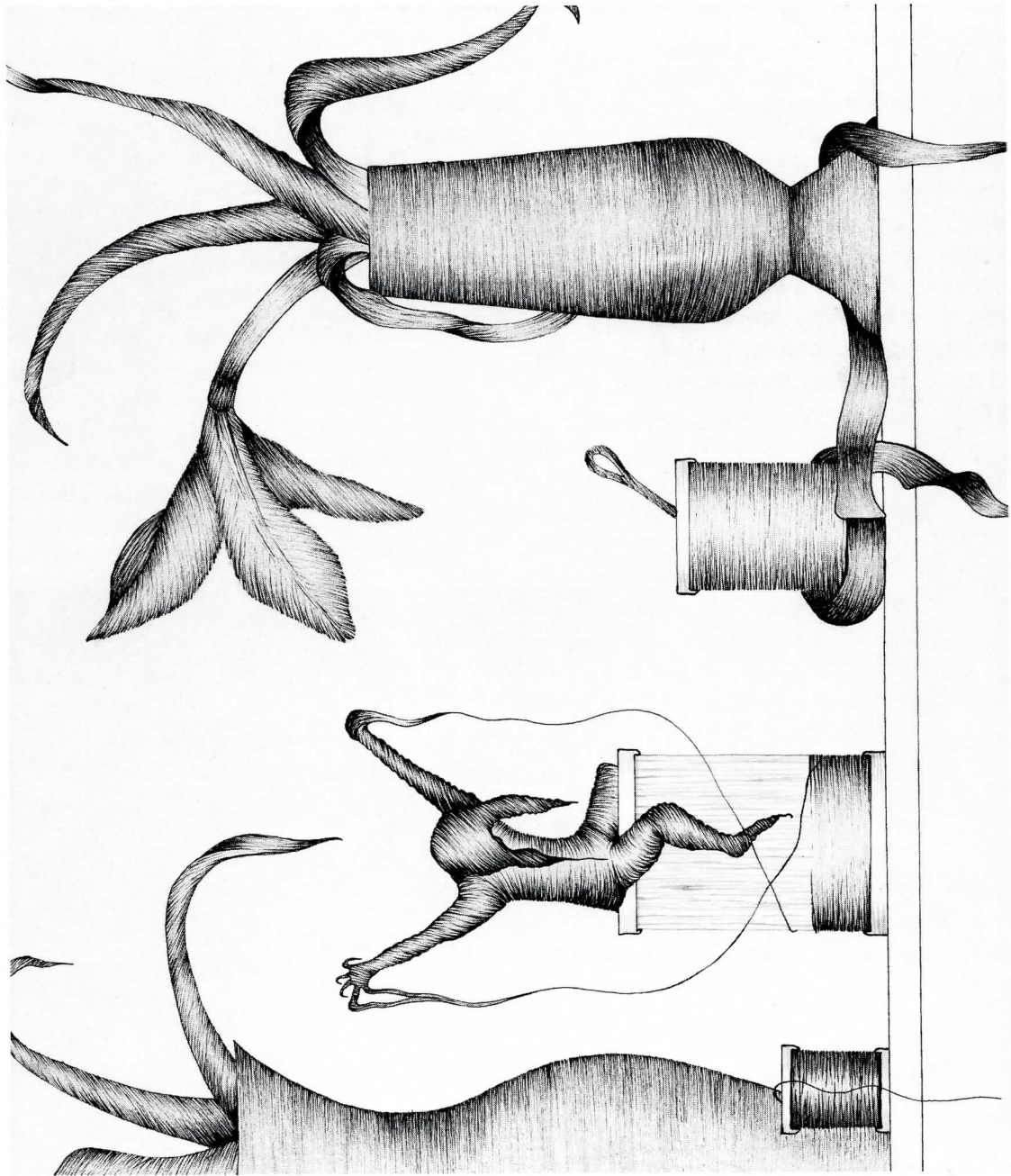
V

THE PHONE at the other end seemed to ring forever. "Come on," muttered Claire. "Come on" Finally, a voice answered. Claire recognized the voice of the photographer from earlier in the day. "Thank God," said Claire, her hand covering the mouthpiece. "Hello?" said the voice at the other end. "Hello? Is anybody there?"

