

# The Messenger

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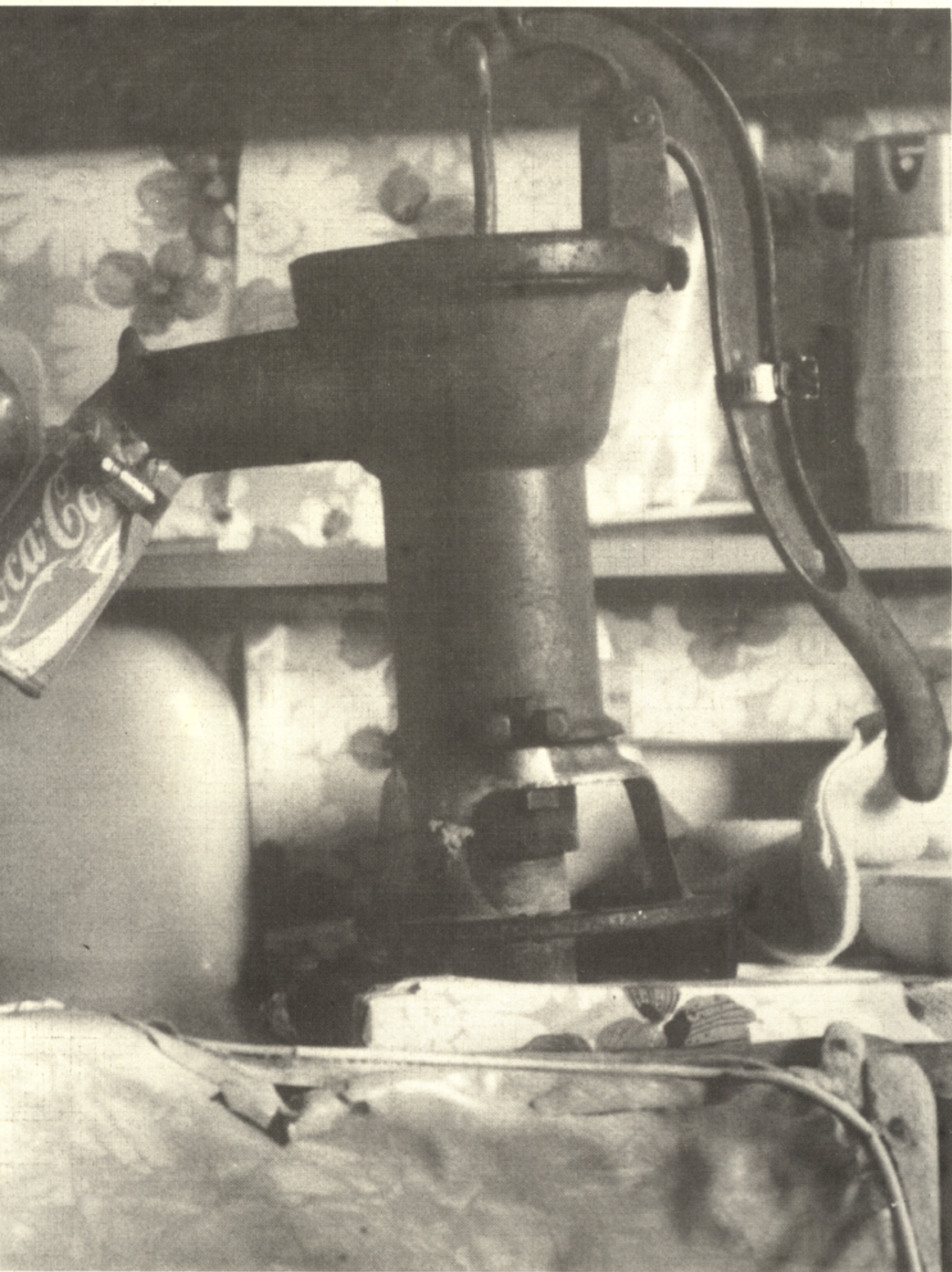
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# THE MESSENGER

WINTER 1991 — 1992



# THE MESSENGER

WINTER 1991 — 92

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UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

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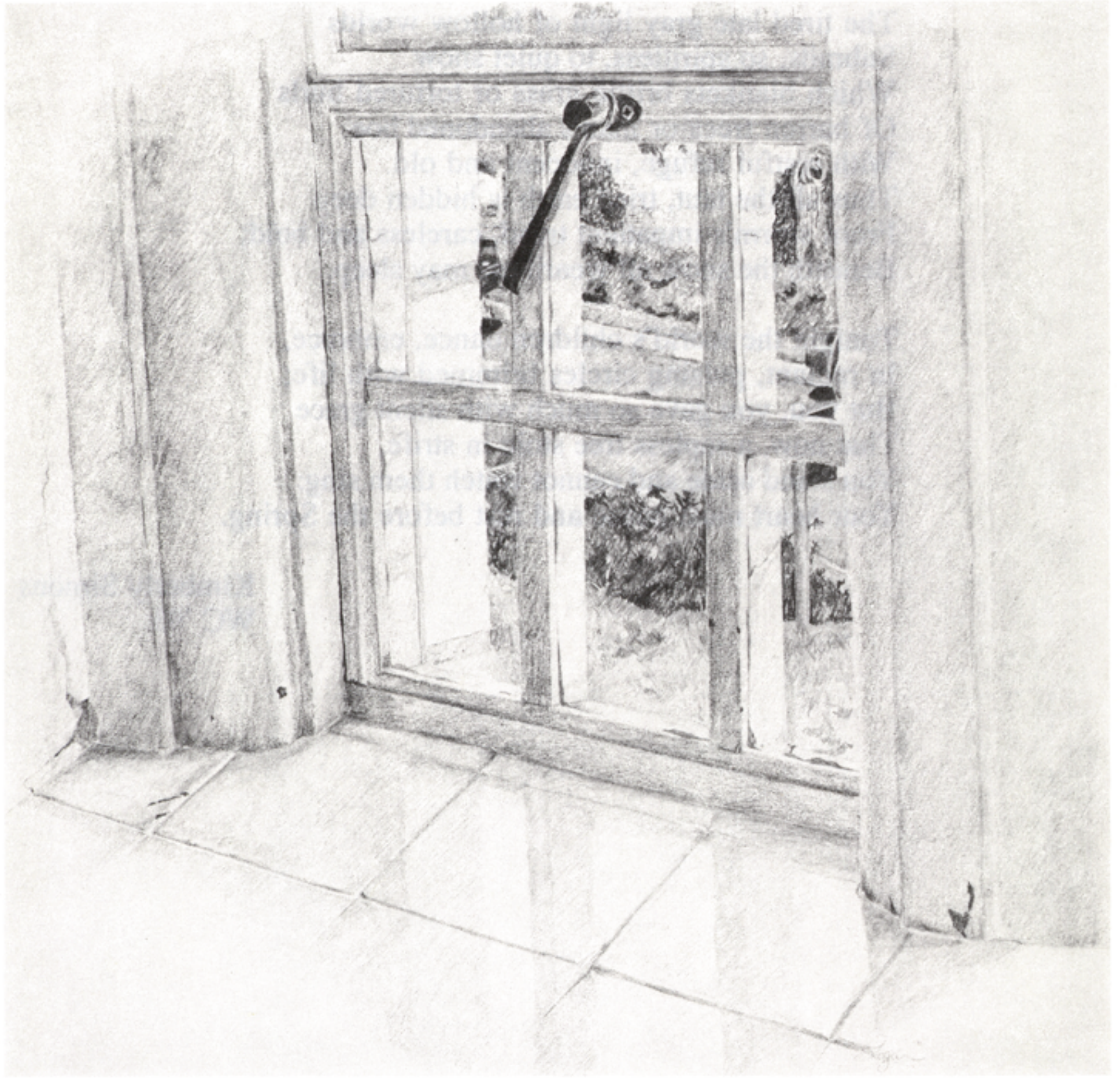
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*All manuscripts are read and evaluated anonymously*



