

# *Winged Nation*



# Winged Nation

Volume 8, Number 1

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Volume Eight, Number One  
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*Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation.*

– Angela Carter

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*Winged Nation* is the proud product of a feminist community at the College of William and Mary. Our publication provides opportunities to share our unique perspectives, and to explore gendered experience.

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## Burning

Sarah Feightner

I have been taught to look

– into things.

Been taught to read

– the underneath things.

Taught to shut my eyes on prayers and dreamings.

To keep my hands to myself to don't

be so sensitive to don't

touch that it's

hot.

Well I can see that, too.

But how can I know that

– the into things –

– the underneath things –

Until I can *hold* that

In the smoldering palm of my hand.

Smoke Signals  
Andrea Seiffert

New pen old thoughts  
will I ever forgive him? my father that wasn't . . .  
3 children minus 1 hearing his laugh for all those years  
his yelling  
I don't know how quiet how loud  
how much love how much anger  
if he can shoot a basket and make it  
if he minds hooking worms  
if he would have brought chocolate to me and my mom  
if he does to his wife  
would he kill the spider or set it free?  
what if I forgave him  
without knowing all this  
forgave him for all the things he never did  
for not knowing me  
for me not knowing him  
for not making my mom stop hurting us  
for being human  
for not loving enough to not lie  
because I don't know  
his laugh  
only one picture in memory only – tickling my baby toes  
– a rough soft beard  
– love from me, love around me  
does he kiss owies or make them  
does he like football  
does it even matter really  
his side of the story that I miss  
if I forgive him where does my anger go

Commodity's Oddity  
Tunisia Riley

What is this brown body?  
human flesh.  
What is this brown oddity?  
tan and colored breast.  
What is this sepia commodity?  
A black bitch at best.

Commodity and Oddity

Once dragged onto an auction block.  
Now strolls down the ghetto block.

SASHE' . . . SASHE' . . . SASHE' . . .  
Swaying to the rhythms of  
Slave banjos, congas,  
Beats and sounds  
Remixed by Kunta "Puffy" Combs Kente.

What is this brown commodity?  
A black body at best:

She is a darkened erotic, exotic, mobile fire flame.  
She is a burnt cinnamon-almond-mocha thing,  
to be marketed  
to be devoured  
to be commodified.

What is this brown oddity?  
brown sugar lips  
caramel colored tits  
caribbean mango hips.

SHIT!  
What the hell have you become?  
What the hell have you succumbed to?

A round black bodily commodity.  
An exotic, sexual oddity  
Shaken, shook and taken.

What is your brown body now?  
No longer living  
No longer breathing.

You've been recreated  
digitally re-mastered and  
now hated on sister,  
by another sista.

What is your name now?

Please answer me.

Reclaim your beautiful, brown body.  
Reclaim it and rename it:

Temple.  
Sanctuary.  
Pre-colonial.  
Post Black Power.  
Present.  
Gift.

Divine.





Grace Camblos

Legs

photograph

## Fish Story

Anna Johnson

Sixth grade, and we're taken ten at a time  
to the Vice Principal's office, all the girls in my class.  
Most of us are good girls: we've never been in here before.  
She's got a couch inside, and a fish tank,  
hard candy in a bowl on her desk.  
She lets us sit anywhere we want to,  
and six skinny girls fill the couch quick.  
One of the girls is so little her feet don't reach  
the floor. She sits with her legs stuck straight out,  
like the dolls I bet she's still got on her bed.  
I sit on the floor and lean against the desk,  
hugging my fully grown legs  
to my chest which has not grown at all.

The Vice Principal wears jeans and a substitute teacher smile.  
She wants to tell us why we're here.  
She stands in front of us and  
fishes something out of her pocket,  
holding it up so we all can see.

*This, she says, is a tampon, girls.*

*Who can tell me what it's for?*

(Six skinny girls giggle skinny-voiced giggles,  
and my fully-grown face turns red.)

*Menstruation, she says, or your "period," girls.*

*It's wonderful! Don't be shy.*

*You're all becoming Women, she says,*

*and some of you may have begun.*

She unwraps the thing and shows us its string,  
dangles it upside down over the fish tank.