Claire cleared her throat and straightened her back a trifle in her chair, as if her posture, along with her voice, would be traveling through the phone lines.



Brenda Eubanks
untitled
Oil



Kristina Gregory
Thread Born
Color Pencil

Stones

Bryant E. Stuckey

As I watch you,
the stones
fall farther
and
farther
inside
your
old
weak
kidneys

Preparing to pass
like a ripened apple in the autumn sun.

Smiles In The Oil

Bryant E. Stuckey

When snow melts black
on cracked spine street,
the children can gander
at face at their feet,

Or look through the sky
and scratch through the clouds,
and pull out the sun
who smiles in the oils.

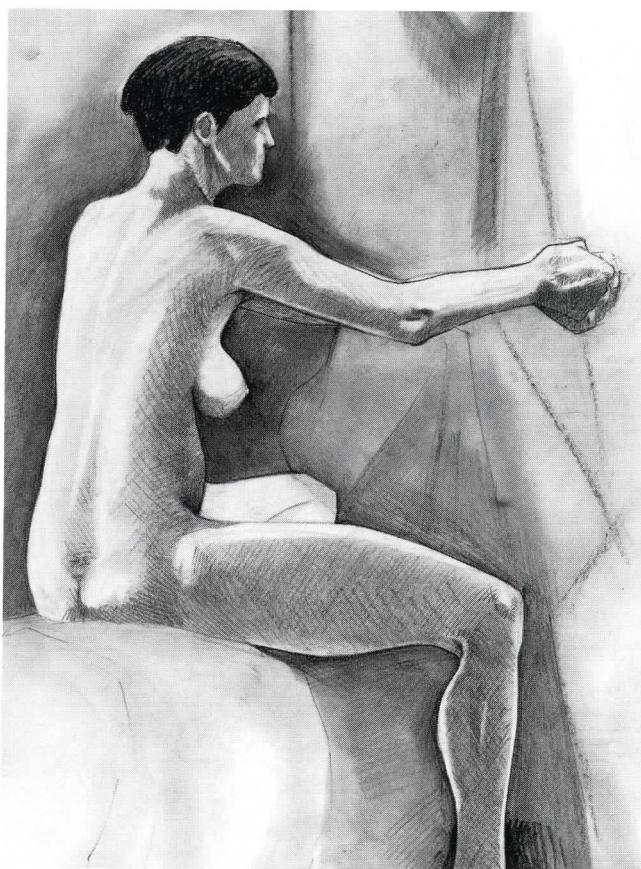
Have You Eaten Your Dead?

Heidi Gotz

Our break-up came in all of your bad breath
–a collection of yuck unmentionable.
Never a milk carton "have you seen me?" gone by
where I haven't answered no, but I've smelt you
dead
rotting in my lover's mouth
for more than weeks
with 'my' tongue the only visitor
–quickly
in and out and a scout around
but gone before an instant
to quiver anxious in my 'own' mouth
(among imperial teeth and royal palate)
weeping this milk-soured misfortune,
this fish-rot fucking of mouths.



Kevin Dillon
Never Alone
Pencil



Sam Farchione
Jennifer
Conte

Memories of the Forsythia

Victoria Harres Downs

IT WILL BE Spring soon. This morning, I noticed buds on the forsythia bushes. A few more warm days and they will be ready to burst out of their slumber and greet me each day with memories.

