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Quarterly Literary Journal
Spring 2007

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Nonfiction



Blue Man Warm
Leslie Baird

A Toast to Tragedy

The Artistic Love Affair with Amber-Tinted Glass

Jericho Parmis

I was sitting in a café in Greenwich Village when I was first told I would die a tragic death. A casual lunch with a close friend and her parents somehow turned its attention to the vague concept known as “my future” and what was in store for my life. My mistake was suggesting a life of art, perhaps writing, one day.

“A carton of cigarettes and a bottle of whiskey, and you’ll be just fine,” my friend’s father replied with a scoff. A man of considerable stature and a writer himself, his words were intimidating and ripe with a sarcasm that went unappreciated.

“I hope tragedy agrees with you,” he continued, as if to say, “Just another young mind thrown to the alcoholic wolves of creation”—until his wife chimed in to suggest they grab the check.

The subway car squeaked and moaned as I rode home that afternoon. I felt irritated as images dashed through my head of Jackson Pollock running drunk in and out of busy streets against New York City traffic, eventually returning to Cedar Tavern for another round of drinks with Franz Kline and Andy Warhol.



In our common perceptions, artistic expression is a marriage of genius and madness. “Alcohol is the anesthesia by which we endure the operation of life,” wrote George Bernard Shaw, echoing sentiments of his peers. Yet

while the link remains unproven, components of most artistic occupations certainly lend a hand to alcoholism. Many artists and writers work in solitude, facing an empty page, a blank canvas, in isolation from the rest of the world. They engage in this process day after day, and must create something divine and original. As Ernest Hemingway once wrote, “When you work hard all day with your head and know you must work again the next day what else can change your ideas and make them run on a different plane like whisky?” Alcohol alters the state of mind, toasting to something new. The artistic world is soaked with competition, where the fear of failure is both real and damaging. Virginia Woolf suffered psychotic depression after unfavorable criticism, and though she did not fall victim to an alcoholic escape, many artists find themselves reaching for the bottle. This coping trait is passed down by example, like a dominant gene through bloodlines to successive generations of other artists in their craft.

Jackson Pollock, one of the greatest talents in the contemporary art world, struggled with alcoholism throughout his life. His two-year affair with sobriety seemed initially effective, leading to a radical breakthrough in which he created his most respected drip masterpieces. Soon, however, sobriety proved unable to feed Pollock’s creativity, and a shift in aesthetics led him down a dry and colorless path. His canvases became anointed with darkness, lacking the colorful expression of previous work. Admirers reacted with both ambiguity and criticism, which may have contributed to Pollock’s inability to remain sober. As he sunk back into alcoholism, his color returned. Pollock’s vibrant work would forever hold his audience as alcohol would hold him until his death in 1956. At the age of forty-four, driving drunk, Jackson Pollock overturned his convertible, killing himself and another passenger.

Upon his death, Jackson Pollock joined a long list of artistic colleagues whose lives were embalmed in alcohol. Each life was filled with madness and pain, and each story ripe with creation, yet wrought with destruction. These forces sought to outdo one another in these artists like rival siblings vying for attention.

My mother grew up a middle child, caught between two brothers with alcohol on their breath. My mother’s younger brother, my Uncle Greg, lived a life illustrated by recklessness and freedom, which lent a hand to his ability

Nonfiction *A Toast to Tragedy*

to immerse himself in alcoholic binges. His fast-paced and fearless life included racing motor cross in the deserts of Arizona, disappearing for days on end, escaping into bars, and hiding each night in a new woman's bed. Mechanically gifted from a young age, he developed a successful business from his expert motorcycle repairs for the loyal customers of his remote bike shop. He approached his passion for vintage motorcycles like an artist, his big red Stanley tool chest always at his side like a sculptor's set of hand chisels. He dismantled junked bikes and reconstructed them piece by piece, restoring their vintage beauty through his loving attention to detail. Success is a demanding mistress, and during the early 1990s, Greg took a nosedive into the heart of his alcoholic tendencies—falling out of favor with clientele and losing his business. Landing himself in the hospital on more than one drunken occasion by wiping out on his bike, his addiction stirred up the dirt of a long and winding desert road and the hearts and minds of those around him. Yet, several years later, it would be my mother's older brother whose portrait would depict an ultimately fatal destruction.

Alcoholism and depression seem to buttress the mythical wisdom that creative artists are mad, that we inherit familial misfortune. Ernest Hemingway lived a life flooded with physical and psychological pain. Haunted by the suicide of his father, wounded in war, and susceptible to pain in peace, Hemingway drenched himself in whiskey and wine, for "that is what kills the worm that haunts us," he wrote. In 1961, with a twelve-gauge English shotgun, Hemingway ended his own life at the age of sixty-one, slaying the demons of depression and alcoholism once and for all. His suicide lends a tragic counterpart to the celebration of his life; his lifestyle is still glorified for its freedom and festivity. Travel guidebooks list Hemingway's favorite bars throughout the world, such that we may take a drink in the very places where Hemingway indulged his creative addictions, painting our own fantasies of raising our glasses to F. Scott Fitzgerald and the like. Trying to picture myself in this scene, my own familial cycles distract my eye.

On a Thursday morning in late June of 1998, my mother's older brother, my Uncle Tim, drove a pickup truck down a crowded highway. The truck pulled an open trailer carrying two motorcycles and their extra parts. Suddenly, and without explanation, he hit the brakes, jerking the truck to

a stop in the middle of rush hour traffic. The weight of the trailer thrust forward, creating a force too large to control, which caused the entire truck to flip over into the center of the well-trafficked highway. Miraculously, his life was the only one life taken in the accident. My uncle suffered from major head and body injuries, lying comatose in the hospital for a week before he died.

My Uncle Tim spent most of his adult life looking for his creative niche while being tortured by cravings for drugs or alcohol. Three near-death overdoses punctuated his search for happiness and fulfillment as a failed engineering student, followed by dashed dreams as a wannabe musician, artist, and architect. He had been in recovery for almost four years. A nearly empty flask was found in the seat of his truck. I added it to my family archive.



