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cover image: base of Greek column, photographed in Venice, Italy

PRIVATIZE THE SPACE PROGRAM

By Robert Garmong

After years of declining budgets, public apathy, and failed missions, NASA has gotten a big boost from the Bush Administration's recent promises of extravagant missions to permanently settle the moon and eventually explore Mars. No one knows what it would cost, but a similar idea in 1989 was estimated to cost up to \$500 billion.

Rather than lavishing money on new missions of dubious value, President Bush should consider a truly radical solution for America's moribund space program: privatize it.

There is a contradiction at the heart of the space program: space exploration, as the grandest of man's technological advancements, requires the kind of bold innovation possible only to minds left free to pursue the best of their thinking and judgment. Yet by placing the space program under governmental funding, we necessarily place it at the mercy of governmental whim. The results are written all over the past twenty years of NASA's history: the space program is a political animal,

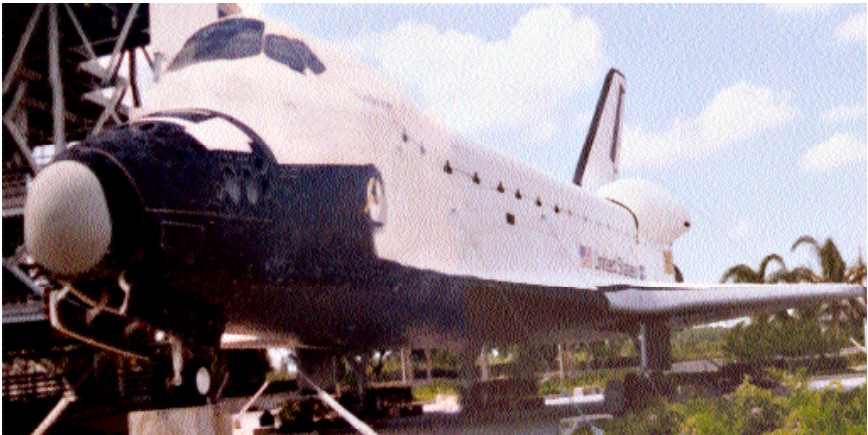


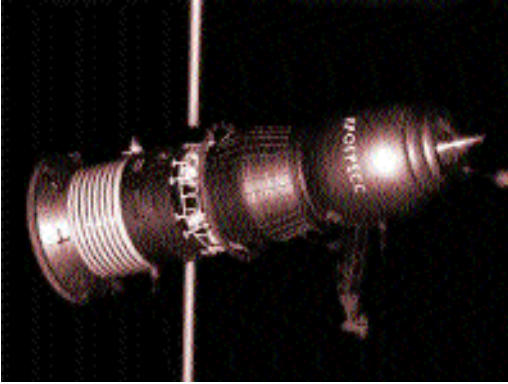
marked by shifting, inconsistent, and ill-defined goals.

The space shuttle was built and maintained to please clashing constituencies, not to do a clearly defined job for which there was an economic and technical need. The shuttle was to launch satellites for the Department of Defense and private contractors--which could be done more cheaply by lightweight, disposable rockets. It was to carry scientific experiments--which could be done more efficiently by unmanned vehicles. But one "need" came before all technical issues: NASA's political need for showy manned vehicles. The result, as great a technical achievement as it is, was an over-sized, over-complicated, over-budget, overly dangerous vehicle that does everything poorly and nothing well.

Indeed, the space shuttle program was supposed to be phased out years ago, but the search for its replacement has been halted, largely because space contractors enjoy collecting on the overpriced shuttle without the expense and bother of researching cheaper alternatives. A private industry could have fired them--but not so in a government project, with home-district congressmen to lobby on their behalf.

There is reason to believe that the political nature of the space program may have even been directly responsible for the Columbia disaster. Fox News reported that NASA chose to stick with non-Freon-based foam insulation on the booster rockets, despite evidence that this type of foam causes up to 11 times as much damage to thermal tiles as the older, Freon-based foam. Although NASA was exempted from the restrictions on Freon use, which environmentalists believe causes ozone depletion, and despite the fact that the amount of Freon released by NASA's rockets would have been trivial, the space agency elected to stick with the politically correct foam.





It is impossible to integrate the contradictory. To whatever extent an engineer is forced to base his decisions, not on the realities of science but on the arbitrary, unpredictable, and often impossible demands of a politicized system, he is stymied. Yet this politicizing is an unavoidable conse-

quence of governmental control over scientific research and development.

Nor would it be difficult to spur the private exploration of space. Phase out government involvement in space exploration, and the free market will work to produce whatever there is demand for, just as it now does with traditional aircraft, both military and civilian. Develop a system of property rights to any stellar body reached and exploited by an American company, and profit-minded business will have the incentive to make it happen.

