

Kelsey

REVIEW

2010



Kelsey REVIEW



Fall 2010

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**MERCER**
County Community College
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Kelsey Review 2010

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As a community-based publication we welcome sponsors and supporters interested in joining the Kelsey Review and other MCCC endeavors.

Beginning in 2010, sponsors will be able to join a college and foundation-wide sponsor network. Your support will be acknowledged in select college and foundation publications and recognized within select college-supported activities in the community.

The 2010 *Kelsey Review* showcases the work of Mercer County residents. More than a hundred writers and artists showed their skills through their submissions for this year's edition. Once again, *Review* editors faced tough choices in selecting the poems, short stories, non-fiction, and art you will find in these pages. The arts are alive and well here in the capital county, and this collection highlights that fact. I know readers will find this issue of great interest.

Mercer County Community College's mission includes maintaining strong ties to the community. The *Kelsey Review* is just one of the many ways the college engages the people who live and work in Mercer County. Many county residents also rely on the college for learning opportunities for personal advancement, education, skill development, and other opportunities for appreciating the arts, such as through WWFM and Kelsey Theatre. Our athletics program consistently produces teams that compete—and win—on a national level. I encourage everyone with an interest in being part of a vibrant educational community to learn more about MCCC through a campus visit, or by viewing the College website, at www.mccc.edu.

We hope that after enjoying your issue of the *Kelsey Review* you will take the time to pass it along to new readers. Whether a neighbor or a stranger, sharing your copy can help us reach more readers, and encourage more participation in the arts here in Mercer County.

The *Kelsey Review* is distributed in part through the Mercer County public library system and is partially supported by funds from the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission. Each edition of the *Review* presents professional quality poems, fiction, non-fiction and art that provokes thought and, with luck, inspiration. Enjoy what you find here.

Sincerely,



Patricia C. Donohue, Ph.D.
President
Mercer County Community College

From the Editors...

Photography has in recent years not been much featured in the pages of this publication. This year, very few art submissions crossed our transom, and many that did were photographs. Photography, harbinger of change in the visual arts at the time of its invention, is the embodiment of a whole new art form: digital art, visuals informed by the nature of image-manipulation tools and digital photography in general.

These images are old-school, and are not heavily edited or modified. But similar images next year might be. It all depends on what arrives on our doorstep.

Kelsey Review veterans grace our pages: Doris Spears, Janet Kirk, and others return. Hunt down their works between the covers of this 2010 issue, and you won't be disappointed. New writers are also present. The more things change, the more they stay the same. And time goes on.

One change we note is in our editorial staff. This is the last year—for the time being, at least—that Holly-Katharine Johnson will appear on our masthead. After five years, Holly-Katharine has decided to move on to new challenges. Edward Carmien assumes the duties of Editor as of the 2011 issue.

We'll be adding social networking to our bag of tricks here at the *Review*. Look for us online!

Let us finish with speaking about ourselves in the third person and move on to this issue's interesting—and accidental—fascination with Princeton. By chance, fate, or alignment of the stars, several works in this issue feature that borough, including our featured non-fiction item. An excerpt from a book scheduled for publication in the spring of 2011, Linda G. Arntzenius's "Tales From the Institute for Advanced Study" speaks about the creation of the IAS, invoking names like Einstein and Gödel.

We thank all who sent their work. There would be no *Kelsey Review* without you! Are you disappointed not to see your work in this issue? Keep trying! Thanks also to the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission, who provide a slice of our funding—and thanks to Mercer County Community College, which provides the rest of the pie. One final thanks to graphic designer Tracy Patterson, who recently left MCCC for New York, where she now works as a freelance designer, and new thanks to Edyta Kuciapa, who has taken over layout duties as of this issue. Grant paperwork assistants Barbara Prince and Kami Abdala and public relations folks—who help get out the word about the *Review*—Saveria Symons and Wendy Humphrey also deserve notice and thanks. And our valiant assistant editors, who fill out the editorial board, receive a tip of the hat: Luray Gross, Ellen Jack, and Roberta Clipper. Last but not least, Editor Emeritus Robin Schore still takes a peek and keeps his hand in, help that is much appreciated. Without all these expert assistants, the *Kelsey Review* could not be.

Please enjoy what follows. It is the work of those who live and work in Mercer County. These pages are the County's pages, they are your pages, they are our pages.

Co-Editors
Edward Carmien
Holly-Katharine Johnson

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Luray Gross, Poetry Editor
Ellen Jacko, Poetry Editor
Roberta Clipper, Fiction Editor

The Reclamation of Woodhenge

I spotted the blonde just as I was about to switch on the ignition in the truck. The truck's windshield needed a wash real bad but I could make out the blonde just fine.

She was about a hundred feet away, and she had—as my high school career counselor once told me to have—a purposeful stride. (Or maybe my h.s.c.c. told me to have a “stride full of purpose.”) No matter; this blonde had nailed striding and purpose just fine.

She was wearing high heels and one of those little sleeveless flowered dresses that show a heck of a lot and dangle the rest in front of a guy's imagination. Sunglasses hid her eyes but I would have bet my baloney sandwich her peepers were baby blue.

My boss, Hawk Fernandes, had spent the past ten minutes jawing with me and rescuing waterlogged angleworms from puddles in the municipal works parking lot. Now Hawk stood up and blinked a few times as he watched the blonde. Hawk goes to ground whenever he's confronted with anything resembling the threat of responsibility but today his antennae must have been down. Hawk was gazing at the approaching blonde like a Labrador eyeing a bag of kibble.

The blonde stopped in front of Hawk. She put her hands on her hips, obliterating a couple of daffodils and several sweet peas, and asked, “Did you pick up five logs at 44 Myrtle Street?”

Hawk's face was turned away from me but I was pretty sure he was wearing his look of extreme bafflement. Hawk wears his look of e. b. a lot of the time and it's often genuine. Hawk's a good guy but he doesn't have the up-to-the-minute smarts to handle a situation like this.

Situations like this are why Hawk hired me: Rocco Tumpey, 32 year-old male, resident of central New Jersey since birth, married once, divorced once, employee of the Princeton Borough Public Works Department for 11 years. We in the PWD head off trouble.

Of course, sometimes trouble just sneaks up and rings the bell.

The blonde took a fresh pack of Salem Green Labels from her purse, tore off the cellophane ribbon, and asked, “Did you?”

Hawk turned to me and the blonde did the same. She had those pouty bee stung lips like Goldie Hawn.

She shook a cigarette loose from the pack and lifted it to her mouth.

Hawk scratched around in his pockets for a book of matches.

“Those logs are a wooden sculpture,” she said. “Its name is Woodhenge. My soon-to-be ex-husband, Pete, made it. Pete says Woodhenge is art.”

I don't know much about art but I knew I hadn't noticed any on Myrtle Street. “I picked up storm debris on Myrtle but I didn't see any sculpture,” I said.

Hawk had come up empty in his search for matches. The blonde took an

iridescent lime green lighter out of her purse. “I suppose you didn’t recognize it as art. It looks like plain old logs. But they were arranged in a real artful way.”

“I see,” I said.

She lit her Salem and inhaled. “Do you have Woodhenge in the back of your truck?”

“Nope”

Hawk said, “Rocky took all the debris—including whatisname? Woodhenge?—to the Ecological Center.”

She blew smoke toward the sky. “Where’s that?”

“3701 Princeton Pike.”

“I don’t have a car today. I wonder if one of you could drive me there to pick up Woodhenge?”

Hawk owed me a lot of favors and he probably figured in some warped way that he was reducing his debt when he piped up, “Rocky, take the lady out to the Center and pick up her logs. I can get along without you.”

Hawk slapped the side of the truck which caused several paint chips to fall from the roof onto my head and shoulders.

The blonde peered at as much of me as was visible through the rolled down window, exhaled smoke into the breeze, and started to walk around the front of the truck. Hawk looked inside the truck, shook his head, stuck his hand through the window, and waved it around.

“Yeah, yeah, I getcha’,” I said. I tossed the desiccated remains of a bunch of green grapes and something black and crisp that was possibly a banana peel into a Dunkin’ Donuts box. I pushed the box under the seat. I reached over to open the passenger door but the blonde had managed on her own. As she got into the cab I caught a good look at her panty line and about eighty percent of her left leg. Her high heels were pink and had little teeny straps that curled several times around her ankles before they tied in bows.

Hawk ran around the truck and slammed the door. “Take your time, Rocky.”

I shifted into reverse and backed out of the lot onto Harrison. The blonde frowned at the windshield. The washer reservoir has been out of fluid since before Christmas because Hawk and I made a bet with some other guys in the department as to how long we could all go without putting washer fluid in any of the trucks. I switched on the wipers and rearranged a few bug molecules.

“Mind if I finish my cigarette?”

“Go ahead. My broker put me into Philip Morris six months ago.”

She looked at me. I didn’t look back.

I burned a little rubber at the Harrison and Nassau intersection while turning right onto Nassau.

“My name’s Chloe.”

“Hi, Chloe.”

She didn’t talk until I slowed for the light at Olden Lane. “I don’t care if Woodhenge is where you dumped him or not.”

I pumped the brake a little harder. “Whoa. We’re not going to get all the way out there and you not want Woodhenge, are we?”

She blew smoke out the window. “I’m in so much trouble ‘cause ‘a that damn Woodhenge.”

She sighed. Her lips got poutier. I knew she was all set to tell me her tale. “I was having my piano lesson with my teacher, Teddy, in my living room just like I do every Friday morning.”

She looked at me as though expecting me to say something. I finally gave her a “Yeah?”

“I was playing ‘Great Balls of Fire’ when all of a sudden Magdalena—she’s my soon-to-be ex-mother-in-law—is standing beside the piano bench in her pajamas yelling into my face. Magdalena said you took Woodhenge and I should have run outside and told you to take your mitts off him.” She had crossed her legs and I noticed that her toenails were painted lavender.

“You and your ex-mother-in-law are still friendly?”

“She lives with me. Magdalena and I get along fine — much better than either of us do with Pete. Pete’ll be my ex-husband in two weeks, but, of course, he’ll still be Magdalena’s son. He once took a bunch of my clothes and climbed up on the roof and threw them across the fence into the neighbor’s pool.”

“Sounds like you and Pete are making a smart decision.”

The light changed and she pulled out the ashtray in the truck’s dashboard and snuffed out her cigarette.

“Could we stop at Teddy’s house?”

“Teddy?”

“My piano teacher. I’m advising Teddy about a mission.”

“Mission? Like going to Africa and screwing up a lot of Africans’ lives?”

“No. A mission of revenge.”

This is where I should have told her I don’t do revenge. I should have said I’m a live and let live kind of guy. I should have told her revenge is bad for the soul.

But I didn’t tell her those things. I stopped for the light at Witherspoon and noticed her lavender toenails again. I looked for a matching lavender flower in her dress. Sure enough, I saw one—about six inches down from the neckline on her left side.

“Where does Teddy Live?” I asked.

“Linden Lane.”

I turned right on Witherspoon, then right again on Hamilton until I hit Linden. Chloe pointed to a pale blue bungalow. “That’s Teddy’s house on the corner.”

Chloe walked to the door. She tossed me a little wiggle about halfway up the sidewalk. She rang the bell. The door opened and a guy came out and talked to Chloe for a minute. He stepped back into the house and came out again. This time he was carrying a jar. He and Chloe came out to the truck.

The jar had a piece of tinfoil held on top with a rubber band, The inside of the jar was lined with white paper.

“This is Teddy,” said Chloe. Teddy and I nodded to each other. Teddy had butch wax in his hair and something that might have been a mustache under his nose. He was wearing a T-shirt that read “I wonder if illiterate people get the full effect of alphabet soup?” His bottom half was clad in pastel plaid Bermuda shorts and huaraches.

Chloe and Teddy did some whispering as I drove along Jefferson Road. At the intersection of Jefferson and Wiggins, Teddy said, “Could you drop me at Anderson Cleaners?”

“Glad to.”

I drove four blocks to Anderson Cleaners and pulled into the parking lot. Teddy whispered something to Chloe. He got out and asked me to keep the engine running.

“Hey, I’m not drivin’ a tour bus here. How long you gonna’ be?”

“Coupla’ minutes.”

Teddy went into the cleaners. I drummed my fingers on the steering wheel while Chloe sighed.

“So, you’re gonna’ be a free woman in how long did you say?”

“Two weeks.”

“Gonna’ stick around Princeton?”

“Yep. I’m keepin’ the house on Myrtle.”

“Oh, yeah, you mentioned Magdalena and you . . .”

Suddenly the truck shook as Teddy yanked the passenger door open. He dived over Chloe’s lap and grabbed my ankle with his left hand as he tried to push the gas pedal with his right hand.

I was kicking at both of Teddy’s hands when a woman yelled, “I’m callin’ the cops!”

I looked up to see a hefty woman closing in on the truck.

I looked down at Teddy. “What’s going on?”

Teddy was struggling to right himself. “She ruined my shirt!”

The woman stuck her arm into the truck and jabbed a finger at Teddy’s Bermuda plaid covered butt. “This nut job emptied a jar of carpet beetles in my storage room. Those beetles are gonna’ destroy all the merchandise I got in there.”

“You ruined my shirt!” yelled Teddy.

“Look—I don’t want to be a part of this,” I said. “I’m a Borough employee.”

“That means you can’t toss me out of this truck,” said Teddy smugly from the truck floor.

“What are you talking about?”

“I have sanctuary on Borough property in this truck. Regulation 35, page 17.”

“He’s right, Rocky,” said Chloe. “I took a course in business law at Mercer County College and I’m pretty sure the teacher said something like that.”

“You learned that wackos are safe from apprehension while on Borough property?”

“Something similar.”

“It’s your duty to protect me,” said Teddy. “If you toss me out of this truck, the results will be on your head. My brother’s a lawyer and he’ll ruin you.”

“Get outta’ that truck!” shouted the woman.

“No!”

“You can’t stay in my parking lot! I’m callin’ the cops!”

“I’m gettin’ outta here,” I said to no one in particular as I started the truck.

Teddy looked up at me. “Where are we going?”

“3701 Princeton Pike. I’m pickin’ up logs, then I’m gettin’ ridda’ you two.”

I turned onto Nassau. The woman from the cleaners was still yelling. “I heard that address! 3701 Princeton Pike. I’m callin’ the cops right now!” I took Nassau through town and turned left onto Mercer. Teddy sat up and wedged himself between Chloe and me.

We didn’t talk much on the way to the Ecological Center. I drove into the driveway and waved at Ronnie who was sitting in the check-in shed. I parked in front of the debris pile.

Teddy stayed in the truck. Chloe got out and picked out the five logs she wanted and I tossed them in the back of the truck.

She grinned. “Ate your Wheaties for breakfast?”

“Honey, I cracked open a Budweiser just like I do every morning.”

I looked in the window of the truck and saw the glove box was open.

Teddy had discovered Hawk's stash of blackberry brandy. And mine of Old Grand Dad.

"Hey, it's a party," Chloe said.

"Help yourself," I said.

Teddy unscrewed the cap of my Old Grand Dad, took a gulp, and held the bottle out to me.

I was about to take the bottle when a Borough squad car drove up. The woman from the cleaners got out of the passenger side. Harley Throckmorton got out of the driver's side.

Harley is the type of guy who should definitely not become a cop. Bad temperament. Harley and I go way back to junior high when I broke his left bicuspid during an apple bob that got out of control. Later, in our high school years I spearheaded a campaign to re-name Harley "Throttlebottom." He has held on tighter'n a tick to his grudge against me.

Harley adjusted his cap. "Rocky."

"Harley."

"What seems to be the trouble here?"

