

2008

PHANTASMAGORIA

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# 2008

# Philadelphia

*Adrienne Vaccarro*

An urban kingdom built upon  
burgundy bricks,  
worn concrete,  
camera-attracting bustle,  
and enough noise to fill the Roman Coliseum;  
has detached itself,  
from all ancient woods and forgotten silos.  
The dull memory  
of once empty land and naked ground,  
is a ghost;  
to the skyscrapers  
that tap against hovering clouds,  
to the thick dusty heat  
that rises from each intersection,  
and to the constant taxis  
that barely inch towards the unkind traffic jams.

These lively streets know no boundaries.  
their unappreciated gridlocks  
cause a sudden sense of awareness  
that consumes your thoughts,  
and intensifies your cautions.  
Their sharp ninety-degree turns  
lay perfectly placed against buildings  
stretched out across this man-made habitat.  
The exhausting sense of urgency,  
is kept within the tight grasp  
of those who are not yet familiar  
with the famous,  
almighty,  
cement-based empire.

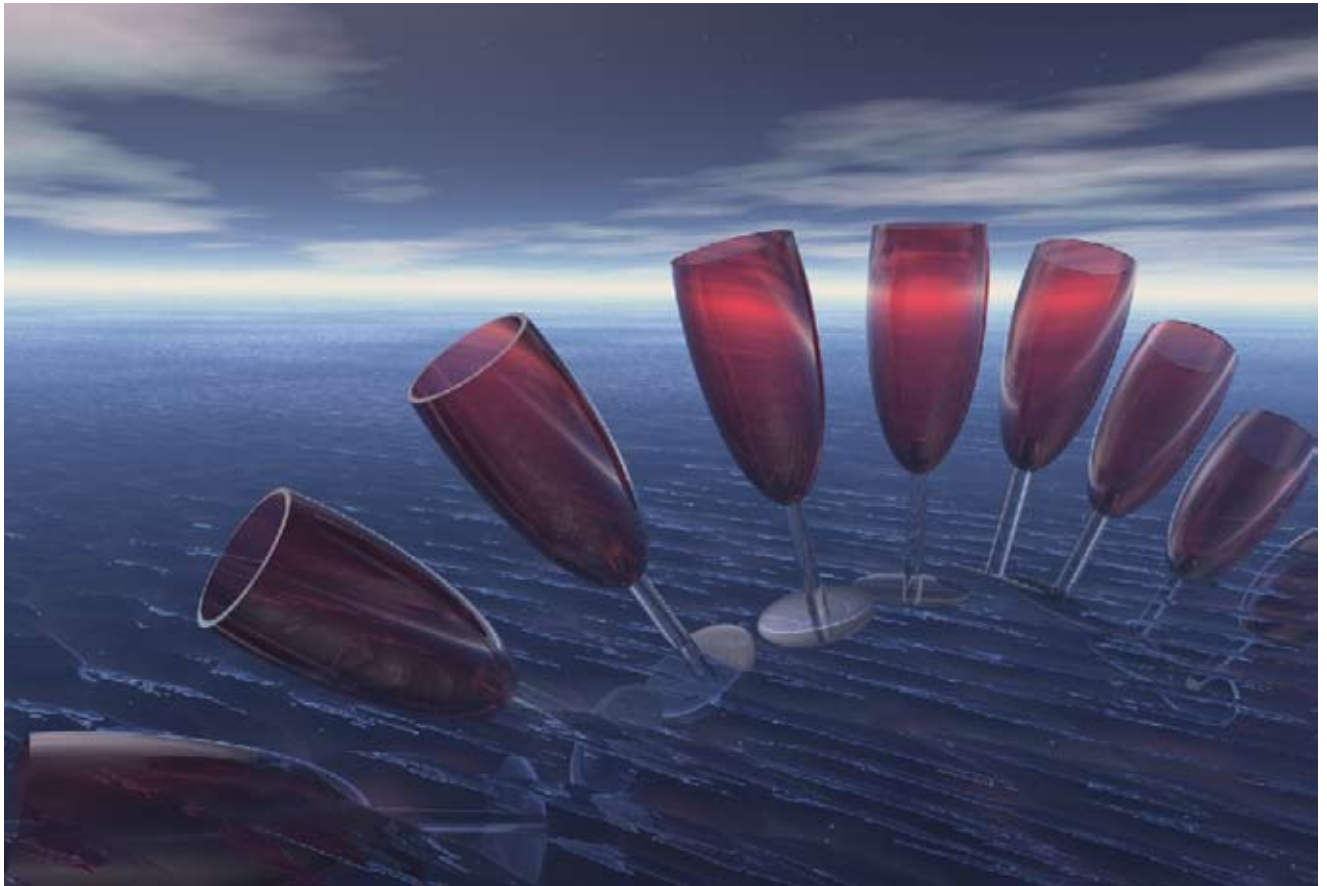
The subway racing under your feet  
will be held liable,  
for the rush and vibrations  
pounding the soles of your sneakers,  
to the incandescent beat of its tracks.

In this distance,  
the occasional booming siren,  
the street sweepers trudging a cleaner path,  
the ever-growing, beeping traffic,  
and the soulful intoxicated laughter  
creeping under the door of a bar entrance,  
and escaping out onto the street...  
will echo against your eardrum for life.

Inhaling the ecstatic vibrations of smiling people,  
and the rich,  
salty,  
over-cooked air,  
releases a liberal sense of contentment  
through your nose and mouth,  
and into your unsuspecting heart.

Hundreds of insignificant street lights  
confidently mask night at its natural form,  
by illuminating every tan, faded sidewalk,  
every metallic tire-rim rolling steadily along  
the Ben Franklin Bridge,  
and every gloss-touched billboard  
that contributes to the stealing space  
all through the action-filled city.

This pavement-covered lifestyle  
is capable of emancipating you,  
leaving you with a picture in your conscience  
of deteriorating negativity  
throughout every corner of the city.  
Untroubled faces filling elongated street paths,  
bring warmth into the tall standing walls of Phila-  
delphia.  
There's no such thing as being silent and lonely,  
like the emptiness of an unread newspaper,  
when you reside in the city of brotherly love.



**3D Modeling**  
*Myles Harrar*

## **Flag**

*Brandon Boekel*

A royal blue rectangle filled in by a galaxy of stars  
Make up a fourth of us. It combines with a  
Collage of red and white stripes to complete our bodies.

We hang above all and keep to ourselves,  
Our movements dictated by the wind.  
As generations altered so did our appearances.

My ancestors have seen the frontline of war,  
And even outer space, however,  
My life is not as adventurous.

Instead I hang in a classroom still and  
Quite, Awaiting a standing ovation of millions  
To pledge to me.

## “Argh Rated; the Naughty Nautical Sonnet of a Love Sick Seadog”

*Alex Bryan*

I set my course ahead at eleven “nots”  
Skewed hat is Bicorné; ripply blouse of lace  
Suppressing memories of last love sought  
I troll for booty at a Sloop typed pace  
All lasses know me as the buccaneer  
My clever lines greeted by facial smacks  
Requests to board her ship soon, met with jeers  
“I’ll drop anchor in ye lagoon.” \*Loud Crack\*  
I’ve never met one to deem my first mate  
My brigantine always plunders alone;  
Those treasure troves devoid of a hot date  
Just empty chests and icy hearts of stone  
    Above the sun sets; cloak over my gloom  
    A pirate life, rejection, ain’t for me.



**Surrealism**  
*Alyssa Karpa*

## Birthday Candle

*Gabriella Canelli*

I am retrieved  
Grasped by a hand, it's firm  
I am placed beside a towering pastry  
I wait to enter  
Cheering and chattering of voices come  
Stomping in with a rumble, confusion  
Once again the hand comes closer  
Picked up, I am lowered  
Into a colorfully decorated coating  
Frosting, it's like taking the first steps  
In newly carpeted snow  
A sharp scraping noise is made  
The room suddenly goes black  
A faint flicker gets  
Closer closer closer  
Strong heat  
Then touches my crusty bendable hair  
Protruding from my head  
The whole world seems silent  
With all eyes mesmerized on me  
A solitary person shouts  
"One, Two, Three"  
Reminding me of my brothers and sisters  
All in numerical order  
Who once had their turns  
In the limelight  
I then hear loud echoes  
Of words and songs  
As they end  
There is a slight pause  
Of complete stillness  
WHAM!  
A burst of hard trembling wind rolls  
With an occasional drop of spit  
Hands are pounded together  
As I am lifted out  
A fish being caught on the line  
A warm towel is swabbed over me  
Positioned back with the other numbers  
I feel accomplished  
For ten more years  
I will sit  
And wait



**Self-Portrait**

*Kathryn Burke*



**Still Life (Charcoal)**

*Peter Nieuwkerk*

## **Thesaurus**

*Kelly Cavanaugh*

Hi, I'm writer1707  
And I'm looking for that  
Special someone.

