



Noisy Water Review
1999-2000

Acknowledgements

The Noisy Water Review wishes to thank the Whatcom Community College student council for funding to make this publication possible.

Thanks to Scott Hewson for all his work this year to coordinate this publication; to Gregory Skidmore for his help with selecting works; to Tyree Callahan for his great artwork; and finally to all the writers and artists.

For information or questions, please write to *The Noisy Water Review* c/o Jeffrey Klausman, DA, MFA Whatcom Community College 237 W. Kellogg Rd. Bellingham, WA 98226

Submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and artwork are welcome from all current WCC students from September through May. Include name, address, phone, and student number *on cover letter only*; no names on manuscripts or artwork. Electronic submissions are acceptable if pasted into the e-mail and sent to jklausma@whatcom.ctc.edu

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Cover art by Tyree Callahan
"Hale's Passage," July 1999
Oil on canvas, 24" by 36"

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Preface

Welcome to the second edition of *The Noisy Water Review*, the anthology of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and artwork by students at Whatcom Community College. It has been my pleasure to once again serve as faculty advisor.

This year, we feature the paintings of Tyree Callahan. Although the reproductions do not do his work justice, they do suggest some of the mastery of technique and the breadth of his subject matter. We are pleased to feature his work.

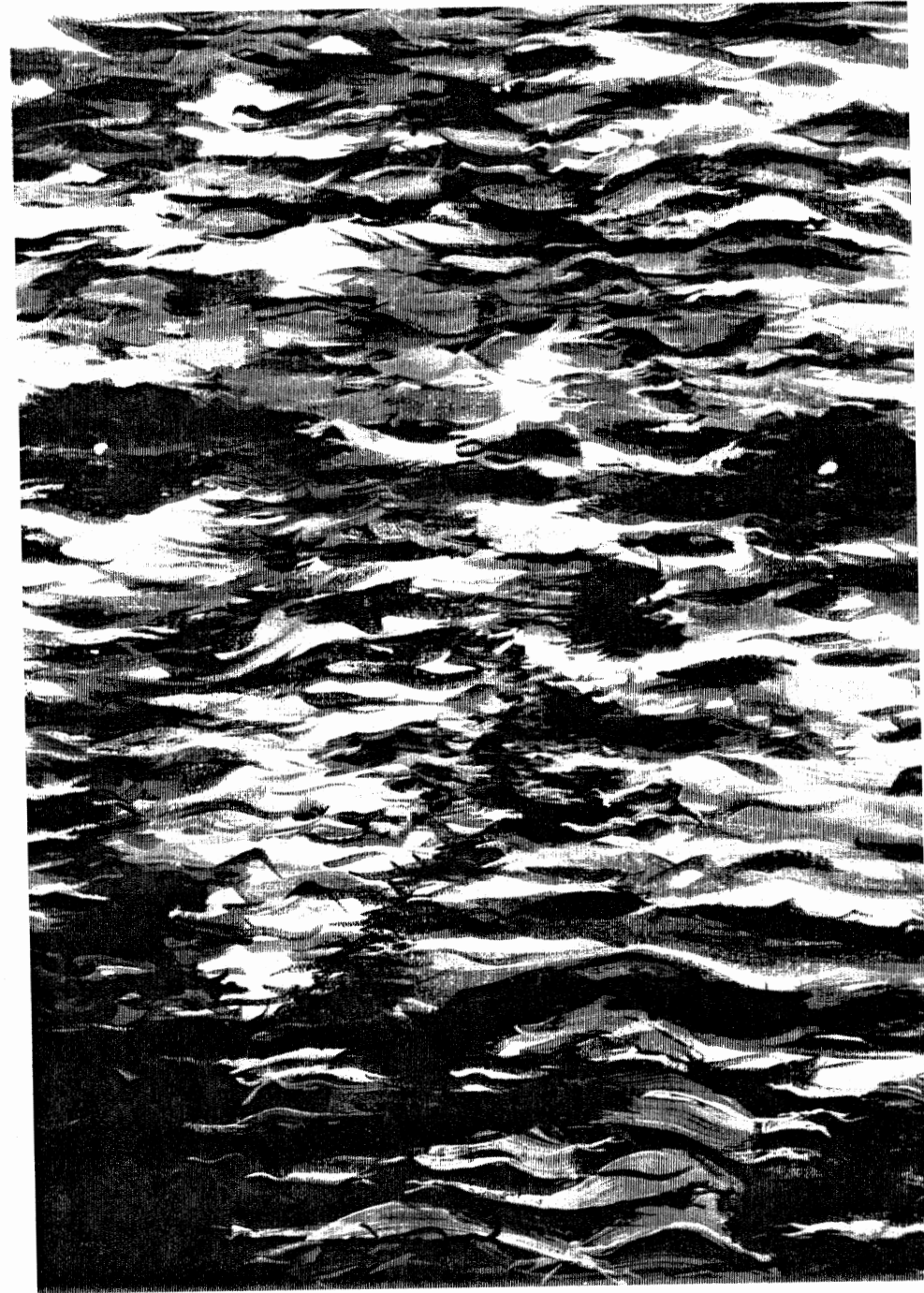
We also are pleased to feature two excellent pieces of prose. Satinder Kauer's essay on arranged marriages is insightful and sophisticated. Selah Tay-Song's story is subtle and imaginative in dealing with a sensitive and easily overwrought subject.