We often hear that the most ambitious projects can only be undertaken by government, but in fact the opposite is true. The more ambitious a project is, the more it demands to be broken into achievable, profit-making steps--and freed from the unavoidable politicizing of government-controlled science. If space development is to be transformed from an expensive national bauble whose central purpose is to assert national pride to a practical industry with real and direct benefits, it will only be by unleashing the creative force of free and rational minds.

Extending man's reach into space is not, as some have claimed, our "destiny." Standing between us and the stars are enormous technical difficulties, the solution of which will require even more heroic determination than that which tamed the seas and the continents. But first, we must make a fundamental choice: will America continue to hold its best engineering minds captive to politics, or will we set them free?

*Robert Garmong, Ph.D. in philosophy, is a writer for the Ayn Rand Institute (www.aynrand.org) in Irvine, Calif. The Institute promotes the philosophy of Ayn Rand, author of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*. Send reactions to reaction@aynrand.org Copyright © 2004 Ayn Rand® Institute*



IMMORAL TO BAN HUMAN CLONING

*Irrational Fears Must Not Block
Scientific Advances*

By Harry Binswanger

The U.N. General Assembly is unanimous on the need to ban human cloning. Unanimous. This alone should give serious pause to those who want to ban such cloning.

The United Nations is an organization that is perpetually split (at best) on such clear issues as who are the aggressors, the Israelis or the Palestinians. The United Nations is an organization that can condemn Saddam Hussein as a threat to the world in 17 separate resolutions--then balk at approving our doing anything about it.

Yet an organization that cannot distinguish dictatorship from freedom, nor rights from the violation of rights, finds no difficulty in determining the threat posed by the peaceful act of human cloning.

Threat--to whom? Whose rights would be violated by human cloning?

In reproductive cloning, the result is a baby who exactly resembles, physically, someone else. Just whose rights would that violate? Not the baby's rights. And not the parents'.

Once we put aside the emotionalism, it becomes apparent that there is no rational or moral basis for banning human cloning.

If you were cloned today, nine months from now a woman would give birth to a baby with your genetic endowment. The cloned baby would be your identical twin, delayed a generation. Twins of the same age do not frighten us, so why should a twin separated by a generation?

Some raise the specter of the mass cloning of one individual, especially cloning of sadistic monsters, as in "The Boys from Brazil," Ira Levin's nightmarish projection of cadres of young Hitlers spawned from the dictator's genes.

The error here is philosophical: equating a person with his body. A per-

son's essential self is his mind--that in him which thinks, values, and chooses. It is one's mind, not one's genes, that governs who one is. Man is the rational animal. One's basic choice is to think or not to think, in Ayn Rand's phrase; the conclusions, values, and character of individuals depend upon the extent and rationality of their thinking.

Genes provide the capacity to reason, but the exercise and guidance of that capacity is up to each individual, from the birth of his reasoning mind in infancy through the rest of his life.

Neither genes nor environment can implant ideas in a child's mind and make him accept them. Only his own self-generated thinking--or his default on that responsibility--will shape his soul.

Cloning the body will not clone the mind. A mind is inescapably under the individual's own volitional control. "The Boys from Brazil"? It was not Hitler's body but his choices that made him a monster.

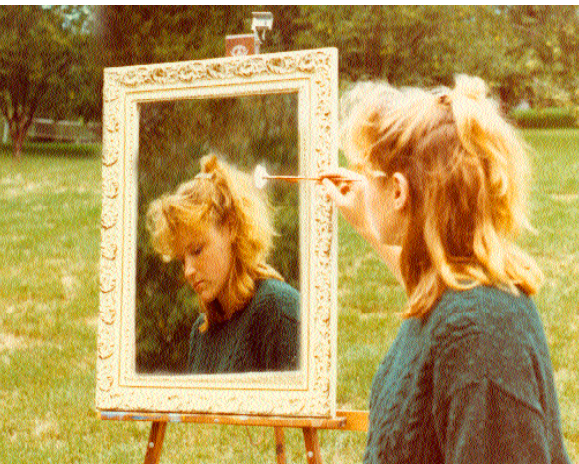
The worry about this kind of problem cannot account for the virtual panic over human cloning, nor for the fact that the cloning-ban advocates oppose human cloning across the board, in any quantity, for any reason.

The actual opposition to human cloning springs from something primordial, the fear of the unknown, the fear captured in the catch-phrase: "We can't play God." But why can't we? We can and we must.

A surgeon "plays God" whenever he removes a cancer or an infected appendix rather than letting the patient die. We "play God" anytime we use our intelligence to improve the "natural" course of events. Natural? It is man's nature to "play God" by reshaping matter to produce the food, shelter, tools, cars, and power stations that sustain and enhance our existence.

Not to "play God" in this way means to abandon the struggle for human life and submit abjectly to whatever happens.