The dry cleaning woman jabbed a finger inside the truck and got Teddy in the right bicep. "This yo-yo dumped a jar full of carpet beetles in my storage room. Them beetles'll go right for the wool. I got sweaters and suits and coats in there."

Harley took out a notebook, turned a few pages, and asked, "What's your name, ma'am?"

"Rosalinda Gomez."

Harley looked into the truck at Teddy. "Is Ms. Gomez right?"

Teddy folded his arms in front of his chest. "Yep. And I'd do it again. She ruined my red cowboy shirt. All the fringes are tangled up, the sequins came off, and part of it turned fuschia."

Rosalinda's bodice exploded with ruffles and lace and outrage. "Hey, the label in that shirt said it was made in some place I never heard of. When you pay two bucks for a shirt at a Tijuana flea market ya' take a risk on quality."

Chloe took a swig from the bottle of blackberry brandy.

Harley sawed his tie back and forth before pushing up the knot closer to his second chin. "Ma'am, there's an open bottle ordinance in Princeton."

"We're not in Princeton."

"That's technically correct, but I'm sure there is such an ordinance in Lawrenceville too."

Harley is padded with years of good living; of indulging himself on Hostess Twinkies and Ring Dings. His most noticeable moving part is his stomach. He looks like he has swallowed a basketball that's sitting on his belt.

"Tell you what I have to do," said Harley. "I have to give Rocky here a warning about the open bottles in his vehicle."

"And . . ." Harley turned to Rosalinda, "do you want to press charges, Ma'am?"

"Damn right I do."

"Please step out of the truck, sir," Harley said to Teddy.

Teddy shook his head. "I'm a Princeton Borough taxpayer and I'm entitled to use this truck as sanctuary. Regulation 35, page 17."

Harley glared at me. I knew he had never heard about Regulation 35. He probably figured I had told Teddy about it.

At this point, a blue Audi drove up. A tall chunky guy dressed in a suit

and tie got out of the Audi and walked over. He had a facial expression like Chief Thunderthud with a case of hemorrhoids.

“Pete!” shouted Chloe.

Pete didn’t burn fuel on small talk. “So, Chloe, I’m eatin’ lunch at Y.Y. Doodles with a potential client when my cell rings.”

“Doodles is a good place,” said Harley. “What were you eating?”

Pete looked at Harley. “Sautéed squid.”

“Squid can be rubbery. Was yours rubbery?”

“It was fine. Anyhow, my cell rings and it’s my mother saying Woodhenge was stolen. Then my client points across the street to the dry cleaners and says, ‘What’s all the ruckus over there?’

“I look over and see my wife’s dingbat piano teacher is running around like he’s nuts—which he is—and jumping headfirst into a Borough truck which takes off. I walk across to see what’s going on and this lady,” Pete nodded to Rosalinda, “tells me the cops are coming any minute to arrest an insane piano teacher. Said insane person has just taken off with two accomplices - a mouthy blonde and a Borough employee. I put two and two together and when the squad car comes to pick up the lady,” another nod to Rosalinda, “I follow and here I am.”

“Pete, seeing as I’ll be your ex-wife in two weeks, you can take your Am and scam!”

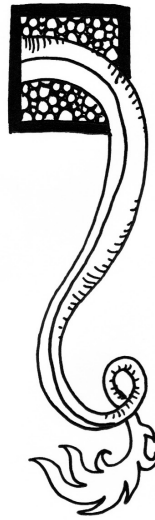
“That suits me down to the ground!” said Pete.

“Rocky, take me home!” said Chloe.

Off we sped. Chloe, Teddy and I. I was a man with a plan. I would drop Teddy off on Linden Lane. Then Chloe and I would rebuild Woodhenge as Mother-in-law Magdalena watched approvingly.

As time goes by, Chloe and Magdalena will ask me to move in with them. Teddy will come on Fridays to give Chloe her piano lesson.

Ah, sweet life. **KR**



—Framed Dragon
Anne Karetnikov

Assault (or It)

First thing when you wake
that apparition claws its way
out of your clogged-up brain.

Later you see it looking through
the windowpane that is
your lover's eyes.

All day it hangs just out of reach,
curling its talons underneath
deep ruffled feathers. But you know

its habits, know it will unsheath,
deliver through tonight's oblivion
some casual epiphany of wounds.

Architecture of Roxbury

Still there the nineteenth century homes
upstairs sleeping porches and drawing rooms
with velvet pulleys to summon backstairs' servants
when my mother and my Aunt Celia took the trolley
to the lower end of Roxbury
to buy from heirs of Transcendentalists
vases with gilded ears
a brass slipper with a shapely heel
chuckkas.

In the domed synagogue on Seaver Street
middle-class Jews in talliths prayed.
Still there the open space of Franklin Park
with trellised rose garden
opaque aviaries
octagonal pagoda that sold Cracker Jacks
balloons that floated up and up and up.

A half-century since the Irish girl dusted
with waving ostrich feathers my mother's bric-a-brac,
in Princeton I watch in Robertson Hall
Leah Mahan's documentary, *Holding Ground:*

The Rebirth of Dudley Street.

Grainy images of black children waking to citron sunrises.
In the icy dawn burnt-out plots where landlord arsonists
had lit the skies. I watch heart sore.

Rats scurry among carcasses dumped from abattoirs.
Lost dreams there in Roxbury. On the cobblestone streets
where Emerson and Thoreau had wandered through fields
of barberry bush, savin, and snow,
still here the hope. In that triangle formed by
Dudley and Warren Streets, The Roxbury Coalition
has built flat fronted houses
strung like freshly washed linen
on a laundry line.

The Secret Life

“It’s inoperable. We can keep you comfortable, Katharine, but there’s nothing more we can do.” The crusty old doctor looked at the chart hanging on the bed. “How much time, Dr. Charles?” Kitty asked, tears welling up in her eyes. She bravely blinked them back and sat up in the hospital bed.

“A good year perhaps, then . . . well, we don’t know. Sarcoma of the occipital lobe. Unpredictable and very, very rare. In fact,” he said, straightening up, “it’s so rare that Dr. Percival Blair-Brown, the world-famous neurosurgeon from London General, is flying over to New York especially to study the case!”

“Code Blue! Code Blue!” the loudspeakers in the corridor suddenly erupted. Doctors, nurses, orderlies raced past Kitty’s door, shouting commands, bustling with authority. Dr. Charles brightened. “Code Blue! Have to go now! Feel better!” He dashed out to join the stampede. Kitty, who had just recovered from breast cancer and lupus, was crushed. It didn’t look like she was going to pull out of it this time. She had been a sickly child: leukemia followed by losing her leg in the dreadful accident. Then, malaria when she was twenty, infected by a rare Jurassic mosquito in the Great Swamp near Iselin, New Jer . . .

“Counselor Walter?” Charles’ Mont Blanc drummed the conference table ominously. “Katharine? Are you on board?”

“Yes!” Kitty exclaimed, as Code Blue faded away. “I am! On board!” Crap, what was it this time?

“Good,” Charles said. “The firm must present a united front. We don’t want a repeat of last year’s debacle in the *Times*.” He stood. Everyone else stood. Kitty stood. United we stood. What was she on board *for*?

Kitty picked up her messages from Cynthia’s desk outside her office. Her secretary wasn’t there—she would be brewing up Kitty’s 11:00 pot of tea. Kitty rifled through the stack: her son, her broker, her hairdresser on top, her colleagues far down the pile. Where they belonged.

“What did Tim want? Did he say?” she asked when Cynthia brought the teapot into the office. “He’s usually not even *up* by 10:00.”

“He did not say, but he *did* say it was not urgent. Don’t do your ‘all-points-bulletin thing’—his words, not mine.” Cynthia poured the Assam blend into a warmed Havilland cup. “Tiffany made him jump through hoops just to get through to *me*—he was not a happy camper.” She paused. “I had a word with her.” She set the teapot back on the tray. “The Henderson letters are on the server, the files from the law library are on my desk and I’m still searching the database for that 1980 ruling.”

Kitty looked up from her computer. Cynthia, who resembled the teapot in its padded cozy, was the rock on which Kitty built her professional life. Charles had tried to poach her twice and had been—rather haughtily—rebuffed; Cynthia did

not like men in general and Charles in particular. “What time is it in Calcutta?”
“9:30. They’re ten and a half hours ahead.”

Kitty nodded. Tom would still be at dinner. “I have a lunch meeting.”
“Isabella told me. I put it on your calendar—Mr. Winslaff, Mr. Rhodes and Mrs. Patel. 1:00 at Darvan on Third Avenue. Here’s the menu. You haven’t been there before.”

“What do you recommend?”

“Salmon Dijon or the chicken with balsamic over salad greens.”

Kitty smiled. “Anything else I need to know?”

“No.” Cynthia crossed the broad expanse of Kashar rug to the door.

Exactly two minutes later, her phone buzzed. “Tim,” Cynthia said.

“Mom?” her son said plaintively. “Jeez, you’re harder to get hold of than the president! What’s with the receptionist?”

“Sorry, Timmy, we’ve got another new one. She’s overeager. What’s up?”

Her son paused.

“What is it, honey? Something wrong?” Kitty focused on the little green phone light. She started to assemble her forces: medical, academic, legal . . .

“I got into Skull & Bones.”

“Oh!” Kitty cried in relief. “Oh, that’s wonderful. Your father will be so pleased.”

“I talked to him already. Like when I couldn’t get you, I tried his hotel in Calcutta and he was in. He was very happy.”

“I should think so. He wasn’t out to dinner?”

“No, the staff was having dinner at the hotel. I’m not supposed to tell you about Skull & Bones, but like I couldn’t talk to you every single day and not say *anything*.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell anybody.”

“. . . we won’t tell anybody about this, will we, Katie? It’ll be our little secret.” Uncle Charles zipped his pants. Kitty shook her head. Nobody would believe her anyway: Charles was her mother’s favorite brother, the one who took over after the rest of the family disappeared in the worst tsunami in Calcutta’s history, sacrificing his own dreams of a career in law—

“. . . on Thursday,” Tim said. Silence. “Mom? Are you there, Mom?”

“Ummm?” Kitty said, still shaking her head. “Thursday? Did you say Thursday?”

“Yeah. At JFK. The museum has somebody picking him up.”

Ah! Tom was coming *home* on Thursday. Two days earlier than expected.

“I’ll come down on the weekend, OK?”

“Right,” she said automatically. Then, “Yes! That would be great. We’ll have dinner at Bouley—I’ll have Cynthia call right now.”

“Mom, it takes weeks to get a reservation.”

“Cynthia has their special number. We may have to eat at nine, but you don’t mind that, do you?”

“You’re great, Mom. Love you. Talk to you tomorrow.”

. . . and tomorrow is only a day away . . . Kitty bravely took her place in the dinner line at the orphanage. She’d been there three years, ever since Mummy and Daddy were killed in the dreadful accident along with her baby brother, Kabir. Her real name was Kirsi, but Father Charles changed it to Kitty because Kirsi wasn’t a Christian name. She’d been born in Calcutta to high-born parents from the top caste, but they’d moved to America after the tsunami and lived in dreadful squalor in Iselin, New Jersey. Her parents had sacrificed their dreams of legal careers in

India for Kitty and her brother. “We’ll work in restaurants or sell newspapers in the subway, so you and Kabir can do anything you want,” her mother said. So they lived with five other Indian families—all from the lowest castes—crowded into an apartment building that smelled like curry.

Her parents’ dream ended when the big semi from Wal-Mart overturned at Exit 14A on the New Jersey Turnpike and squashed the old Chevy Nova flat. Kitty was staying that afternoon with the next door neighbor, Mrs. Patel, because Mrs. Patel was all alone in the world after her children were killed in the dreadful airplane crash off Ireland. Kitty’s mother thought her daughter would be a comfort to Mrs. Patel, but really, Mrs. Patel hated Kitty because she was so much prettier than her own daughter who was dead and so she was very cruel, shutting Kitty in the nasty communal bathroom and making her eat greasy betel nuts...

“Pistachios.” She’d forgotten Timmy’s pistachios at Zabar’s on Saturday. “Did you say ‘pistachios,’ Katharine?” Cynthia poked her head into the office. “Did you want some?”

“No, no, I just forgot to get them at Zabar’s. Tim’s coming to New York for the weekend and he loves pistachios. I’ll have the driver swing by tonight on the way home.”

“Don’t make a special trip. I get off the subway at 79th and Broadway every day anyway—I’ll just stop in and pick some up. A pound be OK?”

“I hate to put you to any trouble—”

“No trouble. I’ll get cheese for my book group at the same time. We meet tomorrow night.”

“What are you reading?” Kitty asked, curious.

“Some book about a girl and a serial killer. I couldn’t finish it.”

“Too graphic?”

“No, too sentimental. Victim lit, I call it. Honestly, all this group wants to read about is rape, incest, child abuse, murder, you name it, the women and kids get it. These are successful women with careers and families—why do they want to read this poor-little-victim crap?”

Kitty smiled. “What do you think?”

Cynthia considered for a moment. “It’s like this. Every woman – in our generation at least—has been victimized. Sometimes it’s at school or on the job and sometimes it’s the big ones—rape, domestic violence. But being a victim is *familiar* and so the reader is interested, involved, sympathetic. Men? Some men have been victimized, sure, that’s partly why we get all these immigrant novels, but mostly American men relate to fighting and winning. Women don’t seem as comfortable winning, especially when it involves violence. Where I’m different is that I don’t want to *wallow* in victimhood; I want books where women frame their own lives. But I’m in the minority, I think: the bestseller list is divided into women’s books about victims and men’s about violent adventures. Women aren’t reading the Tom Clancys or the Dan Browns and men aren’t reading *The Lovely Bones* either, I’ll bet. You wouldn’t catch Tom reading this stuff, would you?”

“Well, no. Tom’s idea of a good novel stops somewhere around the end of the 19th century. He’s big on Trollope.” She paused. “So you’re reading *The Lovely Bones*?”

“Some of us are. Mary Pat loved it and, let me tell you, it has created some really interesting late night discussions. The girl’s supposed to be telling the story from heaven if you can believe—oops, there’s the phone.”

Kitty shook her head. It did sound dreadful . . .

. . . the graveside service was nearly over. Kitty hovered above, watching as

Pastor Charles reassured the mourners that dear Katharine had joined the heavenly choir—Kitty had been the star soprano in the church choir—and would be waiting for them someday in a far, far better place. The minister, fat, unkempt and overcome by his own eloquence, raised his eyes to heaven through the downpour. Kitty's twin sister, Justine, crippled in the dreadful car accident when the girls were six, glared from her wheelchair at old Charley, the gravedigger and general handyman, who lurked on the fringes of the crowd. Kitty tried to whisper in Justine's ear, but her sister brushed her away like a mosquito. Somehow Kitty had to lead them to old Charley's shack by the river. The locket with her dead mother's picture was hanging on a nail next to the stove—

“Kit-Kat!” Tom said happily from Calcutta. “Did you hear from Timmy?”

“I did,” Kitty said, relieved to be back on earth. “I heard his good news, though I guess *I'm* not supposed to know anything about it. It's OK for you lifetime members, of course.”

“I'll be back Thursday night. I got everything we wanted.”

“And you spent a million?”

“Two, actually. I miss you, Kit-Kat! Come with me next time.”

Kitty laughed. “To India?”

“Why not?” Tom paused. “Ah, Jeff's reminding me I'm going to Rome next month for a conference. Think of it—Rome in the spring! Say you'll come—first class all the way.”

“I'll think about it.” Kitty hadn't been to Italy in three years. Even if she just went to Rome for a few days...