I've tried others before,  
But it just hasn't worked out  
They're all too predictable  
Too used, too Cliché.

I'm starting my search again.  
See if you fit the profile:

You must be smart,  
Or at least sound like you are.

You should be to-the-point,  
Without any excess baggage.

Please speak figuratively  
If that's what I need.

And you cannot be dull or tiresome:  
You must appeal to the senses

You have to look good on paper.  
And be creative, but still have structure.

You must fit my focus, tone and mood  
because anything less just won't do

And finally, you simply must make sense,  
Or I will find someone else.

## **Bombing Africa Would Be Quicker**

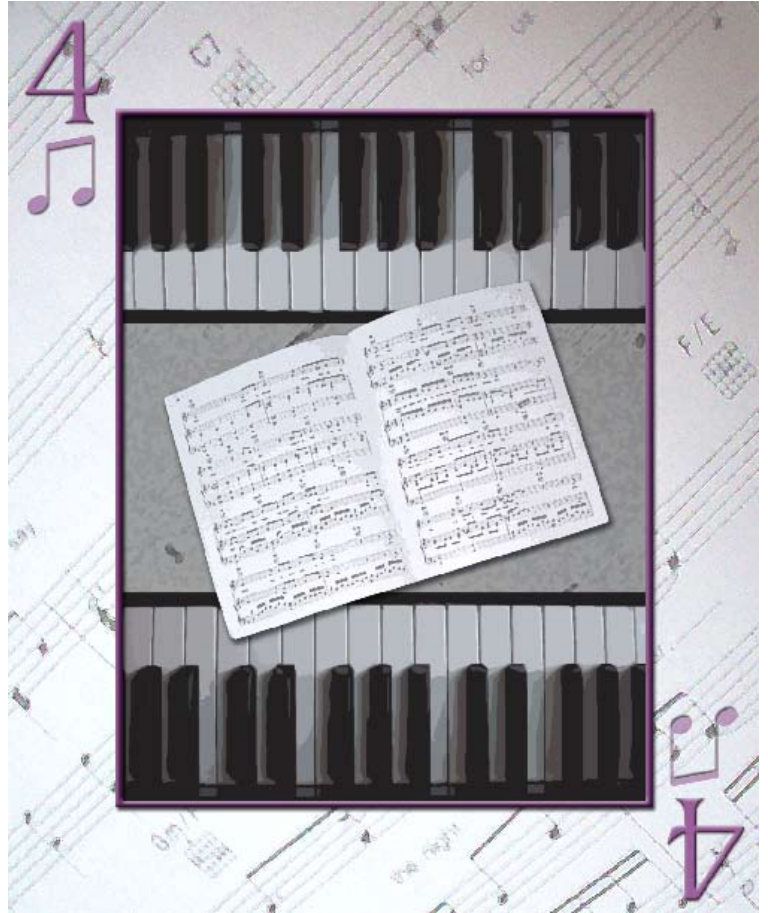
*Kendall Bailey*

My faucet is a murder.  
Instead of leaking out glistening crystals of  
lead filled water,  
it should drop blood.

If only pain had liquid form-  
I could replace it with salty desperation.  
A simple notion of letting the water run, and  
we are unnoticeable lifting the sickle.  
Children, mothers, lovers, dreamers,  
gone.

Stomachs slowly churn  
trying to soak up last bits  
of yesterday's muck.  
Dry, sticky, and a morning breath odor,  
tongues experience effects of missing necessities.  
Emaciated bodies pile up producing  
an unforgettable stench.

The dull responses from society rip apart  
efforts of those who actually care.  
Anything but quick,  
we take people's lives.



**Playing Card**  
*Rachel Marchant*

## Self-Portrait (Pastel)

*Emma Feldman*



## Her Man

*Lauren Barber*

He holds her drink for her  
tonight as she performs  
the song they devotedly share;  
merlot captured in twinkling crystal-  
the same rich hue of her nails  
waltzing along tuxedo keys;  
a sharp, handsome fellow,  
he is singing in sweet compliments  
in her fully elated ears;  
his verse runs tenderly through  
her wild mane, as dark as the  
obsidian cities atop ivory plateaus

Embracing, now, only her solitude,  
the fallboard's atonal bang  
focuses her thoughts on a single  
place-setting, and resounding in  
her swollen heart,  
ushers polished tears.

## **Chocolate Milkshake (With bananas)**

*Lauren Barber*

Melancholy procession down gravel  
Roads beneath ancient trees  
In the midst of winter;  
Mother pressed my ebony skirts,  
And a ribbed turtleneck sweater  
Swallows my throat, already  
Torn dry with searing grief;  
In the sullen stretch I noticed  
A single auburn strand-  
I held my darling sister's head  
In my lap-just this morning  
She wailed;  
Onyx flats nipped my feet  
And hunger gnawed in my belly,  
Home finally, my headache sought  
Relief in chocolate-banana milkshake-  
As we used to share, when he would  
Sing me stories of his youth;  
Dammit-  
Lips pursed, teeth drawing metal blood  
My disbelieving eyes met  
Those green bananas  
As if their chocolate intensity (alone)  
Could ripen them,  
And emptying every reserve of strength, I  
Threw my earth-bound body to  
Our waxed hardwood floors and  
Shrieked insane cries.



**Self Portrait**  
*RSanda Dorr*

## Before the Intervention

*Lindsay DeMaria*

i.

Some idiot took Jonestown  
and encased it in a snowglobe.  
The glass dome reveals sweltering  
jungle foliage bombarded by  
white flaking particles.

ii.

The mother and child rush into  
the drugstore. "Be good," she says,  
"This will take about a minute."  
His mother argues with the pharmacist,  
Jim Jones, about pills and co-pay.  
She does not notice her child  
disappear into the aisle.

The display with the transparent  
spheres grabs at his attention. He  
lifts the nearest trinket off the shelf  
and rolls the toy utopia in his hands.

iii.

"White Night" begins, the real tragedy,  
the rehearsal is over. Here come the men  
in sweat-bleached shorts with gashes  
on their sunburnt legs. They take the ravaged  
children out of the well. Their swollen eyes leak tears.  
The men lead them back to the village.

Inside a melting plastic shack, the wilderness  
beaten medic women are busy with infants.  
Their tangled, matted hair hides  
their expression as they roll out the hypodermics.

The syringes are primed with purple  
liquid that looks right for the tropics.  
The children from the well stop crying  
and watch the needles disappear into  
the newborns' foreheads.  
Grape juice, cyanide and valium.  
The babies shut their eyes.

Now the children are offered  
small plastic cups. Those who  
can remember a time before  
sun-scorched jungle think it is  
Kool-Aid. "Drink," say the women with dirt smeared  
faces.

All the children from the well drink.

iv.

The boy in the drugstore has  
a bleeding cracked lip, bruised arms  
and swelling eyes. He leaves  
the trinket on the floor and returns to his mother's side.  
She is still  
arguing with sterile Jim Jones who  
looks nothing like the grim encased  
women in Guyana.

He tries to grab his mother's hand—  
he wants to go home—but she swats  
him away. "This will only take  
about a minute." The pharmacist  
behind the counter looks past  
the woman and winks at her son.  
The child wanders back to aisle.

Someone is picking up the discarded  
snowglobe. She places it back  
on the display and turns to face the boy.  
Her yellow teeth smile, her humid-crazed  
curls hide her expression, as she  
offers the boy a small plastic cup.

He drinks. The mixture dribbles  
down his chin and stains his shirt  
collar violet.

v.

Later, the mother and child leave  
the pharmacy. She buys her quiet,  
well-behaved son a snowglobe and  
displays it carelessly on his bedroom dresser.  
She notices the purple stains on his  
clothing and remembers the pitcher  
of Kool-Aid in the refrigerator.  
His shirt will need to be washed.

## **The French Quarter**

*Lindsay DeMaria*

On Rue Royale a golden  
harpsichord's radiance is reflected  
in shards of Southern Comfort  
whiskey bottles.

I smell like a grenadine  
Hurricane and hemp, as I  
maneuver past alley vendors  
selling "Fuck FEMA" t-shirts  
and red sequined Mardi Gras  
masks for five bucks.

