

EDITORS' FOREWORD

We are excited to present the Spring 2008 issue of *Euphony*. As always, we have a fine selection of poetry and prose from highly talented individuals across the country. But we are also proud of our own voices—students from the University of Chicago. This year saw the first annual poetry and prose reading contest uchicagospeak. Students read their work in front of an audience to compete for a \$75 gift certificate to the Seminary Co-op and publication in the Spring issue. Jonathan Ullyot's excellent story "From SJR" won the evening, and we happily include it in this issue. We hope to offer this contest next year to further encourage high-quality student writing at the University, and to reward writers for their talents and efforts.

Starting next year, *Euphony* will publish all its work online at euphony. uchicago.edu. The Fall and Spring issues will be available both in print and on our website. In addition, we will periodically publish poems, stories, and articles exclusively on our website throughout the year. We are excited by the prospect of publishing year-round, both to give voice to even more authors and to provide Hyde Park with a little literary warmth against the cold. Visit our website for more information.

THE EDITORS

EUPHONY

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 2 Spring 2008

Euphony is a non-profit literary journal produced biannually at the University of Chicago. We are dedicated to publishing the finest work by writers and artists both accomplished and aspiring. We review a variety of works including poetry, fiction, drama, essays, criticism, and translations.

Founded Spring 2000 by Stephen Barbara and Matthew Deming

http://euphony.uchicago.edu

Euphony is a registered member of the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses www.clmp.org

Printed in the United States of America by The Mail House, Inc.

Copyright © 2008 *Euphony* Copyrights revert to authors upon publication.

STAFF

Managing Editor: Max Falkowitz

Poetry Editor: Sean Pears **Fiction Editor:** Sarah Kull

Staff: Andy Chen, Caelyn Cobb, Nicholas Foretek, Amanda Greene, Catherine Greim, Dmitri Leybman, Hannah Manshel, Max Rubinstein,

Carly Wilson, Anna Zelivianskaia

Cover Design: Clare Wolfe

Cover image: Class 1 (Spontaneous Quadrangles) by Piotr Behr

Webmaster: Sam Bowman

CONTENTS

| Poetry | |
|---|----|
| Urban Idyll | 7 |
| Checkout | 8 |
| Steven Mayoff | |
| Albany | g |
| Ken Cormier | |
| Welcome | 10 |
| Grit | 11 |
| Suzanne Heyd | |
| The Fishermen | 12 |
| Self-Portrait with Crane | 14 |
| Lory Bedikian | |
| Closed Up House | 15 |
| John Grey | |
| A Flying Trapeze | 17 |
| Peter Moore | |
| Melting Pot | 18 |
| Andrey Gritsman | |
| Zippers | 19 |
| Dennis Saleh | |
| Interrogation | 20 |
| Jason Tandon | |
| Fiction | |
| From SJR | 21 |
| Jonathan Ullyot | |
| The Virgin of Monte Ramon | 24 |
| Mia Alvar | |
| Non-Fiction | |
| Book Review: The Strange Worlds of Kevin Brockmeier | 46 |
| Max Falkowitz | |
| Addenda | |
| Contributors | 51 |
| Submissions Guidelines | 55 |
| Acknowledgments | 56 |

Steven Mayoff

Urban Idyll

A cheese-wedge of moon melts over this sticky night, casting a candied pallor over everything, a sweet sickening drizzle of pink and buzzing white.

Sausages on a vendor's greasy grill spit and sizzle and fill us with guilt and lust.

In the Café Youkali you look at me with such hopeless appetite. Our glasses toast the slow-burning ends

of cigarettes like red fireflies against silhouettes of boredom and trust.

On the long walk back we pass fire escapes - rusting zeds like the spiny snoring of singles doubled up bed after bed, sleeping off another honest day's drudge.

Their dreams wander beneath the streets in search of subway trains to leap in front of

while calling out the names of impotence and loss.

Checkout

Against the window a sinewy rain drumming the endless refrain (do not...)

This is the room of imperfect charms (the stain on the carpet, the chipped ceiling) retaining their appeal with the stiff resolve of leaves shivering on some bare limb.

This is the room where two strangers have spent the last hour bearing all their weight on weathered luggage and unspoken comparisons, zipper teeth gritting every indiscreet grunt. (do not...)

An empty chair angled away from the writing desk, a chained pen and ghost-white stationary whisper amongst themselves. Lamp and iron exchange smirks, the coffee machine simmers crusty dregs.

These last dreamless nights have been small comfort once we awoke to find open drawers, the dry aftertaste of cotton, a chalky hint of silk. (do not...)

All we share now is a sad seascape above the headboard, its wind-whipped blue disappearing beyond the edges of the thin metal frame. Its depiction of love ever-changing manages to always look the same.

This is the room that will continue to imagine us after we are gone. (do not...)

The door locks behind us and a yellowing sign dangles pale as a fruitless vine. (...disturb)

Ken Cormier

Albany

City of limitless joy, city where my anger treads, loose-lipped and horse-hipped Albany, a modicum of hair, a trench-mouthed, finger-snapping vision of gang fights in Albany, cheapskate metaphors, debilitating back sores, accompanists sniffing ether, completely stiffened, camped out in socks and underwear, these first explorers, these several men making their perilous journey so that someday Albany will abound, this song is for you, Albany, impressive Albany of the Old West, stamped in oblivion, fictitious Albany, Albany of my discontent, thriving backwards Albany, rinse-soaked Albany, quietly rummaging through Albany, Albany proper, rancorous, deranged, ill-smelling Albany camped out in rectories, worshiping false gods in Albany, complying with draconian rules in Albany, irritating old sores, cold sores in Albany, hopping from bar to bar, suffering backbone, replete with nonsense, keepsake Albany, snow globe Albany, oft forgotten, never forgiven, my dear old Albany.

Suzanne Heyd

Welcome

Elms white noise & we are all about it, we & our lost shoes, bedraggled suits. Expect a birthday & the guests perpetual arrive. I could plait my hair & stop trying so hard, haul tarnish to doorjambs, pocket loose change. Curtains disclose leafy ears, vine the eyes. The guests they extemporize, they umbrella spine with perfume jars, they lidlock, they lip.

Grit

The sliver enters at the cramp, colors the brain a sponge of loss. The way a stutter corrodes the tongue's production of wonder, a dated letter arrests the flow of a day. Thrall of the finest detail, too fine for the eye to discern.

Lory Bedikian

The Fishermen

Resembling the shape of a whale from outer space, the Bronze Age stuck in the sediment and fossils, called Gegham Sea in ancient times, now home

to gulls and geese, otters extinct, surrounded by fields of cemeteries, carved khachkars below oak trees is only some of what I've read about this place.

But none of it matters when they enter the scene: out of a beat-up van, with woolen caps, faces of dark wood, edged, knuckling cigarettes,

hair like yarn, dragging their feet, in some eyes a glint of copper, in others nothing. They are the fishermen who come to Lake Sevan,

from the province of Geghark Unik and other towns and I cannot take my eyes away. I feel like a young girl watching heroes or stars before me.

Fishermen of need, not sport, they've come to hunt sig, goldfish, crayfish, trout, the prince fish of these waters. With bait and hook,

lines and nets, they've come to cast something into the turquoise mass, hoping to reel in scales and fins, rough as their unshaven beards.

I want to ask them if they're anglers, what tackle they'll use.

I want to watch them as they clasp suspenders, yanking on their boots, black as tar, black as their brows.

As if they can read my mind, they stagger themselves along the beach like bowling pins, some turn to me inquisitively, others with stares full of sand. One of them comes out of a photo album of my childhood with his stubbly chin, onyx eyes, hands coarse as tufa, coffee-stained teeth. As he cups

his hand to light a cigarette, he smiles. I grab my camera, wanting to remember this, how they tug at their slickers, scratching their heads, looking out to the lake, hoping

for dinner or catch to sell, how I stop thinking of folklore and storks at the sight of them, how I ignore my driver calling to me as they turn and enter the water's edge.

Self-Portrait with Crane

On road trips, no coastal fog rolling in Brings me the sea gull or sandpiper

shifting from water to sky, but the common Armenian crane

who treks across the Atlantic, breaks through California clouds,

haunts the laurels, the eucalyptus, a message tucked in its beak.

In riffs strummed on midwestern guitars, I can hear the duduk hound me

with its drone of apricot wood, piping a monotone dirge, driven

like the tumbleweed. In New Mexico, each flute player's eyes turns

into the pomegranate seed. Going east should bring foliage

but I see the blue eye in trees. For days, New England's sediment

drops into riverbeds, bends into Gorky's brush strokes.

No relief. Ghosts float west from Ellis Island, crosses tattooed

on their forearms, worry beads pebbled in their grip. Even as I watch

the world series, a fly ball turns back into the crane.

John Grey

The Closed-Up House

It'd been a long time since anyone had wrenched that door open.

Once inside, we could smell and feel how it is for years to be locked up like prisoners. The must, the dankness, the decay, weren't so much in the walls, the floorboards, but were wafting off the corpse of time.

We had to scrub the house clean of its unoccupied life before we could move in with our beds and our rugs and our tables.

My father worked for days on the chimney. There'd be no new fire until the soot from every other fire was blown free of the flue.

My mother washed windows, dusty from no one looking in or out.

I turned on bathroom taps, listened to the rock and splutter of pent-up water. My sister poked around from room to room, clutching her doll to her chest, protecting it from beams and ratty wall-paper, stiff locks and sudden noises.

The house became ours gradually. The scouring of every old stain, the dumping of each piece of busted, abandoned furniture, added to this possession. My parents could only explain it in homilies, how we were family and wherever we lived would be home.

I felt more like an early explorer, claiming a new territory for the king of the last place we lived.

When nothing was left from before we moved in, my sister felt secure enough to leave her doll alone on the bed, when she went out to play in the yard.

Glass eyes, ratty red hair. burst stuffing mouth, it held the fort against any and all future occupants.

Peter Moore

A Flying Trapeze

had always felt claustrophobic living under the big tent. It dreamed of running away and joining an island of giants. O the life of a hammock!

Andrey Gritsman

Melting Pot

After a while it becomes a large happy incestuous family. The room is filled with wonderful creatures: Slavic pagan demigods, old ladies (tempered silver and steel), husky guys, reminding the Cossacks at the pogrom next to Yale-educated thin-boned Ashkenazy, harboring rare diseases, the round-cheeked matryoshka-type girls, as if they just fled from a hotel souvenir shop.