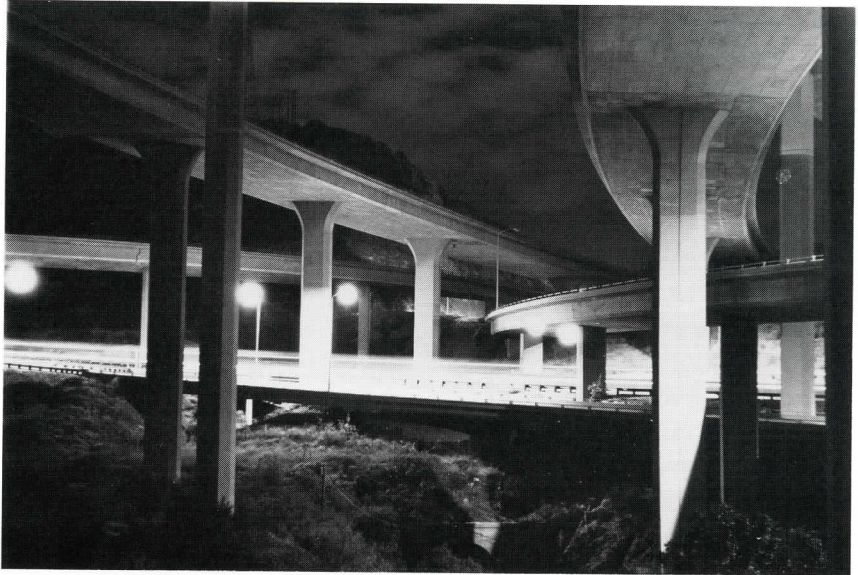
It has been almost two years since Miss Danby was separated from her precious forsythia bushes. I wonder sometimes if she dreams about them, like I do. Each night, my mind is filled with the fragrance of yellow. The blooms are much larger in my dreams, and they speak to me. The sun vibrates off their petals in a queer Morse code. I wonder if they spoke to her, Miss Danby, that way?

I can still see her, as I did the very first time, caressing her dear forsythia blooms in the mid-day sun of late winter. It was the day I moved into her neighbor's spare room (forty dollars a week, meals inclusive, no visitors after 8pm). I was planning to stay three months. My editor, at the newspaper, had allowed me this leave of absence to write the great novel I had always said I could and would write (if I had the time and a quiet place to do it). Now, I think perhaps, he wanted me to see for myself that I was no more than a journalist, and get back to my job with complete dedication. In any case, I was elated over the amount of time he had granted me; plus, if I sent him an article now and then, on life in 'Small-town, USA' he'd pay me to boot. I figured it would take no

more than a week to write the out-line, less than a month for the first draft, and that would leave me more than three weeks to leisurely edit and relax. (A month later, I was still debating on whether to make it a romance or a murder-mystery).

Miss Danby was standing by the forsythia bushes, below her porch (one of those wide numbers, from a more genteel age of sipping lemonade on a warm summer's eve), and if those blooms had been another person, I would have said she was in deep conversation. I was standing on my landlady's porch, typewriter in one hand and a suitcase in the other, when she turned and looked at me. The clear blue eyes of a young girl peered out at me from the ragged face of an old woman. They were mesmerizing eyes that spoke without words. Before I could catch myself. I was answering, "Fine, thank you " I blushed with embarrassment and she seemed to take pleasure in this, though she did not smile. She turned to pick up one of three kittens that had been playing tag around her ankles, and I quickly went inside. Later, I watched her from the window in my room. She walked around her garden, going from plant to plant, caressing, tending, encouraging new blooms. Here and there, she would pick up a cat to pet. There were several in the yard and even more sleeping or bathing themselves on the porch and in windows.

At first glance, she looked like any other old woman tending a garden, a crooked body under a floral-print dress, a large crocheted shawl with lots of dangling pieces of yarn, large calves and ankles, covered by thick wool stockings, and a large straw hat, tied under her chin with a large satin ribbon. It was



James Haydary
untitled
Photography

James Haydary
untitled
Photography



when she looked at me that I knew she was like no one I had ever met or would ever meet. Her eyes held you (or perhaps it's just me) in a strange trance that was hard to break. I always felt as though she were trying to communicate with me. Sometimes I wonder that I never tried to talk to her, but perhaps I was afraid of being forever caught in that trance, her spell, be it evil or good. Every morning, I passed her going to and from my morning jog, and every afternoon, going to and from my afternoon walk. It never occurred to me that my daily route could go in any direction other than past Miss Danby's house. Something always drew me that way. Perhaps it was she. Miss Danby would stare at me; her eyes calling me, questioning me, begging, imploring, crying . . . I never was certain.