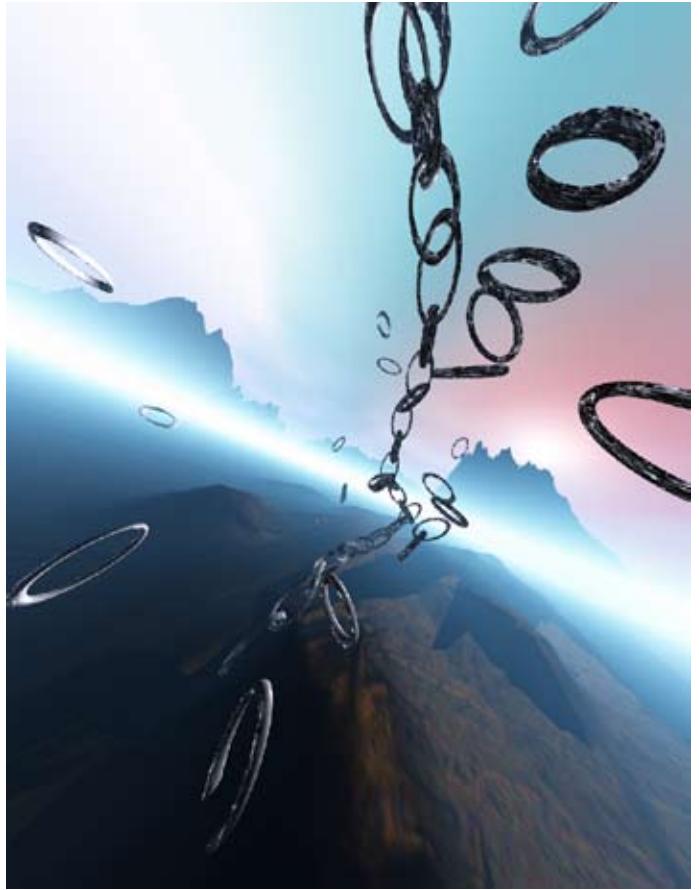
From any wrought iron balcony,  
I can see the white marble  
mausoleums in Lafayette Cemetery  
and hear the clink of plastic  
beads, abandoned on streetlights,  
rustled by the humid wind.

The boy in the voodoo store  
tells me the clubs on Bourbon Street  
blast the synthesizers louder now,  
to prove to us tourists, that the city  
is rebounding.

I buy a shrunken head keychain  
and glide into a postmodern  
art gallery, across the avenue, where I  
can snack on brie and crackers.



**Still Life (Oil)**  
*Herbie Hickmott*



## **Like Play-Doh in the Sun**

*Rachel Elzinga*

I surface in a world of tall people.

Those whose upper lips are no longer caked  
With sludge seeping from the nostrils.  
Those who can knot their own laces, retrieve  
Their own tissues, and swipe their own behinds.  
Those whose mittens don't need to be strung  
Through the sleeves of hand-me-down coats.

Aged and towering faces surround me.

Those whose hearts have been scorched like  
Play-doh in the sun.  
Those who have forgotten how to play he-loves-  
me-not cross-legged in the outfield.  
Those whose souls seek solace but fail to look in  
sidewalk chalk, trampolines, secret  
handshakes, treehouse clubs or the rhythm of a  
jump rope thwacking on cement.

I survey these unfamiliar creatures.

Tired ones who don't have naptime.  
Broken homes, hurt, beyond the power of a band-aid.  
Lonely people searching for a playmate.

And I retreat  
To the childhood glory  
I once longed  
To escape.

**Chain**

*Trevor Konsko*

## **Fingerprints**

*Lauren Pappacena*

You gave me a bouquet of fallen leaves  
from the cherry tree in grandma's backyard.  
It's fruit was plump with porcelain precious youth.

Bark gnawed hands washed over the summer sky.  
That grassy syrup stained our door-knob knees.  
A sunset like clumsily spilled orange juice.

Your eyes mirror gaping honey suckles,  
whose sweet elixir coated our taste buds.  
We would suck the day with a lively thirst.

Grizzled, sapless, a sign that all things pass-  
the old tree molded with fingerprints  
that could be traced right back to you and me.



**Surrealism**  
*Casey Poehlein*



**Painting**  
*Mara Martinez-*

## **I Don't Believe In Ghosts, But I Believe In You**

*Herbie Hickmott*

When I departed, you were still witty and alert,  
still laughing and moderately healthy.

I picked up the receiver of a dull, grey telephone  
in a picturesque Italian hotel.  
I dialed your telephone number,  
extended with international codes and personal passwords.  
I asked the routine questions, expecting  
the same cheerful and quick responses.  
I received a distant reply, maybe  
it was the ocean stretched out between us,  
maybe, you were distracted.  
I was wrong, you became sick, stopped smiling,  
and became the same muted color as the telephone.

When I arrived home on a rainy day,  
in a rainy summer, it became clear.  
Six days passed, and we had said our goodbyes.  
You departed.

## **Burn Out In Aisle 8**

*Herbie Hickmott*

A dull ding rings as the doors open  
and close again quickly,  
like a bouncer admitting me into a club.  
The cashier watches me as I slowly  
meander through the lengthy aisles.  
The overhead sound system barely emits any sound,  
yet I can still hear the distant hum of a Top-40 hit.

He listens to something else.  
He hears the bass blasting,  
and sees me walking to the weak beat of the DJ,  
while the strobe lights from the back of the store blink on and off.  
I take out my cell phone to answer a call,  
which he sees a glow stick.  
I quickly place my drink on the counter.

As he stands, eagerly awaiting my next move,  
I notice his ears studded with small black gages.  
He came to work this morning,  
working a mixture of marijuana  
and half a bottle of Tequila from Tijuana.  
I watch his alarmingly bloodshot eyes,  
bright and blazing like a red spotlight.  
He grunts and asks if I need anything else.  
I decline, and he relies,  
“Your fix will cost you a buck sixty-six.”

## **Self-Portrait**

*Mary Jane Robinson*



## **Like a Dusty Old Photograph**

*Kelsey Hughes*

An old photograph discarded, smoky and tattered  
No light shined upon it since decades ago  
Captivated, I stare trying to listen  
To hear a man's life through somber melodies  
He speaks through silent expressions as though begging to be heard

His lips pursed, tight, cracked with crimson stains  
His skin parched and pleading for moisture  
Neck strained and stocky with hard-earned muscle  
Forehead squeezed with waves of tension  
An unsubtle vein raised like a scar  
Cheeks flushed with dusty black, matted by cool sweat  
Hands no longer soft, now callused and stern  
In his eyes, I do not see sapphire, emerald, or charcoal brown  
I see his life through listening eyes

The midnights he sat with a glass bottle of scotch in his hand  
The fourteen hours a day he worked  
    Suffocated by the smoke and oxygen-deprived tunnels  
The day his mother knelt on the gravel  
    Begging his father to stay  
The day he grew up into the forlorn and cynical  
    Yet driven and hopeful man he was  
Until he took his last hollow breath

I stare at this man knowing we will never exchange hands  
Yet I feel as though we have met  
It's just an old photograph, you say  
Nothing more than scrap  
But who is to say this man's story is not worth the time to listen?  
A pearl in the sea of pebbles, he could be  
If someone took the time to search the murky waters of Ordinary

What would come of the world if all subtle greatness  
Was overlooked and forgotten?  
Like last Sunday's paper  
Like an old shoe under your bed  
Like a dime dropped in the crosswalk of Madison and Third  
Like a dusty old photograph

## **Lunar Eclipse**

*Kelsey Hughes*

So many words we have exchanged in all,  
None as meaningful as the honest silence.  
With each breath we reassured our presence.  
We were there, really there like the bass in  
The speakers, tempo pulsing with our hearts.  
Windows cracked, autumnal breeze refreshing  
The stale concentrated air holding us captive.  
Eyelash silhouettes from the passing car lights.

Enchanted by the moon above us polishing  
The indigo sky. Wonderwall sang as we  
Drove along, without a care fogging our drive.  
A fluorescent red light yielded only our car.  
Lunar eclipse was my heart, shielded by  
The misconceptions of night's hazy grasp



**3D Modeling**  
*Peter Nieuwkerk*



**Self-Portrait**  
*Cassandra Leonti*

**New York, New York**

*Kate Moller*

Puzzle-piece skyline  
gives way to city buildings,  
intimidating in size.  
The streets are lined with  
endless sidewalk,  
fallen leaves lay inconspicuously  
amongst the charming grit  
of the city.

The sent of cigarettes-  
morning coffee  
car exhaust  
permeates the air, enough  
to make me feel silly  
with lunch-blackening rapture.  
Further delighted, I watch  
as rouge-lipsticked women  
expertly wave at yellow taxis  
as if it's a profession.  
The diligent worker bees,  
one by one,  
rush to accommodate them.

And with these seemingly  
strange occurrences; I cast my gaze skyward,  
in search of the opening  
I must have stumbled upon.  
Little Alice has fallen down  
the rabbit hole to Wonderland,  
only to find  
they're all mad here.

## Emergency Evacuation

*Jordyn Kimelheim*

The film is still spooling off the reel when  
the lights flash on and it ends too soon,  
like James Dean dying in the twisted metal of his Porsche.  
The manager does a voiceover, her best “everything’s fine” act.  
It’s like calmly saying “fire” in a crowded theatre.  
We stride to the emergency exit, sign glinting,  
like the lens of a paparazzo’s camera,  
waiting to capture iconic images,  
as we walk a red carpet covered with suspicious stains  
and chewed up gum that sticks to my plastic patent flats.