. . . Kitty swept up the stairs of the Firenzi Palace in Rome. Her husband had bought the grand estate six years ago from the bankrupt Duke of Mantua, but would live to enjoy it no longer: Don Carlo now lay on the marble floor, riddled with bullets. The little priest trailed after her. “Donna Catarina,” he said, “you must go away. Go back to America.” But there was no place for Kitty to go. Her family had all died in the dreadful hurricane in Iselin, New Jersey when she was six; Kitty was fighting leukemia in a New York hospital at the time and was spared. Her mother, her father, her twin sister, her baby brother and her beloved Aunt Cynthia all crushed to death when the Wal-Mart roof collapsed. Kitty, when she recovered, was sent to live in Brooklyn with elderly Uncle Charlie who forced her to cook and clean and go to parochial school. When Don Carlo's wife, who lived next door in Bay Ridge, ran off with the plumber, Kitty escaped into marriage with Don Carlo. “Catarina,” he would say, stroking his gray beard, “I will make you a *principessa* in the old country, we will live like kings.” But the palace was bare and there was no money for furniture or curtains – or servants – so Kitty had to clean the 36-room palace by herself and cook giant pots of Bolognese sauce for her husband's associates who dropped in on their way to Sicily. For months, Kitty, who had thought her husband worked in waste management in New Jersey, watched the parade of swarthy men traipse through the palace, drink red wine and watch *The Godfather* on video before she realized that Don Carlo was not involved in cleaning up the environment. In fact, he had left Brooklyn when he did because the Feds caught up with him; he had been a high-ranking capo in the Bambino family and when they followed him to Rome, he told them everything. The Bambinos had blasted their way into the palace that morning with the highest-caliber weapons and taken their revenge—

“Katharine,” Tuck said, barreling into her office, “aren't you coming to lunch? It's a quarter of.”

Kitty, still in shock from her sudden and violent widowhood, stared at

Tuck incomprehendingly. Lunch? At a time like this? She took a deep breath.

“Right,” she said. “Is Gregg coming with us?”

“No, he’s coming from an appointment.” Tuck paused in front of the huge oval mirror.

“Hair appointment, most likely.”

“Good.” Kitty bent over to get her Coach bag from the drawer. “We have to talk about that meeting.”

Tucker Winslaff IV, Mayflower descendent and a regular in the city’s society pages, straightened his bowtie. “Honey,” he said, giving himself a last approving look, “you were so out of it this morning. Even Charles noticed and he doesn’t notice much.”

Kitty sighed as they walked to the elevator. “I drifted off when he started talking about Perry Mason. My dad read a lot of mysteries during the summers in Maine, so at least I’d heard of him, but the new associates look bewildered. Like he’s a partner they hadn’t met.”

“Charles was talking about the New York Hospital case. He regrets that Perry Mason wasn’t on our side to kick butt.”

“Charles said ‘kick butt’ and I missed it?” Kitty said in astonishment.

The elevator doors opened onto the lobby. “Of course Charles didn’t say ‘kick butt’—he said something like ‘prevail on our behalf.’ He was not pleased with the settlement.”

“So that’s what we’re ‘on board’ for? To stay on message about New York Hospital?”

“No. Halliburton.”

“Halliburton? What does that have to do with me, for heaven’s sakes? I don’t work on that side of the firm.”

“We’re defending them again. Nobody talks to the *Times*.”

“Oh, dear. Well, I never talk to the *Times*. Whoever leaked the story last time, it wasn’t me.”

“You gave that interview to Macaulay in December. Charles is suspicious.”

“He’s a dance critic! He was writing about the New York City Ballet. On whose board I sit.”

“Charles is paranoid because Cheney called him and dressed him down.”

“OK.” Kitty nodded. “That’d make anybody paranoid.”

“You really were out of it this morning, Katharine. Are you all right? Tim and Tom OK?”

“I’m fine. Everybody’s fine. I have more billable hours than there are hours in the month, Tom’s in India trying to trade five Rembrandts for the Taj Mahal and Timmy’s on track to have the highest GPA in his class *again*. And he’s got a sweet girlfriend at Harvard Medical School.”

“Spare me.”

“I shall.” Kitty opened the door of the restaurant. “And now into the breach, my friend . . .”

After they’d ordered, Antonia Patel, house counsel for Arden Industries, began her monthly tirade against the government regulations that kept Arden from branching out into God knows what. Selling arms to Iran maybe, Kitty speculated. She carefully avoided Tuck’s eye while Gregg, who had arrived as late as etiquette allowed, nodded sympathetically every time Antonia opened her mouth. Gregg had acted in Broadway shows for ten years before he ditched the dream and went to Columbia law school; he was handsome, charming and totally ruthless. Kitty admired him enormously and never turned her back. Gregg, though, was a balm

to Antonia Patel, one that had kept her company as a client a record six years. Rumor had it that Antonia would end up in the Bush administration but, to Kitty's sorrow, that no longer appeared likely: it had been brought to Cheney's attention that one Antonia Patel had written a scathing opinion piece about keeping lesbians away from children—especially their own. Even her coveted minority status—half Hindi, half Hispanic and a woman besides—didn't convince Bush to defy his vice-president; he appointed Harriet Myers instead.

"Katharine," Antonia said, "don't you think it's a great opportunity for women in the party? The Republicans have no new women coming up and people look at the Democrats and wonder why they have so many right now."

"The party has Elizabeth Dole and Kay Bailey Hutchinson," Kitty said carefully. "Susan Collins of Maine—"

"She's not a real Republican! And Dole and Hutchinson are old. No, we need new faces—"

"Rice, of course," said Tuck. "She's certainly a powerful figure."

Antonia looked at him witheringly. "She's the most incompetent national security adviser we have ever had. She's a friend of George and Laura. Period. She'll never go anywhere."

"Thinking of running for office?" Gregg asked lightly.

"Putting myself out there for an appointment is more like it. I was, as you know, on the short list for White House counsel and that stimulated my interest. I would be *very* effective." She narrowed her eyes. "Harriet does not have a first-class legal mind. She was appointed because she was a loyal supporter. Period."

"It seems like the major jobs are filled," Tuck said.

"There will be turnover." Antonia sliced decisively through her duck breast. "I shall now lay the groundwork for 2004. When George is reelected, he will make changes."

Kitty looked down at her salmon, delicately dotted with mustard sauce. The law firm leaned heavily to the right; Kitty leaned, though not quite so heavily, to the left. The thought of "George" being reelected so easily gave her heartburn.

"What about the attorney general's office?" Gregg asked. "Ashcroft needs stronger legal backup than he's getting from his current staff."

Kitty looked at Gregg suspiciously: he sounded very sincere. Unlike her and Tuck, Gregg never dropped his façade when he was away from the client: what they heard him say was all anybody heard him say. Even his partner Chris—male or female, no one was quite sure—probably didn't get an unvarnished opinion from Gregg Rhodes.

"No," Antonia said. "I'd be under Cheney's thumb—Ashcroft certainly is—and *Mr.* Cheney is not likely to approve of my presence over at Justice. I have other plans—but I'm telling too much." She allowed a small tight smile. "Loose lips, you know."

". . . sink ships," Chuck stated with grim fortitude. "Katharine, I'm afraid you're going to be our 'pawn sacrifice' this time."

Kitty's heart sank. She'd just gotten out of the hospital after surgery for a brain tumor; she had hoped her life would return to normal. "But the leak came from Cheney's office, everybody knows that. Wouldn't it be more convincing if someone on *his* staff took the blame?"

Chuck shook his head. "Cheney specifically directed that Antonia take the fall, but she's a minority. It'll be too much negative publicity if she goes down. I'm afraid you're the only one left."

"What about Gregg? He's certainly not a minority—he's a middle-class

WASP male. Wouldn't that be better than a woman who's just had surgery?"

"Well, of course, that's the other thing: if you don't make it—and we certainly hope your recovery will be complete, Katharine—then the investigation would cease immediately with your, um . . . exit. It's a win-win situation for us, I hope you can see that. But don't worry, Bush will pardon you before he leaves office. That's part of our deal."

"But I might go to prison!"

"Of course you'll go to prison, but it will be a minimum security facility, a sort of . . . country club. Tennis, golf, that sort of thing."

"But . . . for how long?" Kitty said miserably.

"A year, maybe two, tops. A rest cure, think of it that way."

"But if Bush is reelected, it could be 2008 before I get pardoned. I won't be able to practice even if I do get out in a year!"

"2009 actually. He'll do it just before the new president is inaugurated. But," Chuck said patiently, "your rights will be restored then. Your life will go on just as before."

Five years out of Kitty's life. At least her parents wouldn't have to bear the shame: they had died in the dreadful accident near Iselin, New Jersey along with her twin sister, baby brother and her beloved Aunt Cynthia. Kitty had been in the hospital at the time recovering from a rare sarcoma of the occipital lobe; she spent the rest of her childhood in the orphanage where she'd contracted malaria. Now, with her health finally on the mend after the brain tumor, and with her lupus in remission, she was headed to prison. What would her family have said? There was nobody left to worry about Kitty now—

"Coffee, Katharine?" Tuck said.

Kitty looked bleakly at Tuck. Would he visit her in prison?

"Two coffees," Tuck said to the waiter. "Make it strong."

Kitty nodded and closed her eyes. She'd have to be strong. **KR**

Beverly Mach Geller

Valentine

Envelope me
but do not send
keep in your shirt pocket
close to your heart.

Beverly Mach Geller

Almost Spring

At winter's end
 melting snow cries a river.
 Buds shout open.



—2 **Bridge Lighter blur**
Chris Szokolczai

Househusband

It was a windy and crispy December morning at the Beijing Capital International Airport. Sitting upright in the restraining seat of a Boeing 757, Feng Li turned his head and gazed into the outside from behind the small airplane window and tried to think hard. But he couldn't think of anything, couldn't feel anything. No strong sentiment. No joyous excitement. Only a tiny dose of anticipation plus anxiety, which is not unusual for any trip going to new places. He traveled frequently, and he always had a little such anticipation, plus anxiety, whenever the place was new to him. But this time it was utterly different. He was going to travel across half of the earth to the other side of the Pacific Ocean, to reunite with his wife.

Four years of separation from his dear wife! During those four years they only talked on the phone a dozen times—the charge for such a long distance phone call was costly. He missed her very much. Finally, in less than twenty-four hours, he was going to see her again, to touch her again. He thought of that, feeling a little arousal somewhere inside his body around his belly button. But it was not strong. Just some itchiness, like a tiny and weak flame. Quietly, he laughed at himself, thinking: “For four years I didn't touch a woman. I'm sitting here as calm as a monk or a stone. Is that something? But I'm really tired of all these domestic travels, tired of living alone, tired of the cold home that waits for me every time I turn the key to open the door. Actually, you can't call it a home without the other half of its owners. I'm going to enjoy the life with my wife in the US. Everyone says it's a great place for enjoying life. I'm going to have a wonderful two years while Lin finishes her studies.”

The airplane started moving, faster and faster; finally it took off, leaving his home, his motherland, behind.

Walking hastily along the narrow long hallway towards the exit, Feng's heart suddenly started beating fast. About one hundred feet away, Feng saw his wife among the waiting crowd. She was taller than the people around her, with her delicate head raised high, like a white swan. Feng smiled. She must have been doing the old trick, standing on her toes. When Lin was a little girl, her parents sent her to a ballet school. Feng approached. She was still that beautiful, a little thinner than four years ago. What is that in her left hand? A flower. That's something new. He felt foreign. Lin handed him the flower. But he didn't know what to do with it. It never happened before in their life. Back at home, several times she went to the train station to meet him when he came back from a trip, but it never involved flowers. Plus, his hands were fully occupied by luggage and bags.

“Here you are.” That was the first sentence he said to his wife, in Chinese of course. Lin was stepping up, about to open her arms and give him a hug, but stopped and withdrew after hearing those three words. She didn't want to embarrass him in public. She knew he would be embarrassed if she hugged him.

Chinese people don't like to be intimate in public. But that doesn't mean they don't have feelings. Their feelings for each other are hidden inside deeply. One has to feel it, through the silence, through some small gestures, acts, to feel the feeling other people have towards you. And they are seldom wrong about that. Whether that feeling is love, friendship, dislike, or hate, they can feel it, sense it. It's delicate and subtle, but not hard to learn.

Lin gave up on the idea of hugging, not even thinking of kissing. Instead she turned to the man standing next to her.

"This is my boss, Professor Appleby," she told her husband, in Chinese, "and he is driving today because I just got my driver license and I never drove to the JFK airport. He volunteered to drive when this afternoon I told him that you are coming."

"Your boss?" he was astounded. "So young," he murmured.

Lin quickly added: "He is renowned internationally in our field." Feng was utterly shocked. It's unthinkable in China for such a young person to be a famous college professor, and don't even mention his pony tail.

When two men exchanged handshakes, Feng felt strength from the professor's right hand. He didn't know what to say to the professor except a simple Thank You. He felt he should say more but didn't know how. He only knew a few simple English sentences. He turned to his wife.

"Tell him I want to thank him for taking care of you for the past four years. I don't know how to say it in English," he said.

"That's not necessary," she said.

"Why? It's only proper for me to say that to your boss when I first meet him. I brought some gifts too. Tell him you will give them to him later," he said. Lin turned to Professor Appleby and translated what Feng had said.

Professor Appleby kept smiling. With a height of almost six feet, he was almost one head taller than Feng; and Lin only reached his chest. Professor Appleby was speaking to Lin in very fast English. Feng tried hard to listen but didn't understand anything Professor Appleby said. Feng only noticed the low, magnetic voice of Professor Appleby. Finally Professor Appleby finished. The last words caught Feng's ears: "Let's go".

Outside it was drizzling. It was not cold, though it was December in New York. Lights were everywhere, yellow lights giving off a warm layer covering everything during the night. The continuing and rolling sounds of airplanes in the airport were vibrating, as alive as blood running. Feng felt its vigor.

Professor Appleby was driving. Feng and Lin sat in the back. They didn't talk much. He felt like talking but she stopped him. She told him it's not polite to talk in a foreign language in front of Americans. Foreign language? He was amused by this. "How come my native language suddenly becomes a foreign language, in front of my wife? Is it because I'm in a foreign land? Even with my own wife our language becomes foreign. Oh, I see. That's why we are called FOREIGNERS."

Suddenly the outside became as bright as day time. Feng turned to see a sea of lights radiating from massive high buildings. "We've arrived at the New York City. This is Brooklyn, the south end," Lin explained to him.

It was almost midnight when they arrived at Lin's apartment in Manhattan. Professor Appleby dropped them at the front door and left, turning down their invitation to go up to have a cup of tea. Feng looked around. What he saw in front of him was a tall building. It had at least two dozen floors. Despite the late hour, most windows still had lights on. They climbed up to her apartment at the third floor. The room was not big, but had everything: a bedroom, a kitchen, and a small dining area.

“Look, you even have a shower place, right here at home?” He cried out excitedly to his wife. “And hot water twenty four hours a day. Wonderful! It’s so good. I can’t believe this. It’s like living in heaven.” She smiled at him, moving her body towards him, giving him that long-missed kiss. A long kiss. A four-year-make-up kiss.

Feng settled down. Lin went to school every day from nine to six. She was busy doing research and writing her PhD dissertation. She held a teaching assistantship under Professor Appleby. The job paid for all her tuition and covered basic living expenses. It was not much but it was enough for them to not worry about their financial situation. He didn’t need to go out working like some other visiting spouses did. He cooked, cleaned, and did the laundry. He was happy to do all these things. He studied the Chinese cooking books he brought with him.