“I hope tragedy agrees with you,” my friend’s father had said to me, shading my mind with doubt. The words were haunting as I tried to focus on tone and composition, painting a portrait of a frail old woman posing nude and reclining against a satin sheet shining emerald green. I stood facing the legacy of my family as well as the artists before me. I thought of my grandmother, similarly old and stiff, constantly seeming to pose in one of the velvet, leaf-green wingback chairs that sat in her living room, a drink in her hand.

My grandmother died slowly for ten years—ten years during which manic periods of expression as a painter landed her a gallery showing in Tucson. One of her vibrant landscapes hangs in my mother’s bedroom, a reminder of our artistic lineage. My inheritance invoked apprehension, yet so did my aspiration. Both were laden with tales of alcoholic wounds. Yet as my eyes blurred the stiff brush strokes on my canvass, I saw beyond predicament only to realize, as my mother has, that art is my only antidote.

Eventually alcoholism ate away at my grandmother’s organs, compromising her system beyond repair. In May 1988, her body finally let go of her life against her will.

Nonfiction *A Toast to Tragedy*

The night before Pablo Picasso died, he and his wife entertained friends. Picasso was in high spirits. “Drink to me, drink to my health,” he urged his friends with a smile, pouring wine into a glass. “You know I cannot drink anymore.” Picasso turned in to bed that night, leaving his alcoholic demons behind. At times I feel these same demons nipping at my heels to the rise and fall of my own manic expressions and addictive leanings, the desires I have not yet fallen prey to. And in the face of this artistic tragedy, I’ll toast to life.



Coming and Going
Michael Bartlett

Workin' It: **Tales of an Ivy League Metalhead**

Martha C. White

I've just finished the Friday night grind of a four-hour shift in the dining hall, dishing out chicken parm and beef stew to my unappreciative fellow Princetonians. It's nine thirty, and I've slugged back enough Diet Coke to keep me wired for the rest of the night. This Jersey girl is ready to go exploring. I go back to my dorm long enough to wash the steam-line funk off my face and fix my eyeliner, which has migrated south to give me raccoon eyes. I check the mirror before I go: tight dark blue jeans, a black top, boots and my motorcycle jacket, which I've basically worn to death. The stitching at the ends of the sleeves is unraveling, and I lost the zipper pull about a year ago, replacing it with a keychain that has a little silver skull on the end of it. I love the inside gun pocket, even though I never put anything more dangerous than a hairbrush in it. No one's going to think I spend my summers on Martha's Vineyard, but I still look pretty good.

Earlier that day, I'd seen a highlighter-yellow flier advertising New Jersey Night at one of the eating clubs. They're sort of like Princeton's version of fraternities and sororities, except they're co-ed and offer meal plans for upperclassmen who want out of the dining hall scene. They have WASP-y, aspiring names that sound like subdivisions: Charter, Ivy, Cottage. The clubs and the three blocks they take up are referred to collectively as The Street.

I wonder what Lisa, my best friend from home, is up to right now. The mall has already closed but it's too early to hit the diner for cheese fries and coffee. Maybe she's hanging out with the Mitchum brothers and their restored Chevelle in the parking lot of the 7-11. The Chevelle's custom blue-and-green flame job always attracts attention, and Lisa loves attention. Or maybe she's cruising the narrow highway that winds its way up the

Hudson River with her on-again, off-again boyfriend, Freddy, in his 1978 red Corvette. Since it's the beginning of the weekend, she could also be hanging out backstage at the postage stamp-sized rock club down by Giants Stadium, watching one of our local garage bands play and flirting with the shaggy-haired roadies to score free drinks. I make myself stop thinking of Lisa before I get too homesick. Besides that, I've already reached The Street and I need to figure out which one of the raucous, brightly lit eating clubs is the one I want.

I proffer my shiny new university ID to the guy at the door and walk downstairs to look around. Since the theme was sort of fuzzy, it's apparently been interpreted in a number of different ways. For some reason, a lot of people here seem to think *Jersey* is a synonym for '80s, so there are a lot of sweatbands and drawn-on moles a la Madonna, even though she is actually from Michigan.

A guy sits down next to me as I'm ordering a beer. Leather jacket, flannel shirt, jeans: he's kind of cute, if a bit clean cut for my taste. I nod at him and he says hi. Well. That wasn't so hard. He grins at me and I smile back. *See?* I'm telling myself. *People are friendly here. A metalhead can fit into the Ivy Leagues!* I'm starting to feel all fuzzy inside, even though I haven't gotten my drink, though I think I need it when Captain Friendly says what he says next.

"So, you dressed like this for the party too?" He nods toward my jacket and makes a motion indicating his own ensemble. Now that I'm really looking at it, I see what I hadn't noticed before because I'd been so damn thrilled to think that a guy in "preppy central" here actually wanted to talk to me. His jacket is brown, not black, and it's a bomber, to boot. The jeans are too baggy, the tag sticking out from the flannel says *Gap*, and the chain he's threaded through a front belt loop and tucked into his back pocket is obviously a prop.

I feel my face flush, but I'm in and I can't back down now. "I dressed like this when I got up this morning," I tell him icily. He's caught off guard and looks uncertain, as if it might be him who's made the mistake after all. I take advantage of this to slip through the crowd and bolt without even taking my beer from the bar. I stick my hands in my pockets and walk up

to Nassau Street, where I can strike up a conversation with the townies who loiter around Palmer Square by pretending to need a light.



Wearing my sincere appreciation for the likes of Motley Crüe and Guns n' Roses on my black leather sleeve ten years after their big-hair heyday is one thing, but doing so at Princeton University is another thing entirely. Where I grew up in the mall country of New Jersey, hairspray and hot rods were still prevalent during the grunge years. At Princeton, though, being a metalhead means something different than it did at home. I'm suddenly a novelty, not quite exotic enough to have that magnetism that makes people want to be around me, just oddball enough to be misunderstood.

Sometime after Christmas my freshman year, I'm thrilled when my RA suggests a screening of *This is Spinal Tap* for the whole floor at the end of the week. I'm as excited as the goofy faux-band members when they get their hands on an amp with a volume control that goes up to eleven instead of ten. That Friday, I stake out my spot on the floor of my RA's suite with a throw pillow and a bag of chips. It's been awhile since I've seen the movie all the way through, and I'm psyched, but my good mood evaporates when I hear somebody whisper, "Do you think she gets it?"