## **Prayer for an Aging Widow, Christmas Eve**

The tired late gray light of hollow worlds  
Submits, so spiritless, to quiet snow  
Which blankets brittle grass or tortured burls  
Of barren trees or man's abandoned hoe  
With restful refuge, innocent and old.  
Thus all the taut, tried earth is hidden deep  
From storm's impatient tread, careless and bold;  
Beneath the snow all weariness may sleep.

Tonight the world's children dance, embrace,  
In radiant, pulsing circles brimmed with life;  
But you, you gave so much with silent grace  
That now, a sapless tree stoic in strife,  
You stand aside and cannot watch them sing:  
Your heart must pause and rest before the Spring.

Kimberly Simons  
WC '93

## Preservation Wish

With faux dreams of you in a sunshine tomorrow  
shadowed with the backdrop photo  
of a flaming icon on the  
back lawn of a vacant morgue,  
I toss the gleaming incantation  
my chest against the industrial-metal rail  
my legs wrapping snake-like through the bars  
in prayer  
and neck arched over the edge  
imagining it in the thick goo of slow motion  
soaring in its momentary lust for gravity  
flickering tails after glimmering head  
sparks of glistening friction  
shatter and sparkle and disperse  
and dangle  
and convulse quickly, silently  
and descend  
having separated to bitterly suck in and bury  
the silvery morceau  
in its crescendo-ing fate of  
embracing the humming abyss.  
and I sense a similar sparkling tear  
of saliva  
pending from my lower lip  
and i close my eyes and  
touch the quill to the tip of my resentment  
and wish i believed in some strength  
stronger than I  
to mother the mud from your decaying flesh,  
wiping my mouth as i back away  
from the embers of your life

Alexia Meyers  
WC '94



## Leaving

I pass a tree, naked of leaves,  
On Autumn walk today;  
Its brother, clad in crimson, grieves  
As *its* weeds fall away.

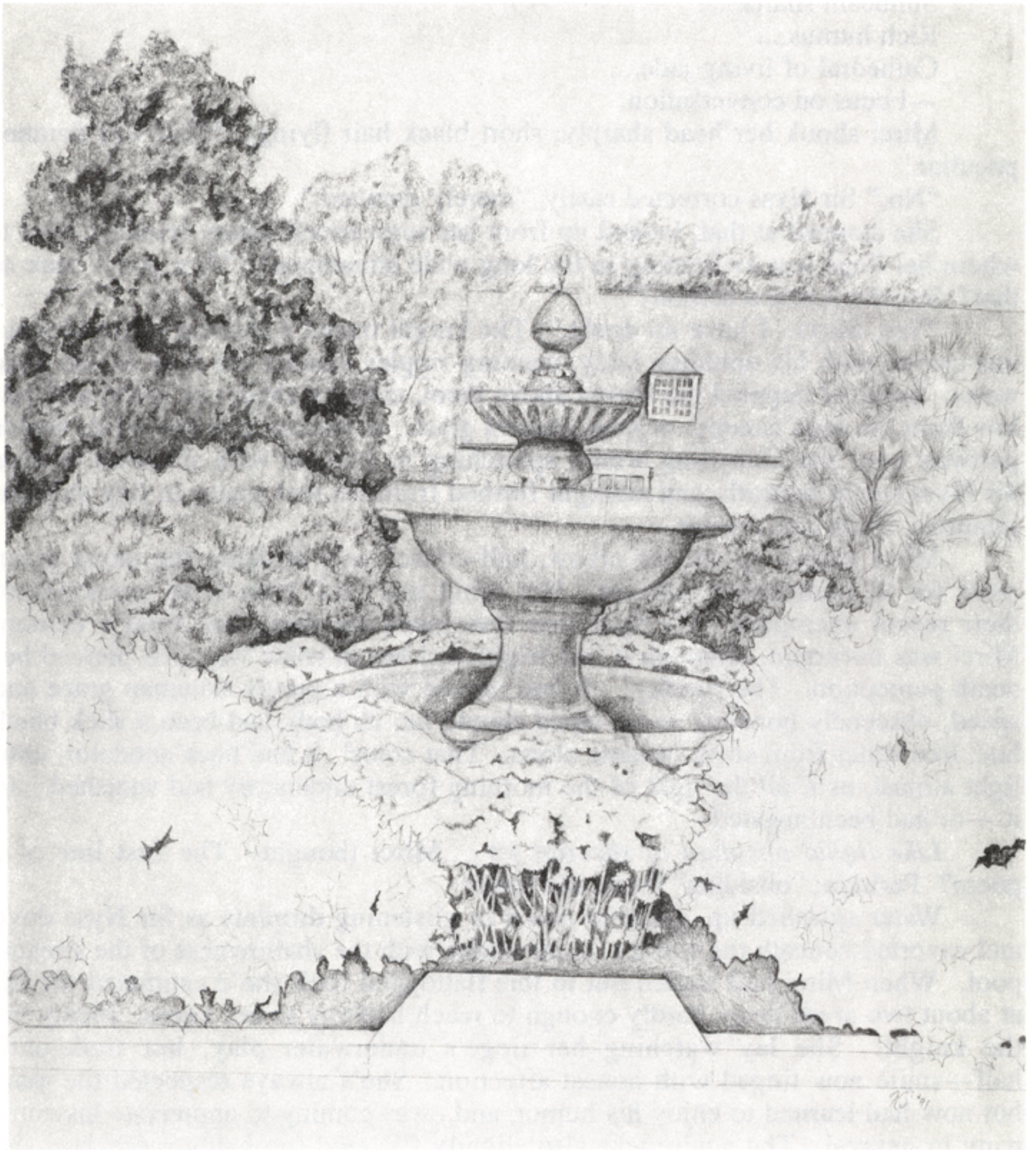
One jagged spade weaves a path  
—Tossed by Spirit of Fall—  
And gently lands, to float in death  
On water's mirror pall.