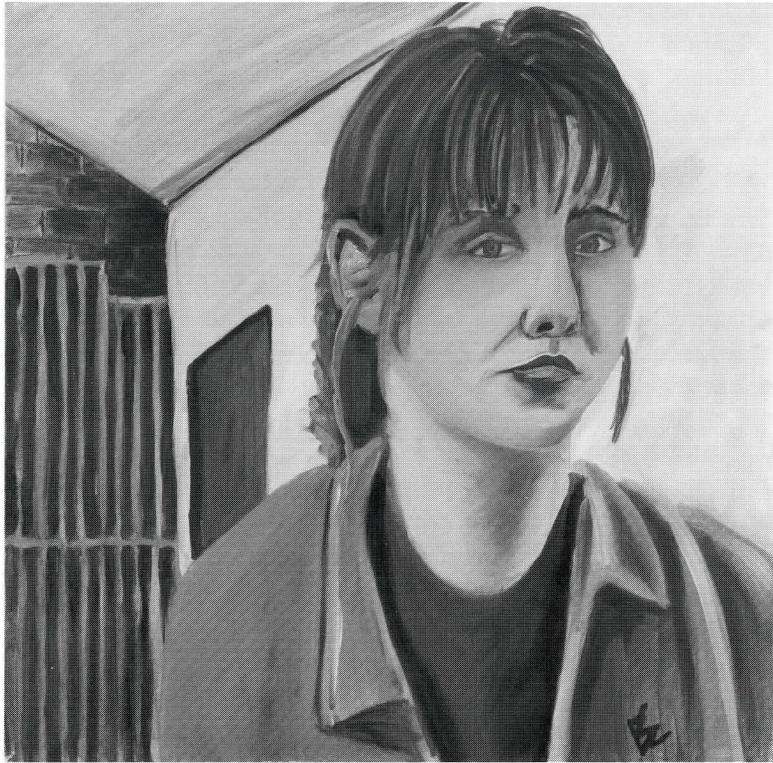
I questioned several people, including my landlady, about her, but was always met with vague accusations; ". . . a menace to this town . . . cats destroying . . . never speaks to anyone . . . small birds all gone . . . mad . . . hundreds of cats . . . hasn't smiled as long as I've lived . . . too many cats!" The only person willing to talk about her was our dear old postman, Mr. Farlow. He walked me home from town one day and told me all he knew of her:

"My father told me, and he was a good honest man my father, that the Danby's have lived in that house for as long as it has stood. Miss Danby's father, he owned the bank and most everything else around here, he built that house. He married him the prettiest girl in this here part of the country and told her that he wanted a child that would bring him as much happiness as the flowers of spring (he was right partial to flowers). So, that's just as

that young lady did. Why, when little Miss Danby was born, he said it was like seein the forsythias blooming in late winter. And that's how he gave her her name, Sythia. The mother died after giving birth, and that child became the most important thing in Mr. Danby's life. She was his little flower, she was. He brought her up spoilt. Mighty spoilt. She was fond of the flowers, like her father, and wanted nothing more than to spend her days in the garden with her sister blooms. And that's just as she did. Never wore no shoes neither. Some would say as she wanted to grow roots and become a permanent fixture in the garden. I don't take to that idea though. I think she was just a spoilt little girl, whom everyone was jealous of and so wouldn't play with, and so she felt best among the flowers that would always bloom with her loving care. And, of course, there's the cats.

The cats. There's the heart of her problems. People around here are tired of all the cats running about. Only the good Lord knows how many there are. They tear up peoples' gardens (cept for Miss Danby's, of course), kill small singing birds, meow and fight all night . . . people are just tired of them. Used to, people was more lenient with Miss Danby about her cats. But them was the people who could remember how this town was almost destroyed by mice and how the cats was their saviors. But people don't remember that no more. They don't remember how mice devoured fields of crop, spread diseases to the animals and humans alike, and made it impossible to keep food from one day to the next. Why, they used to have to keep stocks of grain in the bank vault.

It was Mr. Danby, her father, who came up with the idea of



Brenda Eubanks

untitled
Oil



Jeff Doles
Don't Take Life at First Glance
Pen and Ink

populating the town with cats. At the time there were only a few cats around here, and mostly toms. What was needed was females that would breed with the toms. Mr. Danby, who saw his investments at the bank being destroyed by mice, and who would have preferred gold to grain in his vault, got a couple of his men to go to surrounding towns and collect all the female cats they could get their hands on. They came back with seven females, and fifteen fightin' male cats. (Apparently they had some problems in determining the sexes. The men came back pretty roughed-up.)