What? Can't they see that I get the spoof, the obscure references, the subtle—and not-so-subtle—digs at real bands and the whole bloody joke a helluva lot more deeply than they even realize it goes? I turn around and scowl because that's the badass thing to do, but inside I'm smarting at being so underestimated.

I feel most out of place, though, when it comes to work. Right off the bat, the exchanges I have with other students on the topic of employment are both telling and inadvertently funny. "You work?" someone says. While the tone is obviously scornful, at first I honestly don't know enough to realize I'm supposed to be ashamed. At first, I'm just astonished, and then, when it dawns on me that I'm being looked down upon because I have to have a job, I sort of enjoy getting to use what will become my stock answer.

“You *don’t*?” I fling back, my derision mirroring theirs. This happens often enough, though, that I have to concede that I’m the one on the outs here. Just by virtue of getting a blue-and-white check stamped with the university logo twice a month, I’m in the minority.

I’m not the only one at Princeton who works, of course; there are others. As a rule, they are no-nonsense students majoring in public policy or economics. I respect them, but I can’t relate to them; likewise, they have no use for me. They work because they want to join the Peace Corps or take over the family business; I work so I can put gas in my Firebird and cruise around at three a.m., when even the Denny’s parking lot is empty. I work so I can go to Ozzfest. I work so I can buy the ingredients for White Russians and fill up a Snapple bottle that I tuck in my gun pocket when I brave the grosgrain gauntlet of The Street.



I got my first real job when I was fifteen as a cashier at a low-rent supermarket. It took up one entire side of a pink, U-shaped strip mall squeezed in between a Burger King and a down-at-the-heels apartment complex. I found out pretty quickly that this was one of those jobs where just showing up regularly made you employee of the month. When it got slow, I would lean back against the stack of paper bags, prop my Doc Martens up on the shelf below the register, and touch up the chips in my black nail polish with a Sharpie.

That job did more than any guidance counselor ever could to get me out of the food court and into Princeton. Watching the other workers there, especially women, still being ordered around as if they were headstrong punk kids like me was all the motivation I needed. One manager in particular used to call female employees into his office for “chats” and shut the door. Sometimes I would see them sniffing over their Virginia Slims in the ladies’ room later. They never said anything, and neither did I. I just knew I was not sticking around there any longer than I had to.



After two years of the dining hall, the employment gods deal me relief from the smell of grease in my hair and unidentifiable stains on my tops. I submit my resume in response to a posting outside the work-study office for an internship at the Princeton University Press. A couple of stiff-backed interviews later and I'm in, in a manner of speaking.

I realize pretty quickly I just don't have enough golden retriever in my personality to fit in here. I'm efficient as hell, but it turns out they wanted "nice." Although I'm sort of everybody's gofer, I do have an official boss. From what I can glean, she was a professional student who happened into her job shortly before I came along, courtesy of her professor dad's connections. I try to bond with her, but we have nothing in common. As far as I can tell, she subsists on green tea spiked with soy milk; I eat cheese fries at the all-night diner on Route 1 and can tear through a plate of pancakes at PJ's Pancake House like nobody's business. She wears a lot of twin sets in Easter egg colors. My favorite work outfit is a dark gold sort of party dress with a black lace overlay. I punk it up (and hide the spaghetti straps) by wearing a black velvet button-down shirt over it and high-heeled sandals with black leather roses I bought last summer at Trash & Vaudeville in the East Village.

I share an office with two of the three editorial assistants on staff. One ignores me entirely and spends a lot of time on the phone with her family in Georgia. As for the other one, I dub him Paper Trail, or P.T. for short, in my head.

"I want you to look something up for me," he says one afternoon. I swivel in my chair and grab a notepad.

"Sure. What?"

"You don't have to write it down. I'm going to send you an e-mail."

"It's okay. I'm taking notes."

He frowns. "I'm going to e-mail you anyway."

Okay, then, I think to myself. "What do you need?" As I'm writing, I realize that he wants to document what he's asking me so he has proof of improperly followed directions if I screw up. He watches me jot down notes as he details his request. I tell him no problem and leave the office to get started; when I return, arms full of papers, I can see the new mail icon on my screen. It's from P.T., asking me to do what I have just finished doing.

I sigh and figure that on the plus side, on paper this means I was half done with his grunt work by the time he asked for it.

When I've been at the press a few months, my boss convenes a lunch at the famously stodgy Nassau Inn to say goodbye to P.T., who's moving on to the presumably greener pastures of law school. It'll be the perfect fit for him, I'm sure. We sit more or less in order of importance: my boss, P.T., the other two assistants, and then me.

Unfortunately, the waiter fails to notice our hierarchy and starts with me. I try to demur and wave him away, but my boss pipes in, "Oh, why don't you start?"

I haven't even cracked the menu. I scan it over quickly, skipping over anything too drippy, too pricey, or too fattening. I'd order a burger, but I don't need my boss shooting daggers at me for the duration of the meal the way she does when I bring back a slice of pizza or a hero sandwich to my desk. "I'll have the Caesar salad, dressing on the side, please," I tell him. It seems like a pretty ascetic pick, given that we're surrounded by clusters of dark-suited businessmen pounding steaks and burgers.

I'm proud of my restraint for about two seconds. The waiter finishes with me and turns to the third assistant.

"Caesar salad. No dressing please," she says.

The other female assistant goes next. "Caesar salad. No dressing, please, and no croutons."

I'm envious of P.T., who's surely smart enough to notice what's going on, although, being a guy, he's apparently not required to play the salad game. "I'll have the grilled salmon with rice pilaf," he says, and my mouth waters.

Now we're up to my boss. I'm a little curious; she's going to have to order *something*. "I'd like the baby greens with a spritz of lemon juice," she says firmly, not making eye contact with any of us as she hands the menu back to the waiter.



In spite of the fact that I feel like everything from my work to my lunch is under constant scrutiny, I've managed to convince myself that everything will work out okay. Then one day my boss's boss calls me into his office. He

starts by clearing his throat a few times. Not a good sign. I stand in front of his absurdly tidy desk—complete with pictures of his wife and daughter placed at precise forty-five-degree angles to the phone—trying to swallow down a big, wet bubble that's rising in my throat as I realize he's firing me.