Cloning technology is tied in with stem-cell research. The United Nations has put off for a year any decision regarding cloning to produce stem cells, but the Bush administration is already curtailing it. In this research, the entity that is being legally "protected" is a





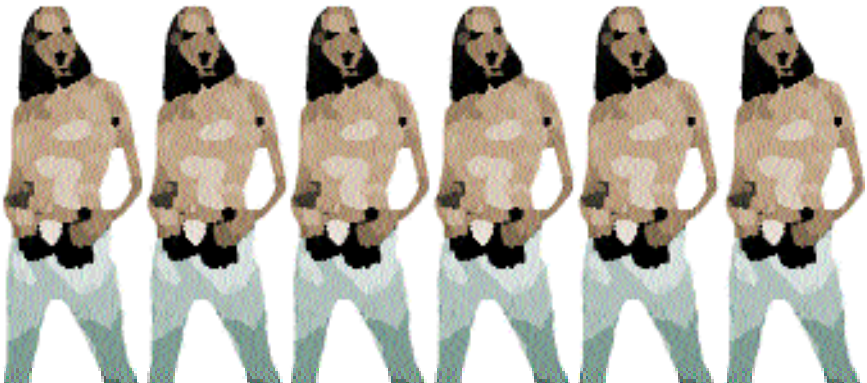
art by Mike Hovancek

single cell or a small ball of cells--not anything that remotely resembles a human being. One can argue about the status of a fetus in the late stages of pregnancy, but there are no rational grounds for ascribing rights to a clump of cells in a Petri dish. It is irrelevant that those cells may have the potential, if implanted in a womb, to produce a baby. A potentiality is not an actuality.

Stem-cell research holds the promise of major breakthroughs in saving actual human lives--yours and mine. The idea of banning such research to sacrifice actual lives to potential ones is obscenely wrong--wrong morally and politically.

At the threshold of a wide range of earth-shaking biomedical advances, we must not let irrational fears of the new slow our progress in the battle to enhance and extend human life.

Dr. Harry Binswanger, author of The Biological Basis of Teleological Concepts, is a member of the board of directors of the Ayn Rand Institute (www.aynrand.org) and teaches philosophy at ARI's Objectivist Graduate Center. The Institute promotes the philosophy of Ayn Rand, author of Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead. Copyright © 2003 Ayn Rand® Institute



LOVE AND SELFISHNESS

The False View of Love as Selfless and Unconditional Destroys its Sublime Value.

By Gary Hull

Every Valentine's Day a certain philosophic crime is perpetrated. Actually, it is committed year-round, but its destructiveness is magnified on this holiday. The crime is the propagation of a widely accepted falsehood: the idea that love is selfless.

Love, we are repeatedly taught, consists of self-sacrifice. Love based on self-interest, we are admonished, is cheap and sordid. True love, we are told, is altruistic. But is it?

Imagine a Valentine's Day card which takes this premise seriously. Imagine receiving a card with the following message: "I get no pleasure from your existence. I obtain no personal enjoyment from the way you look, dress, move, act or think. Our relationship profits me not. You satisfy no sexual, emotional or intellectual needs of mine. You're a charity case, and I'm with you only out of pity. Love, XXX."

Needless to say, you would be indignant to learn that you are being "loved," not for anything positive you offer your lover, but--like any recipient of alms--for what you lack. Yet that is the perverse view of love entailed in the belief that it is self-sacrificial.

Genuine love is the exact opposite. It is the most selfish experience possible, in the true sense of the term: it benefits your life in a way that involves no sacrifice of others to yourself or of yourself to others.

To love a person is selfish because it means that you value that particular person, that he or she makes your life better, that he or she is an intense source of joy--to you. A "disinterested" love is a contradiction in terms. One cannot be neutral to that which one values. The time, effort and money you spend on behalf of someone you love are not sacrifices, but actions taken because his or her happiness is crucially important to your own. Such actions would constitute sacrifices only if they were done for a stranger--or for an enemy. Those who argue that love demands self-denial must hold the bizarre belief that it makes no personal difference whether your loved one is healthy

or sick, feels pleasure or pain, is alive or dead.

It is regularly asserted that love should be unconditional, and that we should “love everyone as a brother.” We see this view advocated by the “non-judgmental” grade-school teacher who tells his class that whoever brings a Valentine’s Day card for one student must bring cards for everyone. We see it in the appalling dictum of “Hate the sin, but love the sinner”--which would have us condemn death camps but send Hitler a box of Godiva chocolates. Most people would agree that having sex with a person one despises is debased. Yet somehow, when the same underlying idea is applied to love, people consider it noble.

Love is far too precious to be offered indiscriminately. It is above all in the area of love that egalitarianism ought to be repudiated. Love represents an exalted exchange--a spiritual exchange--between two people, for the purpose of mutual benefit.

You love someone because he or she is a value--a selfish value to you, as determined by your standards--just as you are a value to him or her.

It is the view that you ought to be given love unconditionally--the view that you do not deserve it any more than some random bum, the view that it is not a response to anything particular in you, the view that it is causeless--which exemplifies the most ignoble conception of this sublime experience.