The dry wind harsher blows;  
—So *skeletal* seems the tree—  
Away the bed of dead leaves flows  
From the Bones—and from me.

Wind, perverse, climbs the bank,  
Raises a hundred undead;  
They charge, chattering file and rank  
Then routed, drifting, spread;

Each soldier gnarled by death  
As if by lightning smitten  
Discolored wrinkled; rattling breath—  
Parchment too vehemently written

Rich Miller  
RC '92



## Journeyman

Sunbeam shafts....

Rich humus....

Cathedral of living jade....

—Focus on conversation:

Mirci shook her head sharply, short black hair flying. “That was damned peculiar.”

“No,” Sir Nyss corrected easily, “merely damned.”

She stopped at that, looked up from her sunwarmed mossy boulder, over to where her liege was swimming in the long wide streampool. “Are you s’ sure of that? So sure it was a demon?”

“Yes, Mirci. I have no doubt.” The knight traced a shifting series of sinuous curves with his ophidian body, sending ripples against the flow of the clear water. Sunlight dappled the leaves above them, coaxing shades of green and yellow from the high canopy: organic stained glass. A slender tree spread its wands partway over the churrilling water, splotching its surface with shadows in turn. Sir Nyss swam beneath, and sunlight flashed from his wet scales in tiny stellar glintings, sharp and precise.

Mirci stayed up on one elbow, half-consciously stroking the moist green moss for its comforting softness. Her mind was aroil with crisp memories of their recent encounter. Sir Nyss was convinced the thing had been a demon; Mirci was uncertain, although it had frightened her in some way that pierced beneath perception. The fluidity! It had moved with a purely inhuman grace and speed, obscenely boneless as no biped should be; its body had been a slick black hue, like water from some oceanic abyss. That color! It had been anticolor, anti-light almost, as if all the light of the morning forest understory had vanished into it —or had been negated—

*Like liquid obsidian of sheerest jet*, Mirci thought. The first line of a poem? Perhaps; “obsidian” threw the meter.

Water splashed up, pattered down in glistening droplets as Sir Nyss dove and cavorted beneath the surface, comfortable with the shallowness of the streampool. When Mirci had waded out to this flattopped rock she’d estimated the rill at about two areds deep, hardly enough to reach halfway to her knees. Plenty for the knight. She lay watching her liege’s underwater play, her trademark half—smile now tinged with honest affection. She’s always respected the man, but now had learned to enjoy his humor, and...was coming to appreciate his company in general. The squire was also slightly flattered (probably more than she should have been) that Sir Nyss trusted her to maintain the guard while he indulged himself. He rarely let himself react on the spur of the moment, preferring (for whatever complex of reasons) to cloak himself in the intangible chasuble of Knighthood, with all its attendant responsibilities and directives. Mirci was glad for her knight’s increasingly frequent bouts of relaxed play. Demon or not (and she suspected not), suddenly facing that icy jet thing on the steep hilltrail

had been a tense way to begin a day—and what if it hadn't paused and stalked away? This streampool was an excellent antidote, bathed in light to wash over the recollections of that insane unlight....

Mirci traced the knight's progress to a wide boulder, centrally placed in the stream. Through the glare from the water's surface she could see him pause before the submerged overhang, his tail beating sinewaves to maintain his position against the divided current.

A blur—  
—strike—  
—score!

Mirci mentally cheered as Sir Nyss shifted the rivercrab to a more manageable position, avoiding its flailing claws and crunching it down. Here it was a half-meal, a supplement, almost a delicacy...but Mirci remembered when she had survived in the alleys on such fare, and much worse as well....

Sir Nyss thrust his blocky triangular head above water for air, coiling his body around a fallen branch below. Mirci envied him his ability to hold his breath for so long. The Nylmlani knight heaved a deep breath, his entire body expanding fractionally. Then he said, "I should tell thee, then. Remember the demon's body?"

"Of course." *How could anyone forget!*

"What color thought thee 'twas?"

A simple answer, surely! But Sir Nyss could rotate any gem to find its asteria. So Mirci's answer was more than ordinarily cautious: "To my eyes, at least, it was black...pure black.—Liquid obsidian of sheerest jet," she added.

"Aye. Was that all thine eyes showed thee?"

She considered, watching a pearly gold damselfly as it perched a number of ells upstream, behind the patient knight. "Yes.... There were two points of light that were in it? Or on it? In the chest, I think. One a little higher than the other."

He was nodding in a satisfied way, viridescent scales glinting in the warm bright light. "Well marked, Mirci." He paused for a second, dipping his head lower to let the current wash over his neck. "Those were our souls, squire. Reflected in the substance of the creature, for it had no soul of its own." He hesitated a beat, then uncoiled from the branch and swam to another rock across from hers, at the lip of the small streamfalls. As she absorbed and weighed his statement, Sir Nyss slithered onto the bare wet rock and sprawled contentedly on its warm wide surface.

He was unarmed at the moment, and unarmored; the caracil and chain mail were steps away from Mirci. Another heartening indication of his confidence in Mirci's alertness. Naturally the Drin girl was armed; she had, after all, survived a childhood in the lowstreets and back-alleys of Velen. Several slender, dense throwing knives (not a matched set!) were nestled in tunic and belt. Mirci felt as vulnerable without her weapons as a Lady of the Velen Towers would have without her pearl bracelets. *Or whatever they wear*, Mirci thought with a trace of the

old, familiar bitterness. *I wouldn't know, would I?*

Another thought. "Miliege, you appear amazingly unconcerned."

"I should hope so," was his laconic reply.

"You're still not worried that we're hopelessly lost?"

An eye opened and fixed her reprovingly. "There is no hope lost, squire, while we yet have our faith."

She let that bait pass. "Another adjective, then. Dangerously lost."

Sir Nyss managed to shrug, despite the fact that he had no shoulders. "We have three weeks yet, and the nightly clouds should lift soon. With the Lord's help we will be able to locate ourselves."

"Don't need that," she grinned. "We're right here."

"In relation to Jaryl Cyt. — You can navigate with the stars."

A brief expelled breath. "We'll find out."

"A loss of confidence, milady?"

Mirci hesitated. Then: "It's been a long time since I really practiced. I knew the skies perfectly when I first learned...but that was eight years ago, almost half my life, and I was just a *renah*."

"A what, lady?"

"Sorry. Velen word. Means 'girl-child,' or close enough. 'Boy-child' is *miinyah*."

"*Reinah*?" Sir Nyss was always ready to learn something new. It was a quality Mirci found refreshing, after most of the Alantyth knights, and (for some reason) endearing.

"*Renah*," she corrected. "Not so much *i*, more *ai*."

Sir Nyss practiced until he got it right to her satisfaction.

"Methinks thou'rt very fortunate," he said a short while later.

"Hmmm?" She had laid back and was staring up above, down the hollow-ness to where the canopy leaves whispered below, arching from fifty ells up to cover the gap made by this series of rills and falls. The New Star was shining faintly through, viridescent and constant.