*This, she says, happens inside you, girls,*  
and she drops the tampon in.

Ten little girls stare terrified as this white thing swells,  
swims with the fish, floats and starts to grow.

It bobs there, bigger and bigger,

till it gets so heavy it sinks

down through the water,

down past the fish,

down to the gravel

where the plastic diver blows bubbles

and the tiny treasure chest

opens and closes its lid.

Cassandra  
Sarah Feightner

“Have I missed the mark, or, like true archer,  
do I strike my quarry? Or am I prophet of lies,  
A babbler from door to door?” – Cassandra [Agamemnon 1194]

Cassie walks the city streets,  
her belly heavy with the futures she's swallowed.  
Just another late-night junkie  
looking for a fix,  
selling herself door to door.

For Cassie is cursed, you see –  
she cannot persuade herself.  
Still dreams the trojan horse at night,  
inevitability  
waiting to be birthed upon the sleeping city.

This is the truth she spoke  
with the sun in her mouth.  
This, the truth she bore Apollo,  
unraveling through the night into a thousand points of light –  
torches gleaming on the sharp points of swords –  
a thousand dead  
a thousand voices all their own.

Cassie still has visions –  
sees all the unraveling truths of the world.  
She holds them inside,  
winding those threads round a point of light too small  
a god, a womb, a hollow needle  
another center to her universe.

Cassie still wakes crying –  
I can hear her through the walls.  
On her knees in a public bathroom,  
red eyes fixed on the dirty tile floor,  
remembering war and the screams of women,  
remembering Ajax and Agamemnon and her on her knees  
and the blinding god she could not persuade herself to keep –  
defense against the bastard truth within.

Retching prophecy,  
a thousand voices spiraling through her gut to the sharp point of her lips  
pregnant with meaning.  
Carrying truths too numerous for the confining space of her body,  
when the sun is one of a thousand stars and the city  
a thousand eyes, tongues, wailing babes on parapets,  
a thousand futures swallowed whole,  
spat out like the thousand grains of sand on the blood-stained beaches of  
Troy.



Grace Camblos Dogwood Tree photograph

Mornings in Exeter  
Trina Zerick

I noticed that the bugs  
went to bed at the same time  
I did.

We woke up to a busload of tourists  
and the abbreviated flight of pigeons  
shifting gables.

The bugs turned under the ceiling light  
like monochrome animals  
on a postmodern baby's mobile.

They followed the paths drawn  
by a mesmerizing screen saver,  
even while I took a nap after breakfast.

Tequila Jo  
Andrea Seiffert

souvenirs still scattered on the floor  
from the trip I'd take again  
even though I missed you  
now I have this weird  
affection for limes  
the sour acid burning shocking my  
tongue as it explores every corner  
like you  
and maybe salt too  
learned there that even Tequila tastes better sipped  
than shot  
like me  
too much at once  
but boy can I last

Untitled  
Christine Weaver

One breath, California.  
Two breaths, New York.

You are a shape-shifter  
and I am on to you.

Sitting soft,  
my sweat evaporating into cool,  
after passion so exhausting  
I couldn't finish.  
My eyes closed, I see you  
get up to test the dampness  
of the bed;  
watch me watching you inside my head  
and try to decide  
on waking.

## Car Trip

Rachel Alice Lewis

My existence is made in a runny mascara world,  
where sleep finds me even behind a Burger King Coke cup  
with limitless refills,  
day dreams are infinite . . .

It is an age of golden locks left strangled by apathetic brushes,  
still within,  
I remain tangled.

And I find myself becoming a victim to both simplicity and complexity,  
as I stare out the car window,  
turn the volume on my walk man a little louder  
and wonder if Sting, or myself for that matter, will ever find  
"Synchronicity."

I am a wilted flower,  
walking into a 7-11 to buy Oatmeal pies,  
always the 25 cent kind,  
I stoop down and notice my shoes are untied.

When I step back into the car,  
a seat belt makes a semi circle around my floating bone body.  
And I stop to wonder why there are air bags for what might lie in front,  
but never for what almost certainly remains behind.