And again, we present a wide range of poetry, from the sublime to the satiric. I hope our little anthology provides a pocket of time in which you can stand still, read, and breathe. Enjoy!

Dr. Jeffrey Klausman
June 2000

The author of genius keeps till his last breath the spontaneity, the ready sensitiveness, of a child, the "innocence of eye" that means so much to the painter, the ability to respond freshly and quickly to new scenes and to old scenes as though they were new; to see traits and characteristics as though each were new-minted from the hand of God instead of sorting them quickly into dusty categories and pigeon-holing them without wonder or surprise; to feel situations so immediately and keenly that the word "trite" has hardly any meaning for him; and always to see "correspondences between things" of which Aristotle spoke two thousand years ago.

Dorothea Brande, *On Becoming a Writer*



Ms. Steak Inwards

Ice peak to use sometimes in a way
that gets Ms. Steak kin.
I don't want to her
chew but
when I mop set tie say things
that would
you win
the con few shun.
Aisle of few. Isle of view.

Wide dew ice a thee
screw wool things?
I just can't
belly view
ill bee here by mice
eyed forever.
I want to be sure of that.
Why can't I say it right?
I love you. I love you.

Tyree Callahan
"Portrait, With Moonlight Dancing on Water,"
April 1999, oil on canvas, 14" by 18"

Greggory Skidmore

Home

Driving down Mission Creek Drive,
I see a man and a woman
standing old. They stand from each
other on the sides of the road.

Her hand reaches in a mailbox,
and he is tall watching her. He looks
her over like a new discovery,
a binding wire between them.

She turns and looks and pauses and looks,
and he is watching her, and I feel
the wire of love between them
cutting me happy as I drive home.

My Best Friend's Mother

She's a mother
living in East Wenatchee
who's aging rightly
as the sun passes over her
today as it has been and will tomorrow.
Yet she has these hands,
stronger than any working hands,
that build life from the thread
she mends together.
She can quilt through herself,
through her eyes that may
only see thread woven up and down
and close against each other unlike her
hands that see the soft beauty
given by each touch
of the pricking needles,
soaring threads,
and the baby child wrapped
in the quilt mended by her hands.
She has no boundaries.

You died today died and you

~ For Raymond Carver and Tess Gallagher

fell soft to a dance
by yourself and I wasn't there
you continued into dreams

as you laid there in our bed
and I woke up to write this
to you you know the sun

is angling on the bed
at your feet like every
morning and that the birds

sing and dance and sing
behind leaves and that
the grass will continue to grow

and children will grow
and run with the birds
and sing themselves

and you know that you want
me to stop writing to you
and begin to breathe by myself

but you know I will make myself
suffocate in this pen
while my life runs out of ink

and until then I will sit
here waiting next to the angling sun
and writing to you always

Separation

I watch a dog standing outside
my work. I stop the vacuum and
he is tied up and looking at me
like I'm his soul mate,

or maybe he just wants to talk.
He wears a black and white coat.
It looks at me too. It's a beautiful
coat. I would brush it though, it needs

love. I look him over. He's standing
by the pole. I look through
the front door window, looking
and then staring at a man

now. He is wagging his finger,
and the dog knows, and the man
kicks him twice to know better.
He leaves, and the dog looks

at me again, and all I begin
to see is his tongue, long
and the color of cherries,
hanging out with a youthful motion

about it. I feel something inside,
a snap of a moment,
and I want to take him forever,
but this is not my job.