After some time, and after many of the weaker toms were driven away by the stronger, the seven female cats that had been brought in, and the three that the town already had, were all pregnant. You never seen people kinder to cats, says my father, as they was to those little mothers-to-be. People set out milk for them, and boxes filled with warm blankets, and pampered them in every way. Within a year and a half, the mice were under control. Within two years, the mice was gone completely, and there was nothing left for the cats to eat (cept the little birds). People forgot about the cats, or mostly just ignored them. But not little Miss Sythia Danby (she was a young girl at the time). She had made friends of those cats, like she'd made friends of the flowers. She decided it was up to her to feed and care for her little friends, and her father, who probably hoped the cats would just move on out of town once the mice were gone, couldn't do nothing to stop her. He bent to her wishes like a flower to sunshine, he did. So, the cats became part of the scenery around here, and Little Miss Sythia's life became consumed

in the care of her feline companions. I think they was just more flowers in the garden to her.

As time went by, the cats and the flowers became her entire life. The caring and the feeding of them took up all her day, from morning till night, as it still does. Mr. Danby died not long after she turned of age. He left it in his will that the bank would always provide for her. And so we have the Miss Danby that you see each day, pulling weeds, planting seeds, feeding cats. . . . And, during the winter months, you'll find her sitting in her rocking chair by the front window, petting a cat. She sits there waiting for spring, cause that's when she blooms. But, that won't last much longer."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The powers that be, down at the bank, have decided to wash their hands of her. They're tired of people complaining about them cats, and they're tired of trying to deal with her. She won't listen to, nor talk to, anyone, save those cats and her flowers. For years, the bank has been payin her taxes, and the grocer, and who ever else, and I guess they just don't want to mess with it no more. Yesterday, they went and had Miss Danby declared unfit to care for herself. They're going to send her to one of them homes for the old. Right sad, right sad."

"Doesn't she have any relatives that can be contacted?"

"No one knows of any. She's probably outlived em, if there were."

Mr. Farlow left me on my landlady's porch, and I sat there and watched that strange little old person next door until it was time for dinner. She never looked at me that evening. Perhaps she knew what

was to come. She seemed so intent on her conversation with the forsythia, saying good-bye . . . or maybe making plans.

The next day, I watched out my window as two men in suits, and a woman, very smartly dressed, came to get Miss Danby. She didn't argue. She didn't speak at all. The woman went inside the house and came out with a small bag. The two men got in the front of their long, white car, and the woman got in the back with Miss Danby. She never fought them, Miss Danby. She just quietly went. As they drove away, I saw that she was looking back, not at her garden, not at the cats, but up to my window.