Once upon a time some of them got married to Feigin, to Napoleon or to the Dog of the Baskervilles. Now they got loose and go out with the New England witches, visit the benzodiaphenous dragons and make friends with predators, whose incisors are always ready and flossed to death.

One day they will all happily go and vote for the President whom they all like and will gather around the First Lady who is warm, long legged, white teethed, well bred and still down-to-earthy, benevolently protean daughter of the American Revolution, giving away Girl Scout Cookies on the rear lawn.

Dennis Saleh

Zippers

"Zipper," a favored word in children's dictionaries,

the first engine of the child, a toy mouth, or alligator.

Open the closet, the zipper at home, perhaps asleep

in the tucks and recesses, an old forgotten secret.

They drape over the hangers like jungle tendrils,

little clinging vines in the blossoms of clothing.

Or uprooted, a flower itself a single petal.

Each a smile hanging, wan, content, nothing to do.

Each a little skeleton like a mounted trophy-fish.

They slip in the sea of hands, open, close, taut, free.

Each is like a trail, something left behind, something gone.

Who could say male or female. Zipper says hello goodbye.

The invitation, the signaling, done like a pennant.

Signature of the exhibitionist, of the policeman.

The Nazis made a perfect fetish to the zipper

that the motorcycle jacket honors still.

in flashing hierarchies of zippers like scissors.

There's no denying also like a snake, or a whisper,

a thin insinuation or muffled snigger at things.

But the lowly zipper is bashful, backward, retiring.

It is an old, old friend, more trustworthy than a dog.

I have my first zipper still, a collection of zippers.

Chains and centipedes of them like bracelets of a mad woman.

They hang and comb the air, cool, deliberate, a musical score.

They play the great melody of unity, joining "two sides to everything."

Each a spirit of compromise as grand as Nature's.

A zipper factory is all agreement, the two halves of the factory clasp.

The zipper is a great teacher, it says a word and unsays it.

Jason Tandon

Interrogation

Midnight snacking, I scour the crock pot With a chunk of black bread. The outdoor motion light triggers And I stand illuminated In a brilliant flood of white.

Innocent, I take a beer to the roof
And plug the gutter full of cigarettes.
Men speaking Spanish bang on the engines of their muscle cars,
Woofers lowered to a dull pulse
Out of respect for the dead.

After scores of sit-ups
I try sleep on the floor, the couch,
Then in the tub with a bath mat
Balled under my head, listening
To the faucet's clock-steady drip.

I crawl back under the covers Where my love is fast asleep. Suddenly, she laughs, and does not wake When I ask what is so funny, Pressing my finger into the hollow of her cheek.

Jonathan Ullyot

From STR

We were in Mrs. Anema's classroom upstairs. I asked Nikel Payal if he liked girls and he smiled and his eyes looked shiny. "I will never like girls," he said. "Not *ever*." When girls first came to SJR in grade eight, their eyes did the same thing when you said something nice to them.

I tried to incorporate some "poetry" into a composition for Mr. Robinson. I described my character's eyes gleaming "like the fires of hell." Mr. Robinson underlined it and wrote, "Cliché."

I pulled apart an entire eraser into tiny pieces of white rubber. One by one I dropped them down Adrian's back. Adrian was the best to torment because she smiled at me no matter what I did, and she was pretty. Tormenting her was like kissing her, though I had never kissed her. She didn't kiss anyone.

Josh Aaronson and I devised a system of secret writing. It was a code: every letter in English was transformed into a symbol. It looked like another language, or like those strange codes in videogames. (*Order of the Griffon*, by Turbographix-16, had the most incomprehensible code of all. It would take almost half an hour to punch in the password. I used to photograph the screen because I wouldn't want to write the password down.) We would pass each other secret messages in class. The problem was that Josh and I never had much that secret to talk about. It would have been great if we had real secrets, like if we had known, for example, that Mr. Ball was inviting the boarders to his house for dinner and crying in front of them and trying to hug them. Josh just wrote about how he wanted to kill his sister and that everyone was an idiot. And I talked about what we should do at recess. We soon forgot how to write in secret code.

I asked Chris Voss to sign my yearbook once during drama class. He wrote, "Look, you can see Meghan's box." Meghan was sitting cross-legged onstage.

I took my helmet off during a practice game of hockey when I was on the bench because I had been drooling onto my chin protector and it was giving me a rash. I shook my hair and it smelled like the Salon Selectives conditioner in the pink bottle: apple. Chris Voss, who had the whitest hair of anyone at school, smiled and said, "Mm, apples!" He was right: it was nice to smell apples when I had been smelling my drool and sweat and thinking about my rash. But it was strange that Chris was commenting on the conditioner I normally used to masturbate with. After that, I only used Salon Selectives conditioner for masturbation.

The first week of grade one we had to line up in the yellow hallway. We were the smallest boys and the most scared boys of the whole school. Mrs. Stutchberry told us the rules about how recess works and when we have to come in. We would learn these rules, then the rules of second grade, then the rules of third grade, and on and on. But thinking ahead only makes things worse.

Daunn Alexia had brown hair and she was pretty even though she had a boy's face and she never wore makeup. Everyone liked her. Mr. Waples said she was good at field hockey but I never saw her play. Her younger brothers were both apparently hockey stars. Then once on the Wellington Crescent bus (Wellington Crescent is the richest street in Winnipeg) Carmen got off and Patty Bolt said, "That's her house." It was a giant metal and granite structure with a long, glass corridor leading to another metal and granite structure. "That's just for the kids," Patty said to me, referring to the smaller one. So that's it, I thought. She's a millionaire. That's why she doesn't wear makeup. My girlfriend Celine from the public school always wore makeup, and I always thought she was beautiful. But Daunn, she didn't need to try at anything. If you ever fell in love with Daunn, it would be real love that lasts forever.

My sister's friend Dale was always spoken of with reverence. She grew up in the country and she knew how to ride horses. She was beautiful. She didn't even brush her hair. Her eyes were soft and kind, "like an Asian's," as James Lemoine put it. She was on the hockey team. She was an inspiration to all women. Girls normally only played ringette. (Ringette is like hockey but there is no blade on the stick, and instead of a puck it's a blue ring.) My sister used to go to Dale's house and ride horses. I always wished she would invite all of us. We could all go to Dale's. And Dale would be my older sister too. I always thought of Dale riding on a horse without a saddle in the dusk just outside the perimeter of Winnipeg. She was the goddess of hunting. She could see in the dark. She could swoop down like a hawk (when she rode her horse through the sky) and kill you quickly if you ever said a bad thing about her or thought an evil thought like, perhaps, wouldn't it be interesting to watch a baby die. And she would kill people who drove cars too, because it's unnatural. And she would make all the men crazy for her and then not even kiss them, just gaze at them with her terrifying, kind eves. "I am a lesbian," Dale's eves said, though she was not.

Mr. Gibbs wrote historical fiction. The moment he got his second book published, he left the school. He also had an affair with a girl in 12th grade. This was long before my time. My brother told me that in his first historical novel there was a long scene in which a 12th grade student in a private school in Canada gives her history teacher a blowjob, and the

narrator talks about how nice it feels. I liked to imagine that I would write historical fiction and get blowjobs too one day. My sister talked about Mr. Gibbs reverently, like she talked about Dale. He didn't follow the rules. He rode the horse of his historical fiction and treated his female students like they were women, all of whom might give him a blowjob. I think about him getting that blowjob in his office, with a dot matrix printout of his new chapter beside him, or of my sister giving him a blowjob, or of her looking for someone like Mr. Gibbs to be in love with her whole life and giving (or receiving) her first blowjob, or of Dale giving Mr. Gibbs a blowjob, or of both Dale and my sister giving him a blowjob together, while Mr. Gibbs' first lover (who would be in college by then) watched and commented on their technique. But it is really not just about the blowjob; the historical fiction and Mr. Gibbs' kind eyes factor in, though I only saw his face once in assembly and then on the back of his first historical novel which he had published himself. And I don't think of the blowjob as something obscene like in porn, or when I watch people giving me blowjobs with the lights on. It is a cloudy spot where the mouth is, or it is a from-behind shot, and the lights are low, and even watching it, you close your eyes, like Mr. Gibbs, and the only glow in the room is the glow of the computer where a new chapter of historical fiction has already begun.

Mia Alvar

The Virgin of Monte Ramon

Annelise was my neighbor, if you measured the distance in steps. I lived on a quiet hill in the town of Monte Ramon. She lived in the ravine below, among squatters in tin-roofed shacks who drank from the same narrow creek where they bathed. My mother's house, a *casita* in the Spanish Colonial style, had guest rooms, well-manicured hibiscus shrubs, and wrought-iron gates the servants needed keys to enter. These servants—a maid, a gardener, and a laundress—came from the ravine. One March afternoon, my mother fired the laundress. "The poor get so lazy in old age," she complained, and Annelise's mother came to fill the vacancy.

So before I met Annelise I met her mother. This new laundress stooped, it seemed at first, to greet me closely. She had on what we call a "duster," the kind of sack-shaped dress ordained for housework. Her veiny, brittle-looking shins could have belonged to a much older woman, and the stoop I had assumed was for my benefit turned out to be her usual way of standing. To greet our new servant, my mother floated down the stairs wearing pearls and a shiny robe. She smiled, her teeth as white as when she was sixteen and crowned Miss Monte Ramon, the favorite local beauty. What teeth the laundress had were rotten. Unlike the laundress, who walked with a haste that suggested there were too few hours in the day to earn a living, my mother was not given much to walking at all, but could often be found reclining, prone on our dark velvet sofa, or taking siesta upstairs where only her gentleman guests were allowed to disturb her.

I was always conscious of the ways people moved through the world, because of my own condition. Where others have legs, I have only the beginnings of legs; below that, a semblance of ankles, and finally two misshapen knobs, smooth as stones worked over by water. I got around on an old manual wheelchair that once belonged to my grandfather. The reason for my handicap was neither accident nor illness. No: when I was very young, my mother told me of its mystical and far stranger origin.

My mother's father, Daniel Wilson, was an American G.I. who came to Monte Ramon in 1944. Our town had been invaded by the Japanese, and my grandfather was among the troops sent out to liberate us. As a soldier he helped evacuate the wooden statue of the Virgin of Monte Ramon—the gilt, gem-encrusted patroness of our town—from her church into the nearby mountains. This was to keep her safe from wartime desecration; yet strangely it was those carrying her who felt protected as they ventured

deep into the forests and mountain trails. She became known, after that journey, as Our Lady of Safety.