Along the highway glimpses across dashed lines,  
but then a synapse,  
I look up to hold stares with a strange boy until our car passes.  
I do not have to smile or look anything more than what I am,  
for in an instant we are both gone.  
But the gap,  
the space between the yellow,  
the conscious and the subconscious,  
has made a line,  
for a blink in time,  
his heart was mine.



## A Treatise of Equivocation

Trina Zerick

I found the fourth antediluvian  
patriarch in descent from Seth  
in a concealed prayer closet  
of a Kentish castle.

He was still wearing his dress blues:  
pins and scraps of metal  
protruded from cardboard  
and duct tape lining.

I assumed his dog tags  
were under the requisite  
wifebeater, tangled in the plastic  
beads of his rosary.

He thought I was an inquisitor,  
so he borrowed from the Jesuit Garnett,  
telling me (as a representative of James I)  
that he was Protestant.

God knows he's Catholic.  
His eyes look differently on this early  
Monday morning than they did  
on the first Friday night of Lent.

I couldn't see his sincere  
army muscles, even with my prescription,  
because of the bulk  
of his blues and Ernest Hemingway.

His face, shaved clean for  
inspection, was defensive.

I slipped off his jaw, this morning  
uncaught in Friday's five o'clock shadow.

In the closet (locked for security reasons),  
he confessed that it was the saltwater in my poetry  
and the duration of my shoulderstand.

It was the six-pack,  
Macbeth's porter added,  
provoking the desire

but taking way the performance.



Kristi Jamrisko

Untitled

photograph

## A Swansong for Kevin

Anna Johnson

*Kevin comes from a stock of cops, Irish Catholic and slightly corrupt, in New York since the potatoes died. His great grandfather ran run from the paddy wagon, prohibiting drier cops from stopping him with the quickest fists in the force. The Viet Cong captured Kevin's father, who crawled free through a river of sewer shit and came out clean enough for the FBI. Kevin himself holds a black belt in karate, and has broken half his bones, but Kevin wants to teach kindergarten.*

Only the ugly children who grow up swans can spot other ducklings in disguise. It's in the way we don't look up when strangers say hello, the way we never think it's us they're looking at when we catch eyes catching ours.

I meet Kevin in my middle school's gym, when we're ten years too old to be there, but using the stage for the summer, for a community theatre play. We walk back from the snack machine together, cutting through the gym to get back to practice, and I make a crack that we've bought out all the food. He looks at me funny, says what I said wasn't, and when I ask him why he tells me he used to be fat, so fat he was the fat kid, so fat even the nerds wouldn't play with him and he had to eat lunch alone. His only friend was the girl who didn't take enough showers or change enough of her clothes, and together they had to hear *fat and smelly sittin' in a tree* . . . at recess every day.

I stop walking and stop him with me, my hand not holding the diet coke can holding onto his arm. You don't understand, he says. No, you don't. I say, I do. I was ugly when I was little, too. I was too smart and wore glasses too thick and braces too long and my hair was way too frizzy. This gym we're in, I say, this gym was hell for me. Middle School. All those dances. I'd always end up crying in the bathroom by the end.

Okay, he says, so how old were you the first time you kissed someone?

Sixteen, I say.

Sixteen, he says. No shit. Sixteen. Me too.

We walk back to rehearsal, where we share his Fritos and

can't remember our lines.

Backstage between scenes we sit on a slip-covered couch and tell each other transformation stories. He ran eighty pounds off in high school, and learned how to talk to girls enough to turn down the prettiest ones who asked and take his lunch table friend to the Prom. I got contacts and a haircut, and learned how to shut up in class and speak up on stage enough to get my headshot hanging on the high school hallway wall, where boys who used to walk away could stop and see my name.

Kevin asks me questions and collects the answers like cards. When he's got a hand so perfect his poker face breaks he grabs my hand and drops to the floor, says, So what are you doing for the next fifty years? We talk Irish Catholic mothers, his and mine and the one I'll (one day) be. We talk future families: four kids, boy first so the biggest will be a brother and fun. We talk divorce, and how you can't once you swear that you do. Kevin says our curly-haired kids might be too cute to live and I think, I fold, you win. By the time I go back to school, six weeks later, I'm in.