"It's clear to us that you're not really happy here, and we think it would be best if we part ways at the end of the month."

The blood is pounding in my ears. I *do* hate it here, but up until right now I think I've done a pretty good job of hiding it. I despise the backhanded cattiness and the bullshit. I resent the drab colors and ugly shoes, but I don't want to get fired. I stammer something out about trying to be a conscientious worker and making everybody happy. He pushes his wire-rimmed glasses up his nose and takes a deep breath. "Frankly, Martha, we consider ourselves genteel around here."

My mouth is agape—surely, not a genteel expression. This, coming from a guy who calls his boss "Old Wally" behind his back, would be Diet-Coke-up-the-nose hilarious if it wasn't for the fact that he's telling me this in the middle of firing me. Make that at the end of firing me, actually. He raises his eyebrows and clears his throat, and I'm dismissed.

I manage to make it most of the way home before I start blubbering, and I listen to nothing but Nine Inch Nails for the next couple of weeks. I slink back to the work-study office for another application, after which I'm uneventfully assigned as a sort of girl Friday to the Comparative Literature Department. The department headquarters is on the top floor of East Pyne, one of those hulking Gothic buildings visible from the other side of the stone walls on Nassau Street. In fact, I often run into tour guides pausing their groups in the building's central arch. Stomping through in my boots and biker jacket gives me a juvenile, *nyah-nyah* thrill, especially on the occasions when I score an unpleasant look from the guide.

Since I'm such a brat with all of this, it bowls me over that the department administrator, a woman named Carol, actually treats me like an adult. For the first time, having a supervisor is a wholly figurative term. Although technically my boss, Carol leaves me pretty much to my own devices as I copy, file, and sort the department's mail.

At first, I think this autonomy Carol grants me is because I've finally met someone who realizes how capable and mature I really am, but as the weeks go by and my first semester there draws to a close, I start noticing other things.

She makes fairly regular mention of an ex-fiancé, but not in a tone that makes me picture her at home, complaining about men to her cats. With her gray hair and her reading glasses, I'm guessing she's at an age where she's probably not going to get married, but she never gives off a vibe like she's missing out on anything. She gives a whew-I'm-lucky-I-got-out-of-that smirk and a shake of her head whenever she mentions him, flicking her hand in a shooing way so the bangles on her wrist jingle. I don't know what she drives now, but she tells me stories about the bright yellow Camaro she used to have. It was a convertible, and she cruised all over Jersey in it, going down the shore back when Asbury Park still hummed with games, rides, and music.

Even though the car raises Carol's cool credibility by a few notches, I don't make the connection until I come in one Tuesday and see her hair. Hair is, of course, a big part of being a metalhead. We all wear it long, the better to swing around during a concert or even when a favorite song comes on the radio. Even though the '80s are over, metalhead girls still process theirs; everybody's got a bottle of that green, apple-smelling spray in her purse or rolling around on the floor of her back seat. The guys generally don't put as much product in theirs, although everybody seems to know one neo-greaser who does the gelled, wet-look thing. Our hair marks us, and we're proud of it.

Carol usually—well, make that always, until today—wears her hair raked back into a bun, anchored by a tortoiseshell barrette or an army of bobby pins. But today, her hair is down. No clip, barrette, elastics, bobby pins, or headband—nothing. It's full gray, the metallic color unchecked by any kind of dye job. Otherwise, it looks just like mine. It falls almost all of the way down her back and, while it's wavy, the curls aren't coaxed into any particular pattern or style. It's hair that says: Step back, put down the soft-tip vent brush, and lower the hair dryer.

I've never seen a middle-aged woman with hair like this. They all crop it into bobs, helmets, pageboys, or some Supercuts approximation of the aforementioned. The women's magazines all tell them to do it. I know this because I paged through so many of my mom's as a kid. While the makeup advice only left me with ill-advised rainbow-colored eyelids and triangles of blush in the hollows of my cheeks (hollows that I was never quite sure I found), the hair articles always made me sad and a little afraid to grow up.

I always keep one eye peeled for middle-aged women with long hair, but aside from the one who runs the crystals and pentacles store in Woodstock, I haven't run into any. Except for Carol, who is now officially my heroine.

A week later, just before the campus shuts down for Christmas break, Carol gives me a gift. It's a box about the size of a TV dinner wrapped in paper with cartoon snowmen on it. Getting a present from a boss is always awkward, so I've been concentrating on how best to fake a reaction of touched gratitude. I'm caught completely by surprise when I open the box and see a heavy silvertone chain-link belt sitting in a nest of tissue paper. I love it.

"This is so me!"

She looks genuinely pleased. "You know, I saw that and I just thought of you. It seemed like you."

If I'm going to say anything to her, it's got to be now. I'm shooting for, "Thanks," but somehow the thought gets hijacked between my brain and my mouth.

"I got fired from the internship I had before I came here," I hear myself blurt out. "I did all the work stuff right, but I couldn't make myself fit in. When they got rid of me, they told me it was because I wasn't genteel."

"Really?" She raises her eyebrows.

"Can't make that shit up." *Oh crud.* That just slipped out there. I ought to apologize or backpedal and say it again more politely. But I don't.

"No, you can't," is all Carol says back, though. Then she shakes her head. "Nobody fits in everywhere. You just have to get what you can out of your time here and look for a place where you do fit. It's out there somewhere."

"Yeah, I guess so," I say. And I walk down the stairs into the chill, crackling evening, humming Poison songs on the way back to my dorm.



Kent Baby
Leslie Baird

Fiction



Boxing Erika
Rachel Stephens O'Riordan

The Flower Thief

Camille Cole

Margaret sat on the swing in her backyard, her head resting against its chain. The toes of her shoes scraped the dirt where the grass had worn thin. She wondered if old lady Losey was home. Her eyes shifted in that direction, but her head did not move. It was spring, and the tulips in Mrs. Losey's yard were blooming. Margaret and her parents had been living in her great-grandparent's farmhouse for most of her seven years, but she had never laid eyes on Mrs. Losey.