At the height of the liberation, during a battle in the forest, my grandfather happened on an Axis land mine and lost both his legs. America flew him home and nursed him at a veterans' hospital as the war was ending. Once healed, Daniel Wilson traveled back to help rebuild Monte Ramon and seek out a girl he'd met during his first visit. He was just in time for what became the very first Festival of the Virgin. Pilgrims came from all over the Philippines to make offerings to Our Lady, now salvaged from her mountain hideaway and safely re-ensconced at her church. Daniel spotted his girl (later my grandmother) in a parade, waving from a float of beauty queens. When she saw him, she descended from the float and placed a garland of sampaguita around his neck. One year later, they had my mother.

I never met this American grandfather, who died in 1960. But my mother said that just before she gave birth to me, she had a vision. The deceased Daniel Wilson spoke to her, dressed in camouflage and lying in the forest where he'd lost his legs. *Although I am dead*, Daniel told my mother, *I shall live on through my grandson*. He told my mother to name me after him, her father, not after the boyfriend who would end up deserting her. Daniel Wilson would not reveal specifics, but said I would be different from other children and remind my mother every day of the family's legacy of pride and courage. And so I arrived: with a telltale lightness to my skin, and the vague buds of feet and toes that never quite articulated themselves.

My mother told this story often when she was not too tired. Its ending left her eyes lacquered with tears. She would gaze tenderly at her parents' wedding portrait: a fair-haired soldier on a wheelchair, Purple Heart pinned neatly to his uniform, and a Filipina bride standing behind him, her white-gloved hand on his shoulder. My mother saw no need to replace Daniel Wilson Sr.'s old wheelchair for an electric model. "What was good enough for a man like Grandpa, is good enough for us," she said. (He was always *Grandpa*, never *Lolo*.) "Who needs a Motorette when you've got such an heirloom? And who needs an ordinary father when you've got such a *grand* father?" My mother smiled at her own pun. As it happened, my "ordinary" father had left us soon after my birth, and was said to be living these days in Manila.

I tried to hold the stalwart image of my grandfather in my thoughts each morning when I went to school. My books were bound by a leather strap, which I would grasp between my teeth, while my arms pumped at the metal rings of Daniel Wilson Sr.'s wheelchair. When I was younger, schoolmates could be violently, unimaginatively cruel: there was a day they

shoved me to the ground and ran away with my chair, leaving me to crawl hand over stump about a quarter-mile until I found it. Sometimes they hobbled on their knees, in amputee fashion, beside me. They were often caught, of course, and punished by the priests; and so they soon discovered ways of mocking me that brought no lashings or demerits. Recently they'd christened me "Manny"—an echo of my nickname, Danny, but short also for manananggal. The manananggal, a mythical vampire, could detach from her own legs and fly her torso freely into the night, feasting with a forked tongue on the wombs of unsuspecting women. The times I thought I could not bear to be aped or called "Manny!" any longer, I thought of medals and uniforms, of the Bataan Death March, of my grandfather bleeding in a nameless wood. Did I think it would be a cakewalk, the road to glory? Was it easy for Daniel Wilson Sr. to risk life and limb for the freedoms of his Little Brown Brothers? Of course not! "Christian children bear their burdens," a priest once said to me, "and suffering burnishes our lives to a high radiance."

schoolmates made about my mother. Once, in Grade Five, I stood up to my tormentors, telling them I was descended from an American war hero. "You'd all be speaking Nippongo now if it weren't for my grandfather," I said to the other boys. I told them of my mother's vision and how my birth had confirmed it. My classmates' jaws fell open. The schoolyard turned so quiet I was certain I had put the insults to rest at last. But then from someone's mouth there came a sound like a balloon deflating, and everyone began to laugh and slap their knees harder than ever. "How precious!" "That is rich!" "What a grand inheritance!" "The baby's got his mother's eyes, and his *lolo*'s stumps!" Then a boy named Luis Amador said:

"That's a good theory, Manny. But I've got a better one. You didn't get this handicap from your grandfather. You got it from your mother—who earns her living on her knees!" To what seemed like a million voices cheering,

Luis genuflected and bobbed his head like a chicken in a coop.

Daniel Wilson Sr. helped me endure, as well, the sordid claims my

It was true my mother had friends in Monte Ramon's finest men: professionals; business owners; even, on one occasion, the mayor. These guests showed their gratitude to my mother in various ways. Bright flowers adorned our mantel every week. After a brownout, our lights were among the first in town to be restored. A priest from my own school gave her a payneta comb, carved from coconut wood into the shape of a lady's fan. "Oh Father," my mother breathed, fingering the comb's scalloped edges, "you are too generous." She coiled her hair, cola-colored hair with streaks of copper in it, above her nape and secured it with the comb. Even the dentist offered us his services for free—a welcome gift, as my teeth ached

often from the weight of books and other belongings. Countless men in Monte Ramon were good to my mother. I refused to believe, however, that she could somehow be degrading herself in the exchange. In her words, my mother repaid her friends with "company and comfort—that's all," and I did not consider it my province as a son to challenge her.

Oh, I suppose that there were reasons, as many as the hills in our town of Monte Ramon, to doubt my mother's stories; and reasons, as variegated as the stones that sparkled on our Virgin's robes, to doubt my mother herself; but what were reasons in the face of faith? I believed her—honoring, as the Commandment taught me, both my mother and that greater, universal Parent Himself.

•

In the month of May, every year since 1947, the town held a fiesta to honor our Virgin. Pilgrims flooded Monte Ramon to pay her homage. Men carried the statue of Our Lady from her church into the mountains and back again in a parade that commemorated her odyssey to safety during the war. Vendors of the local delicacies—roasted cashews, jars of coconut caramel—stationed themselves between the church and residential streets.

The church stood between my school, General Douglas MacArthur Preparatory, and our sister school, the Academy of Our Lady of Safety. Tradition held that when MacArthur's boys and Our Lady's girls were thirteen, we met and prepared to escort each other in the May parade. It was this custom that first acquainted me with Annelise. The girls of Our Lady arrived at our campus on a bright Tuesday in April. My classmates kept their hands in their pockets and their eyes on their shoes. The nuns and priests who had taught us Comportment told us now to introduce ourselves and make small talk. In my wheelchair, I sat apart from everyone.

"What's the matter with you, Manny?" Ruben Delacruz called out to me. "Haven't you been taught that a gentleman stands up in the presence of ladies?" His friends ate that one up. Ruben was our unofficial school prince, blessed with a screen-idol smile and a supernatural ease in everything from basketball to elocution. He was also the son of our town's beloved Dr. Delacruz, which gave me special reason to envy him.

"Give Manny a zero in Comportment, Father O'Connor," said Pedro Katigbak, though not loudly enough for Father O'Connor to hear. I stared down into my school trousers. The laundress had pressed a crisp, straight crease down each leg, long past the point where any contour in the fabric mattered.

The girls, on their patch of campus green, paid as little attention to us boys as they were getting. In their pinafores and Peter Pan collars, they had formed a circle, singing:

Negrita of the mountain, what kind of food do you eat? What kind of dress do you wear?

I remembered hearing "Negrita's Song" in primary school, when we learned about mountain tribes like the Tagal and the Aeta. The nuns took notice and put a stop to the chanting. Then some of my classmates, led by the brave Ruben Delacruz, started to approach the girls; and then I saw Annelise for the first time.

Though a schoolgirl herself, wearing the same uniform as the others, she was unlike them. She did not blush or chat with her classmates, or glance at us from the corner of her eyes every so often. Instead, she was reading a book. Anyone who was not a child was tall to me, but there was a special looming quality to this girl's stature. Her cinnamon-dark complexion stood out against the regulation white, and tight spongy curls bloomed from her head, unpinned and unribboned. As if she sensed me looking, she glanced up directly at me, displaying a blunt wide nose my mother would have called "native."

After some secret chatter the girls brought their new boy acquaintances to Annelise. "How do you do, Negrita?" Ruben said, extending his hand as for a formal introduction. "Tell me: what kind of food do you eat up there in the mountains?" Other boys followed suit, so that the insults of "Negrita's Song" could seem from far away like small talk. The girls grew red holding in their laughter. Before long both boys and girls were grouped about her. There came no response from our teachers this time; they misunderstood it all as a social success, and smiled upon us.

I had longed for the day when a new target would present itself to my schoolmates' taunting, a victim other than me. Now here she was.

When Annelise came to our doorstep, she struck the brass knocker despite the key her mother had lent her. I was midway through a daily regimen of pushups, which I performed against the armrests of my chair to keep the steering muscles strong. I wiped away the sweat above my lip and caught my breath as I wheeled myself to the front door.

Her feet were ashy in their rubber *tsinelas*. She was not in uniform, but in a shapeless duster like one of her mother's. Only when I looked up did I recognize the cloud of curls and the dark *indio* face from school. Annelise for her part did not seem to remember me. Blunt and bold as she looked, her first words to me were polite. "Evening sir," she said. My mother would have approved: she liked when people understood that ours was an English-speaking household. "Your *labandera* cannot come today. I'm her daughter, Annelise." Her voice was as forceful and as flat as a

wooden spoon against a table. It was not a voice that would sing sweetly to you, or tell tales. "If you show me where the clothes are, I can start now." I ushered Annelise into the house. Beside me she trailed a powder-clean scent, like fresh laundry.

A narrow stone paving led from our back door to the grass and the house's outer wall. Clotheslines hung in between. Annelise surveyed the plastic basins, the steel sink and faucet, and the folded ironing board. She seemed accustomed to breezing into strangers' houses to do the wash. She turned on the faucet, testing the water temperature with her fingers.

"Is your mother sick?" I called out, over the sound of water striking a basin.

Annelise seemed surprised that I should ask. "No. She just gave birth to a son." She unfurled some lacy garment of my mother's, scanning the front and back for stains.

Had I known that our laundress was fat with child? She stooped and wore such tent-like clothes, it was odd to think of her size at all. I realized with horror that Annelise would soon be scrubbing my briefs. Hastily I wheeled myself over the cracked, loosening cement and reached for my laundry basket. "These are clean," I said, balancing the basket on my lap and using my other arm to retreat toward the house.

Annelise gave me a puzzled look, then shrugged and wiped her hands on her duster. "She was pregnant when she started working for you," she said, as if to answer my earlier thoughts and pardon them. "You didn't know what she looked like not pregnant."