The nature of love places certain demands on those who wish to enjoy it. You must regard yourself as worthy of being loved. Those who expect to be loved, not because they offer some positive value, but because they don’t--i.e., those who demand love as altruistic duty--are parasites. Someone who says “Love me just because I need it” seeks an unearned spiritual value--in the same way that a thief seeks unearned wealth. To quote a famous line from *The Fountainhead*: “To say ‘I love you,’ one must know first how to say the ‘I.’”

Valentine’s Day--with its colorful cards, mouth-watering chocolates and silky lingerie--gives material form to this spiritual value. It is a moment for you to pause, to ignore the trivialities of life--and to celebrate the selfish pleasure of being worthy of someone’s love and of having found someone worthy of yours.

Gary Hull, Ph.D. in philosophy, is a senior writer for the Ayn Rand Institute (www.aynrand.org) in Irvine, Calif. The Institute promotes the philosophy of Ayn Rand, author of Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead. Send reactions to reaction@aynrand.org

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Obit. II

Pete Lee

Their ages are what strike you now
Even before the faces or the names

Today it's a girl you once kissed
Having approached her

Out of the blue in the parking lot
Of a since-vanished record store

Among the blowing pages
of a discarded newspaper

That flashed the life stories
Of older faraway people

Just you and the street noise
And the girl with the face

That could and did inspire
Boldness in a guarded heart

And she looks back at you
And her name's still the same

And she hasn't changed
Except that she's older

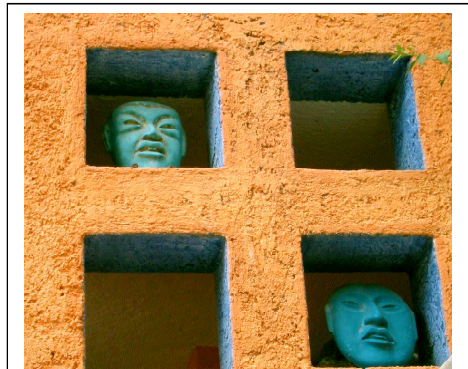
And dead now and far away.

The 2000

Census

Pete Lee

The Dallas Police Dept., on a
Desperate recruiting mission,
Traveled as far as Puerto Rico
But didn't come back with
A single firm candidate.
So they ordered all their
Monolingual patrol officers
To take 60 hours of Spanish.
Now the complaint is that
The cops know enough to
ask basic questions, but don't
Understand the answers. And
All the blacks want to know
How anything has changed.



art by Cheryl Townsend



Overnight

Teresa Maison

Smoke filled the rooms
you came and shook me
we fled to the yard

My gown heavy with dew
I slipped to the back
rescuing the kitten
just standing there
in our Pj's
our chimney burning crimson.

To Lori, Now in College

Donna Pucciani, Ph.D.

You should see him now, you uncle Peter,
Mowing the lawn, mulching leaves.
He parks the mower in the garage, plods
Indoors grunting his old-man noises
In a voice that once whispered bedtime tales
Muffled by the dark of your pillowed hair,
Belinda Macintosh on the Farm in Iowa,
Belinda Macintosh Goes to the Circus,
His eyes glassy with fatigue as you fell asleep
clutching your favorite marble or Tutu the Bear.

It is autumn here. The orange maples burn
holes in a pink sky at sunset, while you
Party with roommates by the pool in Tuscon,
Punch numbers on your cell phone, study
Under sun-blazed palm trees, dab sunscreen
On muscled young legs, you who left
amid boxes, suitcases, and books:
tonight, behind your eyes, will you watch
Belinda ride her horse on a moonlit meadow
Or milk cows in a barn heavy with hay
As an old farmer closes the pasture gate?

On the Flip side

is there any more sanity in the world
I just can't believe that it exists anymore
I haven't seen any proof
with that I'll trust that there is no evidence
and so I rest my case

Military Police



art by
Cheryl Townsend

There are times like this
when I like to think
I'm free of you

I tackle other obstacles every day
the thought of you doesn't cross my mind
and sometimes, you know,
I have a good day
and I face adversity
and I accomplish things
and well, I feel good

and it's nice to know
that you had nothing to do
with making me feel good

I have a ton of things to do today
and I was having technical difficulties
and I had to figure out how to overcome them
and you know, I did everything I could
and I think I ended up ahead of the game
and it had nothing to do with you
and I feel like I've accomplished things today
and I feel like I'm ahead of the game
and it makes me feel good

and it makes me pause and smile, you know,
you little fucking prick
it makes my stop and start to smile
when I think about all that I have done
and all that I can do
and it's all despite you

A ZOO

Michael Keshigian

The animals seem so sad,
elephants with eyes drooping,
a buck and fawn incapable
of a sudden lurch,
the turkey, even a turkey to his wattle,
prized horses stoically corralled in their stalls.
What do they think
as we stare back
at their glassy gazes,
subtle pleas,
or indifferent recognition.
The mute monkey
does not even look our way.
Brethren of mortality
thrust into complex packages of flesh,
they are given
unnatural commands in iron cages,
coaxed to breathe, blink,
eat, sniff, mate,
and especially wait
for casual acknowledgement,
like coins wedged
into a collection folder.