What I don't know yet is that when Kevin ran off all that weight he didn't run away from what being the fat kid felt like. He didn't run out of hate. He calls himself the champion of the little guy, the black belted warrior Spud who started out fat and grew up skinny but never grew tall enough. He's making up for lost inches all around, so he punches through air to hit what he's missing, snatching it back from unsuspecting bigger guys who think he's too tiny to win.

Kevin swears he's never started a fight. Someone starts with him, and then he finishes them. That's all it is. Champion of the little guy, always avenging that fat kid within.

If the cops only give you one phone call, you might as well screw the man and make it long distance, or maybe what he thinks is why bother with local calls when the locals know exactly where to find you - either way it's almost always me that Kevin calls. Four in the morning with a broken nose; three forty-five with a thumb punched blue; one fifteen with teeth too bloody to talk, so I do, still awake for once.

It doesn't matter who starts what, I say. Who says you have to hit back?

Would you have any respect at all for me, he asks, if I just walked away?

What I don't respect is that you won't walk away, I say. You never leave it alone.

Because, baby, if I leave it alone, the fat kid won't let me forget it.

Kevin hits back because he knows how to. He's trained to hit once and hit right. He gets kicked out of bars at least once a week end, got a bottle broken in his face tonight. But he wants to hear my voice, he says, so he calls Virginia from New York payphones, to hear something sweeter than the other drunks who wait in line to call taxis to come and take them home. I only sound sweet because I was sleeping, sober, non-violent, alone.

But what happens is I get used to this. I grow accustomed to what his weekends mean, and I start pulling the phone to the floor by my bed before I go to sleep. I wait to wake up to the ringing, and I make myself be sweet. I let him know I hate to know that he lets himself get this way, but I say it like you say it to an aging athlete past his prime who still tries hard to play. I say I hate this but I say it like I hate he's gotten hurt, when what I hate is that he's let it get to hitting, again. I say I'm scared it'll one day go too far and I say "it" but I mean him and one day he goes too far.

Kevin's sister is two years younger than he is, like me, and she's in school where he used to go. She goes out a lot like he does. She almost got kicked out of school. I haven't met her but she sounds a lot like him, quick wit, quick fists and all. One night when Kevin calls her she doesn't sound like herself. She tells him she was out last night and she didn't want to talk to a guy in the bar who wanted to talk to her and when she left this guy left behind her and he was bigger and he wouldn't let her go. He wouldn't let her go and he wouldn't let her go and so she kicked him hard and ran and ran like hell.

Kevin hangs up the phone and grabs his coat and gets in his car and doesn't stop driving 'til he gets to his sister and he doesn't leave her 'til she tells him who this guy she ran from is and he gets in his car and doesn't stop driving 'til he finds where this guy she ran from lives and he gets out of his car and takes from his trunk the baseball bat that's always waiting there. He swings once and hits home, trained to hit once and hit right.

By the time I hear this story the guy that Jenny ran from and Kevin caught is in a hospital in Ithaca in a coma he might not come out of. By the time I hear this story it's late enough that night to be early enough the next morning that I'm awake enough to take in

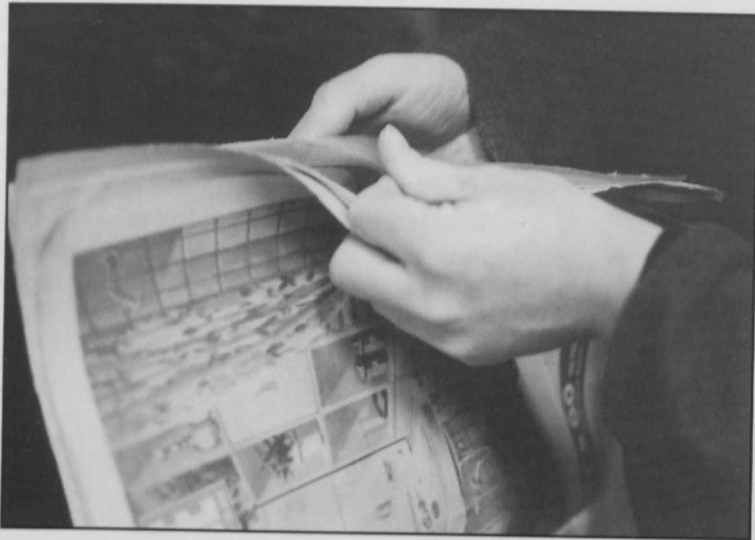
every word that Kevin says. I listen from Virginia as he tells me Jenny's lucky but this guy's lucky because this guy isn't dead yet, and that "yet" as he says it catches in his throat and I think he might be crying but then I realize he's stopped talking because he's heard me crying, which I didn't know I was.