Something was rooting me there to her presence. "Can I bring you anything?" I asked.

Most servants apologized shyly for so much as breathing or taking up space in a room. Annelise looked up from the wash and said, "Do you have a radio?"

I brought a small transistor from my room and set it on the windowsill between our yard and kitchen.

"Thanks." She smiled. "We don't have one at home." Drying her hands on her duster again, Annelise tuned the dial to a radio novella. The characters of *Pusong Sinugatan* ("Wounded Heart") included Joe, an American soldier, and Reyna, a Manila debutante, who met fatefully in 1944. "A pair of star-crossed *magkasintahan*," the announcer called them. The radio was old and full of static. Shampoo jingles alternated with bombs and air raid sirens. "After a word from our sponsors," said the announcer, "we'll find out what the Japs have done to Reyna's beloved papa!" Annelise seemed unaware, as she plunged her shining brown arms into the suds, that I was listening along with her.

29

Our first co-ed Catechism took place at the Academy of Our Lady. The girls played with their skirt hems and pencil cases as we arrived. My classmates filled the spare desks along one wall of the room. The only space for my chair was behind the very last row. I spotted Annelise up front. Her curls hovered over a composition book. Sister Carol rapped her desk with a ruler to settle us, and Father O'Connor said something about miracles.

Sister Carol directed us to a passage in Luke. "Annelise Moreno," she called, for a first reader. The laundress's daughter stood.

"A woman with a hemorrhage of twelve years' duration," Annelise began, "incurable at any doctor's hands, came up behind Jesus and touched the tassel on his cloak."

There was a murmur on the girls' side of the room, and some of Annelise's classmates giggled softly into their hands.

"Immediately her bleeding stopped," continued Annelise. "Jesus asked, 'Who touched me?' "

Two girls in the row before me turned to each other. "How appropriate," said one. "She should touch the cloak!"

"Hemmorhage girl!" whispered the other. They giggled and then mumbled something else I couldn't catch.

"Everyone disclaimed doing it, while Peter said—" Annelise began, then stopped and slammed her Bible shut. She whirled to face my corner of the room. I startled, briefly convinced that she was glaring at me. "Rose and Gemma, if you have something to say," she called, "say it loud and to my face. Don't cover your mouths. Let's hear it." Her voice was hot and full of challenge. The two girls in front of me crossed their legs and laced their fingers, then glanced at each other in wide-eyed, innocent alarm.

Sister Carol rapped her ruler against the desk. "Excuse me, Miss Moreno," she said.

"Sorry, Ma'am," said Annelise, without lowering her voice. "I only—"

"Teachers, not students, are in charge of classroom discipline," Sister Carol said. "Miss Nakpil, please stand and continue reading for us. Miss Moreno, you may remain standing until I tell you otherwise."

There was more giggling and murmuring. The laundress's daughter placed her hands at her sides and stood very straight. The pleats of her pinafore were perfectly ironed. A single, diagonal crease punctuated the back of her blouse. One fallen strand of her frizzled hair hung onto the wrinkle, stubbornly.

At the end of our lesson, Sister Carol allowed Annelise to sit. "Now, ladies and gentlemen," said Father O'Connor. In his hand was an offertory basket full of paper slips, which he shook gently. "It's time to partner up

for the Maytime fiesta. Gentlemen, when I call you, please step forward and draw a girl's name out of the hat."

Students shifted audibly in their seats. I believe it was fate that brought Annelise and me together, for Father O'Connor announced, "We'll go in alphabetical order," and then, as if on whim, added: "reverse alphabetical order, this time." He glanced at the ledger. I had inherited my surname, like my handicap, from my grandfather, and usually came last. "Danny Wilson, Jr.," said Father O'Connor.

Faces turned as Sister Carol helped widen an aisle for me. I rolled awkwardly to the front of the room. At each spin the metal hoops of my chair struck the legs of someone's desk, a sound that seemed to ring into the hallways. "Watch your step, Manny," Ruben whispered. "You wouldn't want to stub your toe." There was terror in the eyes of the girls—each one praying silently, I imagined, for any partner but the class cripple. They turned away as I passed, and fiddled with their girlish things: a gilt-edged Bible, mechanical pencils, a blue heart-shaped eraser whose left lobe was blackened and rubbed flat with use.

But I had a silent, heartfelt prayer of my own. I glanced at Annelise's curls, and imagined their powdery scent, just before Father O'Connor lowered the basket before me. Was it Father O'Connor, or another priest, who had taught us to pray with pure and total trust that our prayers would be answered? I closed my eyes and reached into the heap for her name.

We took recess outside. Annelise and I stayed close to the hedges separating the high school from the little girls' playground.

"How is your mother?" I asked.

"She'll be ready to work again next week."

"Sorry. I wasn't asking as an employer."

Annelise laughed. "O.K.," she said. "She's fine. She was worried about my brother at first. He kept refusing her nipple, like a spoiled little prince! But Dr. Delacruz brought us some formula. That doctor, he's like the patron saint of our ravine."

There was no one in Monte Ramon that didn't know the doctor. Kind, widowed Dr. Delacruz had smiling eyes and a youthful face despite waves of gray hair at his temples. His son Ruben had inherited the doctor's good looks, but unlike Ruben, Dr. Delacruz inspired no fear, only trust and love. He ministered to a scraped knee with the same gentle attention as to severe pneumonia. Every few years, when my back became afflicted with a pressure ulcer, Dr. Delacruz gave me antibiotics and applied the salt-water rinses with his own hands. Of my mother's guests, the doctor stood alone in that he never went upstairs with her. Instead he would offer us a flan or macaroni salad that his cook had prepared, or bring me comic

books, or listen to the news with us in the sala.

Annelise glided easily from Dr. Delacruz to her next subject and then the next, treating them all as casually as she had her mother's nipple. You would presume from her tone that we had known each other for years.

"You seem different from the girls here," I admitted. Then I regretted the implication. "Sorry."

Annelise didn't look offended. "I am," she said. "I'm the 'scholarship girl.' The nuns took me on as their charity case." She smiled and looked at me expectantly. "And you? Which 'boy' are you?"

It was not so easy to name my status. How should I explain the fine house, and the servants who were sometimes paid in bowls or jewels to maintain it? What title bridged the space between light skin and no legs, between a white hero for a grandfather and a half-white mother whose doings were whispered of in town? Which "boy" did all these things, combined, make me? "I'm not the Delacruz boy," I finally settled on saying.

Annelise nodded. Ruben Delacruz, I have said, ruled MacArthur Prep with his swagger and his acid tongue. As if their ears had pricked at the sound of Ruben's name, some of Annelise's classmates breezed by us and made a show of holding their noses. "You stink, Negrita," they said. "Stinks to be poor, eh?" Annelise turned away. She faced me and held the handles of my chair, her knees touching my trousers, so that we made a nearly self-enclosed unit on the grass. Her movement made a rustling sound like plastic bags.

"What's in your diaper?" they asked. "We think Negrita needs a diaper change."

My mother once fired a maid who, she said, filled the house with a wretched odor. "The poor live in a Dark Age of superstition," said my mother at the time. "I won't have her trailing her beastly smells into my house."

"In one ear and out the other," said Annelise, looking down at me. "You don't let the things they say affect you, do you?"

"No," I lied.

•

Later that week Sister Grace and Father Johnson excused us from a joint Physical Education class, where the other pairs learned the waltz. Annelise and I watched from the sidelines of the MacArthur gym. "It isn't fair that you won't dance in the fiesta, because of me," I said. "I'm sorry."

"You say this word a lot," she said.

"Sorry?"

"There you go again." Annelise grinned. "I used to be like that too.

Shy, and 'sorry' about everything." She looked over the couples shuffling across the gymnasium floor, as if in pity. "Anyway, I don't waltz. I wish we had our own radio, though."

"I listened to *Pusong Sinugatan* last night," I offered. I didn't mention that I'd missed Annelise just as soon as my class left Our Lady's campus, that I had wished almost immediately to go back to the Catechism lesson and the recess, or that I'd settled on the radio as a way, alone in my room, to conjure her. I didn't talk about searching my Bible at home to reread Luke's story of the bleeding woman. *Jesus said*, "Daughter, it is your faith that has cured you. Now go in peace."

"Well? What's the latest?" said Annelise.

I told her how Ignacio, Joe's unscrupulous rival for Reyna's affections, exposed the priest who had married Joe and Reyna as a fake and was therefore trying once again to win Reyna back from her American love. In the meantime, General MacArthur had begun his humiliating retreat from Corregidor and out of the country. Joe despaired of ever seeing his sweetheart again. It surprised me how easily I fell to talking about these people, like an old town gossip, as if they were neighbors and lived on our same hill in Monte Ramon.

Annelise sighed. "I knew something would go wrong with that wedding."

"I'm sorry you can't listen at home." I cleared my throat. "I mean, too bad you can't."

"It's all right. This way I get to play detective. And it's always my wildest, most incredible guesses that turn out to be right! What do you think of *Pusong Sinugatan*?"

"My grandfather fought in that war," I said. "Pusong Sinugatan makes me think of him."

"Yes, I've heard that. About your family," Annelise said. "Speaking of incredible." I wondered if she again meant *incredible* in its literal, unflattering sense. She reached over as if to touch my arm, but touched the armrest of my chair instead, helping herself up and excusing herself to the lavatory. As she crossed in front of me she smelled different from the clean, powdery girl who'd done my mother's wash. She tossed her hair behind her, sending a damp and loamy scent in my direction. It reminded me of our garden after a very heavy rain, the scents of grass and hibiscus buds gone slick and overripe under the weather.

Because we could not waltz, Annelise and I were in charge of serving refreshments for a dance—a kind of rehearsal for the Maytime performance. The girls of Our Lady wore fancy dresses to this event, with flowers on their shoulders and waists and hems. The boys arrived in smart,

cream-colored *barongs*. My own *barong* was several years old and fraying in places. Ruben Delacruz and his friends raised their eyebrows at my too-short sleeves and the buttons straining at my chest. I filled their punch cups patiently as I watched the clock and waited for Annelise.

An hour passed, and then another. She did not come. Three hours into the dance, there was no one at the refreshments table but me.

A few girls from Annelise's class approached. "Your Negrita girlfriend is on the rag," said a petite, snub-nosed one. She took a cup of punch from my hand. "She's a freak of nature. Her rags go on for weeks and weeks and she can barely stand for pain. She's bleeding her guts out right now."