FLIRT

Michael Keshigian

She is a propellant
when she hesitates,
kindles a flame
when she strokes my hair,
kisses my cheek,
brushes against my torso,
grasps my hand and giggles.
I blush.
My eyes reflect
the fever she incites
though she talks in riddles,
feels strange and ungainly
in my arms.
I am victim of her charms,
clever as a Mozart symphony
minus the finale,
a progression of unresolved chords.

NARRATION

Michael Keshigian

The other men from town
attempted to entice her with idle bravado,
offered to buy her drinks, asked for a dance,
in their flamboyant outfits garnered with gold.
He watched them stare intensely,
those savage glances
which say so much more than hello,
let them huddle around her
and compete for attention.
He bid his time in a faraway corner,
where the smoke filled air stained his eyes,
away from the embattled contestants.
He wrote on a pad from his pocket,
described her voice and beauty,
sensations he would one day read to her,
when the thoughts were coherent
and courage allowed him
to rouse her from ordinary
into the extraordinary ardor of his verse
through the open doors of his heart.
He would be the different one,
the flushed eccentric with common clothes
and a black notebook,
thick with words
she had never heard before.
He would be the charming misfit
who, in a warm summer breeze,
on the edge of night,
will capture her affection
with a narrative
it took so many nights to contrive.



weren't even married

Janet Kuypers

you jumped from an airplane once
and you promised that you'd force me to go with you
the next time
you were always jumping out of airplanes,
weren't you

the ring i'm wearing
is on my right hand, not my left
and it's on my middle finger, not my ring finger
and it seems appropriate
you didn't even buy me that ring
and we weren't even married

i bought the ring at a street fair
on belmont avenue in chicago
on the day of our first date
where we watched pulp fiction at your apartment
and i asked you to sit closer
to me
and you kissed me

the ring isn't a complete circle
there are two stones that don't quite meet
and there's a void in the middle
and that was appropriate
cause you didn't even buy it for me
and we weren't even married

i've missed you, you know
i can't even pass the apartment building you lived in any more

i remember when you told me

that someone was shot in that building once
and that maybe it was haunted

but they were shot for money
they were robbed
and this time you just slipped away in your sleep
and this time i was robbed

when one of the stones fell out of my ring
i was sad
but i think you were more sad
you wanted to replace the shiny purple stone
but i said no

and now i still wear the ring
and a stone is still missing
and isn't it appropriate
and we weren't even married

i've missed you, you know
and with your absence the bad memories vanish
where you were someone else once
where you were someone once
where you were alive once
i forget that there was so much about you i hated
because you're not here to remind me

so with this ring, i remember
because now nothing is complete anymore
and everything is missing now
and isn't it appropriate
that there's no next time for us

you jumped from an airplane once
and you promised that you'd force me to go with you
the next time

Scars 2000

Janet Kuypers



art by Cheryl Townsend

I
An Admiral, A General

A high-ranking military official
when you get somewhere in the military
when you grease the right wheels
when you climb the corporate ladder
when you get as high as you can

when you make your graceful exit
when you've been adorned with pins
and medals
and badges of honor
and you've got all your stripes on your sleeve

when you accomplish it all
and when you retire

well, then what?

II

the effects of age are getting to me

my vision is shot to hell
my contacts kill me and
my glasses are so old
they're only half the strength of my prescription
so when i look at things
i notice the blur more than
i notice the detail

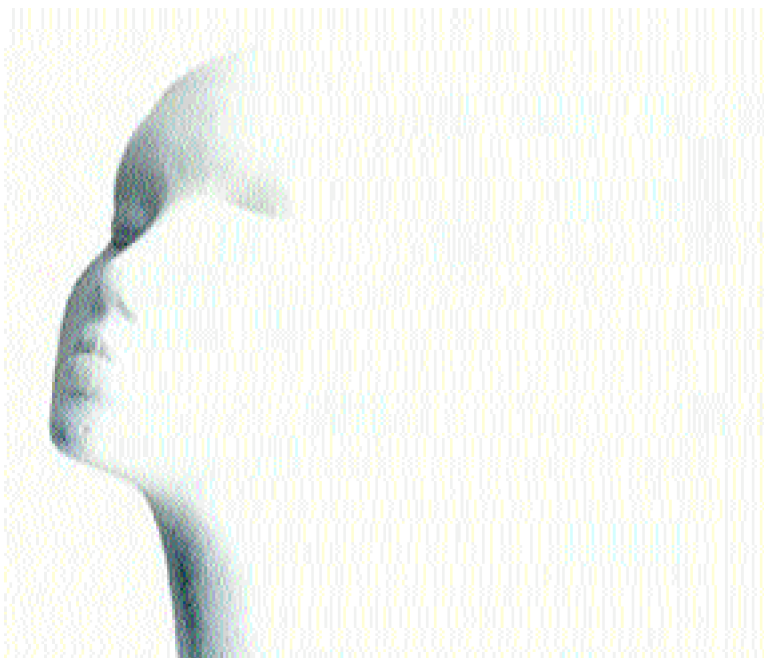
my senses of taste and smell are shot to hell
i throw so much garlic on food for flavor
that i offend my friends and family
and i can't even smell
when i smell
i mean, cologne is lost to me