Sir Nyss elaborated: "You have traveled across the whole of the continent."

The statement stood for itself, Mirci thought, and felt no need for a response. (She hoped he understood that.) This was a comfortable, almost lulling place, especially with the water spilling a dozen areds down beneath her boulder. Far above (or below, as could be imagined), several red and yellow ovals fluttered in unpredictable patterns. Butterflies. She could follow them with her eyes as they danced around each other, looped and rose and vanished into the mysterious, aloof canopy.

"Well," she said, not moving her attention from the heliconiids that remained visible, "can't s'much say it was planned. Miliege."

"You were intent on leaving Velen, though?"

"Surely. But going away from a place isn't 'tall the same's going *to* another." She watched a brilliant yellow butterfly dance much closer above them, watched it float through sunlight over the water, watched it die as a jacamar

swooped with practiced accuracy. “Velen taught me the basics—survival’s masks. Once I’d learned those, Velen didn’t have much else. Not—well, time to leave, see the real world.”

“Velen is famed, milady. A host to marvels sung across the lands.” (Privately Sir Nyss was pleased. Of late Mirci had rarely been this talkative.)

“The Towers.” Syllables bitten and flung out. “The nobles and merchants and all those who served them. I wasn’t one.”

“Mayhap you could have been?”

But Mirci just gave a half—laugh and rolled back on her side, hand on chin, not staring at her knight but rather at the water flowing between them. They were hard to see, darting back and forth, making headway and falling back...but after a moment Mirci’s mind caught the range and she was able to find the group of tlis. “See those?”

Sir Nyss peered over the darkstreaked edge of his rock, following her gaze. “Aye. Insects?” For the knight, an insect was anything small and fast and hard.

“Nope. Furry. Look,” and a quick dip of her hand sent cold water spilling from her palm, stranding a black fuzzy creature with a skein of spindly appendages. An instant served to resolve the tiny mammal’s features: an elongated, flattened body half the length of her thumb, and much thinner; two forelegs with long splayed fingers, slender as threads, to play the harmonies of surface tension; short thin hindlegs and a smooth short tail as rear rudders. The eyes were pink and small, the snout long and sharp; two pale red dots showed in the fur just ahead of the tail. Then the nervous tli had scrambled out of Mirci’s hand and tumbled the heights back into the pool, to rejoin its dozens of fellows jostling and darting across the water. Sir Nyss kept a patient silence. He had little interest in the waterstriding tlis, but was genuinely curious as to Mirci’s commentary.

“See that?” she said briefly after.

“Aye?”

“Never go anywhere. They’re still in their same part of the rill. Plenty of competition for spaces right here—” she flicked a finger in the water, sending tli skittering away— “an’ they all come back, see, but there’s nothing else for them.”

“Mayhap I see thy thrust. You are saying Velen is like this?”

Suddenly Mirci was closed up. “Oh, I don’t know what I’m saying. Never mind me.” Sir Nyss let it go at that. It was enough to feel the cool, moist air; satisfactory, for now, to enjoy the rapid, unhurried pourings of the streamfall just below them. They rested in mutual silence, watching and listening, for at least half an hour.

A dark blur burst from above into a sunshaft, flaring brilliant azure; then the hummingbird was skimming back into the shadows. Concentrating on where it had vanished, Mirci said quietly, “Someone sent that demon after us.”

She had half thought her liege to be asleep on his warm rock, but one slitte sapphire eye was open. “Oho! You call it a demon now?”

“What else could it be?”

Reversal! He compensated: "I seem to remember a lady who this morning insisted on any number of alternatives."

Mirci dismissed that, frowning. "They're not making much sense now."

"They were well-defended."

"Logicking doesn't always fit," she murmured, low enough that Sir Nyss couldn't hear her above the water. She repeated her comment at his politely angled head, and added, "All of this is too far beyond our logic."

"All of what?" (Sir Nyss knew, but wanted her to say it.)

"This." She gestured at the steep hillsides sloping up on either side of them, so lush that no true estimate of their height could be made. "All...the mountains, this whole Daijhedda Range." She cut off suddenly, frustrated by her inability to convey.

"You recognized it, then?"

That startled her. "Recognized the demon!?"

"Not as an individual, milady. As a component. Even the damned had a part to play, and mayhap this one has another."

"You're being obscure, my dear knight."

"Then let me be pellucid as the water below. I have told you that our Lord—"

"—Yours—"

"—is not always to be understood. It is our faith that allows us to recognize and accept these things that are Arranged."

Mirci listened attentively, because she was his squire but also because she was curious.

"We are not lost, Mirci, because the demon was not sent after us."

"That's a relief."

"Listen!" A hint of frustration in the man's voice. "It was sent before us. Unknowing, probably. Uncaring, of a surety. But we can use it." He was sliding from the rock now, swimming to shore. Mirci gave the moss a last regretful stroke, stood, and followed.

"How?" she wondered, wading against the insistent current.

"To move in its tracks," Sir Nyss called back to her. "To pace its motions, if not its actions. To follow it to Jaryl Cyt. We should not stay here longer; you need to learn from doing, now."

And the knight refused to explain until they reached the joust at Jaryl Cyt, saying only, almost half to himself, "Yet still an apprentice...."

John M. Aguiar  
RC '92

## Moment

He comes  
Down whistle-wind streets  
Across streetlamp theatres  
    and the stagewing obscurity between the lights  
Treading the wintry space of silenced footsteps  
    from office to home  
Across yellow patches of other people's lampshine  
    sitting outside their passing windows