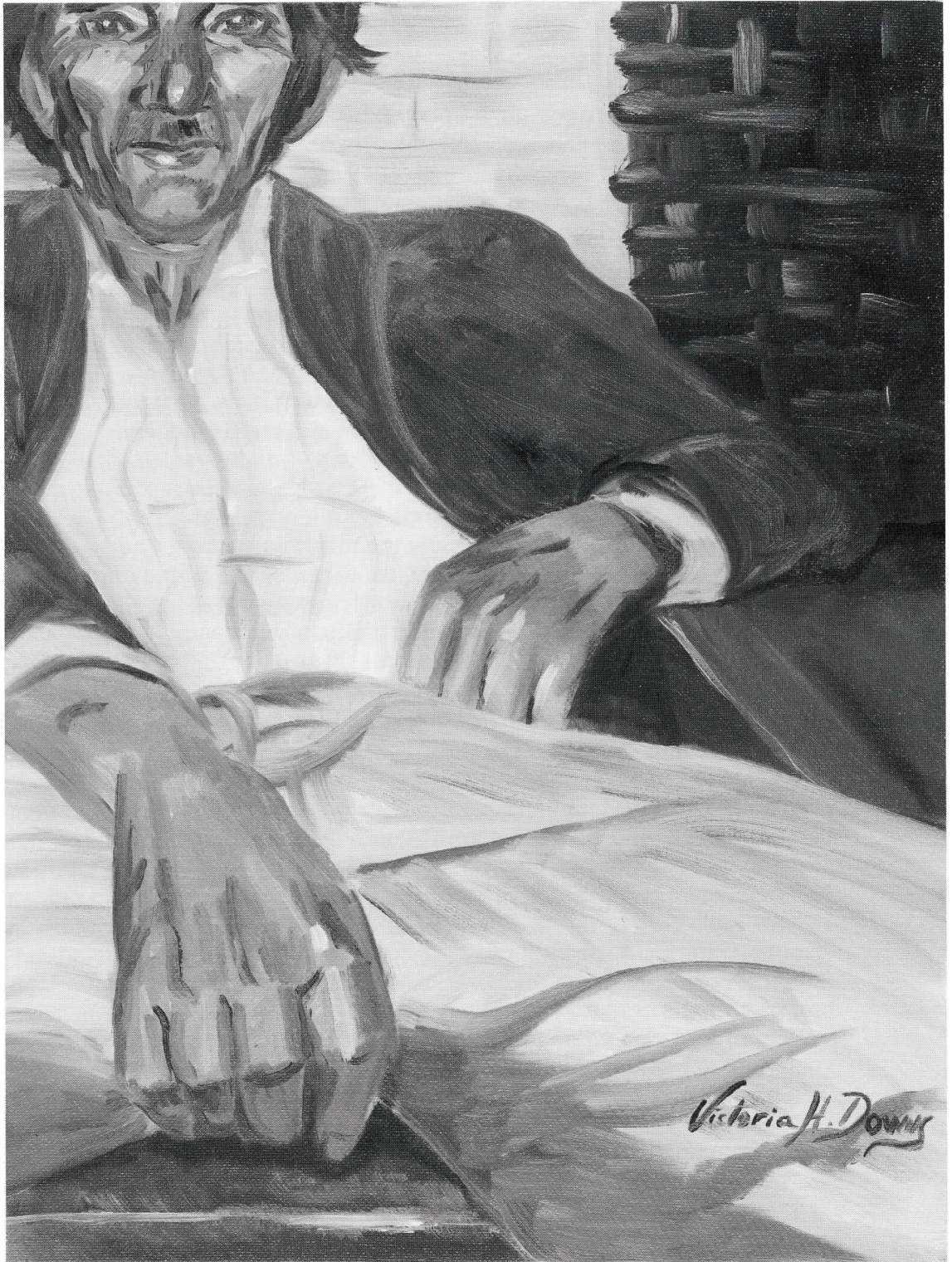
People, sent by the bank, I suppose, came and cleaned out the house, rounded up the cats, and put a 'For Sale' sign in the yard.

I never had cared for my life in the big city, or my hectic job at a big newspaper. The quiet,

small-town life was just what I had always wanted, and if I was ever to become the kind of writer I wanted to, I had to devote myself. The Danby house was the perfect house for me. The bank let me have it at a steal. They said it was wanting some love and care. I didn't think it was wanting love at all.

A few weeks after I moved in, I was out in the garden pulling weeds from among the forsythia, when a large yellow tabby walked in the yard and sat at a distance staring at me with large clear, blue eyes. I gave her some food, and since that day, she's never left. She walks the garden each day, and spends her afternoons napping under the forsythia bushes. She spent last winter sitting on the front window sill, looking out at the garden, deep in slumber.

Sometimes, I find her staring at me, and I can't help but say, "Very well, thank you." I call her Sythia.



Victoria Harres Downs
Tio
Oil

The Story of Peter and Wendy

Heidi Gotz

HIS FAT, CLUMSY fingers lulled along his bright red face of pimples. They circled the tops then slid down the sides. His perspiration made them glisten a sickly green-yellow in the gymnasium light. Some were enormous, like eggs breaking through the skin. Others were tiny and pointed, coming to a crusted tip. The largest of them all centered itself on the back of his neck - a long dark hair shooting from its center. Though the urge to look away was strong; the urge to keep looking was even stronger. Peter made everyone keep looking. He was nothing like the other overweight, body odor problem, acne faced kids that walked the halls of J. Jameson High School.