my one ear is closed most of the time
and it feels like i've got water in my ear
and it hurts for me
to hear myself even breathe
damnit, i can't even sing any more
and do one of the things
i actually like to do
i try to hear beautiful sounds
but people are usually talking over it instead
and all i can hear
is their incessant bickering and whining

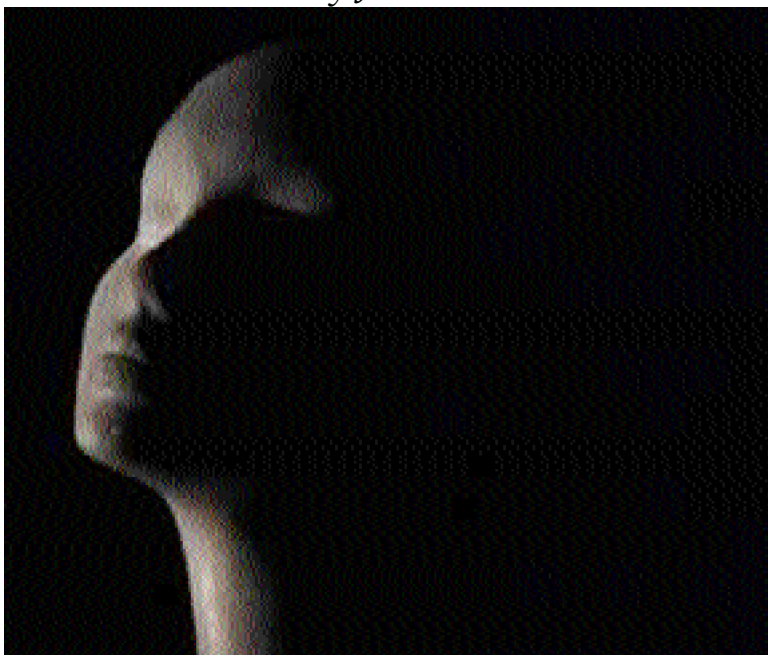
and god damnit, i try to enjoy something
every once in a while
and something more irritating
is usually in the way

you know, i'd rely on writing
but for a while, i couldn't even do that
and what do you have then?

i can feel it in my left ankle
like i can't carry weight like i could any longer
and my left knee keeps cracking and popping
and my sister says,
you know,
you've got the 'kuypers' knees
and i guess the kuypers have bad knees
and i was always unaware of that



art by John Yotko



the knuckle in my right thumb
has been swollen for over a decade
and even the doctors can't find anything wrong

and whenever i write
i grip the pen so tight
that my fingers hurt
and all i can feel
is the ache in my joints



and whenever i look down
and see the scars on my body
and i should be proud of some
and some would say that i should be proud
of surviving some traumas
and having the scars to prove it
but all i see are the scars
and all i feel are the aches and pains

is this what scars do to you?
or is it the memory
of surviving the trials
and getting the scars
and is THIS what you have to show
for everything you've done
are these your pins and military stripes
you get after you accomplished your goal?

because what do you do
when you're retired
do people care about your medals of honor
or do you earn so many
that they just weigh you down?

Faith

Michael Kanuckel



Fletcher was a poor man who had worked hard all his life. He worked twelve hours a day, six days a week, in a plastics factory where they seemed to make nothing but tiny knobs for tiny radios. It was tedious, thought-killing work. Fletcher's life was working, sleeping, eating, and watching television in his apartment. That was all he could afford; a slummy little run-down apartment in a slummy little run-down part of the city where the streets and buildings were always dirty and had an abandoned look to them and the stores had bars on the doors and plywood over the windows. His neighborhood was filled with cars that didn't run, children that couldn't read, cold neon promising escape through beer and girls, girls, girls. And over everything stood the church.

Fletcher hated that church.

It stood on the corner of two streets without street signs, that he couldn't remember the names of, a building of brick and stone and stained glass, with polished oak doors that gleamed in the sun and never looked dirty or singed with riot fire. The fact that it stood so impeccable and clean in this neighborhood was enough to make Fletcher hate it, but that was only one part of the problem. On Sunday, his one day off from the heat and the stink of the plastics factory, the streets of his neighborhood would be lined with cars. Organ music poured out of the church, and voices singing. The people who filled the church every Sunday shouldn't be there. They didn't live in this neighborhood. They didn't belong. Fletcher saw them on the sidewalk below his apartment, the men in their tailored Sunday suits and the women in their fine dresses and the children with their neatly combed hair and clean faces. Rich folks, from the other side of the city. They came to the church so they could look on all the squalor of Fletcher's neighborhood and feel good about themselves

and sing about their glory of God. And of course they believed in God. It was so easy for them, with all their good jobs and nice houses and new cars that always started in the morning and never made them late. But mostly they came to see the preacher.