I had only the thinnest knowledge of what female bodies did in secret. Women's privacy, I'd been taught, was sacred. My mother occupied the second story of our house, a zone forbidden to me and difficult, in any case, for me to access. Sometimes, when I passed the foot of the stairs, I would catch a gust of perfumed air or a flash of eastern sunlight as a guest opened my mother's door and then closed it behind him. Vaguely I knew that around the age girls loosened their hair from pigtails, they succumbed to a ritual sort of bleeding, an intimate event that sparked both poetry ("blossom into womanhood") and scorn ("rags"). Once, Ruben smuggled a medical textbook of his father's to school. I glimpsed something in the female form like Aries: a ram's head with great curlicued horns. But these subjects felt as distant to me as my mother's quarters, closed and quiet at the top of the stairs that I never ascended.

"Maybe Danny's mother can get Annelise some medical help," my classmate Rico Cortes said. "Doesn't Danny's mother know Dr. Delacruz?"

Ruben Delacruz balled his fists. "You watch what you say about my father!" He stared Rico down and away from the table. When the gymnasium began to empty and Annelise still had not appeared, I wheeled my way home.

In Annelise's absence, boys and girls alike refocused on teasing me. After dismissal that Monday, Pedro Katigbak clutched his heart and forehead in a high-pitched imitation of a girl. "Help, oh help!" he falsettoed. "I'm bleeding to death! How oh how can I stop this bleeding?" He placed a hand between his legs and made as if to faint.

Rizal Rojas lumbered over on his knees. "I am Manny-manananggal," he said. "I can save you, Negrita." He knelt at Pedro's standing legs and looked up. "Negrita, let me drink your blood! I'm a womb-eating vampire, after all—and look! I'm the perfect height! Somebody get me a straw!"

The girls howled in squeamish, scandalized delight. Ruben Delacruz clapped his hands very formally. "Bravo," he said. "Well done." I tried

to imagine myself an actual *manananggal*, flying my half-body high above the schoolyard laughter. This little piece of vaudeville wasn't the worst they had inflicted in my school career, but I felt new and unpracticed at it. In my short time with Annelise, I had practically forgotten what it was to be lonely. After school a group of students followed me home on their knees.

At the gate where they finally abandoned me, knowing that our gardener would shoo them off with a giant pair of pruning shears, I stopped. Annelise lived down the other side of the hill, on the banks of the ravine dotted with squatters' shacks. Without pausing to consider why, I turned my wheelchair and pumped past the houses on our street, then coursed down the yellow grass to the ravine.

It took some doing: each rut in the hill's soil bumped me forward. I pressed my weight back to gain some balance. The slope seemed to grow steeper the further I rolled. I hooked an arm behind me, the push handle in the bend of my elbow, while steering forward with the other hand. The yellow grass gave way to rocks and mud, which clung to my wheels at every turn. Every few years, during the wet season, mudslides swept some houses clean off this bank into the creek. I feared toppling forward and landing in the water with my chair overturned, its dirt-caked wheels spinning.

By the time I reached the first shack the air had thickened, with an overwhelming stench of smoke and urine and spoiled milk. The shacks were patched together of cardboard and plywood and other scraps I couldn't recognize, raised by stilts, and roofed with corrugated tin. Clotheslines joined one shack to the next like crude telephone wires. An old woman, her lips puckered inward by toothlessness, stood in front of the first shack. Some children kicked around a metal can beside her. When they saw me, they stopped and gathered to stare with large bottomless eyes.

I recognized Annelise in their hollow, unembarrassed gaze. Perhaps all the ravine's children learned to look at people this way. Suddenly I remembered what was said about the squatters. Their kind would dive into canals and landfills, scavenging scraps to sell or use or eat. What would they do with me, an outsider in a school uniform, with a metal chair and books hanging from his mouth? I resolved to give them anything they wanted. Anything, so long as I could see Annelise and make it back up the hill, using my bare hands if I had to. Like a dog who'd just fetched for its master, I released my books into my lap.

"I am looking for Annelise Moreno," I said to the children. "Do you know where she lives?" One boy, wearing a shirt but no pants, pointed down the row of houses. A small girl said she'd show the way if I let her push me there. I agreed, blinking away another vision of my chair upended in the ravine. My wheels sank slightly into the pudding-soft earth and caught

every so often on rocks within the soil. But my young guide pushed with firm, surprising force. She left me beside a woman yanking clothes off a line. "She lives there," said the woman, jerking her head to the next shack. "Girl kept us up all night with her moaning and crying!"

I tapped lightly on the side of the house. Instead of a door, a sheet of faded green tarp covered a gap between the tin walls. Because of the stilts, I could not go inside even if I were someone who entered other people's houses uninvited. Annelise's mother, our laundress, lifted one side of the tarp and looked out, her arms cradling an infant. I could hear groans from behind her and knew at once that they were coming from Annelise.

The laundress's eyes widened when she saw me. "Anak," she said in surprise. She stood four bamboo rungs above me and addressed me as a mother would her child, but still she seemed frightened, as if I had come to scold her.

"I'm sorry to intrude," I said. "I heard your daughter was sick. Annelise is . . . my partner. At school. For the fiesta."

"You brought homework?" she said, her face brightening. "Annelise wants her homework. She wanted me to get it, but I don't have time. Annelise!" she shouted behind her, disappearing before I could apologize and say that I did not, in fact, bring homework.

I heard a slow shuffle. Then Annelise, almost mummified by a threadbare sheet, appeared. "Danny." Her speech was faint and slow. "Sorry about the dance." She closed her eyes, as if the sentence had exhausted her. I wasn't prepared to see her so pale. Nor was I prepared for the smell, which had magnified since the gymnasium to something like raw meat and burning sugar.

"I didn't bring homework," I said. "I'm sorry."

"Sorry' again!" Annelise smiled weakly. "Do you have a radio?" I shook my head.

"Then read to me. Anything," she said. "Nobody here can ever read to me." She descended the ladder, steadying both feet upon each rung, like a child just learning stairs. On the bottom step she sat and gave a pitiful cry, though she tried to stifle it. She closed her eyes again and tightened the blanket around her.

I unbuckled from my book strap *The Myths of Greece and Rome*. Hephaestus—the poor crippled cuckold—had become my favorite god thanks to his sad, ungodly lot; I read aloud to Annelise of his fall from Olympus and of Aphrodite's betrayal. Toward the end of the story Annelise began to squirm, with a rustle like plastic underneath her blanket. She let out a wail that she did not, this time, try to stifle. Her mother rushed to the doorway. The laundress became mighty and efficient before my eyes, carrying Annelise up the bamboo steps and back through the tarp,

behind which I glimpsed only darkness. Excruciating screams came from inside. Something about Annelise made sense to me then. Her pain filled the shack to bursting; the walls and tin roof turned flimsy up against her pain. There was no room in her house or her body or her world, I saw, for fear or shame or anything smaller than this great suffering. I retreated through the dirt, where Annelise's smells gave way to the surrounding air of mud and smoke.

By my third after-school visit to Annelise, I'd become rather expert at navigating the slope between my house and the squatters' colony. I was not her only visitor then. Squatters had gathered at the steps of her shack, holding buckets of water. I recognized the old woman with the sunken mouth, as well as the young girl who'd pushed my wheelchair, among the others forming a passageway from the ladder and the tarp.

The tarp was lifted, and Dr. Delacruz emerged from the doorway. The congregation of squatters cheered. The doctor was surprised to see me among them. "Anak," he said, approaching me. "Do you know Annelise?"

"We're partners for the fiesta," I said. "And her mother—"

"Ah," the doctor said. "Your *labandera*. Yes, I've seen her in your house. How on earth did you...?" He looked from the hilltop, in the direction of my house, to my wheelchair. "Well. Your friend is doing better today."

"Thank you for helping her, Doctor. You're the patron saint of the ravine."

"The what? Who said that?" Dr. Delacruz laughed. "Even M.D. can't hold a candle to that!" He rested his palm on the back of my wheelchair.

It was around this time I started to fantasize that Dr. Delacruz was my father. He said, "Here comes your girl now, *anak*," and for the first time in my life I felt a deeper significance to the word. Adults called us *anak* and "son" and "my child" all the time, of course, but from Dr. Delacruz it was delivered with such soft regard as to sound literal.

Annelise descended the bamboo steps and walked slowly across the dirt. The squatters dipped their fingers into buckets and sprinkled her with water. Young children splashed her with particular glee. I thought of the dramatic twists in the radio novella *Pusong Sinugatan*. Long-lost relatives turned up on doorsteps, secret identities were revealed, and a character's whole life could turn on a dime. One day you gave up a loved one for dead, or at least gone forever, and the next you discovered him leading a hidden life in surprising proximity to yours. Annelise trained her gaze a few paces before her, as if balancing a basket on her head. She stopped at my chair. "This must seem strange to you," she said. "Like those pagan

maidens being led to sacrifice." A flicker of embarrassment showed on her face, but only a flicker, slight as the mist of water on her arms and cheeks, and evaporating as quickly. "Today I stopped bleeding," she announced matter-of-factly, like a guide to a tourist. "According to barangay logic, I can bathe again. And people around me can officially breathe again."

I thought of the maid that my mother had let go because of her smell. I wanted to say that at first Annelise's smell hadn't seemed wrong, only curious, like a change in the seasons.

"I've told them it's an old wives' tale," she said to Dr. Delacruz. "I even told them that *you* said it was fine to bathe during that time of month. But they don't believe me."

"Old beliefs die hard," said Dr. Delacruz with a shrug. "There's no real harm in this one."

"What I don't understand is, why? No one has been able to give me a good answer. Only vague ideas about body temperature and the cold mixing with heat inside your skin. Does that make sense to you, Doctor? Does it, Danny, to you?"

The question placed me once again at the foot of my mother's stairs, catching perfumed air and sunlight from a momentary crack in the doorway. "I don't know," I said. I remembered what my mother once told me was the correct answer to any girl's difficult question. "You should do as you like," I told Annelise.

Dr. Delacruz patted my shoulder. "Annelise, your partner is a gentleman," he said. "I think we have another 'patron saint of the ravine' on our hands." He scraped some dirt from my left wheel with the tip of his shoe.

"Well, as soon as I get out of here"—Annelise looked to the shacks—"I will do as I like." She turned to her mother, who was calling to her with a plastic bucket in hand, and they went past their house toward the creek.

It was Dr. Delacruz who took me home, pushing me back up to our side of the hill.