Mr. Leint worked down the aisle between myself and Peter. -Clipboard in hand, scribbling who was prepared for class today and who was not. Whistling Andy Griffith (per usual) he quizzed each of us as to which of the Presidential Physical Fitness Tests we would pass today.

"Ebbing?"

"Probably the pull-ups. Maybe the flexibility."

"Eldon?"

"Mmm-hmm."

"Great. Falt?"

"Ehh . . . flexibility."

"Flamhurst?"

"Sprints, sir. -In the bag."

Peter's turn.

"Forrester?"

"What a phlegmatic sot it is! Why sirrah, you're an anchorite! --a vile insensible stock. You're a soldier--you're a walking block, fit only to dust the company's regimentals on!"

The class and Mr. Leint are not surprised at Peter's answer. The class and Mr. Leint are completely surprised at Peter's answer. Between the two initial reactions no one manages to say a word. Everyone sits stone faced, staring in amazement.

Mr. Leint realizes that he should be used to this by now.

"Good luck. Franelle?"

Roll call continues. The mood has changed somewhat as it always does after Peter has spoken. Leint blows the whistle, and we all scramble for different sections of the gym.

My group, sit-ups, consists of about eleven. Peter sits directly to my left.

Leint comes to the edge of the mat, whistle in hand

"Remember, anyone who goes above a 95% today receives honorable mention in the--"

Peter throws a finger in the air.

"What do you mean by more honorable? I don't understand such expressions in the sense of a definition of human activities. More honorable, more high-minded--all that's sheer nonsense, absurdities, obsolete clichés which I flatly reject. Everything that is useful to mankind is honorable. I only understand one word--useful. You can titter as much as you like, but that's true." Peter, finished, returned his hand to his side and fixed a gaze upon my bare knee.

I fixed a gaze right back. I looked, though, straight into the side

of his head, hoping to burn the skin away and see to the brain.

Sit-up hell ended and our group loitered by the water fountain. Peter leaned in close, his big lips puckering up the water. His tongue was lazy in its slurps and shhlips. Water moistened his spotted neck. His pimples grew before my very eyes with this small amount of nourishment.

Tom, the boldest of the bunch, couldn't help himself.

"Move it, fat boy."

Peter turned slowly and squared his puffed up face only inches from Tom's. "I can't stand a naked light bulb, anymore I can a rude remark or vulgar action."

Peter's retort hung heavily in the air, unreturnable by violence or speech. He moved through the sweaty bunch of us. Just before reaching the doors where beyond the buses were arriving, he turned and looked down his nose.

"When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd."

With that he left. Tom didn't get a drink, just wiped his hands on his pants and flipped off the space where Peter had been.

I clicked. A devout Catholic upbringing made me know what line came next and out I went to solve Peter's puzzle. I tried to remember word for word.

Peter's bus was 255. Half empty. I climbed on. No one looked familiar except, of course, Peter who sat alone in the center. His head was propped against the window. I walked to the next seat. He didn't even turn.

"I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility." I trembled a little waiting to see if

maybe I had solved something or if I, too, had gone completely mad.

Peter snapped to life. He jumped to a stand—one knee on the seat and a foot on the floor. His backpack fell to the ground, but he ignored it. I was closer to Peter than ever before. I could see the yellow edges of his teeth. He looked into my eyes for a moment and then asked very quietly, "You take pleasure then in the message?"

Another quote --one I didn't know, but I wanted to keep up.

"Yeah, I do."

Disappointment washed over his face. He sat down again and looked out the window.

I sat next to him now and started to complain.

"Look. I'm trying to talk to you here. Why do you have to be so weird all the time? I'm trying to be nice. I'm on a bus to the wrong side of town, for crying out loud. Does that mean anything to you? Nothing. It's not like you have eight million friends so you can let an opportunity just pass you by. Are you listening? Well, I'm sorry, but you have got to be—"

"Peace! I will stop your mouth."

Grabbing my chin, he pulls me to him. Quickly, his mouth covers mine. What starts as a clumsy CPR rescue becomes a kiss amid my flailing arms. I start with resistance but grow into acceptance. I can taste tuna pieces. There's a hair on my tongue. For some reason I let him finish and my breasts swell with satisfaction. He turns back to the window. I jump from the seat and tap the driver.