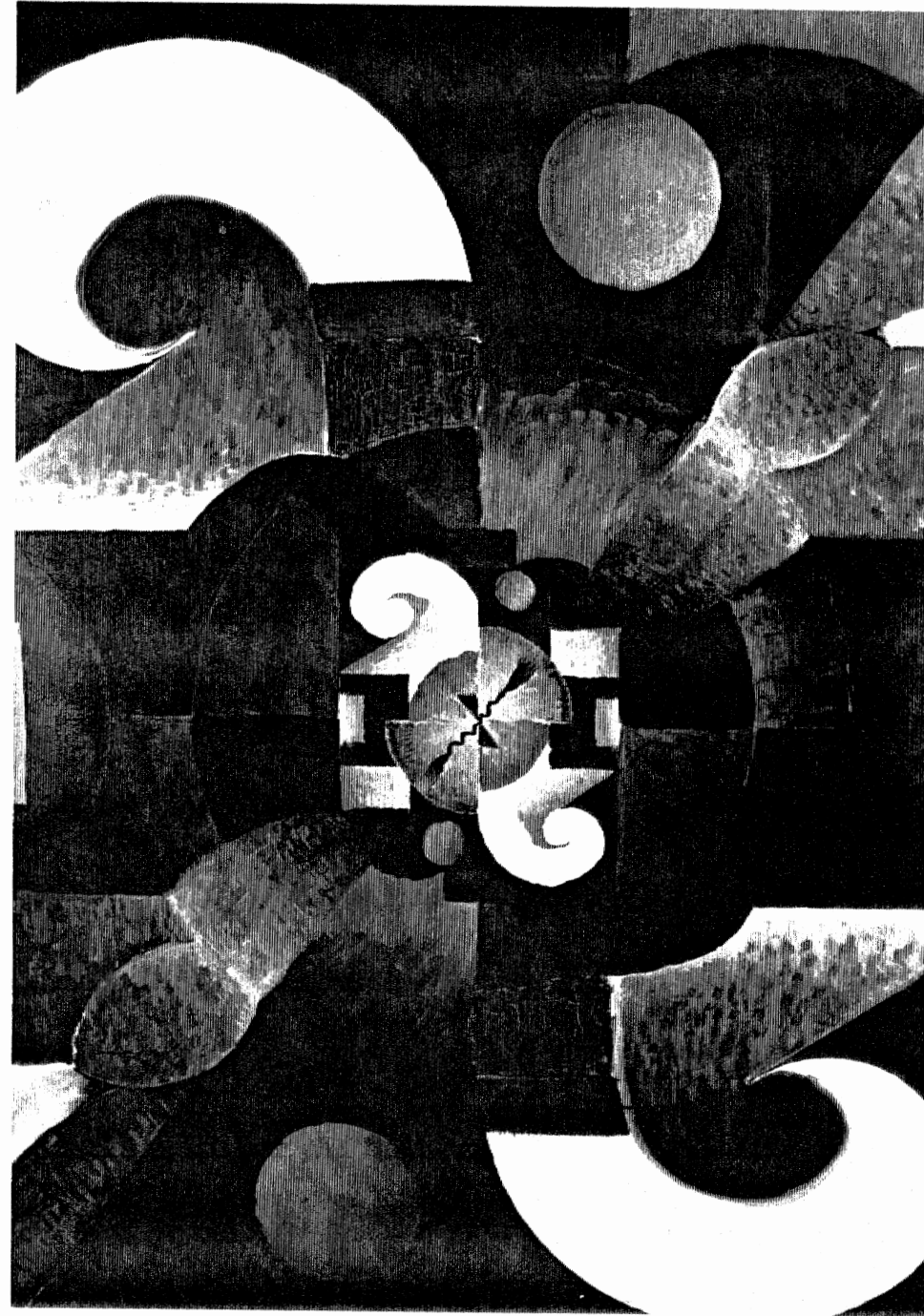
Jabez Richards

Waking to Paint Fumes

Waking to paint fumes,
Like being born during the Earth's final hours,
A premonition that the stars will fall today
And I will greet them with open arms,
Mouth wide with smile,
Breath burdened with the scent of paint.