He comes

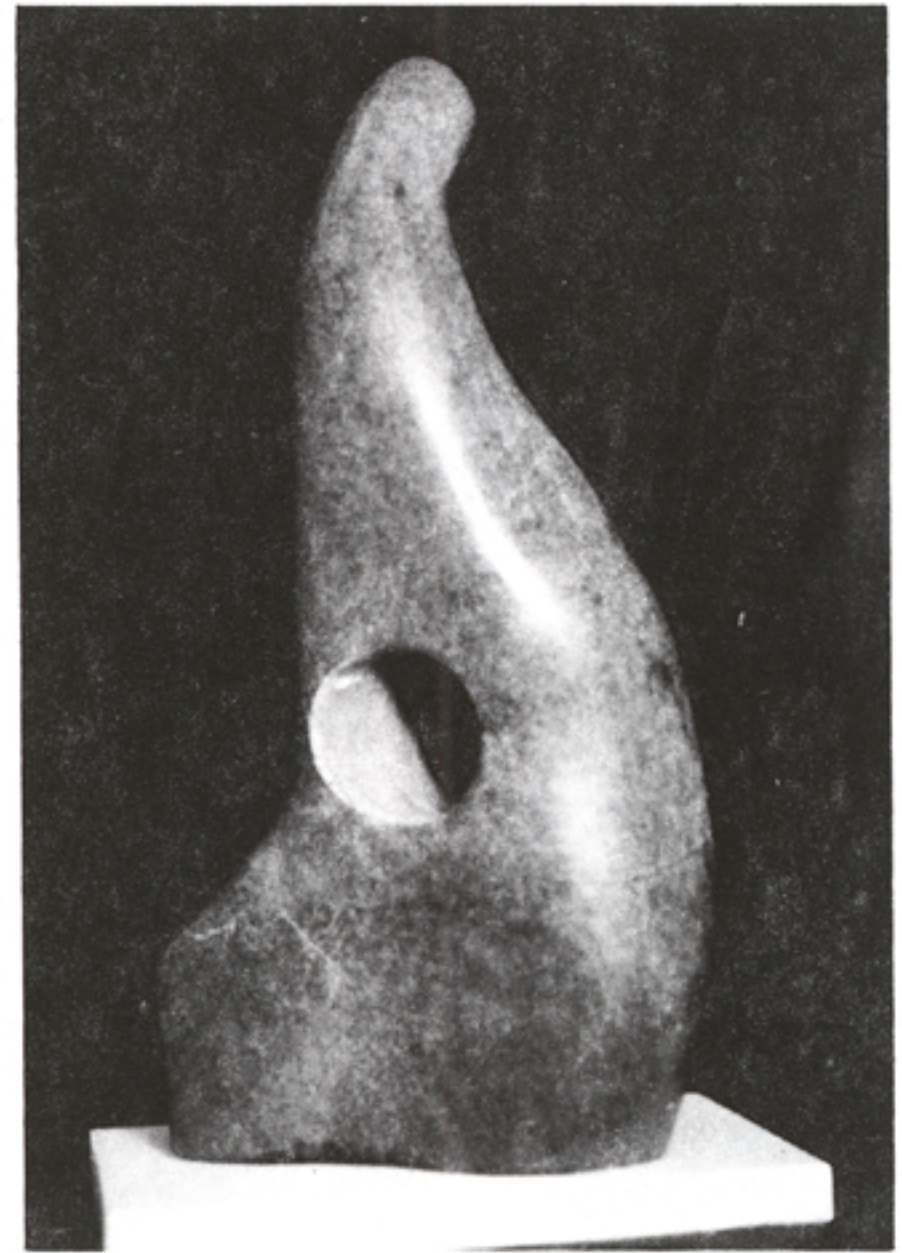
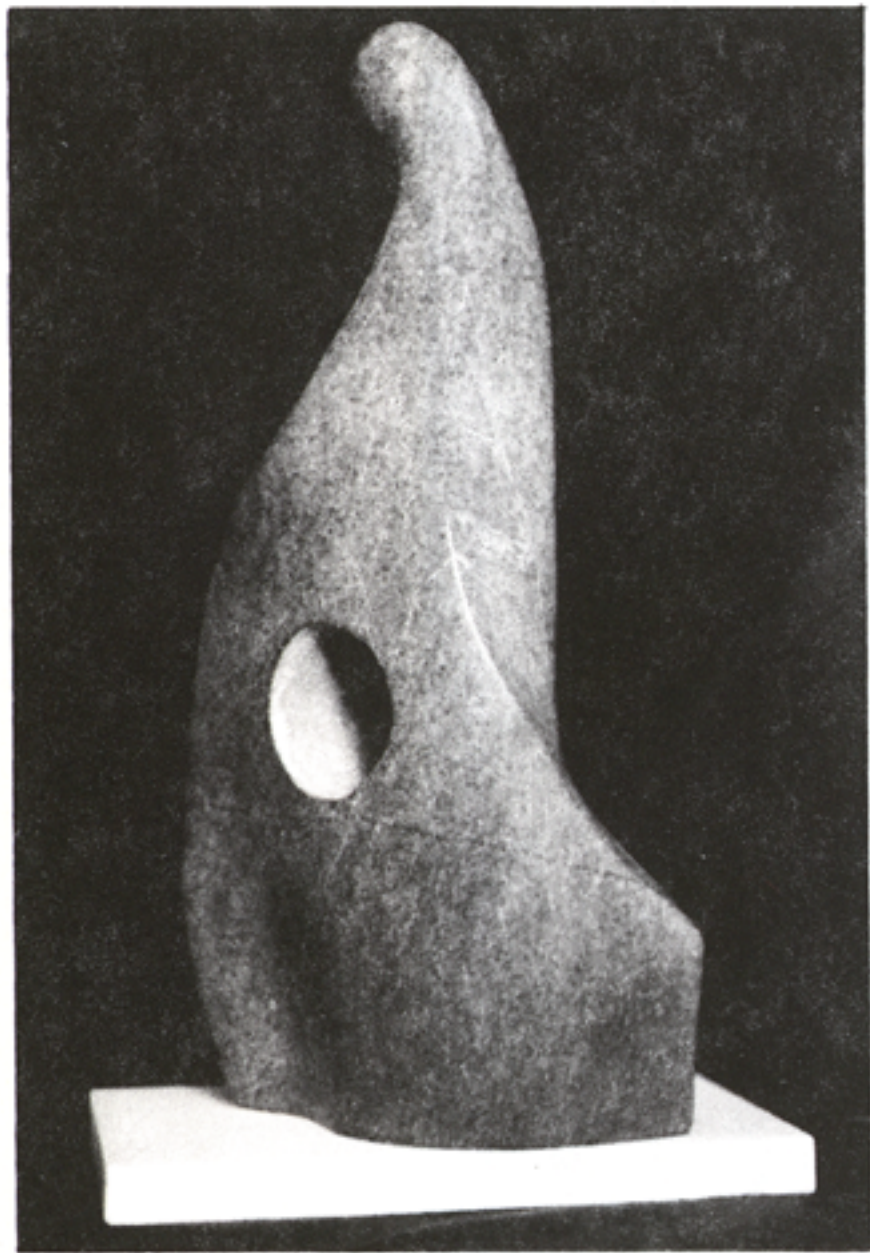
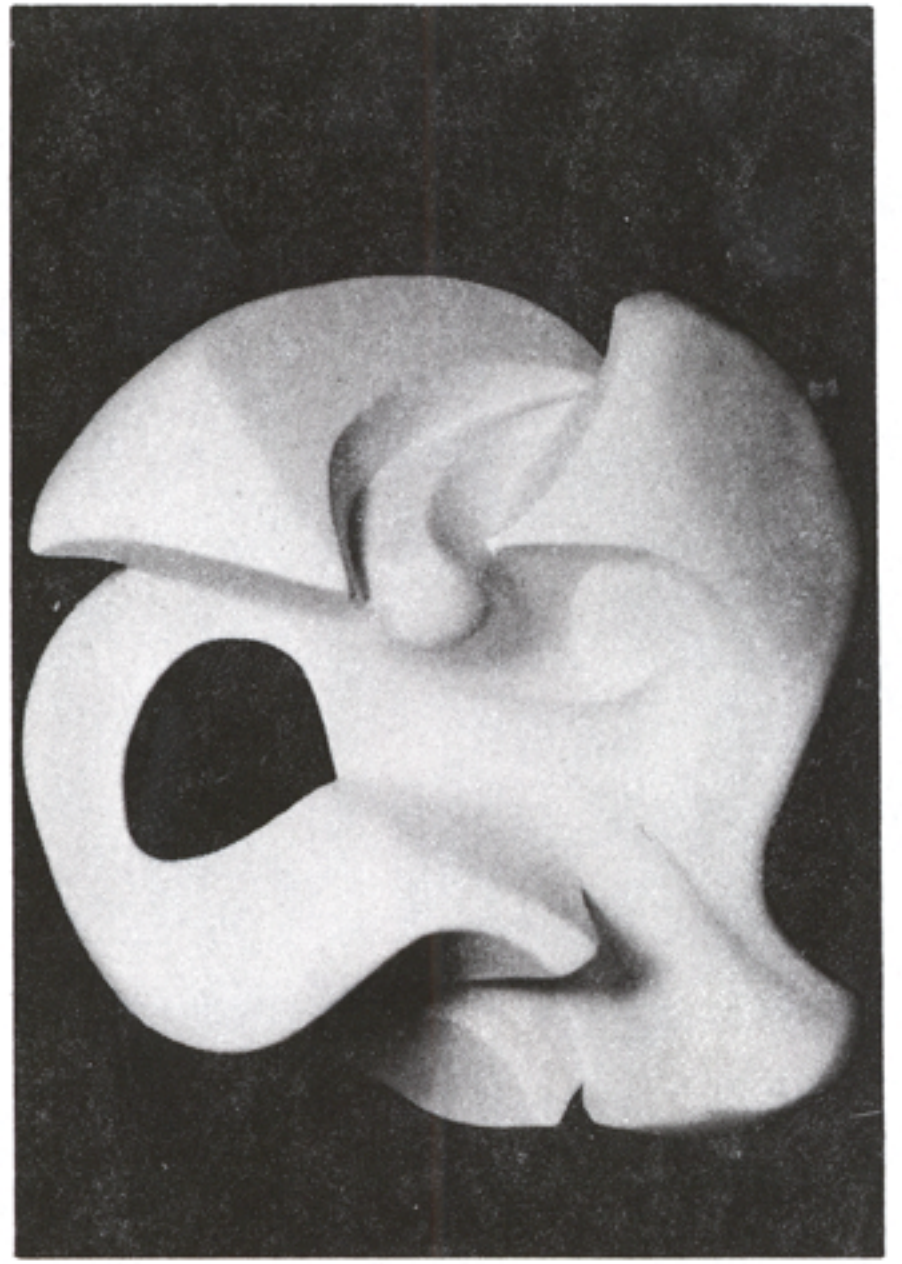
    His mind standing in the front hall  
    Smelling the radiator heat  
    Hearing fifty childish questions  
    Feeling little fists yanking his fingers,  
        overcoat pockets, legs of his pants  
    Seeing the glow of laughter in his wife's  
        unguarded eyes