He still had a lot of spare time. At first he just enjoyed the tranquility alone. But gradually he felt he needed to find something to do. And it was not easy to find something to do. He didn’t watch TV because he couldn’t understand English. Lin would buy a copy of a Chinese newspaper, *The World Journal*, on the way home every day. So reading the paper became Feng’s sole entertainment. In the beginning, he only skimmed the headlines and major news articles. After awhile he read the paper from A to Z, literally. Every article, every news piece; at the end, he even started to pay attention to the classified ads, from selling cars to jobs wanted to massage services. Not that he needed it. It became a venue for him to learn about the new world. For that reason, everything in the paper interested him. Articles that related to China he would read two or three times.

Lin kept telling him, “Feng, don’t read so much of these Chinese newspapers. Learn some English while you are in America. It’s a golden opportunity to learn the language.”

Every time Feng replied, “Why, I am only staying here temporarily. After you graduate, we will go back to China. I don’t need to learn English. You know I’m not good at the language thing. Remember? In college my English was always the worst in class.”

Weekends were their happy time together. Lin dragged him to all the wonderful places in the city: museums, Central Park, movie theatres. Though he didn’t understand it at all, he just liked to sit with Lin inside the theatre, feeling joyful to watch his wife enjoying the movie.

Summer came. That summer of 1987 was hot and humid. Starting in June, the temperature kept shooting up above 90 degrees. July and August were unbearably hot. The air was still; no wind, no rain, not even a cloud. People easily became irritated and frustrated.

For Feng, along with the hot-fever came boredom. The newspaper didn’t interest him that much anymore. Somehow he felt that remote motherland of his was slipping away from him. He tried to grasp it. He didn’t want it disappear. That was his life, his only world.

Lin was in the final stage of completing her dissertation; she became busier than ever before, often staying late at the lab, sometimes even on weekends. Feng felt abandoned. Sometimes, when he sat there, with nothing to do, he asked himself: “Where am I? Am I in America? Then why I don’t feel it? Or am I still in China? But why I can’t touch it?”

It was a Friday night. He prepared a delicious dinner for Lin. He wanted to make up with his wife. They had a big fight last night in bed. First of all, she

forgot to buy the newspaper, again. She forgot the paper more frequently recently. That made dinner uncomfortable. He kept thinking: doesn't she know that the paper is my life? How can she forget so often? Maybe she forgot it on purpose. She doesn't want me to bury myself in the remote, untouchable China in the newspaper.

During the meal he said to her, "You forgot the paper again."

"Yes, I was too busy today," she replied

"Busy has nothing to do with buying the paper."

"What do you mean? I'm busy so I forget the paper."

"You are busy at school, not when you are on the way home."

"But I'm still thinking of my research while I walk."

"You can't think all the time. And you pass the newsstand on the way home. You can't miss it. You just don't want to buy it for me." He stared at her, straight at her eyes.

"How do you know I don't want to buy it for you?" she asked.

"How? From the way you talk," he retorted.

Hearing that, she became silent. She didn't say one more word. Finishing her dinner quickly, she retreated to her corner to read her books, ignoring him totally.

In bed, he asked her again why she doesn't want to buy the paper for him.

"I said I forgot," She was obviously irritated, raising her voice.

"No, you didn't forget. You just don't want to buy it," he said firmly.

"What difference does that make? Yes. Maybe I forgot it on purpose. I don't want you to read that garbage anymore," she blurted out finally.

He sat up. "Garbage? You said garbage." He got mad.

"If it's not garbage, tell me what it is." She sat up too. Both of them were naked due to the hot weather.

"That's my world, my life, my motherland, my home," he almost yelled at the top of his lungs. "How dare you say it's garbage."

"That's not real. You are living in a dream, in a fantasy. Wake up," she cried, "You can't go on like this."

"Like what? I cook for you every day. I wash. I clean up. I do everything for you. Aren't you happy? All I need from you is just a paper. Is that too much to ask? With that last sentence finished, he dropped down in the bed and closed his eyes and didn't want to say a word.

The dinner was ready. Feng sat there, waiting. Presently Lin called to tell him she was not coming home for dinner. She had to finish some lab work. This had never happened. Before today, no matter how late, she always came home for dinner. This was not good. He pondered after he put down the phone. When a husband or wife stops coming home for dinner, it usually means something is wrong. He picked up the phone and called her.

"What are you going to have for your dinner?" he asked.

"I'll buy some fast food," she answered.

"Are you alone?"

Only a few seconds, but it seemed a long pause to him. "No, Professor Appleby is here also."

"Just you two?"

"ehhh, yes."

It was almost midnight when she got home. The lights were still on. Inside he was sitting there, waiting. Dinner was still on the table. "I think you can't eat well at school. So I left all the food on the table just in case . . ." He didn't finish

the sentence. He looked into her. "Are you hungry?" he asked.

"Not really. Very busy today. but I can have a little." She sat down, feeling a little guilty.

"I want to tell you," he pushed the plates in front of her, "I'm going to go out tomorrow and try to find something to do. You are right. I can't stay at home all the time like this. I have to go out."

"That's wonderful!" She was happy to hear that. "But what kind of work are you going to look for?"

"I want to go to Chinatown and see if I can find some work in a Chinese restaurant."

"I heard that the restaurant work is tough. I don't think you can handle it."

"That's impossible. Me? Can't handle restaurant work?" He laughed sarcastically. "Remember? Your husband was a very capable man back in China. I managed a whole department. And also I'm strong physically. I can easily handle you in bed. How come I can't handle the restaurant work?"

"That is exactly what worries me," she said with a frown, ignoring his obscene joke. "You are not used to obeying other people's commands, just like . . ." She promptly stopped.

"Like who?" he demanded.

"Nothing. Nobody."

"Just don't worry about me. How was your work tonight? Making any progress?"

"It's OK," she didn't want to get into this topic. "Let's go to sleep. I'm very tired."

Next day when Lin got home, she found Feng sitting in front of the kitchen table.

"How was your job hunting today?" she asked.

"Nothing," he replied without much enthusiasm. "I went to several restaurants in Chinatown. None of them needed new people."

"You can't just go in and ask. You need to read the job ads first. Then you should call before you go."

"Oh, I didn't know that. I knew there were lots of ads in the newspaper I read, but I never thought they were serious."

"Why don't you believe them? Believe me, in this country the ads are indispensable. You need them to do anything."

Next day when Lin arrived at home, she again saw her husband sitting at the same place.

"How was today?" she asked.

"Still nothing," he replied languidly. "I called all the waiter ads and all of them don't even speak Chinese."

"Why?"

"I mean they don't speak Chinese the way I speak. They speak Cantonese Chinese which I don't understand. How can I find a job if I even can't understand what they are saying?"

"I really think you should forget about the idea of working in a restaurant," Lin said, "I have been telling you all the time to go to school to learn something, to get a degree or something so you can find a decent job. How about computers?"

"How about my English?" he said gloomily. "First I have to study English. That will take forever."

"It won't as long as you stick to it."

"I'm too old for that."

“No, you are only thirty.”

“Thirty is too old to learn a new language.”

“No, thirty is fine to learn anything.”

“Yes, too old.”

“No, it’s not.”

“Yes, for me. Plus, I’m not good at the language thing. I’ve been here for over a year and I haven’t learned any English. I can still only say thank you and bye bye. Whenever I hear English, it feels like a bombardment of bullets hitting my ears.”

“That’s because you never want to learn it,” Lin paused a little. “Please, give it a try. Just for me, O.K.?”

“O.K.” he gave in finally. He loved his wife. He would do this for her. “I thought I’d be content enough just to be a househusband and take care of you and our future child. Oh, yes, let’s have a baby so that I can stay home happily.”

“No way,” Lin snapped. “Don’t even mention it before I graduate with my Ph.D.”

They hadn’t made love in two months. Lin was always busy at school and tired when she got home. Sometimes, Feng was not in the mood. But that night both of them felt a need for some relief; they made love.

Feng entered an English As a Second Language program at a small college. He tried his best to remember the words, to understand what the teachers were talking about in class. The reading part was not that hard. He was good at analyzing the grammar and sentence structures. But the listening was horrible, and speaking was killing him. The most dreadful moment in the class was when he had to speak aloud to answer the teacher’s questions. At end of the semester he got an A for reading and F for listening and speaking.

At home Lin tried to help him with his listening and speaking skills by communicating with him in English as much as possible. But he always felt awkward and absurd. Whenever she spoke English to him, she was transformed into a totally different person, not his wife anymore but some foreigner, at least to him. So he rebuked her and thought he would never be able to open his mouth to speak English in front of his wife. Lin then suggested other venues such as watching television. But that was too much, too fast for him. Plus, he had no interest in anything shown on the screen. News always showed violence; soap opera was out of his reach to understand. Even when Lin wrote down jokes, he couldn’t understand them. It really irritated him. He used to be a big sports fan back in China. He used to watch any sports on television, especially soccer and ping pong. Now, for some reason or no reason, he lost all interests in sports, especially the so-called big three American sports: baseball, basketball, and football. He sternly believed that the baseball was the most boring, the dullest game in the world. Once he joked to his wife that the athletes on the field should wear thick coats in case they caught cold by just standing there doing nothing. Basketball was a little better than baseball, but the biggest hindrance for him was that he didn’t know any team and had absolutely no affiliation with one. It absolutely didn’t matter which team won. That, frankly speaking, killed more than half of the fun watching the game. Football to him was a game for barbarians, no rules, no game plan, no skill, no technique, just colliding, dragging, grasping, and punching, with nothing to enjoy as an audience. He abandoned the television education plan.

Winter was here. Everyone tried to stay home as much as possible. The snow fell constantly. Lin was in the final stage of completing her dissertation. She was busier than ever. Now she often stayed late at school.

In January, Feng started his second semester. It didn't get any better. He was always afraid of going to class, always afraid of being asked to speak by the teacher. He felt isolated. He got another F in listening and speaking. That day, when he went home, he was rather distraught and weary. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. He opened the door, entered the room. Lin was sitting there, beaming. That was odd. She never came back at such an early time. At that moment he forgot his own peril.

"What happened?" he asked.

"Guess what," said Lin exuberantly, "I completed my dissertation last week and this morning I passed the dissertation defense! I'm a Ph.D now, a doctor now!"

"Ah, that's pretty good," Feng said, "Congratulations. You deserve this, after so much effort."

"I'm very happy now. I can relax a little, finally."

"What are you going to do next?"

"Next? I haven't thought about it. I should start looking for a job, I guess."

"Really?"

"Why?"

"But we agreed. When you finish your studies, we go back to China."

"But I like it here. I like the free air in college. I like New York. What can I do in China? My major is physics. They don't need physicists in China. They need people in practical fields like finance and computer science."

"You can be a professor, and find a teaching job at the university."

"No, I don't want to do that. I want to stay here."

With that said, they stopped. They went out that night to celebrate. She was happy and didn't notice Feng's gloomy face. Feng was absent-minded. He was thinking hard. He tried to decide on something. Finally, he seemed relieved. He made his decision. Back at home when they went to bed that night, Lin was joyous. She didn't notice the solemnity of Feng. They lay in bed. Suddenly Feng said to Lin, "Lin, I want to go back to China as we planned."

"Why?"

"I don't like this place. That's all."

She did not reply for a long time. He finally said "and I can't learn English. I can't find a job here. I can't do anything here."

"Oh, today is the school ending day. What was your score in the listening class?"

"F."

"Oh. I see. Feng, you can start again. Don't worry. I can help you now. I have more time."

"I don't want to start again. I don't want your help. And, how can you help?"

Once again she did not reply for a long time.

"Are you going back with me?"

"But . . ."

"No but, are you, or are you not?"

"But . . . but, Feng, can we wait awhile and discuss this later? Give me some time to think about it, ok?"

"Ok."

One evening, two months later, Lin came back from the school. She went to the school library to look up some job-related information.

At home Lin found to her surprise that Feng had cooked some of her favorite dishes for her. He greeted her nicely, which was a little out of place since recently they were not on very good terms. Lin sat down and started eating. After dinner, as usual, Feng washed the dishes and let her rest or read. She offered to help with the cleaning up, but Feng firmly refused.

That night Lin couldn't sleep. She was thinking hard, tossing in bed. She sensed that Feng was also not sleeping even though he was still. Finally she couldn't hold her tongue any more. She turned over to him, and asked him casually, "Do you have anything you want to say to me?"

"Eh, yeah, it's like this," Feng stammered, "I contacted the company where I worked before leaving China, and they agreed to have me back. I've decided to go back next month."

"What? When did you contact them?" Lin was shocked.

"Last week, I phoned them, and today when I called again, they told me."

"What should I do?" Lin asked, but she was speaking to herself.

"I really wish you to come with me."

A long silence prevailed. Neither of them talked. At last Lin decided to tell him everything, "Do you know what happened at the library this afternoon?"

"I don't know. What?"

"I met Professor Appleby and we talked."

"Yes?"

"And he said he wanted me to stay. He offered me a position at his department. And . . . and," Lin found it very difficult to say it out loud. "And . . . he said, he said he loves me."

Another long pause grew between them. Both felt the world swirling around.

"How did you respond?" Feng finally asked.

"I didn't respond. I told him 'don't say any more.' I told him I didn't know what to do. I tell you now I don't know what to do. I don't want to go back to China. But I also don't want to stay here without you." Lin started weeping.

"Why are you crying? Don't cry. Let's discuss. Let's find a solution."

"I don't see any solution."

"I'm definitely going back. It's just you. Will you go with me, or stay with him?"

"I don't want either. Is there another way?"

"I don't see another way." Feng was a little frustrated. "If you think of another way, a better way, tell me."

It was a cold December morning with an overcast sky. Lin was driving to JFK airport. "I heard that there is going to be snow today," Lin said.

"Really, I hope the airplane won't be delayed," Feng said. Feng was going back to China and Lin was seeing him off at the airport and then had to drive back to Manhattan alone.

Suddenly Lin said, "Feng, remember today? It was exactly two years when you came to America. Two years ago on the same day I was on the same road to JFK to get you," Lin paused a little. "Today I send you away. It's been like a dream the past two years." Lin sighed deeply. Feng didn't say anything.

It started snowing, and in a few minutes, the small snow flakes turned big and thick. The view became blurry with a heavy wind and white snow hitting the wind shield. "At least your driving skill improved a lot over the past two years." Feng tried to cheer them up.

"You know what, Feng?" Lin suddenly had a thought, "Even though with all the bad weather and vision, the car at least has a destination, it knows where to go, not like me. I don't know where to go. I don't know what my destination is."

Sitting quietly, lonely in his coach-class seat, Feng's mind was replaying and replaying the final conversation the night before between him and Lin. Lin finally told him her decision. She told him that she was not going back to China.

She told him that she wouldn't accept Profession Appleby's offer, and she was not staying with him. She would be on her own, she told him.

The airplane started moving, Feng looked out. He was talking silently inside his mind: "Good bye, America; Good bye, my wife, I will be waiting for you on the other side of the ocean." **KR**



—Gabriele Borel, 1953

Tales From The Institute For Advanced Study

How One New Jersey Institution Led to Another

In the fall of 1953, the year in which the above snapshot of Einstein was taken, Victor Shapiro, a young professor in the mathematics department at Rutgers University, was looking forward to two years with no teaching duties. Like other young academics lucky enough and talented enough to spend time at the Institute for Advanced Study, he was relishing the chance to get to grips with some of his subject's thornier problems. But as he and his wife struggled to enter Fuld Hall pushing their 10 month-old daughter in a stroller, it was the Institute's doors that were the problem. Just a few feet behind the Institute's heavy front door was another swing door. As luck would have it, two gentlemen coming from the other direction stepped up to assist the young couple. Each held a door open. To his astonishment, Shapiro recognized one of the two men as Kurt Gödel, the greatest logician since Aristotle. The other? Albert Einstein.