Opening my eyes to a stained world
And the shirt that I wore to dinner,
I try to cleanse them both with prayer,
But only end up with my eyes closed again.
Piously I sigh relief,
But find that still I cannot sleep.

My ears consumed by a screaming back.
Though I lie undisturbed in a comfortable bed,
In a heated room of my own,
My back cries for hands to touch it
And lips to silence it at the true source of its soreness.



Selah Tay-Song

The Language of Frogs

I remember tree frogs by the thousands. They slept cradled in the bark of ponderosa pines at night. In the gray hours before morning, their singing would wake me. In the day, they came out, slippery, slimy, and brown to blend in with the muck of the lake bog. They were everywhere, hopping, leaping, shimmying up trees, splashing the pond of a muddy little hollow. I couldn't take a step without staring hard at the ground so as not to squash a tiny squelch below my soles. Mom said it was breeding season and they were only babies, but Chuck said they were a small species of adult.

I remember being seven when my family rolled up through huckleberry groves to the closest campsite to Lake Skookum. We startled chipmunks into their holes and picked buckets of berries. We pitched a dusky orange tent on level, needle covered ground.

When I ask Mom what happened in the tent, she says we slept under the stars.

I remember the tent, though. I remember me and Jan lay in our sleeping bags in the darkness and tried to play I-Spy. "I Spy . . . something black," Jan said. "Is it your sleeping bag?" "No." "Is it the tent flap?" "No." "Is it a frog?"

"Is it big?" he asked when I lay drunk in the mud at fifteen, for the first time, under the heavy scent of his beer and white T-shirt, wondering, "Is that *it*?" I laughed when he told me I didn't know what love was. I remember silently agreeing with him but for my own reasons. Later that summer, I glanced through a girl's file in the summer camp where I worked. It said little of the abused child who asked me, "can I take off my dress?" but the child therapist dropped unnecessary

Tyree Callahan
"The Geometry of Affection," February 1999
Oil on canvas, 38" by 30"

hints around the father's profile. I remember his eyes, the sickly steel color of frozen hamburger, staring through me when he came to pick his daughter up.

I remember that Chuck wanted to take me for a walk around Lake Skookum. I just wanted to stay and watch the frogs. Every morning, I went down to the muddy hollow where they congregated and picked one up and held it between my palms, feeling its slimy coolness burn into my tender flesh. Then I released it with a *shloop* back into the murky pond and picked up another.

I remember lying alone in a tent at eleven, listening to frogs sing in the neighbor's swamp, wondering what it would feel like to have them on me, hopping all over, leaving little slimy footprints in my pores. I wondered about the pressure I would feel when they tensed their legs and sprung away from where I placed them.

I remember gritting my teeth and moving my hips the fourth time I lost my virginity. Later, I wondered if I had counted right—if it was only the fourth time. I was watching TV and I wondered how many times it would take to be rid of it. I looked up to see glossy five-year-old Chinese eyes, and heard a reporter say calmly, "She was sold as a prostitute at birth. She was just rescued and will not let a man touch her."

I remember the large toad at Lake Skookum. Chuck found it and Jan looked at it, fascinated, but I was afraid to touch it. Mom told me that some toads have poisoned skin. It croaked at me and I ran a few paces and then looked back. It stared with bright black eyes that looked wet and cold.

I can't remember what happened in the tent. I can only remember Mom cradling me against her hip, bouncing a little, and handing my sleepy body to Chuck. Even that is a dimly faded memory that could

have easily been dreamed. No matter how many questions I ask, I still can't win playing I-Spy in the dark.