Kimberly Simons  
WC '92









## **This Evening with No One**

this evening  
with no one on the streets  
but me waiting  
to rise to the surface  
and breathe again  
you knelt down helpless  
offered me your serenade  
for a nickel and  
some aspirin.  
i fell into your eyes of endless coffee  
heat and hurt  
from when you were a boy  
shoulders and easy  
warmth for closed eyes  
asleep, their hollow dreams  
a dark mirror for the needs  
of a night like this—  
all a gift in a song  
that let me rest.  
i wanted to give you  
anything i didn't have  
a nickel  
so i gave you two bottles  
of aspirin  
and dug out my soul with a spoon  
to keep you warm  
on a night like this.

Jessica Printz  
WC '92

The Evening with the One

the evening



## Wedding Night

North Carolina wooden shack — weathered and unpainted, hidden off the side of a newly paved country road. North Carolina wooden shack, her family's traditional honeymoon shack, nestled within trees, street light gaping full pale light on our wedding bed.

Hot summer North Carolina night, nearing the full moon. Window wide open, blinds folded, broken, and bent at the top of the pane. Sounds of crickets and creatures of the night buzz, chirp, croak, fall into my ears, into my head. A large silent grey moth sits still, wings folded by the open window.

She sleeps. She is exhausted by the trip here. I hover over her and the drops of perspiration falling off my neck drip onto her nose. With a strand of her long raven black hair I wipe my sweat off her face. Just outside, I can hear a pack of three or four runaway dogs tramping down the road, barking and howling. I cannot sleep.

I did not marry her because of the overflow of hair that cascades in midnight ripples down to the small of her back. Only rarely have I seen it in its fullness, not tucked back or braided or put up in some decorative configuration. It was her crystal mountain snow blue eyes that first drew me to her, physically. But the intangible charms, her virtues, values, and ideas have been the fuel that kept me by her side, until now. I find myself watching her hair. Its tendrils are a forest that frame her face. I stare, and the blackness of the room, cut into broken shadow-fragments by the street lamp is summer-time daylight compared to the way her hair swallows even the moonlight.

She stirs. I lean to press my lips to her cheek. Her lashes flutter, open. She smiles faintly.

“Why aren't you asleep?” she asks.

“It's hard,” I croak a whisper.

“You'll be tired tomorrow.”

“Yes,” I say. “Still, I...” My words fade off. She rolls away from me so that all I am faced with is her hair. Before long I am watching the swell and fall of her breathing and I know she has fallen back to sleep. I am silent and still. I am hungry.

The darkness spins shadows out of the pale lamplight. The thin sheet slightly draped over her nude form is a minimalist's canvas, a painting, the bare forms of the trees that are the shadows of the trees framed by the window, trees sitting still in the absence of wind. Her weight has shifted slightly and the painting warps. I hear her deep breathing and I am sick with heat, the temperature and the longing for us to touch. I won't dare disturb her sleep. Yet, if she were not asleep — passion, its strong spirit within me forms Edenic images of paradise, the heavenly bliss we would be sharing right now. Yet the flesh is weak...

Moments pass. I am in the strange twilight between full-awareness and

sleep. My images in my head have become frightening now, thoughts of carnal desire — random, wild, uncontrollable thoughts run from my brain to my groin. Only a moment. If she would stay awake only for a moment, we could...but still, there will be time tomorrow. I can wait. I have waited this long. I have been so good to wait this long. But shouldn't the waiting be over? This is our wedding night. Shouldn't we be relishing each other with wild abandon? Shouldn't we be, but — did I see here move again? Is she awake? No. She snores.