Fletcher hated the preacher most of all.

He hated the preacher because he pretended to be from the streets and he wasn't. During the week the preacher walked around Fletcher's neighborhood in blue jeans and a plain cotton shirt, too clean and too new to have ever seen any work, talking with people and visiting the local stores. Trying to drum up business for the church, trying to bleed the people in the neighborhood dry. Fletcher knew the truth. The preacher was a wealthy man. He had a whole building down the street to himself, that had been a boarding house or a hotel once. Fletcher always saw people coming and going from the building. Mostly young people. Mostly young girls. On Sunday, the preacher walked through the neighborhood and invited people to have fellowship with him. And the idiots went with him. They lined his pockets with whatever they could spare. Every week the people came and filled up the neighborhood with their cadillacs and their town cars and their lexuses. They came and looked at the dirty streets and thought how fortunate they were, how mucky to be the children of God.

Fletcher didn't believe in God, so he couldn't hate Him. He had to settle for the preacher.

The handsome, charismatic, wealthy preacher came often into Fletcher's thoughts as he stood at his machine, baking in the heat and reeling in the stink and singeing the calluses on his fingers. The preacher had no business in his neighborhood. Where was God when darkness fell, and the bars lit up, and the girls stripped for dollar bills? Where was God when the husbands and wives were screaming at each other, and throwing things, and beating their children? Where was God when the dealers and junkies and cops came out into the dirty streets? Where was the preacher, for that matter? Sitting secure in his private apartment building, that was where, behind the locks and dead bolts and a fancy alarm system, counting his money and laughing at the poor and the ignorant. Laughing. Fletcher knew the truth. The truth was, the preacher didn't believe in God any more than Fletcher did. One day, on his lunch break (he got ten minutes, not even long enough to really eat anything), he decided he wanted to hear the preacher say it. He wanted to hear the preacher say he didn't believe in God.

When he got off the train and stepped onto the street, Fletcher's mind was made up. He would go right up to the preacher's building, break in if he had to, confront the preacher, and make him say it. He would have satisfaction. He would have the truth. He walked down the street and past the dark church, and on to the preacher's building. There was a mat on the side walk at the bottom of the stoop, that said welcome. Fletcher stomped on it. When he got to the top of the stoop he found the door was not locked and bolted but opened before him. There was a snarl on his face now. Inside the foyer, everything was clean and tidy. There was a series of coat hooks, none currently occupied. There were pictures on the walls, mostly of the preacher with groups of children or important-looking people. Everyone was always smiling. Fletcher was sure that none of the people in the pictures had lower back pain, or woke up with aches in their wrists and knees. No, the people in these pictures had the good life. The good life.

All the rooms downstairs were dark. Fletcher went upstairs, and didn't find anyone there either. At the end of the second floor hall there was another staircase. He went up these as well, and came to a small door that opened on to the roof. And there was the preacher. He was over by the edge of the roof, throwing bread crumbs to the pigeons. He looked like he was posing for a picture, majestic and yet common all at once, arms outstretched and the birds flying around him. Fletcher hated him more at that moment than he ever had before. He walked out onto the roof, letting the door bang shut behind him. The preacher didn't jump. He only turned around, a smile on his face, as if he'd been expecting him.

"Hello," the preacher said, wiping crumbs off his hands and offering on to Fletcher. Fletcher didn't take it. He only stood, staring at the preacher with cold eyes. "You seem to be troubled, son," the preacher said after a moment. "Perhaps I can help. Sometimes, it helps to talk to someone. Let's go downstairs, and -"

"I don't need any help from you," Fletcher said. "I don't need to talk."

"Okay," the preacher said, and held up his hands. He looked a bit troubled himself now. Fletcher liked that. "So what do you need? I'm here to help, son."

"I want you to know," Fletcher said, "that if you called for help no one would come. No one in this neighborhood would come to help you."

"Why would I call for help?" the preacher asked. "Are you going to do something to me?"

“Would God let me do something to you?” Fletcher asked.

“His will is His own,” the preacher said. “It is not for me to know.”

“That’s crap,” Fletcher said. “I hate you. I hate your church, and the people who come to listen to you talk about God. You wouldn’t believe in God if your lives weren’t so easy. If you had to work your whole life and have nothing to show for it, you would spit on the very idea of God.”

“Is that what you think?” the preacher asked.