Nor can I remember the day we left Lake Skookum. Sometimes I think that I am still there. Our campsite is blocked off for repairs and the frogs are out of season. But sometimes, even when no frogs sing, even when my ears are folded shut, I can hear them. They must have watched from the pines; perhaps they are singing my story. I remember, being a child, wishing that I knew the language of frogs.

Cece Briggs

Always Feeling Guttled

Always feeling gutted
as seagulls overtake the city
on a wet hiss pavement morning.

When the cars out froth the caw
a receding sound back
to the debris floating on the shore.

There is nourishment
lying on the streets at night
exposed and profane
by the first cataract light.

Dreaming Downwind from Smokestacks

My mother dreams
and the barometer shifts
like a stomach when things are bound to change.

She, asleep and running in a green fluorescent night—
Lake Erie-jaundiced coal mine foam
hiss and burns on
piles of dead fish and the moon.

Her nightgown gauze,
*you are driven by some-
thing.*

Feet slap heavy into
footprints that watch and shove
mud to her toes.

She runs to her garden,
her knees fall and
bury cobblestones.
Squatting wild,
dig in long strokes
to tear perennial roots.

Your wind profile,
wet soil flung
and you sweat-heave
through clenched teeth
like a real
animal
collapsing in
to meet its breath grind.

Layers down,
you scrape your fingernails long on a wooden box.
Straddling the hole in your garden,
wrench it out,
forearms bump white against the earth.

A small crate buried,
you splinter the top with
black-rolling-shark dreamtime eyes
to stare at your own heart
swelling in newspaper.

You hear the slow sink
beat-lament
longing its absence
to the space in your chest.

The sound of your ache
and waves slink back into shale out your window,
roses curl at your bedside,
and you
scowl holes into the wall.

Equatorial Zanzibar

Teaming spices and coral rows, white and lustrous,
plowed in my head like footsteps. The power of the beach
sand and the power of the beach hands reaching and
cultivating seaweed and reef rock. The wind swept bristles
of the sand carried my soul and pulsed at my sternum like
the old muskets of the British rule, the rule of Zanzibar.
A hundred frustrated rows in the Zanzibarian Stone Town.
Wall three feet thick, planted in the sea, raised by bleeding
hands, healed by the beaming sun. The burg of limestone
casting spells on the ocean that bring angry storms that wash
thunder over shores. Bleak shores that heap calimari and crab
cooked in white coconut milk. The island purgatory of
turquoise,
of limbo that lies above the black storms of day and the white
limestone and sand. Handsome are the lustrous shells of
purgatory. Handsome are the lustrous mains of the sea.
Handsome are the black hands on white shores flickering at
me, the white hands on black shores, whispering quietly at
the haze and rain, equating without dichotomy.

The Pollen Masts

Someone told me once that the trees stand still in the wind and that only our vulnerable frail forms shingle with the draft. So I peered at the cedar tree in my backyard, wind fragrancng the point that circled our island harbor. Holding my back straight against a cement wall so as not to bend before the wind, I slowed my breathing, hoping to measure the wind. Standing there I saw the aching brush and leaves, terracing the lawn with frozen texture. Galleons and Norse Galleys were pushed home by the winds as the waves fetched with the leaves. They are outlined in my school text. Blind as I may be, I was told about their battles. For false eyes do not flail near my pillow. I noticed in the falling of the waves that my mind wavered with the billowing air, broken by the spirits who traced the brown of my corona at night while I sleep. Those robbers, hackers in their robes waved at the sky, letting it stumble into a stampede of smoke and mirrors. Yet I still have breath in my lungs when I'm determined to inhale. Is not everything equal when I exhale? Could it be that I steal the windows or add to the embers in the sky? How long will it be until the storm is over and the lights are turned back on so I can regain my balance?



Arranged Marriage

My parents were born and raised in India. They came to the United States in search of opportunities and better life. They have tried their best, worked day and night, to give my brother and me a good education, home, and food. Nevertheless, after raising us in this culture, they expect us to keep the traditions of the culture they come from alive. Their high expectations from me as a girl to be an obeying daughter and follow their rules demand that I must do what they want me to. Since marriage is such a big part of life, they have high hopes to choose a man for me and make me go through an arranged marriage.