Now 85 and Distinguished Professor in Mathematics Emeritus at UC Riverside, California, Shapiro fondly recalls his time at the Institute, which led to a major breakthrough in his research and an invitation to return.

Since it was founded in 1930, the Institute has focused the minds and the careers of thousands of such visitors. For most, it is the highlight of their professional lives, time away from the maelstrom of teaching and administrative duties to pursue their own ideas; a chance to follow, as Founding Director Abraham Flexner observed: "the will o' the wisp of their own intellectual and spiritual curiosity," exactly as the founders intended.

At first sight, an institution devoted to higher learning with no demands for immediate results seems an odd choice for elderly New Jersey businessman Louis Bamberger and his twice widowed sister Caroline Bamberger Frank Fuld. The Bambergers had devoted millions to worthy causes but most of their giving had been directed toward the Jewish community or to the city of Newark: hospitals such as Newark's Beth Israel, clubs for Jewish youth, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and a new building for the Newark Museum. Indeed, the Bambergers originally had quite a different project in mind: a medical school in Newark or on the Fuld estate in South Orange with a preference for Jewish students.

Closer examination, however, reveals the Institute for Advanced Study as perfectly in harmony with the deep appreciation for learning, innovation, and excellence that characterized the Bambergers and their business.

L. Bamberger & Co. was one of the first department stores in the nation. It was the first to put ticketed prices on its stock, offer no-questions-asked returns,

and adopt the “customer is always right” policy. What had started in 1892 when Louis Bamberger bought up a bankrupt Newark company and asked his brother-in-law Louis M. Frank, his sister Caroline (Carrie) Frank, and his friend Felix Fuld to join him in selling its stock, had grown to occupy an entire city block in downtown Newark by 1912. Together the three men and Carrie formed a hardworking team. “The Firm,” as they called it, was tightly bound by family and friendship. After the death of her husband Louis Frank in 1910, Caroline married Felix Fuld in 1913.

By the mid-twenties, the store had become a Newark institution with loyal patrons who referred to it affectionately as “Bams.” It employed 2,800 “coworkers,” as Bamberger liked to think of employees. Their benefits included an in-store extension of Rutgers University, a library, health and social service departments, a cafeteria, and a rooftop radio station, WOR. “Bams” pioneered home delivery and free customer parking. Its window displays were a cavalcade of the world’s wonders. Staff formed clubs and musical groups, and poured over issues of the store’s own magazine, Charm. By 1928, “Bams” ranked fourth in the nation with total sales of \$38 million.

But when Felix Fuld died in January 1929, Louis Bamberger was ready to relinquish his role as singular head of the store. L. Bamberger & Co. was sold to R. H. Macy and Company of New York just weeks before the stock market crash in October 1929 for some \$25 million. It has been suggested that Louis Bamberger, Newark’s shrewd “merchant prince,” had some inkling of the crash, but the sale had probably more to do with the fact that “The Firm” was now down to just two of its original four members. After almost forty years of hands-on business, the Bambergers were tired. In an act of extraordinary generosity, Louis Bamberger distributed \$1 million to 236 of his coworkers for long and faithful service.

Then he and his sister began thinking of how best to use their considerable fortune. For advice they turned to the most influential figure in the field of medical education in the United States: Abraham Flexner. Flexner’s reputation stemmed from his report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, known simply as, “The Flexner Report of 1910.” After visiting and assessing 155 medical schools in the United States and Canada, Flexner had recommended closing 120 of them! But if the Bambergers hoped Flexner would give life to *their* dream, they were wrong.

Earlier in his career Flexner had undertaken a similarly critical examination of American higher education, published as *The American College* in 1908. Over the years, he had developed his own dream of an advanced research institution in the United States inspired by those in Europe such as All Souls College, Oxford, the Collège de France, and late-nineteenth-century German universities.

When approached by representatives of the Bambergers in late 1929, Flexner had recently retired from the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation. Years later, he recalled the telephone call in *Abraham Flexner: An Autobiography*: “I was working quietly one day when the telephone rang and I was asked to see two gentlemen who wished to discuss with me the possible uses to which a considerable sum of money might be placed. At our interview I informed them that my competency was limited to the education field and that in this field it seemed to me that the time was ripe for the creation in America of an institute in the field of general scholarship and science, resembling the Rockefeller Institute in the field of medicine—developed by my brother Simon—not a graduate school, training men in the known and to some extent in methods of research, but an institute where everyone—Faculty and Members—took for granted what was

known and published, and in their individual ways endeavored to advance the frontiers of knowledge.”

Intrigued by what they heard, the Bambergers arranged for a meeting. Flexner immediately poured cold water on their own plans arguing that first-rate medical schools require first-rate teaching hospitals of which Newark had none. He likewise persuaded the Bambergers that favoring Jews was not the best way to counteract anti-Semitism. Such was Flexner’s enthusiasm for his own vision that the Bambergers quickly adopted it as theirs, offered an initial endowment of \$5 million with promises of more to come on and insisted that Flexner should be the Institute for Advanced Study’s first Director. Events moved speedily. A certificate of incorporation for the “Institute for Advanced Study—Louis Bamberger and Mrs. Felix Fuld Foundation,” was filed with the State of New Jersey on May 20, 1930. In June, The New York Times announced the creation of an Institute for Advanced Study, to be located in or near Newark.

The following month, the Founders laid out the parameters of the new Institute in a letter to its newly appointed trustees: Its primary purpose is “the pursuit of advanced learning and exploration in fields of pure science and high scholarship to the utmost degree that the facilities of the institution and the ability of the Faculty and students will permit.” Furthermore, this remarkable document went on: “in the appointments to the staff and faculty as well as in the admission of workers and students, no account shall be taken, directly or indirectly, of race, religion, or sex.”

Bamberger and Fuld eventually also relinquished their stipulation that the new Institute should be either in Newark or on their estate in South Orange. Since a community of scholars needed access to a great library and proximity to a great university, Princeton was the obvious choice. The Bambergers visited and approved of the town and Flexner set out to build his “educational Utopia” starting with the discipline of mathematics. As funds and scholars became available, economics and subjects in the humanities could be added.

A visit to the West Coast, in February 1932, gave him the coup which would propel the Institute into the limelight. Abraham Flexner met Albert Einstein. Prescient of the situation for Jewish scholars in Germany, Einstein was finding respite at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. He responded with enthusiasm to both Flexner and his plans. After continued overtures from Flexner, he is reported to have said: *Ich bin Feuer und Flamme dafür* (I am full of fire and flame). The educational reformer and the world’s most famous scientist were getting along famously! It was not to last, but that’s another story.

Eventually Flexner’s Olympian ideals would clash with the practicalities of running an organization designed with little bureaucratic structure. Flexner’s autocratic style of leadership would ultimately give way to a more democratic version, but not without casualties along the way.

But in the heady months of 1932, Flexner was on top of the world. Just eight months after his trip to Pasadena, he was able to announce the Institute for Advanced Study’s first School of Mathematics with professors Oswald Veblen and Albert Einstein. James W. Alexander and John von Neumann were soon added. As word soon spread throughout the academic community, Princeton replaced Germany’s Göttingen as the world center for mathematics.

It is a sad irony that Flexner’s efforts were helped by Hitler’s rise to power in the very country from which Flexner had drawn so much inspiration for his ideas on higher education. Many have found it hard to resist the black-humored observation that the Institute’s success had as much to do with Hitler as with

Flexner. The anti-Semitic policies of the Nazi regime that made the Institute for Advanced Study attractive to Einstein and others forced a generation of promising Jewish scholars to seek refuge in the United States.

In the early years, the Institute's first professors found offices alongside their Princeton University colleagues in the newly completed mathematics building, Fine Hall. Even though the two faculties were separate entities, to outside observers it appeared that the Institute was part of the University, a misconception that surfaces even today. It was, in fact, simply an arrangement of rented space for the new Institute which had no building of its own until Fuld Hall was built in 1939

Local author Linda Arntzenius is currently compiling a pictorial history of the Institute for Advanced Study where she was formerly Publications Officer. The book is forthcoming from Arcadia Publishing in spring 2011 as part of its Images of America Series. It will be sold with other titles in the series in Barnes & Noble, Borders, and other bookstores.

Princeton

The weather is synaptic
moving her
by moving through her
awakening the tiny bones
at a moment at a time
until, yielding to some intimacy
her morning song
announces her intent –
she will fly
meet the requirements of her nature
honor the ideal expression of the world
of a bird...

The woman watching all of this
moves away from the window—
her heart tells her
she heard her song—strong
winds will bear her
that bird
clouds
higher...then
title to the sky.

Doc Long

Maybe John Coltrane

A family waiting in a crowded train station
mid-winter, heavy snow falling outside all day
trains are late, running behind schedule
mother father and two children
each takes a bite from a single donut
the hole in the center is set free
suddenly music
music from out of everywhere floods the station
all the people stop
all the people go
all the people wait
the family sits close together
smiling at each other
outside snowflakes squall and scramble upward

Writing In Rip Tide

You should have known better
Than to stand at water's edge,
Than to dip even a toe
Into the inkwell of the Atlantic,
So dark, so impossibly deep.

How swiftly
You were swept under again
Arms turning, mind reeling,
Desperate to right yourself,
Make a bee line to the beach.

How you wished a way out,
A single word, an offered arm.
But wave after wave washed over you
In measured, immutable meter
And the salt water whispered,
Vowel after vowel,
Seeping into your every seam.

So it was of small use then
To surface and swim,
Keeping a course parallel to shore,
When the wild-beast ocean,
Already having had its way with you,
Would have carried you back,
Kelp-covered, water-logged, sore.

Really, now.
You should have known better,
Seasoned Poet,
Game, though, you are.

The Love Who Won't Commit

We might go to six funerals,
see three sequels to *I, Robot*.
There might be robots working for us.
Your car will become antique.
Your nephew's in *utero* twins
may one day bring their own kids around.

Yesterday I heard you mention the future
but only in reference to your dentist.
Can I get an estimate, a five-year plan?
Does your meter run on units of common time?
Each coat of paint on my house equals
a missing layer on a nest we could share.

If the wait is ever over
I'll be wrinkled with expectation.
My hope chest will need to be exhumed
from the bottom of my storage unit.
The people I meant to invite to the wedding
will not remember who I am.

Flying to the Sun

A necklace of geese flying to the sun
horizon chasers in a wobbly V
confident leader spearheads dauntless wedge
stretches his neck tows linear wake
shows infallible sense of direction
beaks through limitless sky never looks back

Following flyers drift offset the chain
avoid loose feathers farts burps and BO
each forerunner not concerned who follows
each strives to maintain its social presence
all those birds fly amid tiers of their peers
atonal bassoon-sounds blare out from herd

In line potential chiefs' powerful wings
with latent desire to seize vanguard
on occasion will relieve their leader
most resigned to dawdle among masses
content to flounder rub wings with middle class
conformist souls yield lay back stay in line

Back down along train dally unchased two
conspicuous unstressed duo bring up rear
don't seem to care what's happening up front
waver shuffle in file shift west or east
tailgate without lust no chance to get lost
just thoughtlessly follow bourgeoisie bunch

What factors stratify order of birds
who chooses leaders of great migration
in perennial flight to the sun

God's Way or the Highway

exerpted from *A Voice Long Gone*
Part II Chapter V Circa 1948

“Sistah! Look!” urged Velvet. “Aint that, that Grace gal; the one that was stuck on Oz like a black eye at his birthday party?”

Lessie set the iron on its stand and glanced through the den window in time to see a shirtless Oz, on a break from playing tennis and Grace Etienne, her hands resting comfortably in the pockets of her fashionable white linen culotte suit strolling across the grass together.

As she watched them idling by, a picture-perfect pair, against a most picturesque hot summer day on the bewitching, expansive and fertile Levin-Good estate in Veil, Louisiana, it struck her that neither Oz nor Grace for so much as a second glanced in the direction of the imposing window from which they were being studied. So absorbed were they in themselves, two very vitally rich young people in her age range, that she wondered silently what thoughts had them so casually yet deeply absorbed; an absorption of the same intensity that prevented her from answering her sister's question.

Grace appeared to be listening intently to what Oz was saying. Suddenly she tossed her elegantly coiffed head back and laughed. Lessie and Velvet glanced at each other with raised brows and wondered what Oz could be saying to cause such a response.

Then Grace put one hand tenderly into his and they disappeared from their line of vision. Lessie envied them. Their complacency angered Velvet for she hated Grace. She wrested her eyes from the window and fixed her mouth into a demure smile for Lessie.

“Scuse me please,” she said, “I need to find a bathroom.”

In the hallway at the kitchen alcove she listened for movement. A sliver of light and strains of classical music drifted from the radio from Adella's bedroom upstairs. As Velvet tiptoed through the sitting room, her eyes scanning the sloping manicured front lawn, she saw Oz and Grace exiting from the shadows of trellised white roses, his arm lazily around her shoulders.

He walked Grace to a spanking new imported German periwinkle blue, two-seated convertible roadster parked in the circular driveway while blotting sweat from his face and chest with a white towel that he occasionally snapped at Grace while playfully dodging her attempts at kissing him. Velvet was not amused watching them romp so gaily about the yard like over-heated lovers. She wished mightily that she could have at worst made Grace disappear and at best have scratched out her eyes.

And finally Grace did disappear in style, after retracting her car's roof, waving good-bye to Oz, and pulling off as his image of throwing kisses to her faded from her rear view mirror.

Abruptly Velvet remembered where she was standing and that she did not want to appear to be snooping should Adella find her there. She darted into a nearby powder room closed the door and sat down; images of Grace flooding her mind.

Velvet believed herself to be prettier than Grace, a more exciting girl than Grace, and smarter than Grace, all qualities covered over in part by the gunny sack hand-me-down clothes from other relatives that she had to wear. But if only she could get a chance to spend some time with Oz, just a chance to be alone with him, she could show him just how much more pretty and different she was than Grace and any of the other college girls she remembered seeing at his birthday party. Then he would surely forgive her, her clothing, blinded as he would be because of her other sterling qualities.

As she sat there admiring the décor and the fancy fixtures, the electrifying salmon color scheme with muted shades of taupe and the deep green rugs and wall tapestries soothed her. Scent of jasmine from a single candle light by the bidet refreshed her. She looked around the enormous space used solely for intimate body maintenance. Her family's kitchen was the largest room in their house and could fit comfortably there two times and still have room left. The Levin-Good's were indeed an unfathomable lot of Black folk all right. She washed her hands after relieving herself and walked out.

Who should be facing her as she turned the corner but Oz.

"Precious," he said warmly, his dark hair and dimples all the more handsome against his deeply tanned face. His hazel eyes with their laser intensity invoked a feeling of giddiness, a rush in her blood as she caught her breath and a welcomed miniscule measure of composure.

"My name is Velvet—but people call me Veeta or V." she said.

"I know your name is Velvet." he said confidently, "But you *are* precious. I didn't get to tell you that the food you helped your sister cook for my celebration last week was very delicious."

"So you sayin it now after the fact? Well thanks Oz."

They stood facing each other, the quietness acute. Velvet's hand rose to fidget with the buttons of her dress. He was so handsome. She suspected he was reading her mind; that he was aware of her heart thumping wildly.

"You like college?" she blurted nervously; then not waiting for him to answer she continued, "Whut you like about it?"

"I love college." he said, resting a forearm against the wall and looking now even more intently at her. "I also love animals; most animals. I love watching them. I love studying about them, and in a year or so, I'll be healing them and protecting them . . . how do you feel about animals Veeta?"

She liked the caressing, lazy way he said her name.

"I feels alright about em . . . but I likes eatin em; you know, spare ribs, fried chicken, sweetbreads, eggs." She smiled impishly.