The Maytime fiesta was approaching. Throughout the day, rousing us in the morning and distracting us from classroom lectures, church bells rang and cannons fired, both being fine-tuned for the ceremonies. During the parade we would chant the Hail Mary in three languages, each from a different chapter of our town's past. Spanish, which by then only our grandmothers spoke, gave us the most difficulty.

Annelise decided that she and I would bring our petitions to the Virgin early. During fiesta month, she reasoned, the Virgin fielded so many requests for love or health or babies or luck; we ought to lay our concerns at her feet before the others overwhelmed her. We set out with

two votive candles, a box of matches, and bananas from a tree outside my mother's house.

They kept the 400-year-old statue behind glass in the Church, but a plaster replica of her stood on a roofed pedestal outside. The Virgin's nose was fine and strong, her mouth tiny, her eyes bold. Annelise lay her palm on her robe, which was brocaded with gold paint.

She had a theory about praying. "You must be specific," Annelise had told me. "Vague prayers end badly. There was a man who traveled up here from Manila and asked the Virgin for money. No specifics, just money. On his way home children threw worthless coins at him. They thought he was a beggar with his raggedy clothes. Well, he prayed for money, and he got money! The Virgin needs *specifics*." She lit her votive and set it down in front of the statue.

It was around this time I began to hope that Dr. Delacruz was my father. I lit my candle, and prayer came to me as easily as the tune of a familiar song. I prayed that Dr. Delacruz cared for me the way he did because his past had also been my mother's past, the way pasts in *Pusong Sinugatan* linked inevitably to one another. I asked the Virgin for a soapoperatic surprise that would change my life. Was this specific enough? Annelise was crossing herself already; I had no time to revise. We ate two of the bananas and placed the rest beside the candles. We looked up at the Virgin's face as if to read her answer, but her weathered plaster expression remained still, betraying no plan to indulge or refuse us.

The fiesta came with its usual pomp and fanfare. Bright streamers laced the avenues, which filled with tourists escaping the Manila heat as well as pilgrims from beyond the capital. On the day of the parade my classmates and I went to Our Lady of Safety to fetch our partners. Annelise had sprigs of baby's breath in her thick hair. She wore a light blue dress on loan from the convent, left behind by an Our Lady alumna. As we headed from the campus to the church, Annelise smelled powdery and immaculate, like the Annelise of before. She seemed well. I could not help but think that some specific prayer of hers had been answered.

Six townsmen, Dr. Delacruz among them, took the Virgin down from her glass case in the Church and perched her on a wooden boat. She resembled the plaster decoy to whom Annelise and I had prayed, but the real Virgin was both darker and brighter. Wood grain striped her varnished cheeks, and the jewels in her robe were real. Garlands of *sampaguita* dangled from the boat's rim. Parishioners loaded the hull with offerings of mangoes, bananas, pineapples, and coconuts. As they brought the Virgin of Monte Ramon into the streets, her crown trapped and seemed to magnify the sunlight. A throng of pilgrims followed close

behind, holding candles. The flame-specked worshipers appeared from far away like a train extending the Virgin's gown.

Behind the pilgrims glided the elaborate float of Miss Monte Ramon and her ladies-in-waiting. College boys in stiff white *barongs* escorted these reigning beauty queens of our town. The speakers on their float warbled a folk song in praise of the *sampaguita* flower. Our group marched behind, boys on the left, girls on the right. The pace of a parade suited me. I struggled to catch up with no one, and the spectators seemed too deep in the pageant queens' thrall to stare at me or point their fingers. Behind us, the elementary school children sang about the wonders of Monte Ramon, from its hills to its Virgin to its local sweets.

After the parade, Annelise and I bought *suman* and unraveled its leaves to bite into the sweet, sticky rice packed inside. We vowed to taste everything at the festival. Halfway through our mission, Annelise complained of an upset stomach. We laughed at our foolishness and called ourselves *takaw mata*, more greed in the eyes than room in the belly. We made our way down the littered main street of Monte Ramon, feeling full.

Then Annelise said she had to sit down. As I looked for the nearest bench, she held her middle and doubled over in the street. Her eyes grew listless. I could only catch her wrist as she fell.

"Help," I called. Some passers-by rushed over. What happened? they were asking, but I didn't have an answer. "That girl is my neighbor," a voice behind us said. "It's her faulty machinery does that to her." A crowd gathered as Annelise whimpered on the pavement. Help came in the form of the wooden boat that had just carried the Virgin back from the mountains into town. Dr. Delacruz set Annelise down on this makeshift stretcher, and she curled her body to fit inside. The marchers brought her to the town hospital. By the time she reached the emergency room, the skirts of her borrowed dress were soaked in blood.

Two days later I was allowed to see her in the recovery ward. I had my radio with me. Annelise sat upright on her bed, sipping from a can of pineapple nectar. A bag dripped fluid through a plastic tube into her arm. Although the beds on either side of her were empty, I reached to pull the curtain around hers shut.

"They made bunot out of me," she said, sweeping a hand over her body.

I cringed. *Bunot* was coconut husk stripped of its inner meat, dried out and used to polish floors.

"Would you like to see it?" she said. "My crown of thorns?" She folded down the bedsheet and gathered up the hem of her hospital gown, exposing a swatch of gauzed flesh. Peeled aside, the bandage revealed a

length of dark, scab-colored sutures, crisscrossed like barbed wire. The shadow of raised pink skin around them looked to be weeping. My head grew light; there was a drained feeling at my chest, as if my heart had stopped beating. I was imagining the feel of knives and needles on my own flesh, and wondering if this—the cold sweat above my lip, the difficulty breathing—was how Annelise had felt in the street after the parade. I slumped forward in my chair, the room fading from me until my head touched her bed cushion, and I came to. Annelise covered herself quickly, mistaking my reaction for mere disgust. "Are you all right?" she said.

"I don't know what happened," I said. We apologized at the same time. "Sorry," we said, "I'm sorry." She looked ashamed. I was ashamed, too, not quite believing I should faint now after I had kept my head through all her bleeding, days before.

She switched on the transistor radio, searching for *Pusong Sinugatan*. But the station had cancelled the episode in favor of a weather advisory. Monte Ramon's wet season would arrive any day now. In other news, the Pope would soon induct Jaime Sin, the Archbishop of Manila, into the College of Cardinals. "Cardinal Sin!" laughed the announcer. Annelise fell asleep.

At sundown Dr. Delacruz came into the room. "It's getting late, anak," he said to me. "Let me drive you home. I have something to give to your mother."

It was around this time I started to believe that Dr. Delacruz was my father. He drove me from the hospital in a quiet that felt tender and familiar. "Your friend will be all right, *anak*," he said. At our gate he unloaded the wheelchair from his trunk. There was a care and confidence in how he lifted me from the passenger seat and set me down in my chair. It took me a moment to unclasp my arms from about his neck.

The doctor handed me a plastic bag with a Tupperware container inside, cold from refrigeration. It felt grand to have no duty other than to hold a bag, as Dr. Delacruz carried my books and pushed my chair and used my keys to unlock the garden gate and the front door.

My mother came downstairs from a bath, her hair wrapped in a towel. She looked weary, the bones and hollows of her face sharpened in the absence of her usual makeup. She could become grumpy and vulnerable around holidays and festivals—times of year that even her most devoted guests spent with their wives and children. "Doctor," she said, surprised.

"Just thought I'd give Danny a ride home from the hospital," he said. He pointed to the dish in my hands. "We brought you some *dinuguan*."

My mother's face brightened. The dish in my lap was a fiesta tradition. *Dinuguan*, a stew of pig entrails in pigs' blood, followed after any feast where

lechon had been roasted. "Ah, the *dinuguan*!" said my mother happily. "Now I have something to feed the help when they are working late. As for Danny and I, we've got these sensitive American taste buds. No *dinuguan* for us. Thank you Doctor, for thinking of the servants."

Dr. Delacruz looked down at the floor with a twitch that suggested he was trying not to laugh. I felt glad. Was I not witnessing an intimate moment between them? His amusement seemed to me the province of husbands humoring their wives in some womanly silliness. My mother stepped aside—a cue for me to wheel toward the kitchen and refrigerate our dinner.

After Dr. Delacruz and the last of the servants had gone, my mother reheated the *dinuguan* on our stove. I was hungrier than I had realized, and the mud-brown stew sated me as no meal had for some time. My mother ate ravenously as well. In her haste a splash of *dinuguan* landed on her robe. "Oops," she said between mouthfuls, wiping it off with a napkin and leaving a dark smear. She looked and sounded like a child then, as when she pretended to Dr. Delacruz that *dinuguan* offended our American palates. I saw my mother in a sad, sweet light. By this time I was so certain our lives were about to change that the house seemed already occupied with other people, watching as we slurped dark innards from my mother's finest china and sharing in this ritual that once had been our secret.

The rains began gently enough that I could visit Annelise after school each day. In the hospital, the week she remained under observation, we passed the late afternoons reading or listening to the radio. I longed to tell her about my suspicions regarding Dr. Delacruz, but dared not jinx my fate. First the doctor and my mother had to reunite. Then the house had to be mended down to its last broken tile. Ruben Delacruz had to suffer at the start, then grow to love me, grudgingly, as a brother. And then Annelise could know and share in our joy.

Each time Dr. Delacruz spoke or delivered me home, my sense of imminence grew. I found myself recreating all the moments he had entered our house or tended to me when I was ill. I culled from those encounters any sign I had been too young to recognize before. Had he always said "anak" to me, and always with such tenderness? Did gaps in his stories about youth or parenting or widowhood tell more than things he said aloud? One evening after my visit to Annelise Dr. Delacruz took me home, as usual, and we found my mother in a miserable state. She was sitting on the floor in our sala. The gardener and the maid were standing over her, surrounded by some things dragged from her room: a mahogany trunk inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and a mirrored vanity tray cluttered with brushes and bottles. Her shiny robe had loosened, revealing a swath of

pale freckled skin at her chest.

"What do you mean, you cannot take it? This is French perfume, very expensive," my mother was telling the maid. Payday had arrived, it seemed, and my mother once again lacked cash to give the servants outright. The maid, a girl so young she still wore her hair in two braids, looked at her feet, but her resolve was apparent. Hands clasped behind her back, she would not accept my mother's half-empty bottle. The gardener held an ivory nesting doll in one hand but seemed to be waiting, humbly and patiently, for more.

Dr. Delacruz approached them from behind my chair.