Just the other day, I overheard my mom talking to her sister about finding a good man for me and marrying me off in a couple of years. As I stood there listening and realizing the fact that my parents had already decided my future for me, I wondered what would happen if I didn't want that future for myself. They expect me to go to college, get my degree, and then have an arranged marriage with their choice of man. That's how things are done in their culture and they expect me to submit to their plan. Especially being a girl, I'm not suppose to have my own way of living my life; I need to follow the road laid in front of me, unless I want to bring disgrace to my family.

What is the worst that can happen if I do choose to make my own path? For one thing my own close family would not approve of it or justify it in any way. They would blame it all on the American culture and its bad influence on me. Then, not only would I be made fun of in their society, but my parents' reputation would also go down. Their friends, family, everyone

Tyree Callahan
"Drumoland Castle Grounds," March 1999
Oil on canvas, 18" by 24"

that knows them, would point fingers and socially outcast my parents. So is it really worth it for me to selfishly choose my own road and let my parents' reputation go down – all that they worked for all their lives?

I must confess, being sixteen, I never thought much about this issue until recently. The word "marriage" never bothered me and was the last thing on my mind. But, about a year ago, my family was invited to a traditional Indian wedding. So I got the opportunity to witness that part of my heritage which would not only alter my mind toward the meaning of marriage but also cause me to weigh my own expectations and beliefs against the culture I was raised in.

I still remember that warm day in May when my dad drove my family to the place this event was taking place. On the way there, I couldn't help but listen to what my parents were saying about this wedding. My mom summarized the groom and bride's families' high status, wealth and good reputation. Then she went on about how the bride's character is good. Even after receiving good education, the bride did not reject the traditional ways; instead, she let her parents' chose the man for her and submitted to their will. And then my dad stepped into the conversation and started giving one of his pride speeches about the culture he comes from – that no other culture values family so much as the Indian culture. He further went on explaining how even the younger generation submits to traditional ways and keeps their family's reputation, unlike the "American kids" who don't respect or obey their parents, since they come from dysfunctional homes. Having heard his speech a hundred times, I have learned to shut myself off from his world of stereotyping. Very easily, I can enter my own world where I can analyze my parents' beliefs and see how

wide that gap between us has become – not just the generation gap, but the cultural gap, which only widens, every time I evaluate their beliefs against my own sphere of life.

When we reached the place, I ran into my friend, Jenny. The wedding ceremony – in which the groom and bride circle the holy book five times and take vows to make the marriage work – seemed too boring and slow, so we went to a corner and had a regular girl talk about boys, school, life and boys. After talking away the two and half-hours in which the wedding took place, we realized that the religious part of the wedding ceremony was over and now it was time to dance and party. However, when Jenny and I looked at the couple now seated on two fancy chairs, we realized the wedding atmosphere was not too colorful for them.

The bride in her red wedding dress, with jewelry and makeup on, which gave her the appearance of someone out of this world, never showed a sign of life on her face. She just sat there; her eyes lowered on the floor, her lips pressed together and her mind lost somewhere. There was no hint of excitement, or happiness on her face, while the groom was smiling and accepting presents from friends and relatives. During this time of my observation, neither the bride nor groom looked at each other or talked. The bride sat there lost in her own world, unaware of the party excitement that everyone was feeling. It was so obvious that on this big day of her life, only her five-foot body was sitting besides this stranger, but her five-inch heart had wandered away someplace else.

For those couple of minutes, as I sat there trying to take the whole scene in, I attempted to guess what was on her mind – maybe she was forced to marry this man, maybe she loved someone else, or maybe she is thinking of the future when this unknown man would set the boundaries of her dreams and thoughts. My

mind went on guessing, when my eyes met Jenny's, I realized I wasn't the only one trying to figure this situation out; Jenny had the same thoughts running through her mind. So I just flashed a smile at her, not knowing how to say what I saw and felt, but she grabbed the moment and said what I didn't want to consider or ever think about.

"One day this mess is gonna happen to us," she said.