Oz grinned. She lowered her eyes, wondering if he was comparing her to Grace. She started to walk around him, but he stepped aside.

"Do I make you uncomfortable?" he asked.

"Nope," she lied.

"How old are you? May I ask?"

"Aint you suppose to say, may I ax first? . . . But if you must know, I'm seventeen . . . why?" she lied again.

Thoughtfully he smiled, revealing beautiful teeth, "I'm just curious . . . do you have a fellow?"

“No. My mamma won’t let me. She said I’m too young. She’s into the holiness church. Besides, I aint got your kinda schoolin.”

“Meaning?”

“Shoots . . . meanin, the boys I know, don’t know much as me. I want a fella to know more than me. You knows a lots more than me so I guess we caint be friends.”

“Why would you say that?”

“Ohhh. Cause your folks is rich,” she said casually, “and you gon be a animal doctor.”

Oz’s lips curled into a half smile, “So is it less about the knowledge and more about my parents’ money?”

“It’s about both I reckon,” she answered, looking away.

“Veeta,” he asked, with increasing curiosity, “would you have a cup of tea with me? I would be very delighted.”

She followed him, blushing and thoroughly elated, into the kitchen and sat down on a stool at the cubed island while he prepared their cups. She unfastened two of the top buttons on her dress and wished she had on some lipstick.

“So . . . do *you* like school?” he asked, sitting across from her holding her gaze.

“You make me nervous.” she said matter-of-factly.

He looked surprised. “What am I doing?”

“The way you lookin at me,” she said as he put the tea bags into their cups.

“Would you rather I didn’t look at you?” he asked half seriously.

“Yeah—well no. Yeah.”

“You’re quite a gal to look at,” he said, filling the cups. “How about if I look away most of the time. Will that help you relax?”

She tried not to smile, but he could see the trace of one on her face as she stared into her steaming cup.

Oz stirred his tea, “You never told me what you like about school.”

She bit into a piece of lemon and to her dismay a squirt of it missed his face by a breath. “Scuse me,” she said, flustered, redness creeping from her neck up her face. He allowed her a moment.

“So you were saying about school?”

“I don’t like nuthin bout it. We spose to be readin parts of important books but it aint interestin to me. A whale story, a story about Indians fightin. Then we do arithmetic which I do like. But me, personally, I like to dance and listen to music myself.”

“Oh yeah? Are you a good dancer Veeta?”

“Of course.” she said with conviction.

“If your parents are sanctified, and you’re not cookin at a party, when do you ever get the chance to dance or see people dance?”

She looked at him as if he were joking, “You mean, Oz Levin-Good, you aint never heard of the corn licker my daddy makes and the socials that goes on at our barn sometime? Your daddy gits his hooch from my daddy.”

Oz thought for a moment. “You know, I *have* heard of your daddy’s mash. It’s suppose to be the best there is around these parts.”

“Course it is. Round any parts.” she said with pride, “White and Black gets my daddy’s corn. I seed my daddy and his friends and they girlfriends who aint so holy dancin’ a lots.”

His eyes widened in interest, “Really . . . what does your mother say about that?”

She slurped long on her tea, “She don’t like it . . . say he gon go to hell but her sayin that don’t bother him none. They play cards and have a lot of fun laughin and dancin. Me and my brother Luke sneaks out the window and watch em some Friday and Saturday nights. And sometimes my daddy lets us dance wit em, but not a long time . . . Oz,” she continued, very animatedly now, “I bet I can learn you to dance.”

He raised a brow, “What makes you think I don’t know how already?”

“Cause you a college boy,” she laughed softly. “You don’t know nuthin bout that!”

“Didn’t you just cook at our bar-b-que?” he asked. “Unless that was someone pretending to be you, you saw me dance all night.”

She looked at him soberly then laughed uproariously, “You call that dancin? Why folks in the holiness church dance better than that.”

Suddenly an opulent cascade of piano music penetrated the kitchen. The dispirited expression on Velvet’s face registered vaguely with Oz.

“It’s just mamma,” he said, dismissing her concern.

She quickly hopped up from her perch at the cube, her voice anxious, “Y’all gotta pitcher you can fill with ice and water?”

“Sure do. But what do you mean, church people dance better than me?” he said, feigning displeasure.

“I really need to get that cold water to Lessie, Oz. She axed for it a while ago and I shoulda took it back way before now.”

Oz started to smile, “Tell me what you meant first?”

“Look.” she snapped, “Just gimme the ice water Oz . . . please.”

Her tone and abrupt change of mood made his eyes search hers in confusion, but she remained stoic, “Alright, alright.” he said looking for the pitcher in the pantry.

Adella glided into the kitchen, “I’ll get the water son.” she said.

“Mamma, please continue playing . . . It’s nice background music to our conversation. Veeta here said I can’t dance . . .that I have no rhythm,” he said jokingly.

“Veeta SAID that?” Adella said, “I’m shocked! Why I didn’t think our Veeta could talk . . . and lo and behold here she is holding a conversation with you.”

Adella got the ice and water, “Oz dear, you have a call. It’s Grace.”

“I’ll be back V,” he said excusing himself. “Stay right there. Don’t move.”

She would have preferred staying there but without Adella’s presence. How could she have let herself become so comfortable with Oz that she didn’t give her whereabouts another thought.

She wished that Oz’s mother would have quickened her pace assembling the items for the tray. After arranging some fruit and other foodstuffs she turned and looked at Velvet directly, her demeanor pleasant.

“Will this work for you and Lessie ?” Adella asked her. “Or do you speak only to my son and your sister?”

“Yes ma’am. Whatever you fix will work fine, Mrs. Levin-Good.”

“You take the tray,” Adella said to her, “and I’ll fill and bring the ice bucket.”

“I’ll come back for it, Ms. Levin-Good. It aint no bother really.”

Velvet walked ahead of her with the laden tray.

“Mrs. Levin-Good . . .” she turned toward her, as she stopped short of the doorway.

“Yes Velvet?”

“I . . . I . . .”

“It’s fine, Velvet.” Adella said and proceeded into the den ahead of her to find Lessie diligently ironing clothes.

Lessie looked up, her face beaming, “What you got there ma’am?”

“Darling, why didn’t you let me know you were thirsty? I could have fixed you and your sister some lemonade when you first arrived.”

“Mrs. Levin-Good. I’m just fine . . . You know you always make me feel welcome enough to get what I want from your kitchen.”

Lessie glanced over Mrs. Levin-Good’s shoulder at Velvet who looked down at the floor.

“Well, I’ll just set this here. I heard your sister tell Oz you asked for a pitcher of ice water. These are some orange brownies you might want to try, made them myself, some cheese and crackers, and fresh berries from the garden.”

“Why thank you ma’am. Uh . . . Velvet knows I like my water on hot days,” she said, noting that Velvet’s demeanor had become extremely tight.

“I’m sure,” she replied, “Now promise me, Lessie, if I can get either of you anything at all . . . to make the day or work load smoother, I insist that you tell me. I appreciate all your hard work and the great job you do for me. Have you any idea how much you’ve spoiled me?”

“No ma’am.” Lessie said with a shy smile.

“Then, you will let me know when and if you need anything?”

“I’ll let you know Mrs. Levin-Good. Thank you for everything ma’am.”

“That means you too Veeta.” she said, then left them.

The last couple hours of work at the Levin-Good household sped by too quickly for Lessie Mae and not fast enough for Velvet.

As Mr. Levin-Good’s truck rambled along the road to their house with about a mile to go, Lessie Mae spoke first, “Mr. Levin-Good suh, would you let us out here? We need to pick some herbs for our mother.”

“Y’all want me to wait for you?” he asked, “It’s no trouble.”

Lessie opened the truck door and stepped down the running board, “We’ll be fine suh . . . sittin’ all day, we need the stretchin’ that come wit’ pickin the plants.”

Velvet dutifully followed and they waved goodbye, watching the truck disappear in the yellow dust before starting the trudge toward home.

“You know Veeta,” Lessie turned to her sister reproachfully, “sometimes I think your house really got everything you need in it—then you do somethin that shows me it aint quite full at all.”

Velvet pouted, sucking her teeth, “If you talkin bout me and Oz gettin to know each other, why don’t you just say it? What house is you talkin bout?”

“See, there you go playin dumb agin and insultin my thinkin. I’m talkin bout your mind V. Where is it? Stalkin Oz . . . and right in his own house tryin to git him . . . you think Adella Levin-Good is stupid? You think she caint see through you?”

Velvet had fallen a few paces behind Lessie, whose anger was causing her to walk with fresh energy, “I wasn’t doin no such thing Lessie, honest. We just talked a lil bit.”

“You told me you had to go to the bathroom.”

“And I did.”

“Well why didn’t you come straight back to me? You suppose to be workin wit me. We work for the Levin-Goods V. We work for them.”

“So dat mean, I caint talk to him?”

Lessie stopped in her tracks, “Look...ever since the bar-b-que Velvet, you come to Mrs. Levin-Goods house swolled up in ugliness. She smile at you, try to talk, make you feel comfortable and you clam up tighter than a chicken butt. She wonderin if you sick. But then you spy Oz and you act like you under a spell, like you done had somethin. You think Mrs. Levin-Good don’t notice that?”

Velvet smiled at her sister. “Lessie, you need to relax.”

“And you need to act like you got somethin besides grits between your ears,” Lessie said, resuming the trudge.

Velvet stopped in her tracks. “You callin me stupid Lessie Mae?”

Silence.

“I said . . . you think I’m stupid? . . . Do you?” Velvet yelled as her sister continued walking.

“Watch yo tone lil girl.” Lessie said over her shoulder.

Velvet wiped the sweat and dust from her face with her arm and picked up speed, “You aint my momma. You might be my oldest sistah but you don’t tell me bout how to talk.”

Lessie stood still, her back to Velvet sensing her combative energy. Velvet charged and stopped, poised on the brink of striking her on the head. “If you put your hands on me . . . you gon have to explain to our mother through a toothless mouth how you lost the use of both of em. You that crazy? Huh? Show me then Veeta.”

Velvet defused like air from a popped balloon, then draped her arms lovingly around Lessie from behind, “I’m sorry sistah . . . my God . . . why you so touchy?”

Lessie spun around and looked Velvet in her eyes, holding her tightly by the shoulders, “But touchin you is not somethin smart for me to do right now. And you mustn’t never, ever think about hittin or hurtin me . . . or any of our brothers and sisters cause we are all we got . . . you understand? We aint never suppose to fight each other I don’t care what nobody say. If other people attack us or one of us, we fight back, try to kill em but not each other. You understand?”

Velvet nodded yes and walked along thinking about Lessie’s words.

“And another thing,” Lessie added, “our mother? I love her just like you . . . but turnin the other cheek if you attacked is bullshit unless it’s buyin you time to come back for a body.”

Confused, Velvet, looked at her sister gingerly; she’d never heard her cuss before and could surmise nothing about the origins of her seriousness.

“Sistah.” she said “I’m sorry for real . . . but God . . . all I wanted to do was talk to him. Why is that so bad? Aint you never been in love?”

Lessie Mae looked on quietly at the high grass, bent by the breeze, and then at the fluffy late afternoon clouds. She was twenty three and always felt a smile or two away from a downpour of tears. Their mother always told them just to be glad to wake up each day and she for one was glad, but there had to be somethin else to get up for. She fantasized about asking Mrs. Levin-Good to ask her mamma if she could stay there with them as live-in help. At least there she could wake up to natural beauty, refinement, some space, some different air. It seemed at the Levin-Good’s time stood still. There was room to breathe.

“Velvet,” she sighed, “I understand your wantin Oz. I really do. I’d want him myself maybe if things was different . . . but we don’t have no money cept what we get from workin for folks. At the end of the day, we broke...always workin but we always hungry . . . caint never git full. Our clothes is old and out of fashion, we just don’t seem to be nuthin some time. And it embarrass me the way you act round Oz.”

“Embarrass you? How sistah?”

Lessie in exasperation started bunching the fabric in her dress as she walked, “I guess cause I need that job to keep helpin the family and I don’t want us to be no problem to the Levin-Good’s. Plus you embarrass me as a woman. Oz the kinda man deserve a woman wit some class goin after him.”

“And I don’t look like class, huh?”

“Sorry Veeta. I just think one of these days you might be in a way to go for Oz...But the time is wrong. This really aint it. On top of everything else you too young for Oz.”

Velvet sighed, obsessed with Grace. “Well . . . at least there’s hope. All aint lost. There’s a chance I might measure up one day . . . alright sistah, from now on when we go to the Levin-Good’s, I’ll bow to Mrs. Levin-Good. Be the best helper I can be to you and I’ll stay in my place. I promise. No more talkin to Oz.”

“I don’t think I’m gon take you wit me again.”

“I said I’m sorry Lessie . . . really I am.” she entreated, “ I promise. You won’t never have to remind me of my place again.”

“I just wanna keep the job.” Lessie sighed as they got nearer the house. “Just wanna keep it.”

By the time they finished picking the herbs for their mother the sun’s strong heat and glare were gone, the sky flecked now in a sultry exotic mixture of azure, gold and fuschia, imparting a shadowy cast over the high grass. They lingered at the top of the man-made hill for a few minutes that marked the clearing to their ramshackle house; parts of which remained in states of disrepair until the money could be made to fix them.

With the small cotton bag full of herbs knotted into the sash of Velvet’s dress, they took a few deep breaths, and as was their custom, the two young women locked hands, and descended the hill, at first walking and then trotting until the momentum of the downswing had them running, laughing, and gasping for breath at its base amidst the resounding chirp of crickets and other evening critters. They loved running down that hill, and not to be outdone by their brothers were secretly working on ascending it with the same aplomb. They rested for the trek to the porch.

Echoing from the raised windows of the house, paralyzing, pitiful, pleading screams filled the air. They quickened their pace towards the sound hearing heavy furniture scraping the wooden floor, another yelp, and a door violently slammed against the heavy snap of a razor strap.

“You done beat me enough mamma.” They heard Freda wail between wrenching sobs. Her voice sounded like she was now behind a barricade.

In utter shock they stared at each other. They left the porch and followed the sound of the voices to the side of the house where they could hear better; then stooped behind a thick bush a few feet away that allowed them to see from the waist up, their mother pacing back and forth, the razor strap in a hug with her grasping fingers in front of the locked door that protected Freda.

“God says parents is not to be despised Freda Lou. Proverbs 30, verse 17 says the eye that mocketh his father and despiseth thy mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out and the young eagles shall eat it.” Dessa continued, earnestly and calmly. “I want you to come outta there . . . right now so that I can chasten you.”

"I'm eighteen years old mamma." Freda pleaded, "I don't despise you. What are you talkin about? What did I do for you to beat on me like this?"

"I am your mamma. You disrespect me when you let a man rub on you and pull on you. I know what it can lead to. And if I hadna come outside and seed you who knows what youda been doin . . . I seed you pull back from him when you seed me; so you know and I know your thoughts was on sin." Dessa droned on. "God said even a child is knowed by his doins—whether his work be pure and whether it be right . . ."

"Mamma listen . . ."

"You sayin . . ." Dessa implored, her voice rising and riddled in anger "I didn't train you up in the way to go? Lettin that boy feel on you is your way of cursin me before Jesus? Come on out here right now to be re-deemed! He that spareth his rod hateth his child—but he that loveth him, chaseneth him betimes . . . I can show it to you; Proverbs 13-verse 24. You know I love you too much to not do what's right."

"Mamma . . . you don't know what you doin," Freda whimpered.