Margaret slid off the swing and stood still for a moment, straightening her pink-and-white striped dress. She imagined her Aunt Helen's beaming smile when she handed her a colorful bouquet. But she could also see her mother and father's faces the night they told her that Mrs. Losey had complained about her picking the flowers in her garden. They said that she was not allowed to go in that yard again. If she picked so much as one more bud, there would be hell to pay. Even though she knew she might be spanked or exiled to her room, she couldn't resist the beauty of those flowers, and the opportunity to offer her favorite aunt a gift.

Aunt Helen and Uncle Ed lived on the other side of the big old farmhouse that had been divided in two after her great-grandparents died. In those days, people called it a two-family house. She loved her Aunt Helen who would bring Margaret into her kitchen and sing songs like "Who Put the Overalls in Mrs. Murphy's Chowder?" while she did the dishes and fixed dinner. Margaret wanted to take her some flowers. She wanted to share what she knew to be beautiful and irresistible.

As Margaret neared the Losey backyard, the brilliance of the garden twinkled like a million colored stars. Red and yellow tulips shimmered in the faint breeze and afternoon sunshine, some wide open and some waiting

for their turn. The flower beds rippled across the backyard and around the far corner of the house, reminding Margaret of a curious parade of colorful clowns she had seen at the circus last summer. She had never seen so many flowers in one place.

Margaret stood still at the edge of the yard where the weeds on her side ended and the freshly mowed carpet of the Losey yard began, providing a border before the garden sprang to life and encircled the house. She stood between the two yards, barely taking a breath, listening. A choir of returning robins, cardinals, and little brown finches resounded from branches of overhanging trees whose new leaves were crisp green, shading the far end of the yard. Scanning the terrain of the forbidden garden, she spied her Uncle Ed's black cat sitting motionless beneath Mrs. Losey's shrubbery on the far side of yard. If Margaret were caught, she could run toward the cat and claim she was trying to rescue him. If not, she would grab just a few of the flowers and run as fast as she could back to her own yard.

She turned to see if anyone was looking out the windows of her house. Her mother would be taking a nap, her father at work until much later in the day. The heavy velveteen curtains that had kept the house warm during the frigid upstate New York winter rested quietly against panes of glass. She could see no perceptible shadows inside. She looked back at Mrs. Losey's lawn. The cat had disappeared. Margaret took a tiny step across the border and stopped, teetering between two worlds, drawn to one and yet frightened of both. This terror strangely pulled her forward into the soft green carpet of new grass. A few more steps and she stopped again, frozen in full view of Mrs. Losey's dining room window. She stared at the blank space of glass, imagining the angry woman bursting forth.

She took off running toward the tulips.

Inhaling and exhaling between clenched teeth, Margaret began plucking the rubbery-stemmed flowers. She hoped to get one of every color so Aunt Helen, her only constant friend, could see the full delight of this magical world. Too frightened to think straight, she harvested each bloom randomly and quickly. Sticky juices covered her small hand; it felt like the blood that had coated the side of her face when she had fallen against the coffee table the year before. She never looked up, so she did not see Mrs. Losey coming

around the corner of the house. She only felt the hand on her shoulder and her blood icing over as tears filled her pale blue eyes.

Margaret dropped the flowers and hung her head. The hand on her shoulder felt electrified, and she feared it would crush her skin and then her bones.

“Your name is Margaret, isn’t it?” a soft voice demanded. The woman waited for her answer, releasing her arm. In the silence between them, the young girl sensed something about the mysterious woman that surprised her. She looked up slowly, cautiously.

Mrs. Losey towered above her as Margaret raised her eyes up to a weathered face with striking white hair. She wore an apron that was covered with paint splotches instead of bacon grease. Relaxing slightly, Margaret hung her head and stared at the blades of grass beneath her PF Flyers, the sneakers she had wanted so badly last summer that were now all worn out.

“Come with me, young lady,” Mrs. Losey said. This is what Margaret was afraid of, but Mrs. Losey’s voice seemed to lack the danger that she had initially feared. There was something inviting in her tone and in the feel of her warm hand when she took Margaret’s in hers.

Mrs. Losey led the way past the garden and through a breezeway on the other side of the house. The screen door creaked as Margaret entered a dark kitchen brimming with aromas of cooking. It smelled familiar, like dinner at her Aunt Helen’s house, maybe cookies, too. She wiped her cheeks with the back of her hand.

Mrs. Losey motioned Margaret to keep going through the kitchen door and into the dining room. A large, shiny wooden table took up most of the space in this room; light reflected through the curtains on the glass doors of a hutch cabinet filled with flowered tea cups and china girls in flowing skirts. Margaret wondered if she would be able to touch these figurines. She paused slightly as the woman released her hand and moved ahead, into the next room.

“Come sit here next to me, Miss Margaret,” Mrs. Losey called from the living room sofa. Margaret followed her cautiously through the half-opened pocket doors. More light shone through crisp sheer curtains, half blinding her as she inhaled a new scent. It smelled like the cloth doll with the china head hidden behind the colorful dresses in her Aunt Helen’s closet.

“I’d like to show you something,” Mrs. Losey said once Margaret had scooted back against the afghan covering the back of the sofa, her feet straight out in front of her. Her knees were dirty. Mrs. Losey stood up and lifted a photo album from the end table. Bound in a deep reddish velvet cover, a golden monogrammed *L* decorated the front of the book. Margaret eyed the glittery, gilded edges of the thick pages as Mrs. Losey nestled in closer, gently pulling back the cover to a page that had been opened many times.

“Do you see this woman here?” Mrs. Losey asked. A young woman with tightly curled hair and piercing eyes stared past Margaret. Her throat was covered in a high lacey collar, and the expression on her face left no doubt about her determination. She was framed inside an elliptical mat, embossed with gold leaf and swirling, hand-painted accents. Though the picture was in sepia tones, the woman’s cheeks had been touched up slightly in a soft shade of pink. The expression on her face made it seem that she might have something more to say from her hiding place in the book.

“This was my mother, Lily. We lived in this house when I was a small girl like you. In the springtime, she planted the flower gardens out back.”

Margaret looked up at Mrs. Losey and saw that she was staring off beyond the ceiling of the parlor. Margaret thought that maybe she could see into the past by looking through the ceiling.