I looked away from her eyes and didn't respond. Her comment was not just a statement; it was a fear that needed to be calmed; it was a question that needed an answer. It was one of those sentences which define reality--like the sky is blue, and no matter how much you try to manipulate its meaning, the same haunting reality would scream out always, whether one likes it or not. So badly, I wanted to assure Jenny that one day she would not be sitting in that chair receiving a life sentence to a life that she didn't want to live. So badly, I wanted to keep her infant dreams from tasting their funeral that night, but I was no help; I just sank into my chair, searching for the same hope and answer.

That was the first time I became aware of the borders set before me, and the first time I felt trapped under the weight of my heritage. In this centuries-old tradition, a matchmaker chooses a man and a woman. Then the families meet. They see each other's caste, wealth and place in society. If they like what they see, a meeting is arranged, so the man and woman can spend an hour or two together, to come to know each other. If they are lucky then they'll get the chance to say whether they want to marry each other or not, but often they are told that they will marry each other. Then the wedding date is selected and a big wedding is held. Hundreds of people are invited to see these two people being threaded into a relationship; these two people, total strangers to each other and not having the slightest idea

about who their partner really is, are expected to start a new life together.

For my parents, as for most old people, there was nothing amazing or disturbing about an arranged marriage. On the other hand, when I witnessed it, a billion thoughts invaded my mind as I tried to piece together what this ceremony was all about and the strangeness in this process. Just the thought of spending my whole life with a man—whose heart and mind would be totally alien to me—gave me this unspeakable fear. How can one person just marry another and vow to spend their whole lives together without ever really knowing who the other person is? Sure, the guy and girl had time to spend together before the wedding, so they know each other, but I wonder, how can two human beings really come to know each other in an hour or two? Their goals in life, their expectations, their values and beliefs—how can they promise to accept each other, without completely knowing what the other person is all about?

Sitting there, I couldn't help but be amazed by the idea that these two strangers were going to spend the first night together and experience that physical intimacy without sharing the emotional and mental intimacy. It almost made me wonder in awe, when I thought the first contact between these two strangers would be getting naked physically, not emotionally or mentally. The word "love" wouldn't even become a part of the marriage dictionary, until after the wedding night.

But then again, I look at all the couples that had an arranged marriage and are happily married. These couples fell in love with each other after they promised to stay together, until death tears them apart. So I wonder whether it's just me who is making such a big deal out of this issue while it's not even an issue in itself. Maybe I am influenced by this American culture where

I'm being raised in, and, so, I can't see the positive side of arranged marriage. Maybe my perception that marriage is between two people who love each other is just a picture created by the media and culture that I'm living in. I mean, after all, arranged marriage almost never ends in divorce. My parents had an arranged marriage, and in all their arguments and fights, the word divorce is never even mentioned; so in a twisted way, it isn't all that bad. But, then again, lack of divorce rate in arranged marriages could be explained by the fact that people go through this process to keep their parents' head high in society and keep their family tradition alive; so, since, divorce means shame to their family, it isn't even considered an option. Therefore, arranged marriage should be only for those that want it; it should not be a "must" for all the people born in the culture.

If I decide to bring disgrace to my family by not having an arranged marriage, then that doesn't only mean that I would be looked upon as a bad girl, but my parents' reputation would also suffer. The good thing is that we live in the United States, so the Indian society here isn't that closely knit; however, if I do take a step like this, the news would travel to their relatives and friends in India, and my parents would lose the respect they have gained in their society. But no matter what, I know, I will never let this "mess" happen to me, not for the sake of my parents or their position in their society.

The funny thing is that there are moments I can talk about the things I won't let happen to me, but there are also moments in which I feel so scared, so helpless. What if all the things I say I will do are just one of the things that the Indian girls talk about doing, knowing they can never do it? What if that five-foot tall body had also promised the same to herself but never was able to make it come true? What if one day I will also sit in that chair like a dead body, ready to be buried? What

if...and these thoughts go on. They don't have a stable mind, just the way many of us Indian girls don't. They are just tiny fragments telling the story of our lives. But, I will not let them tell my story; I will do anything to be able to marry the man I love and know.

Michael Rerick

Beer, Bars, and Bards

The sad song played on strings
of old pine sap, strung frozen and sad
rub from your peaceful lips,
ooze from the drops of your dripping beer
and laugh out from some heaven.