He says, it's okay, she's okay, and I think, she? It's you. It's you who hit this guy so hard you have to say "yet" when you say "dead." If this guy dies you did it. If this guy dies this time it's you who won't wake me up the next time there's a fight.

This time when I say goodbye I say it like you say it when you mean I'll see you soon, but I mean it like you say it when you mean it.

Only the ugliest ducklings are not naturally inclined to fly. It's in the way we think our wings will weigh us down, the way we don't count on the air to be there when we test its weight with ours.

Only when we outgrow ugly are we finally light enough. Some swans unleash their beaks from beneath their wings and teach themselves to fight. Some fly south.



Grace Camblos

Inga's Hands

photograph

Three Women  
Andrea Seiffert

Ever been in love with people?  
Not in love with sex  
or swept away by a nice ass or chest  
Or even by how you think they'd feel waking up next to you  
But in love with someone's  
    smile when they see you  
The way she focuses inside her dazzling mind to  
    express her philosophy on evolutionary biology  
    in a sideways answer to my question about love  
Or the way she lets me lie on her lap  
    while she pets my hair and I  
    whine "like a girl" about things  
    she knows will change tomorrow  
Or the way she bounds across her  
    lawn as I make sure she gets inside –  
    dances wildly to the music from my car  
    just so I'll laugh

## Swingset

Susannah LeVine

It doesn't let you fall, the screws in tight,  
the lumber strong. You watched your Daddy  
build it, lines creasing Mama's forehead  
as he crawled across the framework,  
ten feet floating, trapeze artist. He drew  
the plan before, architect and carpenter  
(he sawed the lumber), so that even  
a pair of adults (he said) could swing the swings.

You and your sister fight over who gets which one,  
swooping down, baby birds not that sure of flying,  
but the swingset catches you, always at  
the same point above the ground. You are  
forbidden to climb the sides of it (you might fall,  
says Mama), and you don't, but swing higher,  
and they don't come out to swing with you  
after all, the pair of adults. She tends tomatoes,  
he plants rosebushes.

You can see it all,  
high up, a bird without them, watch them  
separated by a stretch of yard, then  
swoop down to the dust track worn  
by your feet under the swingset,  
under your particular swing. Shoes progress in size  
along that track, your track not theirs,  
now unfamiliar size fives bought with child support.  
As your legs grow longer, you raise the swings,  
you and your sister, and the swingset holds  
a pair of adults, still holds them after all this time,  
rooted together but flying like seeds in the wind.



## Sometimes I Forget

Trina Zerick

Sometimes I forget  
I lose my fingers  
and I begin to doubt myself  
Doubt the keystrokes I know so well  
Over sixty words a minute  
Tracing the lines of your body  
I know so well

I'm typing so fast  
I feel like I'm in the middle of a word  
when it's already finished and  
so my fingers move without me really noticing  
as the keys get dirtier the letters rub off  
I can't look or else I'll become muddled

It's the same with your body  
my dog-eared textbook  
During the last few days I tried so hard  
to memorize and remember  
to think during each kiss  
This is a kiss  
This is what her lips feel like on mine

And this is what it feels like  
to have her body against mine  
in blue sheets and  
light and laughter seeping under the door  
and no other noise  
only a glow from the clocks  
Alarm clocks turned off

Those last few days I stared  
hard at her body  
and paused when we had the chance  
to make love  
I looked and saw and tried to memorize and said  
This is what it feels like

She contains so much space  
in such a small piece of flesh  
so much space  
You contain so much space  
so much that I can hardly look at you  
I can't look straight at you

I can only catch the edges  
it's like looking at the sun eclipse in London  
because you have to use instead  
a piece of cardboard with a hole punched in it

Karikazo  
Philip Clark

On feast days,  
My dances will not stop.  
Maiden girls gather  
Among the field's flowers,  
Feet slide over thick grass.  
Other days, I watch  
From a distant window, strain  
For panpipe melodies, far-away songs.