“She would work those beds from morning till night.”

“Did you have any brothers or sisters?” Margaret asked in a soft and reverent voice. “Yes, I had one brother, Ned. He and I used to play with your grandmother and her two younger sisters, Jessie and Bell, out in the cherry orchards. We’d play there all day sometimes in the summer. Our mothers would pack us a lunch, but that was all before the accident.”

“What accident?” Margaret sat up on her knees, her eyes wide.

A banging sound outside the kitchen door suddenly tore the young girl and the woman from the story, from the past. Mrs. Losey stood quickly, placing the album on the sofa next to an embroidered pillow as another knock snapped the air inside the house, louder and more insistent this time. Margaret watched her walk to the kitchen door. She yearned to stay hidden in that room with Mrs. Losey. She wanted to hear about the orchards, about her grandmother, and about Ned.

Her mother's voice trumpeted through the screen door, her out-in-public friendly voice that Margaret knew meant she was really furious and as soon as everyone was out of sight, she would let Margaret know all about it.

Was it too late to hide? A bulky easy chair sat diagonally in the corner of the room. She could make a dash, but too late—the two women ascended like the drums of doom. Would Mrs. Losey turn her over to her mother? Margaret held her breath in anticipation.

Her mother smiled but stopped short of entering the room. The sunlight that had previously warmed the living room had faded, revealing dark and tattered furniture, a shabby rug. Margaret felt goose bumps on her bare arms and began to rub the palm of her hand on the worn nap of the sofa.

"Well, I've been looking all over for you. Do you know how much you worry me when I can't find you?" Her mother crossed her arms under her breasts. "The cleaning lady said she saw you in this backyard." Margaret's mother glanced in Mrs. Losey's direction. "What have we told you, Margaret, about coming into this yard and bothering this poor woman?"

Margaret hung her head, ashamed to have her new friend hear her mother talk to her this way. She scooted down off the sofa but still held back, tracing the outline of a large flower pattern in the rug with the toe of her sneaker. This was too much for her mother. She crossed the room in three long strides, grabbing Margaret's arm.

"I'm sorry we can't stay," her mother said, excusing their hasty exit. "Margaret has chores at home she must get to, you understand." The back door slammed rudely behind them. Mother and daughter flew in tandem around the side of the house and along the narrow sidewalk. Margaret's mother still pulled angrily on her arm. Suddenly Margaret lost her balance, tripping and landing on her feet in the corner of the tulip bed. She looked down in horror at her worn-out sneakers, her toe sticking out of the frayed hole as the bright red and yellow blooms collapsed into the dirt. Newly ripened flower stems snapped, and delicate petals settled into an injured clump. Margaret's heart pounded. She quickly jumped back, looking up at the window where the woman with the white hair and kind eyes stood quietly watching.



The Lovers
An-Magrih Erlandsen

Cul-de-sac

Jo Barney

Our friend Marlene dies, and Phyllis and I need to figure out how to find Dodie, who is in a new adult foster home out in Beaverton. We'll take her out to lunch and then go to the memorial service, we decide. It's become kind of a tradition: lunch, then the memorial service.

Before we leave, my husband, Fred, gets out his magnifying glass but it doesn't help much anymore, so he has to tell me where to draw the line on the map, just a few inches on Highway 26, then onto Skyline. We can't find the exact street we need, but Fred says we should look at the house numbers. They'll let us know when we've gone far enough. Then he puts on his earphones and waves goodbye in our direction.

I am the navigator. Before Fred lost his eyesight, he drove and I looked for reasons to tell him to turn, to put his foot on the brake, to watch out. I am still good at it, and Phyllis and I do fine getting onto the freeway, Phyllis staring straight ahead, her white bun like a rudder on the back of her head, her speckled hands working her Cadillac's steering wheel with jerky little moves. I can't see the speedometer, but I can tell from the number of cars going past that we are not excessively moving. I watch for Skyline Boulevard, and when I see it, I point and she edges to the right, straddling the white emergency lane and finally making it up the off ramp without rubbing against the metal railing. Our pencil line says go left, so we do, and we head into the sun, squinting at street signs. After a few minutes, one name seems familiar: May. A month. Or is it a flower we are looking for? We can't remember, but we decide to turn right on April.

The houses on this street are huge, with heavy wooden roofs. They loom like marooned ships in tiny seas of bright green grass. Their brick porches are as big as my living room. The windows with their closed gray drapes

remind me of Fred's empty gaze, which then reminds me of his advice, and I look for the brass numbers above the doors. We're in the ten thousands here, if I'm reading them correctly. Way out of town. I'm about to ask Phyllis if that sounds right when she slams on the brakes and says, "Shit." The street has grown fat and round and we are at the end of it, against a curb. Phyllis turns the motor off. "We might as well look at the map," she says. She has always been the practical one.

April is not on the map. No May or June either. No straight line with a round bulge at the end of it tells us where we've just driven. Phyllis rummages through her purse and finds the paper with Dodie's address on it: 11087 SW Daisy. Off Skyline, it says. We look on the map for Daisy, for Petunia, for Lilac, but no luck.

"How old is this map?" Phyllis wonders, and from the folds and stains, I guess ten, maybe fifteen, years.

We glance back over our shoulders to make sure we haven't dreamt April Street. Then Phyllis says, "Look at the houses, all one color. Perfect paint, black driveways. No sidewalks. Trees four feet tall." I know what she is thinking, and I nod.

"We are in a development," she says. "There are no maps for this place. We are on our own."

Phyllis and I know developments. "Just like a long time ago," I say.

Phyllis puts her hand to her mouth and rolls her eyes the same way she's done for fifty years when she is ready to laugh. Or cry. I can't tell which it is this time, but I myself am feeling a surge of sadness thinking about that row of white Cape Cods, two bedrooms, one bath, unfinished attic, spindly birches wagging in front. A taggle of children digs in the dirt or sucks their thumbs on porch steps just big enough to hold one left-out kid. There is a picture window in every living room with a brick fireplace, and each house contains a husband, home for good, not too damaged, and with enough discharge money to make the down payment. I was so proud of my new tan wall-to-wall carpet and felt so wifely mashing the oleo into yellow with the back of my spoon, the roast beef sizzling in the oven.