As we shiver and pose in the February chill,  
glittering stars project to bitter, searching eyes.  
A reminder there are even brighter ones,  
frozen on celluloid, awaiting their cues,  
and the memory of their dialogue, wittier than our own,  
echoes off the pavement  
like this parking lot’s  
the best soundstage in Hollywood.



**Surrealism**  
*Rachel Marchant*

## **Do the Rubik's Cube!**

*Jordyn Kimelheim*

Ten of us,  
twisting the night away.  
Colors jumble as we jive  
to a click clack retro techno beat  
that's vaguely Germanic,  
but mostly geometric.  
We pop and lock  
and jerk and slam and jam  
on plastic squares we slide together.  
We're angry and cramped  
and headaches throb above the music.  
But then, like breakdancing in reverse  
it all fits in place.

A perfect symmetry for  
the genius choreographer  
and his exhausted, satisfied hands.

**Surrealism**  
*Katrien Genyn*



## **Fire**

*Jordyn Kimelheim*

A guest uninvited, she arrived very bright  
and ravenous, ate plaster, plastic food.  
She's beautiful and scarlet, but not polite.  
Lit up and smoked, the air that hazily exudes  
So thick and black, it chokes. She wants to seize  
it all, so selfish. She claimed the shelves with light  
and branded wood as fuel through ash tattoos.  
But mostly there's a heat that goes all night.  
Her burnin g, shining, vicious, maddened mood.

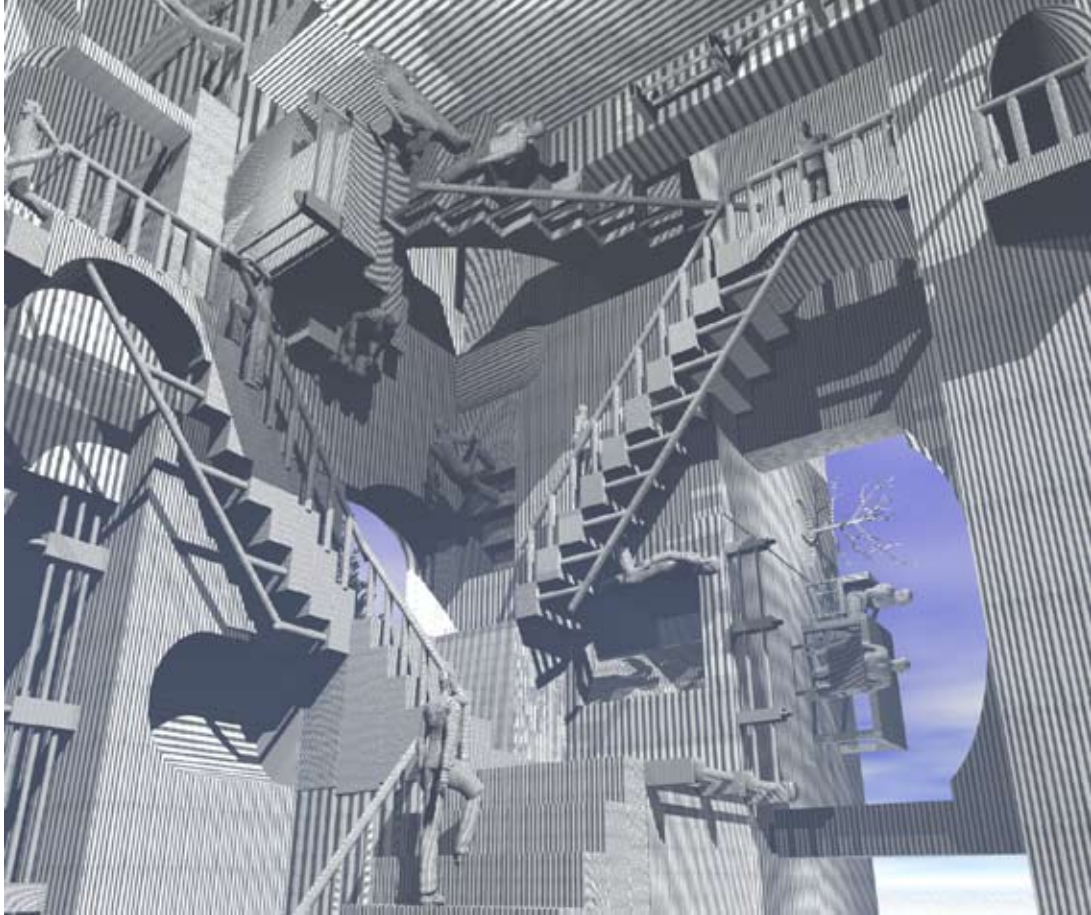


**Self Portrait**

*Alex Wang*

## **Relativity**

*John Presti*



### **Summer Resort in Winter**

*Jordyn Kimelheim*

After the tourist season-  
When laughter doesn't beat down  
in rays of joy and money  
that these happy travelers direct  
toward the cheapest souvenirs, their fondest memories-  
What do you have, you sad little town?  
When all your fair- weather friends have left you  
and all your locals will do nothing more  
than be fishermen, bartenders, or Bruce Springsteen?

The precious sun that nourishes you and pays your bills,  
is hiding out in the eastern hemisphere.  
It needs a break from tanning your bikinied livelihood  
making them desire sweet ice cream that melts down their hands  
in a cold, runny stream of thwarted ambition.  
Even the waters rebel,  
tossing and turning and trying to escape,  
like your dissatisfied teenagers who will grow  
to be fishermen, bartenders, or Bruce Springsteen.

## Free dom [free-duh m]-exemption from external control

*Abby Kreisher*

A half painted porch  
One side green, smart, and new  
The other worn and broken  
I stepped over both  
Feeling the hard wood.  
Little splinters  
Gripping at my feet.

The railing shields me  
A struggle to liberate myself.

I walked through the cool grass  
Still slick with the morning's dew  
My toes remembering the softness of a moss covered rock.

Finally I arrived at the water  
Still shivering from a cold summer night  
The sun had yet to greet it today  
Hiding itself behind a gray protruding hand.

I riddled myself of the t-shirt and shorts  
I had slept in only an hour before.

So Early  
Freedom  
Letting me slide off my last bit of restriction  
The water embraced me as though missing me  
Greeting me with all the warmth it could muster  
Yet still chilling me.

Movement  
My body slipped through the water  
Barely breathing.

I sailed to the other shore  
It let me go  
Dismissing me faster then it had welcomed me.



**Self Portrait**  
*James Lim*



**Self Portrait**  
*Steph Gilstein*

### **A Drive To The Basket**

*Peter Malamas*

A fluorescent orange comet soaring out of reach  
Flexing my knees I spring to snatch it  
The foam blocks padding my palms  
Nestle the comet as it is launched at me.

I look into space and see many galaxies  
But their constellations aren't nearly as bright  
As the sun that I am shooting towards  
A black hole quickly grabs my mind  
Alluring me, pulling me to move closer.

Deftly, I assemble the orb to my rockets  
Ready to take off and thrust forward full-throttle  
The decisive movement shears the surrounding air  
The vacuum I enter tugs at my eardrums.

An opposing asteroid belt clogs my path  
Colliding would be detrimental  
It seems as if it will be light years  
Until the landing gears of my spacecraft can be used  
I fear that I will become the next Challenger  
Exploding only footsteps into my journey.

I revolve the comet around my body  
Like a satellite enraptured by my gravitational pull.  
Upon dodging my near deathly fate  
I lift off with all of Houston watching  
Like an Apollo mission into the sky.

## **A Mother & Child's Outing To The Pool**

*Peter Malamas*

The mother beside her son  
Hovering over the swelling edge,  
Confronting the brunt of toxic chemicals.

The child's elegant descent into the welcoming pool,  
A balmy blanket captures his spirit,  
The boy scans a mystical underworld.

The mother witnesses her child in repulse and disdain  
Submerged in hairballs, snot, and other muck,  
Contaminating the water like mutant bacteria  
Multiplying inside a Petri dish.

The scuba diver proceeds on his wondrous escapade,  
Discovering entangled networks of coral reefs  
That transform into an underwater jungle.  
He propels along the bottom of the sea,  
His beating flippers whirling the coral reefs into a vortex,  
Colliding neighbors into much disarray  
Like wreckage of a sunken ship destroyed by pirates.

The child begins to struggle,  
Refusing to comply with his body's demand.  
Air seeps out the corners of his mouth.  
As time ticks louder approaching the end  
The diver escapes the threatening constraint  
The finality forces him to defy gravity  
Filling his lungs at the surface.

Returning from the enchanted depths,  
The hypnotized child hears a faint voice  
An annoying and repulsive tone of reality  
The mother urging him to exit the pool  
As the grimy liquid plasters his firming skin.

But his soul refuses to part ways  
His feeling too tough to overcome  
For he does not want to leave what lies beneath.  
The son turns his back and deflects his mother's arms,  
His imaginative spirit rampant within,  
As he plunges to the real world,  
And the fantasy awaiting his return.