The hunger in my stomach draws me to the glow from the light of the ancient refrigerator I have just now plugged in. Inside, it is empty. Its motor emits an ugly mechanical growl as it begins to cool. I am in the kitchen, which is an extension of the living room in this three-room shack. I realize that in our haste to beat the storm promised by the weatherman we forgot to buy food. I had meant to, but — damn that we have to go out in the morning to find food. And I am hungry now. My stomach aches for substance. My head feels light for lack of energy. I should sleep. I scratch my mosquito marks. Each one I'm sure is a pin-point of blood by now. They run all up and down my legs. My fingers press against them — hard little bumps and there are a few bites on my arms. I wonder that she has not been bitten. Or has she? But she is so tired she must not care if she has. I open up a cupboard. Empty. I open another. Bare. There is another. In it there is a small, flat can of something. It might be tuna. I pull open a drawer by the sink. Barely visible from the light of the 'fridge is an old carving knife, blade stained with rust. The wooden handle is loose. Farther into the drawer I reach in and feel a thick piece of rope maybe a yard long. No can opener. There is nothing in any of the other drawers.

I am hovering over her, standing, naked beside the bed. Perhaps she will wake. I hear one of the stray dogs outside the window, digging and sniffing, rooting around for something — a bone perhaps? I watch her hair. Her face is covered by it. I pull it back gently, hoping that the movement will make her open her eyes and see me standing before her and not resist me. Her eyes are closed. My fingers make small contact with her cheek and I follow its curve down her neck then up again to her forehead. I am kneeling by the bed, staring into her closed eyes.

"Darling," the words are choked out. "Darling," I say again, almost a whisper. I don't really want to wake her, disturb her. I want to leave her lying there, calm, asleep. Yes, I resign. I will let her sleep. I stand and climb into bed, checking my weight to keep the mattress from sagging. Her weight shifts only slightly. I lay down. I close my eyes, pulling the sheet that only half covers her over my own body. My mind is on the can of tuna, or something — anything, but nothing is open this far out and I'm beginning to think that her grandparents' shack was not a good idea for our honeymoon and I watch her spine. I reach my hand out to touch her spine and my fingers gently trickle down her vertebrae.

I am watching her hair. Long black and tangled, thick, a blackened forest. I allow myself to bring my hand up and touch it. I caress its thick softness between my fingers as I run my hand through it, moving down from her scalp to the ends. I move slowly as I run into tangles and then....

Something happens. My eyes, the shadows, the heat, plays tricks. I feel as though it is the hair itself moving through my fingers and not me making motion at all. The feeling is so real that I am startled and jerk my hand out of her hair and then feel it with my palm to tell if it is moving. I felt it literally, I mean, it seemed to have...flowed over my hands. So strange. I run my fingers down from her scalp again, slowly to the ends. The strange sensation returns. It feels as if her hair is moving on its own. I remove my hand.

In the pale street lamp I stare at this gorgeous void that is her hair. Ridiculous. Yet what was it that I felt? I watch and for some time I am sure my mind gets lost in the darkness and the shadows of the trees on the sheets become skeletons and her hair begins to move imperceptibly and my eyes are closing...

Suddenly, her body shifts. She lies flat on her back. Yet her hair flows down her chest and I watch, hardly knowing if what I see is real, yet...the hair, it's creeping, slowly across her chest. I imagine that it is caressing her breasts, winding up towards her smooth white neck. I can see it spread over her. How can she feel nothing? She is dreaming, murmuring in her sleep, her head motioning slightly back and forth to the left and right. If she would just wake up! Can't she tell what's happening? The tendrils of her hair move like iron fingers. I am shocked as I feel them now tightening around her windpipe, squeezing tentatively and then — violently constricting. I feel helpless. I try to move but can't as it pulls tighter and tighter around her neck in large bands of black. She still does not open her eyes!

She is now struggling for breath, gasping. Suddenly, I panic and run for the kitchen, open the cabinet drawer and fumble for the knife. I run back into the bedroom, to our bed, to her body, her beautiful naked form and begin chopping at the hair, cutting, chopping at the hair, practically pulling it from her scalp, furiously slicing it as best I can with the blunt kitchen knife. Trying, I'm trying to save her, save her from her own hair, but I find that I cannot, cannot stop, I can't stop cutting. The blade is like a magnet to her flesh and as I feel my hands cutting her and watch myself do this, her blood oozes and the hair is cut in ribbons and her flesh is pierced and I cannot stop.

Sometime while this is happening she wakes, feeling her flesh being ripped apart. My ears ring as she screams and screams and screams. I cannot move to stop myself.

It is morning. The trees filter the sunlight that floods our wedding bed. I gaze on her body, still and silent. I feel nothing. She is not moving. I find the knife clutched by my hand and her hair hacked and slashed in ribbons and the



stray strands and shards of it cover the bed, her body, her once lovely face. I remove the bloody sheets. I spread it on the floor, along with its contents.

The rays of golden sunlight spilling onto the floor, the first well of tears filling my eyes. The hair I sweep with my hands, wrap all of it — the bloody sheet, along with the rusty knife, along with her dead body.

I manage to bury it, bury it in the woods behind the shack. I dress quickly, open the shack's creaking front door, lock it, get in the car and drive away.

The headlights of the early morning cars stare at me as they pass. I watch the gaping road signs as they swiftly pass by. There is a tightness in my throat. My windshield wipers swap furiously back and forth. My radio is broken. My tires are whining. My hands are shaking and I am blind with tears as my car begins to slide off into the lane on oncoming traffic.