I can still remember lying awake beside Fred in bed, worrying. Up to then the war had taught me what to do: when to buy meat, shoes, and sugar, how to save tin foil, color my legs and draw a black seam up the back, how

to write cheerful airmail in the midst of lonely crying jags. Then it ended, and I was on my own. I had to figure out my own rules. I think my friends on 35th Street were as scared as I was, and that's why we started the coffee klatch: to give us some company as we learned to live ordinary lives.

I wonder out loud if the wives of April Street have coffee klatches. I'm relieved when Phyllis finally laughs. "Or D'Accord Clubs," she adds. That is what the klatch turned into after a few years when we had gotten our bearings. The twelve of us played canasta once a month, and we celebrated each other's anniversaries with clam dip and too much liquor in our basement party rooms, our husbands dancing and flirting and making us feel sexy. "We had good times, didn't we?" Phyllis says.

"Good times," I agree.

Now what we do is go to memorial services. The D'Accord Club is down to three. I don't say this out loud because Phyllis has her hand up to her mouth again.

We spend the next hour going up and down streets that quit on us. It's like sticking fingers into empty pockets, never finding the dollar you know is in one of them. We are getting closer, though. We're out of months and have driven past six daughter's names, including two of our own (Marie and Linda) and have finally come to the flowers. Daisy is right after Iris.



"We're so glad you're taking Dodie out," the foster home man says, when we explain why we are here. "She loves eating at the Chinese restaurant, Forbidden City, at the end of the next block, just before it intersects Highway 8." We must look confused because he adds, "Her son, John, takes her there almost every week."

Dodie, waiting in the living room, seems pleased to see us. Of the eight of us, she was always the spunkiest, the best at tennis, the first to have her veins stripped, the prettiest of us all with her curly blond hair. And she was the only one brave enough to go into the fringe of Douglas firs bordering our project to face the baby bear that a couple of our kids, including her son, Johnny, claimed they had seen while they were picking blackberries.

The next day she had her picture in the newspaper, holding a boy with an I-told-you-so-smirk on his face while a little brown creature looked out of a cage at her feet.

Today Dodie's hair is navy blue, or seems to be, her white scalp glowing through a sparse dark fringe that someone in the foster home has created for her. She has also gained weight. For a moment, the idea of getting her out of the sofa and into the back seat of the car overwhelms us. The man offers to help. Somehow we shove her in, blue head first, her muumuu billowing and her stripped legs poking out into the air like big pincers. I pull from the top, they push from the bottom, and she is in, upright and smiling. "Where are we going?" she asks.

Phyllis looks at me. "Marlene will never miss us. Let's just go eat." I nod, still sitting in back with Dodie and trying to tug her dress down to cover her knees. One thing about getting old is it gets easier to figure out what's important.

At the restaurant, it's obvious that Dodie is known. We pull up in front of the door and, as soon as they see who's inside, people come with a chair with wheels. "Dodie!" they say, and she is pulled out and into the chair in one big swoop. Phyllis glances at me through the rearview mirror, her eyes wide.

We follow them in after we park the car. The tables, shiny plastic but with nice pink cloth napkins in the water glasses, are empty except for Dodie, who sits with her hands in her lap near the window. We join her and open our menus. The server comes over and points out her favorites to Dodie. She nods and then looks at us expectantly, like we should introduce ourselves.

For the next few minutes, Phyllis and I talk and smile as if Dodie is tuned in. We glance at her when we laugh and reach out to touch her hands, which now lay folded like nesting doves between her silverware on the table. Her eyes blink at us and her mouth twitches upwardly, but the rest of her is somewhere else. Then she looks around. "Where is Marv?" she asks.

Marv is dead. All of the D'Accord Club men are dead, except for my Fred. It was after Marv's funeral twenty years ago that Dodie began making the phone calls. In the middle of the night, she would tell us her plans for parties, give us all assignments, food to bring, records to play. I guess she

was trying to get it all back together, the way it used to be. She would laugh and joke and get us excited, and then the next morning we would call each other and try to decide if we were crazy or she was. About the time that we would think, what the hell, we should do it (the boat trip to Alaska, the Las Vegas weekend, whatever), Dodie would disappear. Nobody would hear from her for a month or two. Then the phone would ring at three a.m. and she would be back, as if she'd never left.

"Bi-polar," Marie, my daughter who is a psychologist, says. "Dodie is bi-polar." I have tried to explain to Marie that I don't care about the name of it, just what we should do about it. The medication makes her sappy, like now.

"He's passed, Dodie. You know that." Phyllis is so matter-of-fact that Dodie sits back and stops blinking.

Phyllis unrolls the pink napkin and lays it across Dodie's knees, and when the food comes, Dodie livens up. She wraps her fingers around her fork and points it at her bowl. The problem is that she can't seem to get anything into her mouth. Noodles dangle in her lap, down her chest, over her shoulder. Phyllis and I try not to notice at first. Then I can't stand it anymore and reach over and tuck the napkin into the neckline of her dress.

"There we go," I say, as if I do this for friends every day. But Dodie is still not able to get a grip on a noodle. One or two hang from the handle of her fork.

Phyllis leans across the table and cuts them up for her. "Maybe this will help," she offers in her steady way.

The two of us keep eating and talking, darting little glances at Dodie to see how she is doing. She is working with a spoon now. It jams against her upper lip, then against her cheek. Finally, I say, "Oh, go ahead," and Phyllis scoots her chair closer and takes the spoon out of Dodie's hand and starts feeding her.

"Open up," she says and Dodie does. After a while I take over so that Phyllis can eat something herself. As I ease a spoonful toward her open mouth, it suddenly snaps shut. She puts her hand on my arm, and chicken broth splashes in her lap. I am about to scold her when I look at her face and stop short. It's Dodie, the real Dodie, looking back at me.

"Helen," she says in a clear and steady voice. "You know it didn't mean anything."

Phyllis and I don't move. Dodie is still staring bright eyed at me, but looking very sad. "It just happened. We were dancing and then. . . Fred felt terrible afterwards. I did too." She finally looks down, dabbing at the soup spots on her dress.