"I aint got to know what I'm doin, baby . . . the Lord knows." Dessa returned. She brought both her fists with the strap in them to her face. With her eyes rolled upwards she spoke reverently, "Withold not correction from the child, for if thou beatest him with the rod he shall not die. Freda I love you much as my other girls, maybe more. The Lord say thou should beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from hell. I'm tryin to talk sense to you, now come outta there like the child of mine I done raised you to be and let's git this over wit."

"Mamma, there's cuts on my throat and welts and scratches on my arms and legs. What I'm gon say to peoples mamma . . . this is wrong . . . you caint do this to me."

"Freda." Dessa yelled hoarsely, "I done took worse. Now bring yourself outta there right now! Don't make me break the door."

"Mamma! You crazy!!" Freda cried.

"Oh no!" Lessie and Velvet shrieked at the same time.

"Let's go in." said Lessie to Velvet.

"But . . ." Velvet started.

"Come on!" commanded Lessie, yanking her sister along with her around to the stairs where they took them two at a time up to the front porch and bolted into the house.

"Oh praise God, praise God, Lessie Mae!" Dessa said whirling around, relieved to see her eldest daughter.

"Mamma what did Freda do?"

"You gotta make her come outta there Lessie Mae. She need a beatin. Actin like a whore out there wit one of the mens from the church."

"What man mamma? Who?"

"One of the Dubarry boys. Maine . . . the one help Rev Kirkendal wit the haulin. He come out here to drop somethin off for Mr. Les. I was in there and seed em through the window. He was rubbin on her face like he knowed her and she was lookin up at him. When I come to the door they step away like it wasn't nuthin."

Lessie Mae looked pale, "Mamma . . . I don't feel so good." she said doubling over.

Dessa looked at her daughter, concern clouding her face. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know. I'm in pain," she said ". . . oh mamma . . . oh Lord, help me." she moaned falling to the floor.

"My goodness child," Dessa said. "Veeta, where those herbs?"

“Is it time for your ministrations, Lessie Mae?” her mother asked worriedly. “Probably so mamma,” she groaned.

Dessa slowly shook her head, then yelled, “Freda Louise Street, I’m gon see you later. You stay right in there until I’m ready.”

Dessa and Velvet helped Lessie Mae to the couch, and Velvet proceeded to fill up the kettle and fire up the stove. “You gon be alright baby,” Dessa cooed massaging Lessie Mae’s head. “I’m fixin you some tonic, and it’s gon git your stomach back. You probably never shoulda went to work today. Was she okay at work Veeta?”

“What?” Velvet said, more an exclamation, than a question, staring at her mother, then incredulously at Lessie. “Yeah. She was fine.”

As Velvet and her mamma ministered to Lessie, they heard the loud forceful voices and movement of the Street men unloading the wagon. When Eli and Bertam came up the steps and opened the door, who should go through it as though shot from a cannon but Freda, her face puffy and welted, her clothes ripped, her hair a tangled mess of kinks and curls, scratches, and blood spots everywhere. Her feet were bare and she bolted from the yard shouting miserably and unintelligibly.

“What’s goin on?” Mr. Les implored, as Eli, Bert, and the others looked one to the other in confusion.

“Freda!” Dessa screamed. “Eli y’all go bring ya sister back! I caught her bein fresh wit one of the Dubarry boys.”

“Mamma, we don’t know where she run,” Eli said.

“She caint be but one or two places,” lamented their mother. “She aint at the Yeagers or no other white folks house.”

Mr. Les took a deep, disgusted breath. “Dessa, what did the girl do?”

“I just told you what she did. She let that boy put his hands on her. He was feelin all over her face.”

“Is that all?” he said, relieved. He wiped sweat from his handsome tawney hued face and ran his strong graceful fingers through his thick wavy blondish brown hair. Then he glanced at the others staring at them. “Y’all scuse us.”

His sons went back outside. Lessie Mae and Veeta went upstairs behind the two youngest girls.

“Dessa, do you agree that sons, includin your sons, gon grow up to be mens some day?”

“Yes. God willin.”

“Then woman, whose *faces* do you think they gon be feelin on? Whose do you want em to feel on?”

She was silent for a minute. “Need I remind you it’s two kinds of women...the kind that saves they self...and the kind you and your friends be out there doin the devils business wit on Friday and Saturday nights.”

“So it’s bout that. Dessa, our gals don’t be out there . . . and besides them gals that do be out there is girlfriends of the men that don’t have wives. You my wife . . . what would I do with they’ern ?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I don’t know why you got to be out there at all.”

“ . . . And you know,” he continued, “that you free to come out there anytime you feels like it. I aint doin nuthin to be ashame of.”

“You aint ashame of havin liquor on your breath before the Lord?”

“Well, Dess,” he said thoughtfully, “the only reason why he turnt water into wine is cause he didn’t have no corn formula that was outstandin.”

“You goin’ to hell Mr Les,” his wife said, repulsed, “and Freda look most like you . . . your ways is in her . . . she goin’ there too, lettin that animal paw her.”

“Is that why you beat her? Cause she remind you of me Dessa? My makin hooch, gamblin, likin dancin, and music? Tell you what . . . just let’s answer that later. Tell me holy woman . . . is it a woman’s face you want your sons to be feelin on?”

Her eyes clouded; she found her voice. “What kinda question is that Mr. Les. What you tryin to ax me?”

“Maybe it’s somethin you need to ax yo’self . . . because you caint continue to beat the livin shit outta your daughters cause they function like womens.”

She slapped her husband’s face a stinging blow. “Ya think I don’t know they big gals? You think I sleep easy bout it? I guess it don’t bother you none, huh?”

Mr. Les pulled his thoughts from a far away place, then said gently but pointedly, “What is it I’m suppose to let bother me ‘bout the gals? They good gals. What I’m suppose to lose sleep over?”

“That you and all these nasty men use other womens to do your duty on, that’s whut.”

Mr. Les blanched, “I got news for you Dessa. All women is a other woman to some man, somewhere, at some time, and that’s gon include our daughters.”

He poured himself a cup of coffee and sat back down. “Do that announcement include your sons as nasty men too? The sons you suckled? The boys you doctored on when sick and hugged and tickled when they run all over the place wearin you out?”

“I don’t know.” Dessa said stricken.

Mr. Les moved slowly toward her and though she resisted, pulled her toward him enfolding her in his arms. He pushed her hair back from her face and held her face up to his by her chin. He hugged her tight. “I guess we just a big ol’ nasty family,” he whispered lovingly, his face a warm glow, trying to soften her.

Her expression was stone.

“No more beatins, Dessa,” he said.

“I caint have the kids growin up loose, Mr. Les.”

“Baby, they grown already. When they leave here they gon be what they want.”

“The Lord don’t like sin,” she said.

“The Lord created sin,” he said, holding her tight.

She shoved him away, disgusted. “What kinda man you is?”

“The kinda man that sinned wit you at least ten times,” he said quietly. “I think you kinda liked it, too.”

She scowled at him.

He threw up his hands, then tried to hold her again.

“Don’t you touch me,” she spat angrily.

“Alright. Alright Dessa, but you do somethin for me. Pray to your God that he ease your mind to not beat your girls no more. I have a feelin Freda aint comin back.”

“Why you say that?” she said, her eyes wide. “I done put Freda in check before.”

“Freda loves you. But she done got her last whuppin. Rather than hurt you, she won’t come back.”

“What you mean hurt me?” Dessa asked.

“I mean that she might feel the yen to fight you one day and to not do it— she won’t come back home. A lot of daughters won’t let they mamma beat on em long as you done beat yours.”

“I guess dat go for the boys too wit you?” she said in a huff.

“I don’t beat the boys. Aint hit’em since they was ‘bout ten or leven years old, Dessa.”

It shocked her. Chastisement of the children was something she had believed she and her husband were in deep agreement on, though they’d never discussed it.

“Boys have to be taught to talk if they gon’ grow into the kinda men who can think. Even when you use to hear em hollerin in the barn, they wasn’t bein hit. I told em to holler for your benefit.”

Dessa exhaled deeply. “I see Mr. Les . . . so you was undoin everything I thought me and God was teachin.”

“Caint nobody undo God’s work Dessa, and I think our God is the same. I just expect a bit more of him than you do.”

She poured herself some coffee, “Do Rev Kirkendal know how you feel?”

“He do indeed.”

“O.K.,” she said with resignation and sat down.

Mr. Les walked through the front room and caught a glimpse of his nine sons and daughters on the stairs as he made his way to the front porch for a smoke. He wondered how much of the conversation they’d heard.

They huddled around him to comfort him and be comforted. They saw movement in the dusk and the emergence of Rev Kirkendal.

“Evening Deac,” he said. “I have Freda in my truck. Picked her up off the side of the road; looked like she been worked over pretty good, said her mamma whupped her.”

“I’m ashamed to say she did, Rev,” Mr. Les began.

“I aint ashamed,” said Dessa, comin slowly onto the porch.

“Evening Mrs. Street.”

“God says we is suppose to rule over our children. You think I done wrong, Rev Kirkendal?” she asked him, sincerity in her eyes.

“The Bible does say that Mrs. Street, and sometimes there are more to the words than what we read. We need to be certain when and if something applies. Would you agree with that?”

“I guess . . .”

“Then, why don’t you and I talk about that after the service this Sunday,” he said kindly. “I heard you say Freda is in your truck. Thank you for bringin her home to us,” Dessa said.

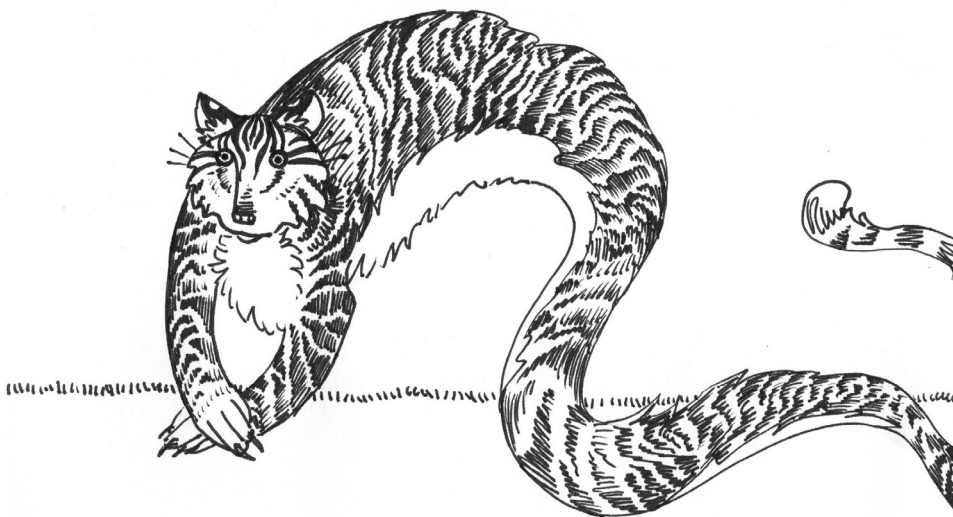
“I came to tell you all that Freda is safe. However, she’s not coming home. She is in the truck with Maine Dubarry, and I’m giving them a ride into town.”

“What you mean Reverend. She caint just go from us,” Dessa said, moving toward the steps. Mr. Les stood up and pulled her to him.

“I know the circumstance of this is upsetting,” said the Reverend, “But with all due respect to you Mrs. Street and your husband and your family, Freda is of legal age . . . so is Maine. They both can do whatever they want to do. I know you can as well, but this isn’t a good time to talk to them. Please ,for me, abide their wishes. I only wanted to let you know your daughter is alright. Things could have been so much worse with her trying to walk alone on the road at this time of the evening.”

“Thank you Reverend,” Mr. Street said, extending his hand to their Pastor. “Yes, thank you,” they all chorused solemnly. All that is except Velvet who, from her perch, watched and listened to everything in accordance with what it meant for her plans with Oz Levin-Good.

Adessa Street was silent. A tear slid down her face as they all watched Rev Kirkendal disappear into the pitch darkness, heard the low powerful engine of his truck, and closed their eyes to its tail lights, revisiting in their minds as they sat down first, to an eerily quiet supper and later retired to bed, their bodies, and the conditions that drove one of their most gentle and favored sisters from their midst. **KR**



—**Long Brindle**
Anne Karetnikov

Swallow

From the world whose invisible fingers open
as the fingers partway uncurling from Joan's palm
give shape to a weight that's spinning in this world
of clay and wool, a skinny Scotch ghost comes
haunting my studio. He's family, I guess from the way

he scoffs at my pomp and upholds 'the language
of ordinary men.' Family style, he insists
I can't make divinations from flowers or birds,
or summon spirits with poems, even his. He's right

of course. He ceases to exist. I can almost smell
the smoke. His scoffing is our family heirloom,
our charm against witches, churches and bosses.
Mine against my government. Is the ghost gone?

But whose is the face that's meant to fill
the disembodied mask with black ties extended
that flapped above our heads one day? A broad skull,
horrid, sulphurous lower lids, the eyes huge,
flourescent red . . . a glaring emptiness shaking
an awful scrutiny down upon us. What had we done?

We had intruded where the red-winged blackbird
rules over the reeds with this terrifying illusion.
We had come creeping along planks through phragmites
to spy on swans and cygnets splashing in dune pools,
hoping for a sign to celebrate our neighbors.

The neighborhood kiln had just fired its first load.
Someone had read from *The Book of Changes*. Someone
knew the Algonquian name for the moon that was shining.
Someone pressed the whorl of a conch to his lips
and blew a long tone at the moon. Then mud that
hands spun cold and wet, in fire became stone.

No swans, but swallows hawking mayflies from pondfilm,
with overstuffed, wide beaks leaking gauzy wings
and damsel tails all the way back to their artful
retorts of mud and straw tucked under lighthouse eyes:
not swans but easily a sign for spinners. conch-blowers,
sculptors—my neighbors who daub and dine gloriously,
scribbling forms that vanish as they swoop.

A fleshy artisan, twirling wreathes of calcium
out of surging tides, made the conch stone.
Who thinks what eddies twisted and whirled it
till it wound up on our lips importuning the moon?

The moon is a stone. No one can wrap it
and hang it for weighing. What's it worth
to join wrists and blow from the spiral shell
a hollow note toward the moon's blank reflection?
What price do you put on stagy illusions?

Not zero, I hope. Moonclues keep the neighborhood
merry, keep us feeding the kiln fires, keep us
clowning along the weird routes in this kingdom
of long wings and forked tails, flat as cave art

stencilled on the sky's wall, where the blackbird
performs our kind of feat, conjuring a demon
to drive rival illusionists out of this place
neither land nor water, where the air is full
of calligraphies turning gnats into songs..

The ghost says my face would do to fill
the black mask horrifying the air; the eyes
are red from bonfires and from chanting moonfire
into my brain. They blink in broad daylight,
unable to see what people lie bleeding from,
or that strangers' hands, twining handsome thongs
have bound me into a club like a bloody stone.