**Landscape (Acrylic)**

*Jackie Muto*

## **Eyes**

*Michelle Mattes*

The deep brown eyes  
Fixed on me through a shattered mirror  
I know that they are your eyes  
Even if my tears cry through them  
When I speak  
People say I sound like you  
Impossible  
Never can my voice sound so sweet  
Love expressed in every syllable  
Escaping through the teeth  
Stained with coffee from the years  
Painting on a weak smile  
I hold my sisters delicate hand  
My black dress becoming a shield  
Having to stay brave for her,  
Knowing the pain inflicting in her  
Is increasing by the second  
I've had sixteen years,  
Her,  
Only twelve  
An unfair timeframe  
Memories turn to black and white  
The hugs and I'm sorrys  
Only pads  
Protecting from the fall  
For which I was pushed



**Self-Portrait**  
*Mariah Samulea*

## **History Being Made Before My Eyes**

*Julie Mento*

“Indoor recess”  
Said the monotone voice  
The infamous boos  
Came from the restless 4th graders  
No reason was given  
No explanation to why  
We were sustained inside like caged birds  
On the warm September day  
Teachers’ whispers avoided our little ears  
Darting eye contact  
as if we looked at them we would know  
Something was wrong  
Expression of shock appeared on their faces  
Quickly vanished into fake smiles  
We had no idea  
To the degree of what was happening  
Outside our comforting world

Oblivious to the situation  
We went along our way  
Playing, learning, skipping home  
To discover mother sister  
transfixed to the T.V.  
Tears slowly dripping down their faces  
“Breaking News”  
Shouted on every channel  
Each filled with  
Images of fire trucks  
with dust colored clouds.  
Crying people panicking  
in their desperate city  
Fragment of words  
“Plane”  
“World Trade”  
“Crashed”  
was all I heard  
Naïve to what was happening  
I blanked out  
An innocent mind full of questions

## Something to Fix

*Julie Mento*

His calloused hands are coarse as a brick wall  
Evidence of each birdhouse created  
Of each fishing rod creatively fixed  
Of everything we thought was broken  
Made new  
Our unsteady confidence  
Is always proven falsely.

He thinks beyond the average mind  
Ideas and innovations  
The starting points of each project  
He decides to overtake  
But his ambitious thoughts  
Are brought to a halt by  
Tired eyes  
Fragile knees  
IV injections twice a week

He is never afraid of what doctors say  
Their words are just wind chimes  
Pronouncing themselves abruptly  
But never pondering on one's mind.

And as he sits on a bench  
Their words vanish from his mind  
New thoughts arise  
Something to fix  
Something to make new.

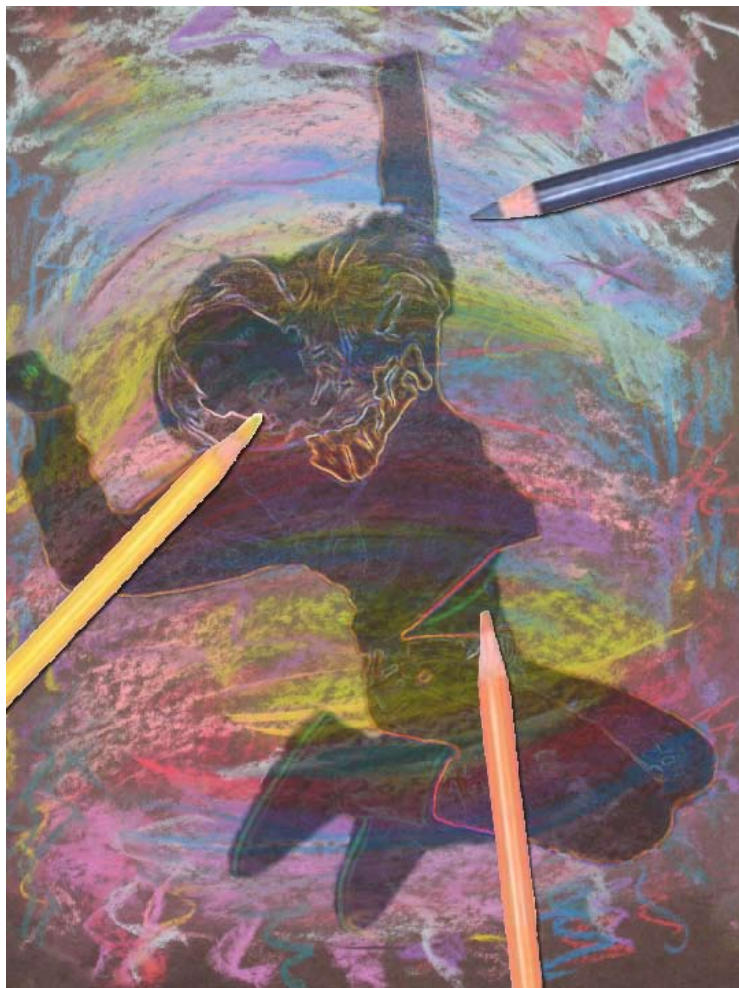


**Figures**  
*CJ Andris*

## **School Bus**

*Kate Moller*

Yellow box, a neatly  
wrapped present.  
Bus ride home,  
moving ever so slowly.  
Out the window,  
telephone-wire bird  
faintly  
utters a cry, merely  
painted into the background.  
And rain, diamond-tipped,  
Angry, pelting,  
distorts the window is clouded  
by the necessary breaths  
of those within.  
Colors bleed,  
becoming one.  
Technicolor vomit.  
Blinded, I see far more  
vividly have before.



## **Self Portrait**

*Casey Bolinski*

## Wisdom Teeth Extraction

*Ruthanne Myers*

Bloody gauze  
forced against stitches  
to staunch the warm gush,

savagely sliced,  
two knife incisions  
mirroring two above.

Stagnant, salty, rusty iron  
obvious on my desiccate tongue,  
crackled beads more apparent.

Tears leave a sapphire staircase  
royal carpets under my eyes-  
almond finger print shadows  
linger beneath my ballooned chin  
and along my jaw-  
War paint.

Sleep persistently evades me,  
no harmless dreams of distraction,  
I am left,  
alone,  
agony and frustration double team me.

Searing degrees of discomfort,  
melting  
ice packs reduced,  
mere jelly now  
against battle scars.

## 3D Modeling

*Steffane Creighton*



## **Makeup Not War**

*Lauren Pappacena*

Cosmetic casualties are scattered,  
a massacre of mascara  
amongst a stub of pulverized pink lip gloss-  
The smoothed over nub left from an impromptu amputation.

Black gunk infects the top of mascara, like a pussing wound,  
sticky and dank with oozing vitality.  
While gun powder cover up flutters through the dead air ominously,  
an indication of the rampant pandemonium that took place here.

Bobby pin bayonets,  
their points dull from repetitive puncture.  
Cotton ball bombs lay misshapen from the foundation that projects a  
cakey sludge,  
which masses in a slumberous heat of hellish pain.

A mutilation of makeup,  
this bedlam of beauty products has ceased  
with a foreboding air of repetition  
to ensue tomorrow morning.



**Charcoal**  
*Kristen Erickson*

## Surrealism

*Alyssa Marx*



### **Newsprint**

*Alicia Pustay*

The scissors bit, stoic, through newsprint  
Lines, drunkenly slanted, through  
'In lieu of' and 'survived by'

The articles are badges of courage,  
Telling of warriors, their struggles.  
Victims of heart disease, cancer, and time.

Memories, defaced, on newsprint  
That falls, apathetically.

Forgotten, read of by someone alien and abandoned,  
Like yourself; a stranger  
Cutting through newsprint,  
And wondering.

## **Blood Diamonds**

*Sean Roberts*

The diamonds of Africa are stained red with blood  
Too many people do not know what it is from  
It is from children being torn apart from their mother's hands  
As she is brutally executed in front of them  
The eyes of innocence gone in a quick muzzle flash  
Refugees throw the children over a wooden boat or stump...whatever works  
Fear erodes them like a horrid disease  
As the machete is taken from a leather holster  
Muscles ache steadfast and real  
As the blood stained blade is lifted into the air  
The heartbeat of a small child races too fast for them to take  
It finally hits  
So sharp  
Cutting through tendon after tendon  
Vein after vein  
Blood spews profusely out of what is now a fleshy stump  
Depressing screams illuminate a once happy face  
A face now desensitized and spattered with blood  
Where does all of their blood go?  
24 carots of conflict  
Blood showers the engagement rings



**Bradley Jahn**  
*Surrealism*

## Hardboiled, Yet So Cracked

*Jordyn Kimelheim*

I was kicked back in my chair, feet propped on the cheap metal desk, when the dame walked in. She was dressed in all black, because it was slimming, and as she appeared out of the shadows you could see her cold, hard eyes and her mousy brown hair. She was my wife, Trudy, and she was no knockout.

“I can’t believe you’re actually doing this,” she said testily.

“And good afternoon to you, too. Take a seat. Like the office?”