"Where have you been?" my mother demanded—whether of me or of Dr. Delacruz I wasn't certain. I had followed the same routine like clockwork for a week. The doctor whispered to the servants, taking a billfold from his pocket and handing each of them a sheaf of peso notes. The gardener set the doll gently upon our marble-topped coffee table, and both servants hurried past me and out of the house.

In my concern for Annelise I had forgotten how lonesome and theatrically fragile my mother could become during fiesta season. "I was visiting my friend," I said, "at the hospital."

"The *labandera*'s daughter?" my mother laughed. "The squatter child with the 'feminine problems'? You be careful of squatters, *anak*. People from the ravine see a boy with a big house, a nice garden, and—"

"There's really no need," interrupted Dr. Delacruz. "Danny has been a great friend to Annelise."

"And so have you, I hear!" she replied. "Another *pro bono* project for the great Dr. Delacruz! She's the last stop on your road to canonization, isn't she?"

I sensed they would be shouting soon. The air was ripe for revelation.

"Look at this house." My mother pointed to the ceiling. A leak from her upstairs bathtub had made a growing stain in the plaster, damp and beginning to smell like mold. "My phone's been cut off, too. But I suppose I have to be a *labandera*'s daughter to expect help!"

"Was he a phantom that just paid your servants?" said Dr. Delacruz. "I've been getting your son home every day. I've brought you food—"

"Oh, the servants' dinuguan has nothing to do with this!"

"The servants!" Dr. Delacruz laughed. "That's right, it's the servants who eat the *dinuguan*. Because your 'delicate American stomach' can't handle native grub. You know, it's all this make-believe that's the problem. It's not the house that needs fixing.

"Anak," he said, kneeling suddenly to address me, "I have always wanted to help you. There are prosthetics we could try, or better chairs.

But your mother says no to all of that."

My mother's eyes widened with something like dread. "Because this chair is an heirloom," she said in a desperate way, "and Danny is proud of his grandfather—isn't that right, son?"

Dr. Delacruz ignored her. "Anak, your mother was sick in the mornings while she was pregnant with you. So sick she wanted pills for it." There was a German miracle pill, said Dr. Delacruz, which expectant mothers had taken in the West. It dulled their pains and helped them sleep.

I was mightily confused. The revelation was taking a long time, and veering in a direction I hadn't foreseen. I scrambled to reword my prayers to the Virgin, to be more specific, to tell her how my exact fantasy unfolded. But it was difficult to sustain any kind of prayerly focus in that room that evening.

By the time my mother was expecting me, Westerners had lost interest in the miracle pill. Large shipments were made to pharmacies in Manila when it would no longer sell in Europe and America. "I asked your parents for more time," said Dr. Delacruz. "Pamphlets from the drug company told me nothing. If I could only find out more . . ." But my mother begged him; she was suffering, and if the doctor would just prescribe, then her American father could obtain any Western drug she wanted, even ones not readily available in Monte Ramon. He resisted my mother and her boyfriend but finally gave in and wrote the prescription. Then he saw, the day I was born, that he should have resisted more.

"It's my everlasting penance," said Dr. Delacruz. "If there's anything you want or need, Danny, I'll do my best for you. I can't forgive myself for the past. But I can't lie to you either, *anak*. These fairy stories that her father's war heroism begat a son with no legs . . . Even children deserve to know the truth." He stood up. "You poor boy," he added, in a voice laden with regret, and left the house.

My mother looked pale and stunned, as if we had been robbed and found ourselves in a *sala* emptied of its sofa, its cabinet, its sepia portrait of my grandparents. "Oh God, don't believe him," she said, falling to her knees in the doctor's place. All this kneeling was starting to remind me, perversely, of the children who mocked me at school. "Who is he? I am your mother; believe me."

There was nothing left for us to do, my mother said, but pray. She threw herself at my chair, weeping on the empty fabric of my trousers. She crossed herself and gazed tearfully at her parents' wedding portrait, looking for a moment to be praying to them.

By the time Annelise returned to school the monsoons had begun in earnest. Rain fell so abundantly it struck up fat white stars along the ground. It became difficult to see what was in front of us. One day I insisted on escorting Annelise home, feeling chivalrous until she had to help control my chair on our way down the hill. Along the ravine, children were laughing in the storm, shirtless or bare-legged or all the way naked. Their rubber tsinelas clapped along the mud. Below them, the rising creek collected raindrops with a sound like frying oil. Some of these children might lose their houses in the coming months. Annelise might have to take refuge, as she sometimes did, in the Our Lady convent. While they pranced and played the children took care not to slip. This caution slowed their movements and gave them a deliberate, choreographic beauty. I was stricken with longing for a world where everything should move so slowly. The most forward-thinking squatters were dismantling their homes and carrying the scraps to higher ground. Others just held up as hats what used to be their walls. Annelise took the handles of my chair, plowing it carefully through the dirt toward a shining, solitary scrap of tin that we declared ours.

Max Falkowitz

The Strange Worlds of Kevin Brockmeier

The View from the Seventh Layer Pantheon, Hardcover, 267 pp. March 2008 The Brief History of the Dead Vintage, Paperback, 252 pp. January 2007

Kevin Brockmeier's presence in the literary world has more or less resembled his writing itself. Quiet and subtle, he has slipped from the eyes of what could be many potential readers and fans. Critics have praised his tenderness and his weirdness, but his unique style has turned away many others who consider it too quiet or too strange. As a result he has been compared to both Italo Calvino and a pretentious hack. But beyond these labels, Brockmeier is a bright voice for both science fiction and mainstream literature. His writing brims with understanding, telling stories about life and death, growing up and growing old. This article spotlights his two most recent works, the *New York Times* bestselling novel *The Brief History of the Dead* and his new collection of stories, *The View from the Seventh Layer*.

Most of Brockmeier's fiction falls into the camp of magical realism, which is where his imagination runs most rampant—a creativity even his detractors praise. The Brief History of the Dead is about the city we go to when we die. Life in this city more or less resembles life on Earth: there are businesses and shops; people eat, drink, and make money all in the company of friends and family. They remain until every person who can remember them is dead. After that, they move on "into that distant world where broken souls are wrenched out of their histories"—the world beyond the grasp of human memory. The City's population shrinks rapidly as a plague sweeps the planet, eventually leaving only one living soul, Laura Byrd, trapped in Antarctica, who is unknowingly sustaining the lives of thousands. These people range from her parents to the homeless man down the street; the City-dwellers slowly expose the intricate web of connections that bind them to this one woman. Memories, grand and small, are the fundamental ties between individuals, which give meaning to our relationships and ourselves.

The shorter works of his new collection tread equally strange—and unique—pastures, which again probe issues of memory, human connections, and longing (be it for the past, future, or the nameless desire for something else). A man buys God's overcoat, which extrudes slips of paper scrawled with the prayers of those nearby. A city decides to banish all sounds in order to preserve serene silence. Perhaps most remarkably,

Brockmeier treats us to an adult Choose-Your-Own-Adventure, including choices to make about whether we've ever been truly happy. Some of these stories are simple fables and are titled as such, but transcend their quasi-didacticism through beautiful poetry:

We are none of us so delicate as we think, though, and over the next few days, as a dozen new accounts came across his desk at work, the sharpness of his loss faded. He no longer experienced the compulsion to hunt through his pockets all the time. He stopped feeling as though he had made some terrible mistake. Eventually he was left with only a small ache in the back of his mind, no larger than a pebble, and a lingering sensitivity to the currents of hope and longing that flowed through the air.

This last sentence is an apt summary of how Brockmeier's writing affects the reader, with a distant, not entirely painless appreciation for the ways of the world.

It is all too easy, when constructing fantastical realities, for an author to build all the rules and conditions he desires in any way he chooses, which suffices to create unique, imaginative worlds, but can often leave a sense of our world behind. Brockmeier does nothing of the kind—his greatest skill is not just to sculpt these imaginative spaces, but to place in them entirely human characters, emotions, and drives. Shining through a mist of longing and memory are remarkably clear human tendencies. One of Brockmeier's continuing themes is the anxiety of losing one's self in grief, memories, or dreams. And while the figurative scene is vaguely carnivalesque, the emotions couldn't be more realistic.

This is so because of Brockmeier's considerable talents at seamlessly merging the known and the unknown, the human and the alien. I hesitate to call his work science fiction per se because it far too easily bleeds into real life. While there are plenty of fantastical elements in several of his works, they serve less to create a new universe than to mystify our own. The reader is constantly in a state of muffled anxiety, as every truth spoken leads the way to another greater mystery. The comfort—or discomfort—we gain from knowing our memories tie the dead to the afterlife is plagued by the curiosity of what happens next. Many of the stories in *The View from the Seventh Layer* leave more questions than answers. As to whether "lingering sensitivity" or semi-anxious uncertainty takes center stage while reading, Brockmeier teasingly leaves that up to the reader.

Underlying the tone of these works is a subtlety of tone on par with Kazuo Ishiguro, who masterfully sneaks emotional poignancy into even the

most banal of narratives. He does this with horror—take the nauseating moments in *Never Let Me Go* where you realize the ugly truth the characters know all along—as well as more normal emotional domains. When reading both of these authors it is as if the emotional reality of the situation at once bubbles to consciousness, with the silence of a knife and the blunt force of a hammer.

Brockmeier accomplishes his subtlety through pacing. Not much in the way of plot happens in these books. The slow pace allows plenty of time for Brockmeier to develop his story—fleshing out details that make the picture perfect—as well as for the reader to pause and consider the implications of what he's reading. (As Brockmeier's speculative writing is all about realistically drawing seemingly impossible situations, this pacing is a natural choice.) It also makes his writing all the more eerie: Brockmeier assigns us no Virgils to guide the way, and the longer we dwell, the more disturbed—and touched—our thoughts become.

When Brockmeier does want us to focus on one specific point, he draws the meandering action to a quiet stop. The next sentence, rest assured, is the knife: "It seemed clear to Olivia that the life she was looking at was one whose meaning lay entirely in the beginning. She had started out strong and beautiful, and she was not sure when she had changed." Suddenly all the careful winding of character and ambience is unraveled, and all truths are laid bare. These lines are often forcefully blunt: "The past is irreparable and so is the future" leaves little to the imagination.

Most of Brockmeier's criticism stems from his pacing and these one-liners. And some of this criticism is entirely understandable. The one-line zinger, particularly at the end of his stories, is something of a characteristic sci-fi cliché: the revelation that hopes to change everything or give the story a whole new spooky dimension, but in reality takes all the craft out of it and replaces it with crushing literalism. Brockmeier borders on this at times, occasionally doing real damage to the atmosphere he spent so much time crafting. One may also say it is a symptom of writer's anxiety that the reader "won't get it" unless everything is clearly laid out for him.