"—really embarrassing," I whisper in her ear, "but I got on the wrong bus. Can I please get off, please?"

I'm as East as Middleberry Road. This means about three extra miles before home. I spit a lot during the walk to lose the tuna taste and wonder if Peter thinks that I'm smarter than all the other kids at school. I bet I was his first kiss. I bet he'll remember me for the rest of his life. . . .

"But, alas, he forgot all about me."

At 4:37 a.m. I wake up remembering the kiss. Peter's tongue was fat, like the rest of Peter, and it filled all of my mouth. I wondered if that is not all Peter has that can fill my mouth. In the relative quiet of humidifier and refrigerator hum I imagine it. Certainly not on the bus, but maybe on the gym mats or in the Science atrium. —Or in the band shell.

At 5:08 a.m. I wake up and curse myself for being disgusting. I can't fall back to sleep, so I lay still, figuring what to wear. I wonder, just a little, if he wants it. With me or with anyone.

The cafeteria is ear-piercing and dumb. Everyone squeaks and shouts. The cheerleaders "ooh" as Lisa Rodecki does the Chinese splits atop the elongated, Formica table. Chad Milligan, their permanent mascot, is palmed by a supervisor just as his tongue reaches her upper thigh. The two crinkle noses as they are dragged apart. Lunch is Italian Beef sandwiches. Beef is everywhere and currently in motion on the new ceiling fans. Mashed potatoes are in eyeglasses. Gym shoes are on table tops. Styrofoam cups are ringed with lipstick and gnaw marks.



Sharon Viland
untitled
Oil

Peter is four people from me in the lunch line. Just some of us hear him say, "The arm seized one loaf of bread and took it. Isabeau rushed out; the thief was making off at top speed; Isabeau pursued and caught him. The thief had thrown the bread, but his arm was still bleeding. It was Jean Valjean." He runs off toward his usual table, waiting empty and lost in the back wing of the cafeteria. Only Maria, the server, watches him like I do and tries to imagine what, possibly, he could be thinking of. She clicks her tongue at him and rolls her eyes. "Poor boy," she says, "I just don't know what's wrong with him."

My feet stick to pea juice and spilt milk. The sandwich goes slowly. The girls around me have finished and are telling stories about Molly Trinner, the tallest, thinnest, most nightmarish girl in school. She's engaged to a guy in college. Her parents bought her a trip to the Bahamas for her birthday. She did it with Chad Milligan. She tried to seduce the Art teacher. She stole a leather jacket.

A noise not matching all the other cafeteria noises is happening behind me. Too wrapped up in the many lives of Molly Trinner, I don't hear it at first. Then, spinning, I see Peter in the center of a giant commotion. Molly, only an arm's length from him, is crying and pulling his hair. Dozens of other students lurch and shove the jumble into a semi-circle around the vending machines. There are punches and elbows and hair-pulls. Most of the boys have lost their baseball caps as they lunge through the mob for Peter. With Molly finally removed the group disperses . . . except for Peter who remains smiling and laughing with his hands in his pockets.

"Fucking freak!"

Food goes everywhere. Peter stands still and content. His lips are moving rapidly. Getting closer, I can make it out.

"Nobody listens to me anymore. I can't talk to walls because they're yelling at me. I can't talk to my wife; she listens to walls. I just want someone to hear what I have to say. And maybe if I talk long enough, it will make sense. And I want you to teach me to understand what I read."

Then, more, laughter. Three supervisors run in rings around him.

"Young man, you just can't go around kissing whoever you please."

"Your going to be in big trouble. . . ."

"Oh no . . . none of that, mister. . . ."

"Peace! I will stop your mouth."

Peter swoops up to Ms. Layton's mouth just as he had mine. Before he is finally dragged away, Peter reshouts the last line at least ten more times. No female is safe. His tongue waves beneath his lower lip. A drop of drool is wedged between his cheek and chin.

Five girls and two supervisors spend the day in the Principal's office filing reports. Peter makes that his favorite line.