Today, I join them in the meadow.  
Even after months, my feet  
Remember rhythm, while my eyes  
Stare at the sweep of skirts,  
White arms under layered sleeves.  
This time, no one mentions  
My uncovered head, lacking  
The marriage scarf.

So aged, at twenty. There is idle talk,  
Mothers and aunts: *Where is her husband?*  
I remember one suitor, a shy  
Pale boy. I had seen him look  
With longing at the blacksmith's  
Sturdy son, bare chest silhouetted  
By the dying summer light.  
For both our sakes, I turned him away.

An old maiden, I join  
The drifting circle. We drop hands, turn  
Return with a sigh. My gaze falls  
On a girl's slim waist, her rising breasts.  
Caught in the ring, a step  
And a shift, I do not avert  
My eyes. Today, a feast day,  
This dancing lasts for hours.

Metamorphosis  
Robyn Benson

A dichotomy  
Of innocent beige sand  
And presumptuous ebony midnight  
United as sisters  
Only under the chill  
Of a mid-november eve

You, me, she, her  
A quartet of fearless females  
Deceptively confident  
Agents  
Of a nonsensical generation  
Anchored  
By grandiose expectations  
We surrender to a stereotype  
The unjaded warriors

Yet  
In an instant  
We stand victorious  
Bare flesh cooled  
By subtle swirls  
Caressed in velvet waters  
Of serendipitous baptism  
Whose ferocious peacefulness  
Melts the shackles  
Of acceptance  
And denies us societal shame

And we  
Four companions  
Are freed  
Are  
Beautiful

## Father's Day

Alyssa Meyers

The ring of the axe, bright and hard. Words slicing  
through the thick immovable grain of language. It's breath  
weather. I know what you're thinking:

*Sugar peas, snap peas, butterbeans before the frost,  
kale and cabbage after.*

Your eyes follow the ridge and slope of the house. They don't  
meet mine. What are words but small exhalations of self?

*Dogwood blooms – four points for the Cross,  
red heart for the blood.*

You had to finish the wood in one day. Coming in  
exhausted at twilight, golden showers of sawdust arcing  
to the floor.

*You always sang hymns to the silence*

Adjectives, adverbs, nouns; they slow the blood. Bound inside  
by the intangibles – the roots of a mountain, noise of a moving  
cat, breath of a fish.

*If I close my eyelids and press*

*I fall off the world*

"The oldest, she's a little strange. But we  
don't like to talk about it." Sometimes I get to go  
with you to the back country. There are fifty-seven  
silences. I counted. I've always been good at that.