“It’s not an office! It’s our garage,” Trudy replied. She began to pace, tacitly declining my earlier offer.

“It is an office,” I said evenly. “I moved the car out and everything. And plus, I hung up my certificate. On the wall. Right there,” I pointed to it and read aloud. “Robert P. Sloughman, certified private investigator. See, certified.”

“You got that from a company you saw in a commercial. You’re not a real detective. Oh Bob, why’d you quit?” Trudy whined. She was still pacing, tap-tapping on the cement floor like she was using Morse code, trying to get me to understand a message that I rejected when spoken out loud, the one I was rejecting right now.

“Because I didn’t want to be a construction worker for the rest of my life.”

“You were a contractor. You made good money. Think about your family.”

I sat there and thought real solemnly about my family, for about two seconds. The wife who yelled at me and the teenage daughters who ignored me. We were really cute together. Like the freaking Cosbys, if they were white and didn’t like each other very much. Then I responded.

“Trudy, babe, I’ll make money. Because I’m gonna get loads of customers. And the way I’m gonna get them, is by busting the crime wave. I’ll—”

“What crime wave?” she interrupted.

“Uh....the crimes that have been going on for the past few weeks. You know. In waves. Jesus, woman, don’t you read the paper? Talk to your neighbors? Are you so into yourself that you don’t even...never mind. Anyway, I’m going to investigate and bust the perps. Probably just some stupid hoods. My rep spreads, I get business, and Johnnie Law might even slip me some dough as a reward. We’ll be able to pay our mortgage, and there might be enough left over for you to buy some shoes. Capiche?”

Trudy looked at me in disgust.

“Besides from that being the stupidest plan I’ve ever heard, since when do you talk like that? I mean, ‘Johnnie Law’? Who do you think you are, Mike Hammer? You’re just a guy with a hammer.” With that zinger, she turned on her heel and walked through the open entrance into the Pennsylvania sunshine. I couldn’t be too angry. It was the most clever thing she’d said in 20 years of marriage. Rubbing my temples, I stared at the digital alarm clock I had taken from the guest bedroom. 1:33. The clock didn’t give me the satisfaction of being able to watch the hands spin ‘round the face. It just randomly shifted to the next time. Watching it felt like Chinese water torture. I kept waiting, waiting for the minute to change, for the hour to pass, for a customer to show, for something to do, but never knowing when (if?) it would happen. 1:34. I’d go nuts if I kept sitting around like this. I decided to start working on my investigation of the crimes. The police would be a good place to start. They could give me the skinny on what’s been happening with the

case. There wasn't a land line in the office, so I pulled out my cell phone and dialed. The phone felt small, fragile, and unnaturally smooth in my meaty hand, still calloused from heavy labor.

The other line picked up immediately.

"911, what is the nature of your emergency?"

Damn it. I had called 911. Force of habit. Who knows the number for the actual police, anyway? Might as well run with it. Maybe the operator can help me.

"Yeah... uh...got any dirt on local crimes? Burglaries?"

"Sir, is this an emergency?"

"Umm...no, not really. But they were emergencies at one time. Someone must have called them in. Did you get a call last week from uh...I have the address on my desk somewhere. Let me find it. Yeah uh...Beech Street. Something about a break in?"

"Sir, unless you have an actual emergency to report I'm going to terminate the call."

I panicked. "No wait! Don't hang up! Do you know the phone number for the township police—?"

Click. The operator hung up on me. What a bitch. I should probably call the real cops. After a 20-minute scramble for a phone book, I had my number.

No one picked up for several rings. Finally an extremely bored sounding teenaged girl answered.

"Madison Township Police. Can I direct your call?"

"Yeah, I need to talk to someone important. The captain, or a sheriff or something."

"About what?" she said, sounding slightly more interested. At the very least she stopped talking in monotone.

"Crime."

"No, really? You called the police. Like, what specifically?"

"The crime wave."

"What crime wave?" she questioned.

"You know all the crime that's been around here lately, kid? The break ins? I'm a detective investigating." It felt nice to say that out loud. I'm a detective.

"I like, really don't know what you're talking about. I'm just the receptionist. Summer job, you know. Do you wanna talk to my dad?"

"Who's your dad?" I questioned.

"Sergeant Murphy. He's not that high up, but he works here. Dad!" the girl shouted. "This detective guy's on the phone and he wants to talk to you!"

I heard a garbled conversation in the background, then someone new picked up. He sounded angry.

"I don't know who the hell you are but you should know that we don't appreciate prank calls here at the station. We're busy."

"Oh, this isn't a joke. I'm actually a detective. Bob Sloughman, P.I."

"Who?"

"Bob Sloughman, P.I." I repeated.

"Didn't you remodel my kitchen?"

I pointedly ignored his question and kept talking. I kept asking him for some dope about the crime wave, about the burglaries, but he didn't really help me.

“Look, Bob,” he said finally. “There’s no crime wave. Just a few houses broken into. That’s it. This isn’t Compton. Everything’s fine. Stop sticking your nose into it.”

Then he hung up without warning. It was pretty rude, but I still liked him better than the 911 operator.

After a few minutes thought and some more existential clock watching, I decided to go out and work my case, lone wolf style. I didn’t need the coppers to help me. I’d interview people, get some hot tips, maybe do a stakeout. The whole shebang.

I walked outside and pressed the buttons on the wall-mounted keypad. The white garage door rolled down, a metal curtain closing on my office. I squinted in the glaring sun, fighting the urge to go back to get my sunglasses. When my eyes had adjusted I crossed the street to reach the home of the one guy who I knew could help me- Kenneth Johnson, head of the neighborhood watch. The group was mostly made up of bored housewives and busybodies, and Ken was no exception. But they were the only ones who paid any attention to local affairs. Ken would have the scoop.

Conveniently enough he was outside, mowing his already pristine lawn.

“Hey Ken! How are ya, buddy!” I shouted. We weren’t friends but I figured I’d play it like we were.

He stopped the mower. The sudden lack of noise and blowing grass left a sort of eerie calm. I hoped he’d fill the void with some good talk.

“Uh...hello Bob. What brings you to this side of street?”

“Well, it’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood. Thought I’d go for a stroll. I have a hunch things are starting to get less peaceful around here.”

“Oh?” he said with puzzlement. “Well, I guess you’re right. School’s letting out soon, the kids will be everywhere.”

I ripped up a few blades of grass with my size 12 sneakers. He winced at the injury to the intensely manicured ground.

“I was thinking more like the delinquents will be everywhere.”

“What are you talking about, Bob?”

This is when I got angry. Maybe I was a little harsh, but I’d had a rough day.

“Cut the crap, Ken! I know you know about the crime wave! You and your stupid neighborhood watch. Trying to cover it up, make everything seem all shiny and perfect. You can’t fool me! I know the truth!” He looked shocked.

“I’m going to have to ask you to step off my property, Bob.”

I could have roughed him up real good, but I didn’t. I politely stepped off his property and jumped into my car. A nice long drive would cool me off.

My nice long drive turned into a nice long trip to the local bar. I’ll admit it, I got pretty smashed. But I’m a responsible guy, so I slept it off in my car until I sobered up. It was past midnight when I finally got home.

I knew something wasn’t right when I saw the lights. Red, white, blue, they burned themselves into the night sky like fireworks. Fireworks that didn’t explode or fall to Earth, just stayed in place, illuminating everything.

When I approached the house I saw the source. Police cars. I ran toward them. They were already bringing out the body. It was Trudy, in a black dressing gown, like she had dressed for her own funeral. The only mar in the monochromatic outfit was the bloodstains from a big gash in her head.

An officer walked toward me me. I read his badge – Sgt. Murphy engraved on gold plating.

“Are you Mr. Sloughman?” he asked.