December

Walker-Gordon's Rotolactor was a big glass-enclosed carousel, each cow milked and stripped in twelve and half minutes twice a day, fourteen hundred cows in under six hours

The most common local school trip after Washington Crossing (Washington's Crossing to local geezers) limited only by "A" sticker gas rationing from late 1942 right on to Hiroshima

A line of Walker-Gordon Jerseys crossing Washington Road on their way in to milking on one fall Saturday afternoon before the War

Glimpsed from the rumble seat of a Model A putt-putting off from old Palmer Stadium after the Penn game

Alone back there that day

Up front, Fa and his hipflask, Mother in her ratty raccoon coat driving

Happy days, Great Depression days, childhood days

Brown knickers and knee socks days

Brown then was the old blue

As black now is the new logolux

Deep memory heap percolating since the days when the last century was not nearly half over

Down to now, ten years into the twenty-first where on top of another immense pile of complexities we have spooky al Shabaab, shrinking ice caps, and Yemen on the table

Winding up, winding back

Willie Mays drifting back toward the fence in deep center for an easy catch one Trenton Little Giants evening in 1950

Dunn Field, wooden grandstand, capacity thirty-five hundred, right at Brunswick Circle where the NJ Lottery is now

George Case, one of more than a dozen locals who made it to The Show, had a baseball-oriented sports shop downtown on West Hanover

Lightweight Champion Ike Williams fought nine times in the old Trenton Arena, middleweight George Johnson lived most of his life in Trenton

George Antheil, b. 1900, Trenton

His American Symphony, No. 3

Franco Harris, Dennis Rodman, Hobey Baker

When they dig or ditch anywhere near Nassau Hall, up come the coins, colonial shoe buckles, spoons, knife blades, glass fragments and pottery shards

When it was the capitol in 1783, the Continental Congress delegates strolled back and forth to Bainbridge House all summer

There from as far away as Georgia, from New Hampshire, they pulled it off, they stayed

The skies and roads and streams were clear in those days

Shad runs were enormous until recent times and long, long ago the Delaware was a salmon river for the centuries of the glaciers' retreat

The first Dutch navigators figured the Delaware might be a shortcut to China

With a treasure map in hand, in their twenties Fa and his sister went around digging for Black Beard's hoard along the tidal river, both sides

In turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Elizabethtown in the Adirondacks he would head down the hill to the barn where half a dozen Guernseys stood in oak stanchions slammed tight to be milked and stripped by hand

Brown leather hightops, shorts and sailor jumper swinging a gallon milkcan for the family camp to be left out on the screen porch that night for the cream to come to the top

His sister Florence wore frilly Winslow Homer dresses as a girl and often carried a parasol

There are photographs

He spent the Twenties in New York and in the Depression decamped on the Pennsylvania Railroad like so many others

Walker Evans and Delmore Schwartz and James Agee

And the wives and friends they brought

A lot of others, artists and demi-artists, poets, poetasters, potters, photographers, profiteers, in the hegira from the city during the Depression's long decade

City people fixing up eighteenth-century stone farm houses, buying antiques, selling real estate, jokes about country people using "ain't," smelling of cow manure, wearing work shoes and bib overalls

Laying houses knocked up from cheap, unplanned southern pine near the old oak-beamed dairy barns, range houses for summer pullets, do-it-yourself hatcheries

Jersey Homesteads, Roosevelt, with its Ben Shahn murals, deep idealism and community house's embossed aluminum doors

The commuting money-people generally didn't come out until after the War

Sundogs, parhelia, this bicycle afternoon from a ridge off the middle Delaware, warm on the ground but ice-crystal diamond dust high above in the cirrostratus

Fortunate and rare

Still an Indian river north of the Fall Line redolent of wickiups, grapevine fishing weirs and dugout canoes

The Valley's multitude of birds, the shyness of the animals

The fields of cool season grasslands, of orchard grass, timothy, Kentucky bluegrass, smooth brome, and reed canary-grass

The succession of goldenrods, asters, milkweed, Canada thistle, wild bergamot, common mullein, ox-eye daisies, black-eyed Susans

Out Harrison Street in Frenchtown to 27 Second Street where Agee lived

He and Alma Mailman came out from New York in spring 1938 with Walker Evans trailing them lobbying for group sex

In that era of casual, clichéd misogyny and hard-drinking novel writing and journalism when post-Prohibition boozing allowed a counter-culture like pot and LSD in the Sixties

Artists around since Edward Hicks's "Peaceable Kingdom"

Edward Redfield (Delaware Valley impressionist), "The Island," 1908, Hendrick Island flanking Stockton above Center Bridge

Arthur Koestler owned Island Farm on Hendrick Island in the early 1950s, wrote a good bit of both *Arrow in the Blue* and *The Invisible Writing* there

He'd walk across to the Stockton post office to pick up mail in an eastern-European style waist-length leather jacket and stand in the checkout line of Errico's Market reading *The New York Times*

Paul Gallico, Paul Whiteman, Lee Gatch, Tony Sarg

Downriver along the canal through Lambertville to the southern terminus of the Pennsy's Belvidere Division, Trenton, the capital from 1790

Hotel Hildebrecht at 27 West State Street and the Stacey-Trent

The Hildebrecht, the secondary one, ten stories, finished in 1929, razed a long time ago

The Stacey-Trent, eleven stories, at 51 West State with its Nymph Room's painting of nearly nude Rubensesque frolickers over a red leather banquette, the swank bar in town

From the early 1940s Nymph Room's bill of fare for apple brandy: Lairds 35 cents, Wurfels 35 cents, High Point 35 cents, Courtneys 35 cents

Ale and beer in bottles: Budweiser 25 cents, Pabst Blue Ribbon 25 cents, Schlitz 25 cents, Trenton Old Stock 20 cents, Piels 20 cents, Ballantines 20 cents

Along the street toward the Broad Street Bank Building, Travers Bookstore's art nouveau entrance, mezzanine, and commodious staircase to a secondhand section downstairs

Dunhams and Gimbels

Matching hats, gloves and handbags, girdles and cheap furs, their floorwalkers and the peculiar stasis of their dramatically decorated windows

The Trent, The Paramount, The State

The secretarial school for typing and Gregg Shorthand, corner of West State and Barrack

The old GM plant near the airport producing Avenger torpedo bombers tested upriver in screeching dives before being flown off to England and the Pacific Theater

The bus station to everywhere at 21 Willow Street

The Federal Writers' Project of the WPA, New Jersey a Guide to its Present and Past (Viking, June 1939), it has a lot of it, not all

That Trenton of a century and more ago in the decades of the European immigration flood

Trenton of the wire rope Roeblings

Many Trentons before that one, old John Roebling himself arrived from Germany in the flush of 1848

Leni-Lenapi, living there for thousands of years fishing at the Delaware's falls and the mouth of the Assunpink, called it Sankikan

Corn, beans, squash

The Swedes and the Dutch working upriver in the 1630s called the site Sankikan Kill

Way back, way ahead

And sequences of future Trentons approaching down the line

Each of them to leave a mass of videos, memoirs, photographs, triumphs, injustices, enigmas, local heroes, and forgotten wonderments

All set in place



—Shoes lighter
Chris Szokolczai



Contributors

Ellen Foos is the founder and publisher of Ragged Sky Press and a production editor at Princeton University Press. Her first collection of poetry, *Little Knitted Sister*, came out in 2006. A MacDowell Colony and Vermont Studio Center fellow, and a member of U.S. 1 Poets' Cooperative, her poems have also appeared in *U.S. 1 Worksheets*, *Kelsey Review*, *Edison Literary Review*, and *Sensations Magazine*.

Gail Gaspar received an Honorable Mention in the 2009 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards. She serves as an adjunct writing instructor at Middlesex County College, Edison. Her poems have appeared in *South Carolina Review*, *Journal of NJ Poets*, *U.S. 1 Worksheets*, and *Bucks County Writer*.

Beverly Mach Geller is a graduate of Syracuse University School of Nursing. She earned a BA in English from Rutgers University and an MA from The College of NJ. She is the author of six books for children and her poems have appeared in many anthologies, including *The Kelsey Review*, *Delaware Valley Poets*, *New Jersey Poetry Society*, and *U.S. 1 Worksheets*. She has lived in Mercer County for more than sixty years.

Helen Gorenstein is the author of the praised *Portrait of a Reading Woman*. Many of the poems first appeared in *The Kelsey Review*. The book and reviews are available on Amazon.

Anne Karetnikov is a New Jersey resident currently attending the University of the Arts in Philadelphia where she is in her senior year in the illustration program. She has attended classes for credit at Mercer County Community College for two summers, and remembers going to day camp at the campus many years ago. Anne works primarily in ink and watercolor, reads voraciously when she has time and has many hobbies and far too many obscure interests.

Janet Kirk grew up in rural Minnesota. She graduated from the University of Minnesota. Her stories have appeared in the *Kelsey Review* and *U.S. 1*. She lives in Princeton.

Betty Lies is a Geraldine R. Dodge poet and a Distinguished Teaching Artist for the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. She has published four books of prose and two books of poetry, *The Blue Laws* and *The Day After I Drowned*.

Doughtry 'Doc' Long's poetry has been published in numerous journals including, the 50th anniversary edition of the *Literary Review*, *Brilliant Corners*, *Obsidian*, *The Painted Bride Quarterly*, and *U.S. 1 Worksheets*. He is currently completing a fifth volume of poetry entitled *Flight into I*.

Beth Morgan is a web designer and writer who lives in Lawrenceville, NJ. Not so long ago she reread James Thurber's "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" and realized it was an accurate portrayal of the mind of a fiction writer. Morgan was well into adulthood before she found out that most people didn't spend the day making up stories about everything that happened around them. "The Secret Life" came about when she wondered what would happen if the protagonist of Mitty were a woman.

Joe Preneta began typing poems in the 4th grade and was eventually published on the West Coast. He represented Chabot College at the Marin Writers' Conference. Joe intends soon to gather up his poems and get a book published.

T. M. Rago, after having served in the US Air Force and having completed studies at the Institute of Design of IIT in Chicago, at Arizona State University, and in Germany, returned to reside in Mercer County.

Doris Spears is a Trenton based professional Jazz and Blues Musician. "God's Way or the Highway" is a chapter from her soon to be released first novel, *A Voice Long Gone*.

D. E. Steward has a serial 24-year month-to-month project, each month written in the style of "Decinber," and of "Avreglo," that appeared in last year's *Kelsey Review*. Almost two hundred of the months are out in literary magazines.

Chris Szakolczai majors in history at Rutgers University and runs his own photography business specializing in weddings and events. His photo documentary chronicling the training of the Mercer County Police Academy class of 2008 was featured in a six part series in *The College Voice* student newspaper at Mercer County Community College.

Yongming Wang came to the United States in 1989 as a graduate student studying at Rutgers University. He got his masters degree in Library and Information Science in 1992. He now works as a systems librarian at The College of New Jersey. This is his first English literature publication.

Mark David Wilkie is 19 years old. He lives in Hamilton Square and is a recent graduate of Steinert High School. He has been drawing ornate linear drawings since age ten. He recently exhibited a piece of his art work at Art All Night in Trenton. In addition to pen and ink he also works with wood, clay, and stone.

Peter Wood's poems have appeared in national poetry journals such as *Antioch Review* and *Prairie Schooner* as well as many regional journals and anthologies. He has participated in many of the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry programs in New Jersey and the annual poetry festivals at The Frost Place in New Hampshire. He has published three illustrated chapbooks in collaboration with Demarais Studio Press. After nearly forty years of teaching poetry and writing, he retired from the English Department of The College of New Jersey in 2001. He lives in Lawrenceville, NJ where he and his wife Joan are active in issues involving open space and public trails.

Editors & Staff

Edward Carmien writes, teaches, and is privileged to serve as co-editor of the *Kelsey Review*. You may find some of his recent work in *Catopolis*, a 2008 DAW Books short story anthology. He lives in the historic village of Griggstown with his family, two cats, and far too many books.

Holly-Katharine Johnson is co-editor of the *Kelsey Review* and an Associate Professor of English at Mercer County Community College. In addition to teaching

composition and creative writing, she also teaches all levels of journalism and is the faculty adviser to Mercer's award winning newspaper, *The College Voice*. Johnson received an MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts in 2004 and received her bachelor of arts from Cornell University in 2001.

Ellen Jacko is a poetry editor of the *Kelsey Review* and earned a BA in English Literature at Rutgers University and an MAT in English Education at Trenton State College. She has had a variety of post-graduate experiences including the study of twentieth century British poets at Exeter College, Oxford University, England. For more than thirty years she has worked at Allentown High School in Allentown, New Jersey where she currently teaches AP Literature and Composition and creative writing. Throughout her career she has worked with students as writers. This includes working for the writing center and acting as faculty advisor of the yearbook, the student newspaper, and the student literary magazine, and helping her students prepare their work for publication. Additionally for fifteen years she was a member of the adjunct faculty at Mercer County Community College. Through all these endeavors her focus has been on helping her students understand the beauty, joy, and power of the written word.

Luray Gross is a poetry editor of the *Kelsey Review* and is the author of three collections of poetry: *Forenoon* was published in 1990 by The Attic Press in Westfield, NJ, and *Elegant Reprieve* won the 1995-96 Still Waters Press Poetry Chapbook Competition. *The Perfection of Zeros* was published by WordTech in 2004. A storyteller as well as a writer, she works extensively throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania as an Artist in Residence. She was the recipient of a Fellowship in Poetry from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. In 2000, she was named a Distinguished Teaching Artist by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and was the recipient of the Robert Fraser Open Poetry Competition Award from Bucks County (PA) Community College. She was the 2002 Poet Laureate of Bucks County and resident faculty at the 2006 Frost Place Festival and Conference on Poetry in Franconia, NH. Her poem "The Perfection of Zero" was featured by the Pennsylvania Center for the Book's Public Poetry Project in 2008.

Edyta Kuciapa is a recent graduate of Rutgers University, Camden and the newest addition to the Publications department at Mercer County Community College. With a dual degree in Graphic Design and Animation, she's also a lover of photography, sappy romance novels, bright colors and clean typography.

Roberta Clipper is a fiction editor of the *Kelsey Review*. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley and is a full Professor at Rider University. A fiction writer and poet, she has published many stories and two novels, including *The Bride Wore Red* and *Fifty Fifty*. On a Fulbright-Nehru Fellowship, she served as a visiting professor at the International Institute of Information Technology in Hyderabad, India during the Monsoon Semester (fall), 2009.

Submission Guidelines

The *Kelsey Review* is published once each September. The deadline for each year's issue is May 1st. We respond no later than August 15th. The *Review* solicits contributions from those who live and/or work in Mercer County. Send us your:

Short Fiction

Length: 4,000 words maximum

Poetry

Send no more than six pages

Essays

Length: 2,500 words maximum

Black & White Art (suitable for digital scanning)

See Below

Writers and artists who appear at Mercer County events such as poetry readings are also eligible. Organizers of such events should encourage those who work and/or live in the county to submit a short non-fiction critically informed review of the event; the editors will contact the writer/artist to extend an invitation to appear in the *Review*. We see this as an opportunity to promote such literary and artistic occasions and venues within the county.

We invite *proposals* for non-fiction articles on any topic relevant to the people, history, businesses, educational institutions, and/or government of Mercer County. What has come to be called "creative non-fiction" also falls into this category.

Except for art, the *Review* generally only accepts one item per author.

Send *disposable* manuscripts (NOT the only copy, NO electronic submissions, DO include your name on each page of your submission) of poetry and prose and legible copies of art to:

The Kelsey Review
Liberal Arts Division
Mercer County Community College
PO Box B, Trenton, NJ 08690

Include a stamped, self-addressed #10 envelope (regular business size) with first-class postage with your submission. Your cover letter should include all contact information including email address and a short biography that begins with your name (see the contributor's biographies in this issue for examples of what we're looking for).

- We require an electronic version (MS Word or .RTF file) of *accepted* prose and poetry and original art for scanning (only send original art upon acceptance; we return originals after scanning).
- Send your work to us electronically only when requested to do so. All rights are retained by the author.
- Payment is in copies (4).
- Each year we nominate up to six published items for the Pushcart Prize. See www.pushcartprize.com for more information.
- **Art:** The *Kelsey Review* uses art in the following sizes: half page, full page, and cover/centerfold (double page size).

Send questions via email to Kelsey.review@mccc.edu. In late fall 2010, look for us on Facebook.

Edward Carmien
Holly-Katharine Johnson
Co-Editors



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