*Lightning rides across the mountain.*

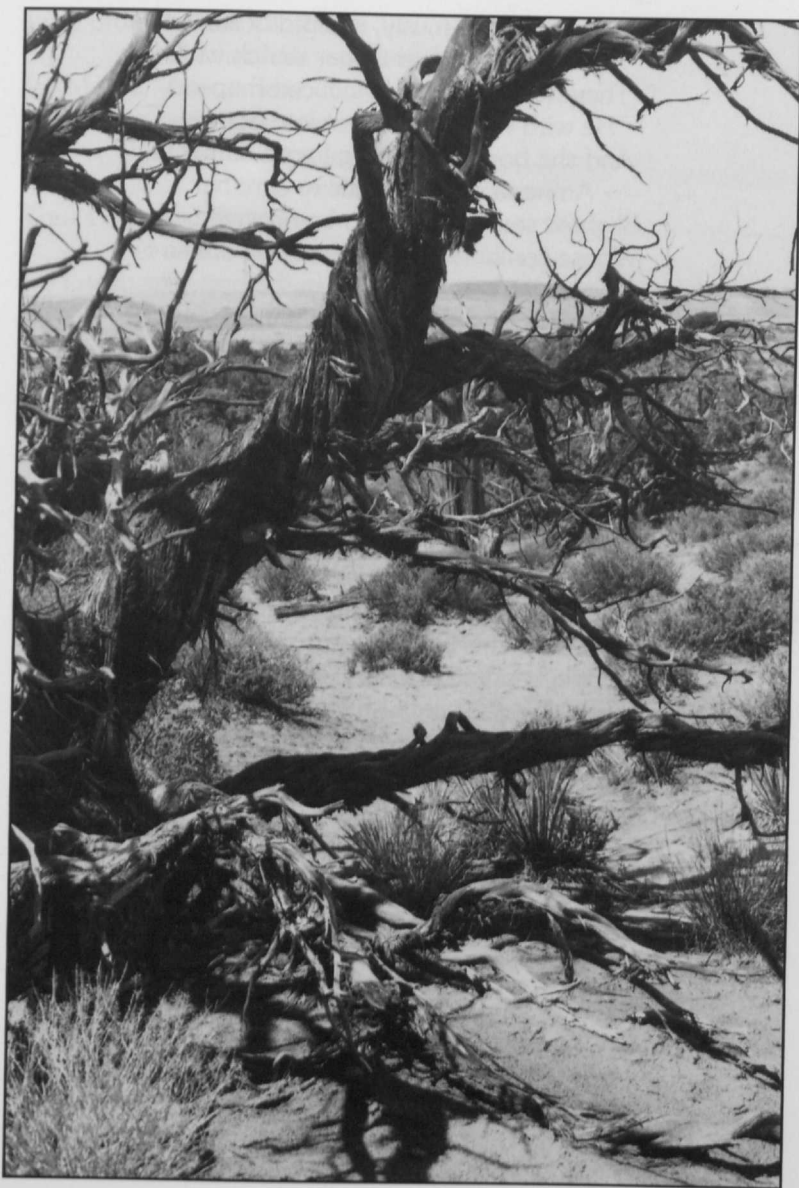
Test tubes, microscopes, an overwhelming scientific  
hush – these are your tools. Every day you purify meaning  
into alchemical symbols. Pressure is falling at the speed of snow.

*A blue dress in white water.*

Distilling to the bare essence of words; miles  
and miles of the shining glassware of the heart.

*The land and sky look the same. And if  
you're not careful you might forget  
which side you're on.*

Like Marie Curie, denying to the end that her  
beloved radiation was killing her – language, words,  
a profusion of vowels spilling through the blood unspoken.  
*High up in the cedar tree, O Lord.*



Kristi Jamrisko

Untitled

photograph

## Riverside Motel

Robyn Benson

The room was musty, smelled of singed  
Styrofoam and sweet cigar stench while  
They waltzed in a rum-induced rhapsody  
He with visions of ascent into ecstasy,  
And she hoping, aspiring for an almighty  
Amnesia, an antiseptic to cure her  
Blighted soul and soon-to-be-ravaged body  
Whose combination of curves and coiffure  
Ignited much appreciation in the opposite  
Sex, who craved creamy skin and a warm  
Wet woman to sedate their desires and  
Inflate ever-growing egos conquered only  
By age while leo, an exemplary specimen,  
Danced the buttons right off her shirt  
And tangoed with the zipper until  
She lay there the color of peaches and  
Cream as he took a vicious bite out  
Of her innocence, leaving her thighs  
Glazed with sweat, her face tainted with  
Tears and her hand made inconspicuous  
By a hundred dollar bill, her ears filled  
With the audacity of his greedy snoring,  
Announcing the expiration of his night  
And the beginning of hers.

Last Call  
Anna Johnson

Lucy orders a Sloe Gin Fizz,  
    red like her hair was in high school.  
for Mas, a Midouri Sour,  
    its neon green natural,  
    the juice of Japanese melons.

Tom's our only Bud man,  
    but all the boys want beers;  
Ivy League James no longer does bottles,  
    asks what the man has on tap,  
    scoffs at the list, picks Guinness;  
Chris echoes my Corona  
    when the Bartender's out of red wine.

Tom reaches across the table,  
    half of a high five aimed at me  
        (for beer, for still being one of the boys,  
        for liking my drinks blonde like my hair's  
        always been)  
and I lean through Lucy's smoke,  
    laughing as my hand hits his.



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