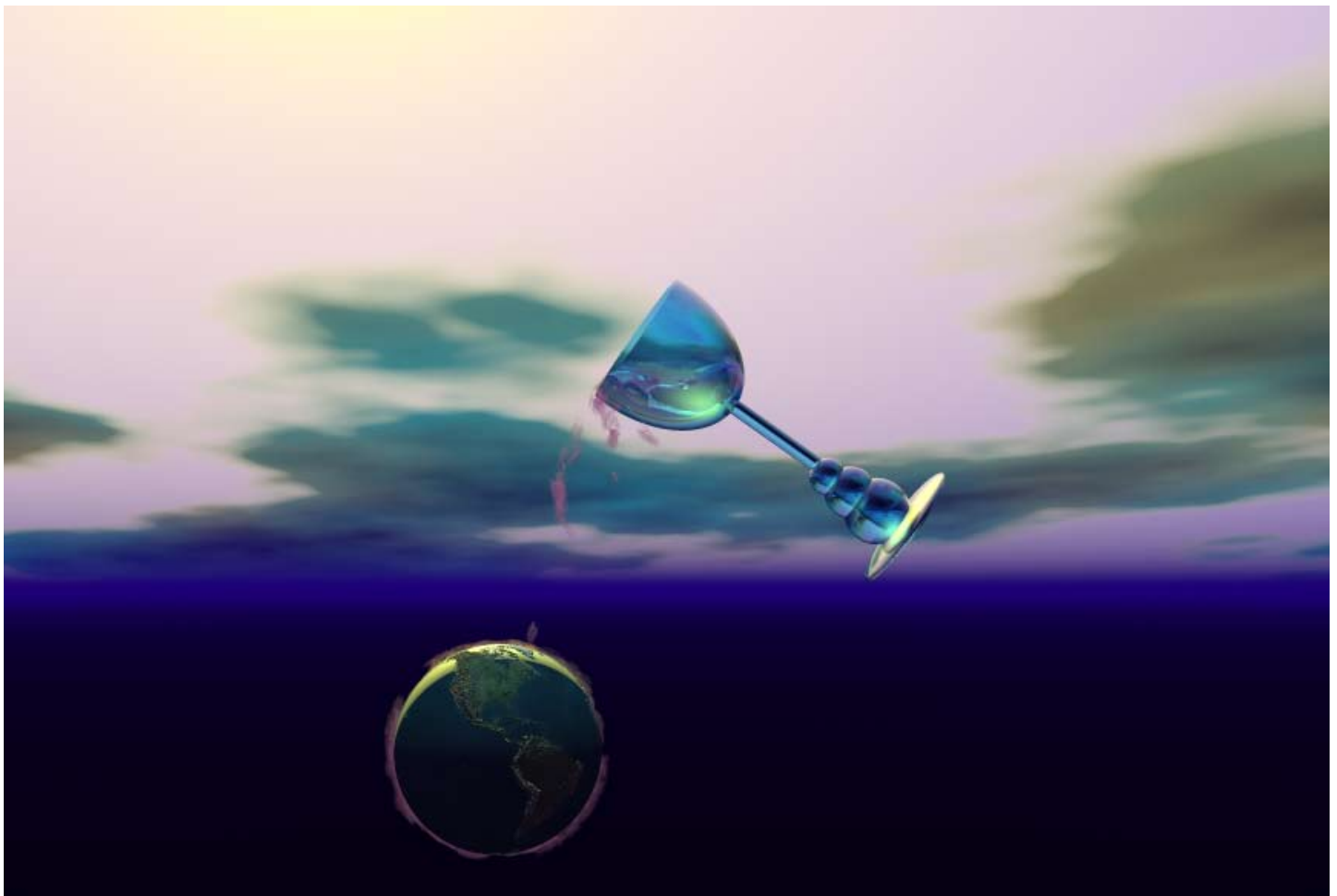
I nodded, already knowing what he was going to say.

“I’m so sorry...your wife....” Sgt. Murphy faltered for a second, then continued. “There was a robbery. She must have interrupted it. They hit her with a blunt object.” He paused again. “I guess you were right this afternoon, about the crime wave...”

We stared at each other for a long, nervous minute until Murphy excused himself, muttering something about “police business”.

I just stood there, paralyzed, transfixed by the spectacle, by this sudden, though not entirely unexpected, shattering of the suburban serenity, by the bloody footprints dripping down my front steps. The sirens wailed and my daughters cried in the background, providing a hellish soundtrack to my reflections. The girls were the elevator music from a ride that never ends, just keeps going down, down into the darkness. I moved to comfort them.

The funny thing is, I wasn’t really that sad. All I could think about was the life insurance money, and that I’ve got a hell of a case on my hands.



**Andrea Kuhn**  
*Wine Glass*

## Once A Widow, Forever A Wife

Inspired by **Hamlet** (Shakespeare)

*Herbie Hickmott*

After another year of unhappy and stormy marriage, I pretended to accept my husband's gift of gas station daisies on Valentine's Day with joy and love. The flowers, like our love life will bloom and thrive for a week annually and wilt away rather quickly. I hear most couples get the seven-year itch, but I guess we were too busy focusing on keeping our newborn son out of the intensive care unit (damn health problems) and making sure the family company was still afloat. Instead, after twenty-seven years of 'wedded bliss', I have not begun to itch but rather claw at the same spot on my neck where he used to caress.

As a woman of fifty-one, I look at what my life has become. My twenty-year old son has become accustomed to locking himself in his room and painting his emotions into supposed 'works of art'. My less-than-kingly nobleman husband spends more time sitting behind his desk than at home with me. I know my vows to my husband once included something along the lines of "until death do us part", but until the death of what? Death of my heart? Literally or figuratively? Literally, it still beats like a bass drum in perfect rhythm. Figuratively, my loving died about eight years ago, so I see nothing wrong with my, shall I say, long deserved hobbies?

Despite being two years younger, Claudius, my husband Hamlet's brother, is more mature and worldly in every other way. And while Claudius has enjoyed his life single, never making any serious commitment (the path I often wish I had taken), he is a wonderful companion. Hamlet should not have trusted me, his seemingly beloved wife, for the month he left me here while he was off enjoying the free drinks and hotel suites in London on a business trip. After a week of sleeping in an empty bed, I became restless. I conjured up my plan: to claim a rodent problem in the bedroom and invite Claudius to come and take a, let's say, friendly peek around the royal bedroom.

The next thing I remember, I fall back onto the scarlet satin pillow and brush the crumpled sheets off my glistening body. Sighing, I turn over and instead of seeing the routine balding and scarce silver hair, I see Claudius, exhausted, rise to his feet, pass the fresh bouquet of flowers on my vanity, and head for the bathroom to wash.

After tucking the sheets back into their proper place, I slide into my bathrobe and hear a knock on my bedroom door, and in walks my son, (also named Hamlet, which was also not my idea, I did not need two men walking around this house with the same archaic name) "I heard there was a rodent problem?" he questions.

"Oh, never mind, I thought I had seen something under the bed; it was just your father's ratty old sock," I explained, seeing Claudius out of the corner of my eye hide behind the antique curtain that leads to the balcony.

I guess it was at this moment that I realized I still had plenty of life to live and love, and I was becoming more and more tired of my husband. Everything about him – his slowly growing bald spot, his lack of interest in anything and everything (including me), but most of all his loss of hearing had begun to test my patience.

After young Hamlet had left, Claudius returned to my bed and did not leave until my husband returned three weeks later.

...

As Hamlet and I ate breakfast on a May morning, our son walks in mumbling something incoherent. I ask him to speak up and he screams, “Seams! Mom! The seams of these pants are not right! The cleaners did not listen to my specific order!”

“What has Ophelia done to you?” I said with disgust. “Removed your pride and manhood and transformed you into her little play toy which she can control you? Are you her puppet, or are you her-?”

The young and naïve Hamlet interrupted, “Am I her what? Her boyfriend? Yes? Her future husband, yes. I cannot comprehend what prevents you two from loving Ophelia as much as I do.”

“Oh, where to begin,” I explained, “Maybe the fact that you two are practically siblings? You were born only seven sinfully long days apart, in the same damn hospital room. You’ve grown up together, try someone new. Hamlet, any mother would be wary if her son had gone from friendly, happy, and loving towards his family to someone distant, cold, and excluded. You spend your time either locked up in your room or writing poor excuses for sonnets with your drugged girlfriend.”

“She’s is not a drug addict!” Hamlet shrieked, exposing his (still) pubescent vocal chords. “Ophelia takes Anti-Depressants for her severe anxiety and depression.”

I scoffed, “Anxiety over what!? Deciding whether to look like a frumpy three-year old drowned rat or a lost lunatic must take a huge toll on her,” I paused “Hamlet, my son, I am not against you having a relationship with someone. As a twenty-year old young man and a college student, you need to move on with life. Date around! Make a few mistakes – be rebellious, never call a girl back, better yet, take a girl home for once! Intimacy does not last forever, trust me.”

I laughed to myself, knowing how oblivious old Hamlet was as he sat next to his son and read the Business section in the New York Times as he sipped a cup of decaffeinated coffee, per his usual morning routine. His blindness made me so angry. If I was any more obvious I would hang a flashing yellow neon sign in our bedroom that reads, “Honey, I’m not in love with you and I am having sex with your brother”, but he’d probably ignore it and ask me if I can turn off the evening news.

As my son left with a flamboyant sigh of his usual hatred, I grabbed my husband’s hand. With my sultriest voice, I whispered to him, “Meet me in the courtyard at nine tonight for a little rendezvous, please? I have a special surprise for you.” I batted my eyelashes to an uninterested audience. He grunted in acceptance. As I got up from the oak table, littered with various newspapers, bills, and memos, I rubbed his shoulders and kissed his ear.

Realizing for once in my life, I should actually care about my needs, and myself, I met the gray Hamlet in the courtyard at nine o’clock that night. Lit only by the dim city glow a few miles away and some cheap candles, he walked up talking business on his BlackBerry. I originally planned on renewing our marriage once more, but his ignorance to my intent was the last straw. I called him over and sat him down. As I began to massage his doughy and less than muscular back and shoulders, I coughed, signaling the start of my plan with Claudius.