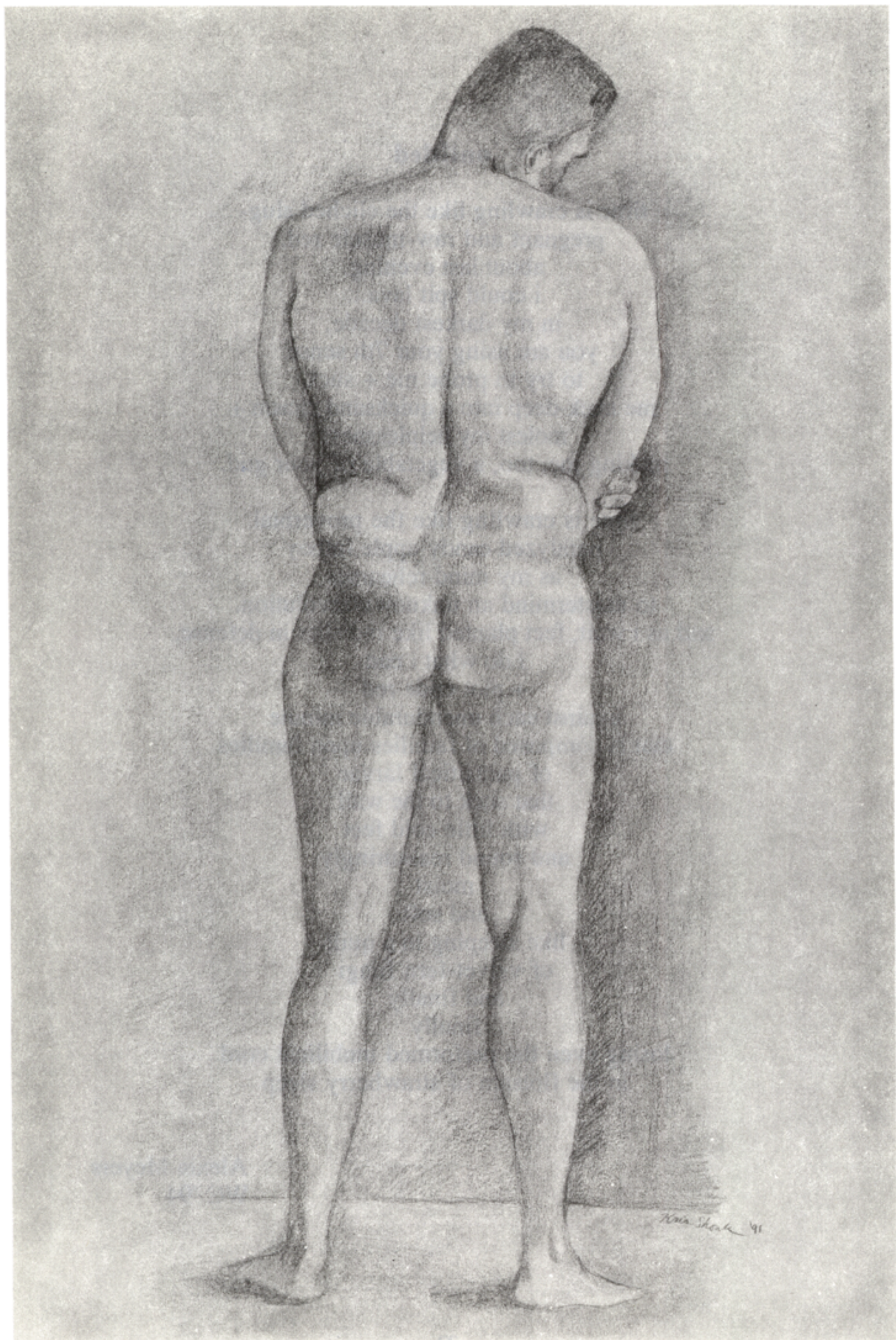
Jeffrey Scott Fowler  
RC '91

**untitled**

time is crawling like the cliched slug-  
pregnant and raw-muscle red.  
about last evening,  
i could spit lava...  
in my darkest decade,  
you are using your 7th sense  
to try to probe me + suck  
me neck-deep into a quicksand chasm +  
molest my helplessness  
making me, too, a vegetable of your god.

time is crawling like the proverbial  
paralyzed candy-apple fatboy  
as my mind rehearses  
to mastermind an unknown revolution.  
and as i wait, feet planted like radishes in defense,  
i do what i can  
+ plot code red  
against each unendurable minute  
that is composed of families upon families  
of parasitical larvae  
that suck to the wall  
with little cold feet  
and sound reassuringly  
moist  
and soft  
like sleeping in a quilt  
of velvet-fern fungi  
and finally  
finally  
losing even the performed umbilical cord  
in the flotsam of strawberry sleep

Alexia Meyers  
WC '94



## Philosophy

One evening my sister, home from college  
tried re-defining Descartes with a broken mirror:  
she bled, therefore she was—  
or rather, not quite,  
because my mother opened the door, and,  
after the required hysterics,  
called an ambulance  
all the while mourning the damage  
to her family honor  
and her new carpet.

They took sis to the hospital,  
and patched her up.  
I visited her the following week,  
bringing flowers and news and no sharp objects.  
She looked as pale and dried as a juiced orange,  
sitting with her latch-hook and her smile,  
There were pieces missing when they reassembled her,  
or else something was leached away as a cure,  
and when you asked how she was, she'd say  
fine, fine, thank you very much  
(this is a recording and I'm a paper doll)  
having earned a respite from philosophy.

Jen Welsh  
WC '95

## Why I Don't Write Poetry

I don't write poetry because I have no rhythm. I have no sense of measurement or of too much or not enough, and I don't write poetry because I don't have enough ink to smear all my thoughts and loves across a page. Nor have I the time to pull reams from my shelves and drop them on my desk or lawn, and sit down to compose what Wordsworth did for his Abbey or Dylan did for his Hill. Neither do I have the might to push my pen against the grain, to stand it up on its tip, feeling the voice that is great without me. I will not admit that poetry is better than me and my own feeble tube of ink.

I don't write poetry because my lover is more rhythmic than I. She dactyls and hexes and stands above me, and knows of the natural beats that jump from her feet, and knows the difficulty I have with penned emotions, emotions I cannot free without her support beneath me. But she stands averse to lending or teaching me her rhythms, so I write awkwardly, stilted not by her, but by a rigid plastic.

I don't write poetry because poetry suffers glad fools who try to pen it down, who try to mix their heart's blood with ink, and fail like I would fail, because they cannot decide whether they love more the poem or its subject. I do not want to fail poetry; I do not want to fail my loves; I do not want to fail myself. I write prose because I will not fail the paragraphic structure, the rules of the semantic, the orders of Strunk & White. Three sentences, three parallels, three successes.

I don't write poetry because I never learned. I pretend instead that I am the noble writer of sublime prose, the slave or savior of the discursive style. And I can write like this for long times that run on and on, to express feelings like extended verses or enjambed lines of many words piled on top of many words, sticking, clinging together. Or fragmented ideas of mine. There is victory in such pursuits.

But my language is too often unconscious of itself, rarely palpable, rarely mute. So I continue to drag my pen over the page, knowing that to break routine is to be less than great, to be less than rhythmic, to be less than brilliant, to be less than a poet. I do not write poems because I will fail.

Alan Mitchell  
RC '95

## 36 Lines

The Autumn boughs bend under the drift-meal tides.  
Burnt flakes and ashes thrash with the blight-blown sighs.  
The groins entangle 'neath this bleak-brown season.  
A wind without life, a life without reason.

Negativity encircled, held the screaming  
Of the trees, the rocks, everything without feeling.  
I felt the hour I was born for.  
The wind, the rain, the incessant pour.

So I took my leave and sought the border,  
Forgot the Tempest, Chaos, Disorder.  
Almighty One and One and One denied,  
Fell full on my knees and smiled, and cried.

The angels sang no sweet reprise,  
No solace sprang from wintry skies.  
I laughed, I mused, I wept to sleep,  
The Journey still my only keep.

All men enjoin, encircle each other,  
My Father, Mother, my only Brother.  
Each song is lost from our shame and fright;  
The Others decision, what's wrong, what's right.

Each action look for another's approval,  
A judgment passed with a punished removal.  
Alone we stand, together we imprison  
Our Spirit, our Life, our sacred Decision.

Pass no more through pious religions,  
Landed life and promised provisions.  
To take root and seed and rot and die  
Is a back-turned glance to every lie.

The Journey keeps my eyes awake,  
I live the life my dreams forsake.  
No one so fair could break my stand,  
To take her heart, her path, her hand.

The Autumn is over, the wind is chill,  
Whiteness covers every mountain and hill.  
The screams still shatter each child still-born,  
The roads of man remain battered and worn.

Kevin James Luber  
RC '93