It is written in the book of saints and fathers
bound in black,
that there is nothing new in heaven or earth;
but your glacier smile
and the beating of your winning heart
is a new star never seen
by Yeats in heaven or Dylan by the green bay,
and you are the guide
through the beasts and signs of this earth.

Never again will the thick pine forests,
the song of oaks seen through grass,
the inseminating beer white foam
or the path be the same again.



Rachel Moore

Getting to Know a Place

Getting to know a place is a process of
learning new streets
noticing the green film that covers things
seeing a row of boats, rust-streaked stomachs/
up to catch the rain.

New plants, trees,
houses, unfamiliar—a row of roses now, I see in dreams.

People out on a Wednesday morning
swathed in raincoats
Feet stout and awkward in black rubber,
armed with spades and rakes
Hands pink-white, rounded off at the wrist where/
cords, drawn tight, try to
keep the water out.
it gets in anyway, elsewhere.
In through the cracks in their impervious boots,
In through the thick seams of their jeans;
down their throats with every breath.

Getting to know a place takes time.
Wandering thought
Careful scrutiny, Interest.

It cannot be done from within the confines of
a vacation cottage
or
a resort trailer.

(Continued)

Tyree Callahan
"The Italian Alleyway," February 1997
Oil pastel, 12" by 18"

It cannot be done on
time share weekends
or
sunny Saturdays at the water-park.

One must beat the roads with
Feet or Wheels,
scan the sides for
old Doritos bags
decomposing rats
cars, sprouting trees.
The imagination must
Travel up creeks
On beyond houses
In between trees
Burn through the fields like a fresh application/
of herbicide from the county truck;
turning brown
Reflecting the straight parallels of power lines/
in uneven round refractions.

Repotting the Plant

Re-potted the plant
yesterday
Whose green masks;
Fierce faces
Had begun to yellow
sickly and wilted.

I prepared a new home
gravel soil
main drainage
company's own water

And when I tried
to remove the plant
It clung fast,
like a hermit crab
reluctant to leave the dubious shelter
of its old, familiar home.

I shook; upside down
still, tenacious,
it gripped the slippery blue plastic,
soil long gone
absorbed into the massive white root-ball.

Finally, in a reluctant hurry
I raced with butter-knife
against the rain, pattering down
ever faster
circumcised the plant
Scraped around roots,
and it shook, finally,
free into my hands.

(Continued)

White gnarled fingers
groping each other,
Blind in the darkness
like some twisted movie theater.

I could not separate
what, in all good gardener's conscience I should have
Tried to wrench the roots apart
Stubborn, they held on
for dear death
to each other--ignorant of my help.

Ode To Rite Aid

Double aisle of greeting cards,
fuzzy yellow Easter bunnies,
stale candy, wasted money,
\$6.60 for stamps and after
the rote

"Thank-you-and-good-afternoon,"
the bag holds only toothbrushes.
I have to ask politely,
"Were the stamps included in the total?"

A rushed click-click
(customers are staring)
followed by a brisk "Sorry."

"Do you have a Rite Aid Rewards Card?"
"No ma'm,"
I always say politely.
I don't want to yell in the store.
I don't want to rant at the overworked,
underpaid,
plough-cow in red and blue
about how I don't want a reward
for buying boxed toothbrushes
wrapped in plastic,
for forgetting to ask for no bag
when I have a backpack.
My voice would rise,
I would become hysterical,
they would tell me to leave
and I would have to go
to Wal-Mart for my polite greeting cards.

Sean Tait

Green Guinness

My grandmother once told me
"Smile when they call you Mick
and stand up straight."
She passed down pride,
our only Family Heirloom.

But nowadays
when everybody
wishes they were Irish
I want to slip out the back.

My grandfather wont talk
about the life he left behind
but once I saw an old picture
of a burned down house
all brown and creased in his wallet.

My dad told me once
that Great Uncle Tory
was an Irish Hero.
But I never heard
of Great Uncle Tory before or since.

I stay in now
on St. Patties day
and say the pledge of allegiance
while everyone else
Is puking up green beer.

Noisy Water Review

*Whatcom: Where the waters are noisy
with the sounds of falls and frogs.
(Coastal Salish language)*