...

“My husband, God rest his soul, was a good man.” As I stood before the entire company in the courtyard in a black Yves Saint Lauren gown (given to me as a gift from Claudius, which perfectly highlighted my newly taut figure), I struggled to produce tears behind my Dior sunglasses. I, like many other things in my previous marriage, had to fake my emotions while giving old Hamlet’s eulogy. I continued on, “Our almost twenty-eight

years of marriage were magical and everything I could have ever asked for. A loving father and husband, Hamlet was more than just a name plate in an office with a view, he was my true love.”

After the drawn out funeral service (finally) was over, I retreated to my room. I slid off my new Gucci shoes and peered into the full-length mirror, making a mental note to call my dermatologist about some new injections of Botox. The satin sheets were freshly pressed and the comforter, embroidered with a black and red criss-cross pattern, had just been sent from the cleaners. As I disrobed, I quickly removed my late husband’s framed picture from my nightstand and placed it in the hamper with the dirty laundry. Claudius quickly walked through the double doors, undressed, slid between the sheets, and rested his head next to mine.

...

The alarm clock rang at 7:45 a.m. and I recalled the night of passion that had preceded and remembered the sin both Claudius and I had committed. I slipped on my black terrycloth robe and walked down the kitchen steps, to see Hamlet sipping a cup of fresh acidic orange juice, moping, as usual. “Good Morning son, how are you today?” I asked, hoping for a simple answer.

“Me? Oh, now you care about me? I can’t believe-“ He rambled on, and I nodded occasionally. I heard bits and pieces about how he cannot fathom my ability to get any sort of a good night’s sleep in a time like this and how upset he was. I poured my routine cup of jet-black coffee, and caught my reflection in the window and remembered to call the hair salon, and zoned back into his rant. “...and now Ophelia wants me to go to her psychiatrist’s appointment with her tomorrow. I don’t know what to do. Know what!? I don’t want to, I want to sit here and cry. My father, my poor, poor father, dead at such a noble age. Why the hell are there even snakes in the suburbs of New York City? What are the odds of such a loving and caring man being killed by such a devilish and slithering creature?” He exhaled a heavy breath into his bowl of generic store brand oat flakes and peered out the window. “And why the hell is it going to be in the 40’s this week? Those pretty spring flowers are going to die in this frigid weather!”

“Is it really? I hadn’t even noticed the forecast” I paused, “Now son, your father would not have wanted you to grieve and stop all work. You have an interview for an internship today, right? We’re all upset, trust me, we are, but life needs to move on. If you are going to cry and mope and be unproductive, you can officially consider yourself a seven-year old child again. What does Mommy always say: To be working or not to be working – either way you need the money. Now lets get ready to go to the mall with that blank sheet of a girlfriend of yours.”

He whined and pushed his chair in and stomped up the stairs into his cave-like room. I yelled up to him, “Oh, and stop playing with my mirror, take those damn ‘MyFace’ pictures or whatever they are called in your own room with your own mirror! I’m sick and tired of finding my mirror on the bathroom floor. Don’t make me tell you again, or I’ll have you cut off!”

...

“So, Gertrude, what are we doing—”

“Oh honey,” I said with hopefully a noticeable amount of seniority in my voice to Ophelia, “Please call me Mrs. Hamlet. What are we going to do at the mall you ask, Ophelia? Well, to shop for things I need, of course!”

What I really needed was a good drink and to get out of that goddamn house, so I invited my son to experience the outside world for a change. He got all dressed up in some spiffy new black outfit, similar to the piles

of black button down shirts and dark washed jeans that rest peacefully in his closet. Ophelia was invited only on Hamlet's behalf, because Hamlet wanted an excuse to go into Express and ask for girls' sizes in their jeans. As she sat next to me in my champagne-colored E-Class Mercedes she settled into the jet-black leather. I saw out of the corner of my eye her already weathered-looking hand reach for the CD changer dial.

"Don't even think about it," I snapped. "Go listen to your weep-o or whatever on your own time. My car, my rules, my Bonnie Rait album. Who do you think you are?"

Everything, except Claudius, began to irritate me and make my one strand of elegant gray hair grow even faster. I needed something exciting to happen. I needed a reason to put the attention back on me, instead of my recently deceased spouse.

As we walked through the Manhattan Mall, Hamlet and Ophelia scattered away into Express and I saw the most perfect white and black dress in Charlotte Russe (who cares if it was cheap!?). It was at that moment I knew exactly how I would rekindle my relationship with the public eye.

...

Days raced by, and before I knew it, it had been two months exactly since my husband had, what word are we using again, oh yes, passed (like the kidney stone he was). My relationship with Claudius grew more passionate and serious with each heated night. I convinced Claudius that in order to keep the business and financial assets in place, the two of us should marry. Yes, our intimate relationship was thriving, but no one knew that we were together, as most saw us simply nod as we passed one another in the halls. The reason for the marriage (at least my motive), in its simplest explanation, was so I could keep the income I had been accustomed to. Because Hamlet and Claudius' father had started the company, it was intended to remain strictly a family business. Besides employees, only spouses of living family members would receive any sort of income from the company. Thus, after two months of me forgetting what the inside of Tiffany's and Saks Fifth Avenue looked like, I initiated the engagement to Claudius because there was no way I was going to sit behind a desk in some unflattering outfit and actually do work.

As Claudius and I stood before the company at an early July gala, I explained, "I have found someone who loves me as much as Old Hamlet. I see my late husband in his eyes everyday and we are to be married this weekend. I know the time span may be shocking, but this marriage shall calm my nerves and I will be at peace as every morning I can wake to see the closest thing, besides my son of course, to my past husband as possible."

Had I really tricked two men? I thought to myself, my son, an entire company and the public into believing my love for Claudius is more than sexual and my devotion to my son and old husband are more than purely coincidental? Come on, I'm not that innocent.

...

I woke up in the middle of the night after the wedding, tripped over the Gucci shoes I had worn that day and went onto the balcony and finished my glass of Pinot Noir from the night before. As I overlooked the estate and distant city skyline, I ran through everything in my head. This must stop, I thought, and knew the insanity that had been going on for the last however many months needed to end.

As I sat later that night at another one of my son's acting spectacles, I couldn't help but be catty. Maybe it was the wine speaking or the early signs of menopause, but I was in a terrible mood. He apparently loves Ophelia more than I - how dare he! But revenge, as they say, is a dish best served cold, I thought to myself, and drank another cup of wine, being careful not to drip any on my rented white Versace cocktail dress.

Luckily, the acting disturbed Claudius and we retreated from the theater. He told me he had something in his eye, flailing about and screaming, "I can't see! I can't see, Gertrude! Damnit, give me light!"

Less than twenty-four hours after stepping onto the balcony that previous night, I had another realization; Claudius is the same man that Hamlet was - exciting at first, then slowly dimmed like a cheap candle flickers. In the midst of my thoughts, my son passed through the doors with his sheepish grin.

"What now, Hamlet?" I asked.

"What did you think of the play? I think it went well" He was visibly out of breath. "The actors were fabulous, no? What'd Claudius think? I hope the title wasn't too vague. The scenery was great, yes?"

"Oh, don't worry, he enjoyed it as much as I did. The title, The Mousetrap? Too vague? It was about royalty, not vermin. I just didn't get that part, but I guess you creative kind are far more inventive than I ever was."

As I turned my back to fix my hair in the full-length mirror next to the bed (the summer humidity just kills my natural volume), I hear my son scream "I have found the rat your were looking for!" and take the decorative dagger off the wall (bought in Toledo, Spain, on my honeymoon with what's his name) and began to stab the curtains that hung in front of the French doors that lead to the balcony.

I shrieked, "Hamlet! Hamlet! What have you done now!?"

The antique curtain fell from the bronze rod, hitting the potted Ficus plant and exposing Polonious, our chief Financial Advisor who was walking in from smoking a Marlboro on the balcony, dead on the ground, bleeding all over my newly steamed rug.

Everything in my life had turned into this hurricane of chaos, and I blame my deceased Husband. Would it really have killed him to kiss my cheek or put down that damn phone and acknowledge the tattoo of a daisy I had gotten above my hipbone?

...

This is my story. You, the workers of the company, deserve to know the truth, as everyone in the building has done nothing but work hard to keep my income flowing. You are the people I truly love.

I hope someone finds this note, because if not, many people died for nothing more than pleasure. I hope young Hamlet did a good job wiping my brow before I fainted and didn't smudge my flawless makeup; I don't want my age to show too much. I went my entire life not standing up for what I believed in, so my death was something I could control. I have lived my life as the lady not protesting enough, and I died in one last act of protest.

Sincerely and Truly Yours,  
Gertrude

P.S. You may want to wash the sheets before they come to clean the house, I don't want anyone thinking I was a whore.