At the core of these charges is the premise that the author is lazy, stuffing in some "meaning" into a sentence or two to make his stories matter. Brockmeier is anything but, as his graceful, rhythmic prose demonstrates. His careful pacing and considered diction are sure signs of the diligence that makes its way into each sentence. His stories would not fall apart without these lines; even if he didn't say in *The Brief History of the Dead* that a man's small, seemingly insignificant memories are "much heavier than they should have been, as if they were where the true burden of his life's meaning lay," we could figure it out on our own.

However even as I tried to be charitable with these cases, there were

several occasions in *The View from the Seventh Layer* where I felt cheated. Some stories that were building up their own their own intensity felt deflated, as if the ballooning atmosphere were pricked by a pin. But the stories did not pop or fall apart. Was the atmosphere harmed? Yes, but the effect wasn't entirely negative. For unlike most cheesy zingers, Brockmeier's lines carry a meaning to their core, important and profound. These truths reveal an uncanny insight which strikes at the heart of Brockmeier's ideas and characters.

Critics have also commented on Brockmeier's slowness of plot and hazy (or absent) resolutions. There are times when one wonders what is taking Brockmeier so long, for even if his writing is smooth, it doesn't go much of anywhere. In *The Brief History of the Dead* this manifests itself in meandering, seemingly extraneous chapters; likewise, there are some dud stories in *The View from the Seventh Layer*. Frankly, there are few story collections which have no weak links, and while little can be said of these duds, their weaknesses are certainly outweighed by the serene beauty of the stronger pieces. Prose which goes nowhere is a bigger problem in novels, where skipping ahead to the next chapter poses the risk of losing necessary information. But these dry spells can be waited out, for none last too long, and the subsequent meat is worth the wait. One can only hope Brockmeier aims at greater precision for his future works.

A criticism I find completely unwarranted is of his "disappointing" resolutions. Both *The Brief History of the Dead* and several of the stories in *The View from the Seventh Layer* lack any kind of definite conclusion, but hardly to their detriment. (Many of his other stories do have decided resolutions, though these tend to be his weaker ones. In other instances there are definite conclusions, but as to whether anything is resolved is unclear.) Again I point to Ishiguro, another—celebrated—master of indefinite endings. *Never Let Me Go* hardly ends at all, reminding us that novels need not tell the complete lives of individuals, and even if they do cover all the time between birth and death, the notion that we "know" the full life of a character is absurd. Instead, we have a view from a unique perspective unavailable to both the character and the people with whom he interacts, which by necessity means it isn't a complete view, for we lose all the idiosyncrasies of daily interaction and experience.

Brockmeier paints elegantly detailed portraits of people at special points in their lives—facing great changes or a complete lack of change. Resolutions in stories suggest some kind of conclusion or growth, something to be learned or a lesson missed. In the case of Brockmeier's characters, how they confront the challenges before them are all we need to know. How their lives turn out would be the ultimate handing of themes on silver platters. Instead, we are forced to make these judgments for ourselves.

The simple truth is not all of life's stories have resolutions. Crises manifest themselves in constantly changing ways. Certain doubts never disappear. Certain repairs cannot be made. Learning from the world and learning to change our lives are two very different things, as Brockmeier shows us while writing incredible truths about each. The challenge—an open one, on which Brockmeier has made no clear stand—is to see whether either is possible, and to what degree. In this view, resolving a story has little to do with anything, and in Brockmeier's strange worlds, resolution in the sense of change, growth, or certainty of any kind has little meaning at all. "The past is irreparable and so is the future." How we respond, both as people and characters, is where Brockmeier holds us captive, and where we come away most touched.

CONTRIBUTORS

Mia Alvar received a B.A. in English from Harvard College and an M.F.A. in Writing from Columbia University. Her work has appeared in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Hanging Loose*, and *Small Spiral Notebook*. She lives in New York City.

Lory Bedikian earned her M.F.A. in Poetry from the University of Oregon, where she received the Dan Kimble First Year Teaching Award in Poetry. Her manuscript has been a finalist in the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition and the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award Competition.

Piotr Behr is 22 and has lived in Illinois for most of his life. You can call him Peter if you like. He will graduate from the College with a degree in mathematics this spring, only to then study the arts "for real" in various places around the world. He enjoys Ultimate, beertasting, bicycles, thinking about the architecture of human existence, and spending time with friends and loved ones.

Ken Cormier is editor and producer of *The Lumberyard*, a radio magazine of poetry, prose, and music broadcast on WHUS, 91.7FM, in Connecticut. His first book, *Balance Act*, a collection of poems and short stories, was published by Insomniac Press in 2000. He has released two CDs of original music, God Damn Doghouse in 2000 and Radio-Bueno in 2002, with Elis Eil Records. Ken is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Connecticut, where he is also an instructor of creative writing. He has taught poetry and performance workshops in high schools around the state, and at the York Correctional Institute, a women's prison in Niantic.

Max Falkowitz is a regular reviewer for the online journals *Curled Up With A Good Book* (curledup.com) and *The Book Report* (bookreporter. com). He studies Psychology and Russian Literature at the University of Chicago.

John Grey is an Australian born poet, playwright, and musician. His latest book is *What Else Is There* from *Main Street Rag*. His recent work has appeared in *Cape Rock*, *Weber Studies*, *Writers Bloc*, and the *Connecticut Review*.

Andrey Gritsman is a poet and essayist, originally from Moscow, Russia, who writes in English and in his native Russian. His works have appeared in many magazines including *Richmond Review* (UK), *Notre Dame Review*, *Manhattan Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Hawaii Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, and *Poet Lore*, several of which have been anthologized. His book of poetry and prose *Long Fall* was published in 2005 and his new collection, Pisces, was published earlier this year. His work was nominated several times for the Pushcart Prize and was short-listed for the American PEN Center Osterweil Prize for Poetry in 2005. Andrey runs Intercultural Poetry Series at Cornelia Street Café and edits international poetry magazine *Interpoezia* (interpoezia.net). He lives in New York City and works as a physician.

Suzanne Heyd is the author of *Crawl Space* (Phylum Press, 2007). Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and appears in recent and forthcoming issues of *Third Coast, Jubliat, New Orleans Review, Nimrod, Diner, Sonora Review, Southern Poetry Review, Hunger Mountain, Washington Square, So To Speak, Gulf Stream, Open City, Porcupine, Puerto del Sol, Red Wheelbarrow, Northwest Review, and elsewhere. She is also an interdisciplinary artist, crossing poetic practice with visual, performance, and environmental art.*

Steven Mayoff is a writer living on Prince Edward Island, Canada. His work has appeared in various Canadian magazines such as the *Windsor Review*, *Grain*, *All Rights Reserved*, *Grimm Magazine* and *CV2*, as well as Terrain. org and *Aquapolis* (USA), the *Dublin Quarterly* (Ireland), the *Arabesques Review* (Algeria) and *Upstairs At Duroc* (France). Upcoming work includes a poetry chapbook, *Fridge Magnet Cycle*, to be published by Mercutio Press and a fiction collection, *Fatted Calf Blues*, to be published by Turnstone Press.

Peter Moore has work currently appearing or forthcoming in *Gulf Stream*, *Poetry East*, *Pool*, the *Hawai'i Review*, the *South Carolina Review*, *Rattle*, the *Saranac Review* and the *Pacific Review*.

Dennis Saleh's poetry, prose, and artwork appear widely in magazines and collections, including *Boulevard*, *Brevities*, *Phantasmagoria*, *Psychological Perspectives*, and *Terra Incognita*, as well as two new poetry anthologies, *Reeds* and *Tapestries*. Work from his collage series, *Accretions*, will be included in new issues of *Blackbird* and *Blades*. He has read from his poetry, and a novel-in-progress set in Ancient Egypt, at the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum in San Jose, CA.

Jason Tandon is the author of two collections of poetry, *Give Over the Heckler* and *Everyone Gets Hurt* (Black Lawrence Press), winner of the St. Lawrence Book Award and Wee Hour Martyrdom (Sunnyoutside).

Jonathan Ullyot is the screenwriter of *Crime Fiction* (Anthem, 2008) and the upcoming *Tennis with Jesus*, currently in pre-production by Midway Films in Los Angeles. He is currently finishing a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago in Comparitive Literature.

Clare Wolfe is a South Asian Languages and Civilizations major at the University of Chicago. She is interested in the intersection between cultural linguistics and social justice issues in South Asia. She does graphic design in her free time.

SUBMISSIONS GUIDELINES

Euphony welcomes submissions of unpublished poetry, fiction, critical essays and other forms of prose, and musical scores. We suggest that authors familiarize themselves with the current issue of the journal before submitting.

We have established the following guidelines for submissions:

Electronic submissions should be sent as MS Word attachments. Manuscript submissions should include either a functional e-mail address or a self-addressed, stamped envelope with sufficient postage for return of manuscript. All submissions should include a brief biographical note.

With regard to musical scores, hard copies or Finale-formatted files sent as e-mail attachments are acceptable.

Simultaneous submissions must be noted as such. If work is accepted elsewhere, please notify us at once, by e-mail if possible.

There are no strict length requirements. Please type your work and number the pages.

Due to the high volume of mail, please allow three months for our editors to respond.

Electronic submissions should be sent to:

euphony@uchicago.edu

Manuscript submissions should be sent to:

Euphony 5706 University Avenue, Room 001 Chicago, IL 60637

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our gratitude and best wishes to the following friends, whose support has been integral to the success of Euphony as a publication.

Sola Akintunde David Bevington Diana Doty Kaylea Hascall Nancy Jenner Garth A. Johnston Maria Parks Melissa Roy Davis Scott Mike Smith Eirik Steinhoff Holly Stotler Joy Usner

The Chicago Maroon
The Chicago Review
Powell's Bookstores
Seminary Co-op Bookstores
Student Government Finance Committee
University of Chicago Bookstore

Publication of *Euphony* is made possible in part through donations and grants generously provided by our readership. Without their advice and financial support *Euphony* would not have been possible.

Euphony welcomes financial support in the form of donations, planned gifts, and grants. For further information, please e-mail euphony@uchicago. edu, or write to:

EUPHONY 5706 S. University Avenue, Room 001 Chicago, IL 60637