I want to ask what she is talking about, this *it* that happened, but I don't seem to be breathing.

Then Phyllis leans toward Dodie and whispers, "Dodie, it's okay. That was a long time ago." She looks at me with her eyebrows raised, and I manage to find my voice.

"That's right, Dodie. We all did silly things when we were young. It doesn't matter now."

Dodie keeps working at the spot on her skirt and, when she is satisfied, she crumples her napkin into her noodles and pushes back her chair. "Time to go?" she asks, and we understand that Dodie has already gone.



We don't say much on the way home. Phyllis pats my knee once in a while when she figures it's safe to let go of the steering wheel, and I answer with a squeeze of her fingers. When she drops me off, waiting until I get the door opened and give her a wave, I walk into the house and Fred grunts hello in his usual way, still listening to his Books for the Blind tape.

"Take off your earphones," I say. "I want to talk."

He reaches out and clicks a button, setting his headgear on the table next to the lamp so he'll know where it is when he wants it. "How was it?" he asks.

"It was all right," I answer. "We didn't make it to the memorial service." I don't give him a chance to ask. I admit we got lost. "It's all different out there now. It's amazing we ever found Dodie and that we found our way home."

"Yeah?" Fred says.

"And we had to feed her."

Fiction *Cul-de-sac*

Fred nods, then turns his head away as if he's looking out the window, and I wonder what he's thinking. Not about old ladies getting lost, I imagine. I lean over him and kiss his bald spot. "She still looks pretty good though," I say.



Overlook
Alice Marie Hill

Author Bios

Jericho Parmis

Jericho Parmis was born and raised in New York City. She developed a love of art and writing at an early age, as well as a motivation to use writing as a vehicle through which to see the world. She has a bachelor's degree in political science and history from The Colorado College. Since living in Colorado, Jericho has traveled throughout Central America and Spain, where she was first inspired by the tragedy and triumph of artistic legacy.

Martha C. White

Martha C. White is a New Jersey native and graduate of Princeton University. As a professional journalist, she has written about topics ranging from business and marketing to travel and dining.

While at Princeton, Martha won the Althea Ward Clark award for fiction writing and was given the green light to write a creative thesis, a privilege bestowed on fewer than a dozen students each year. That thesis would later blossom into a complete young-adult novel. Drawing from her background growing up in the mall country of Jersey, Martha is currently working on a memoir about being surrounded by wealth and privilege at an Ivy League school.

Camille Cole

Camille Cole is a retired educator who currently follows her bliss as a freelance writer. She works out of her home office, writing every day and currently working on a novel as well as a collection of short stories.

When she isn't writing, Camille provides consulting services in the areas of educational technology and program development for local and national

educational organizations. She is a member of Willamette Writers and Women in Portland Publishing, and is grateful for the opportunities she has to pursue her creative impulses.

Jo Barney

Jo Barney's life today is one of a writer of novels (three, unpublished, but that's not the point) and short stories like "Cul-de-sac." Before writing, she counseled children, raised her own, and dreamed of being able to write every day. Jo is now seventy and still living the dream.

"Cul-de-sac" is almost true: Jo's mother is now ninety. She and a friend went looking for Dodie when they were eighty. All three women are still alive, which leads Jo to believe she has a novel or two left in her, as well as countless stories.

Artist Bios

Leslie Baird

Leslie Baird considers herself first and foremost an artist. She is involved in painting, drawing, sculpture and computer graphics, and enjoys using the life model as her primary source of inspiration. She has worked as a graphic designer for many years, working with businesses, publishing companies, and organizations to create magazines, newsletters, logos, illustrations, and other advertising materials.

Leslie is very interested in using color as a source of expression because it can express both feelings and images. She loves to play with various color mixtures to see what can be created in the finished product. Leslie also greatly appreciates the use of the computer as a new medium. By scanning and manipulating photos, she can create a new and expressive piece of art. View more of her work at www.lesliebairddesign.com.

Alice Marie Hill

Alice Hill holds a BFA in painting and an associate's degree in technical and scientific illustration from Marylhurst University in Oregon. She is an instructor at Pacific Northwest College of Art and has also taught at the Portland Art Museum, Multnomah Art Center, Oregon College of Arts and Crafts, and Walters Cultural Art Center. Her work has been exhibited in both group and solo shows in Oregon. Alice recently completed an artist-in-residence program at Crater Lake National Park and exhibited her work at the Schneider Museum of Art at Southern Oregon University.

Sandy Wright

As a photographer, Sandy Wright feels most inspired and challenged when she creates images using multiple steps and processes. When doing so, she is able to further reinvent the world and shape it into a dreamscape of sorts.

Sandy is interested in places that are abandoned and left to rust as well as the unknown vast universe. It is refreshing to know that some places are still left unseen by the human eye, whether these places are fact or fiction.

An-Magrith Erlandsen

An-Magrith Erlandsen is a Norwegian Seattle native. She holds a BFA from Cornish College of the Arts and an AA in visual communications from the Art Institute of Seattle. An-Magrith is an independent art teacher and a performance artist. Her main medium is oil on canvas, and she likes to work large (5' x 3' is her favorite size). Her work can be seen at www.tarotofthepomegranate.com.

Rachel Stephens O’Riordan

“Aut viam inveniam aut faciam.”—I will either find a way or make one.

Rachel Stephens O’Riordan is a California native who recently relocated to Portland, Oregon, to improve the quality of life for her children. She is completely self-taught in the digital mediums of photography, design, and illustration, having discovered her love for photography in 2004 and going pro in 2006.

With the gift of discovering her passion in life, she loves, lives, and breathes her art. Rachel considers her work to be relatively untouched by the influence of trends and modern demand, as her busy life raising children and working left her little time to study art or get involved with the art community.

Michael Bartlett

Portland native Michael Bartlett fell in love with the medium of photography and alternative photo process while finishing an education in graphic design. By using photography as a catalyst to keep both his artistic and design visions fresh and intriguing, Michael is able to continually grow as a freelance graphic designer. At home, he shares a spotlight in the arts with his long-time life partner, a beautiful ballet dancer for the Oregon Ballet Theatre. Michael may be reached via email at: myklejay@hotmail.com, with any questions or comments regarding his work.

Colophon

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