“Yes,” Fletcher said. “I know the truth. You use the idea of God. You say that you are a servant of God. And while I break my back for nothing you live off the people of this neighborhood. You are a parasite.” The preacher said nothing, only stood and watched him. “I want you to say it,” Fletcher said. “I want you to say that God doesn’t exist, and that you use the idea for profit.”

“I won’t,” the preacher said.

“If you don’t, I’ll throw you off the roof,” Fletcher said. “I can do it.”

“If you feel that you must,” the preacher said, “then do it. But I will not renounce my faith in God.”

Fletcher laughed. “Do you think God will save you? That if I throw you off the roof of this building God will somehow stop it from happening?”

“He will do as He sees fit,” the preacher said.

Fletcher hadn’t really known he was going to do anything until he did it. It was the preacher’s face, his arrogance, his words. Rage filled him, and he charged. He took hold of the preacher by the collar of his shirt and his belt, and threw him like a bale of hay. He saw him go over the side of the roof. It was a short distance to the street below. Soon the preacher would be dead, and Fletcher knew that now, in his mind, he was cursing the name of God.

The preacher’s shirt slapped around in the wind created by his fall, billowing out around his outstretched arms. But, as Fletcher watched, his fall slowed. The preacher was losing speed, losing momentum. He was falling like a leaf from a tree. The pavement did not rush up to destroy him. At the last moment the preacher turned himself upright, seeming to float as in an updraft, and then his feet were on the sidewalk. He looked back up at the roof of the building, where Fletcher stood, and smiled kindly.

“He’ll love you too, son,” the preacher said. “If you let Him, He’ll love you too.” And then he was gone.

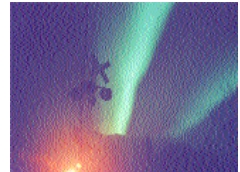
Fletcher, empty of everything, sat on the roof and wept.

Venture to the unknown

I've always loved the idea of being in outer space,
so when my chance came
to be a part of a crew
to explore a foreign land
to do what no man has done before
I jumped at the chance



People ask me what it's like to be in space, see a new planet.
it's hard to explain all of the details,
there are so many you forget,
like when you see the sun in the sky,
you even see Earth in the distance,
it is still dark where you are.
the Earth's atmosphere makes the sun's light omnidirectional
but here the sky is black too, even during daylight.
Without the Earth's atmosphere
the stars are always out,
there are so many stars in the sky,
so many asteroids,
you can even see the dust in the air.
The Earth's atmosphere is insulation
that stops us from seeing all in the universe.



They create gravity in parts of the space stations
to help people acclimate themselves
but in some stations you have to always hold your equipment
because it can float away

and when we go for mission walks
every step disturbs the land
dust and dirt explodes with every motion

it's a fragile, delicate balance we try to strike
when we venture out into the unknown



art by John Yotko



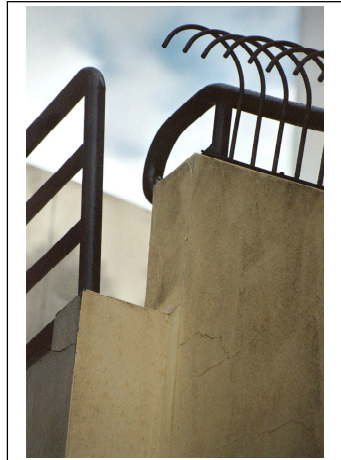
art by John Yotko



art by Scars

Freedom just past the Fence

After working for the Army
for years on repairing jet engines
I ended up being stationed
in Pennsylvania one summer
repairing air conditioners
and refrigerators.
I'd only do a little work
and then have nothing to do
for a day or two.
But the thing I remember
is that at the time Cubans
were defecting to the United States
by boat.
They'd sail to Florida,
most of them dehydrated
and all of them malnourished.
The U.S. government
didn't want them spreading diseases
in our country,
so when the Cubans would appear
off the coast of Miami,
the military would be waiting
to make sure they were healthy.
Well, all I knew
was that they got all these Cubans
into trucks we called 'cattle cars'
with only a few benches
and trucked them up to Pennsylvania,
where I was,
and the military gave them some shots
to make sure they weren't dying.
So these people, after
escaping their country
in a shoddy wooden boat



art by
Cheryl Townsend

were taken by the U.S. military,
herded into a boxed-in truck
and shipped up the country
so they could be given shots
and detained.
These Cubans,
who came here wanting freedom,
now had to wait
in a fenced-in area
until they were tested
and given food.
And it was my job
to make sure that
their fridge and
air conditioner was working.
So I sat there for
a day or two at a time,
drinking cans of beer,
and looking out my window.
I had a view of the razor wire fence
and all I remember
was seeing all of these Cubans
leaning on the chain-link fence,
wondering if this was what it was like
to be free,
holding on to the metal,
looking out to what they were sure
was freedom.

HIROSHIMA

Joel J Rane

What are you to me?

Wasteland, American child, setting of a thousand Sunday movies,
Post-nuclear orphan. Hold you in my arms,
your skin peeling from your bones.

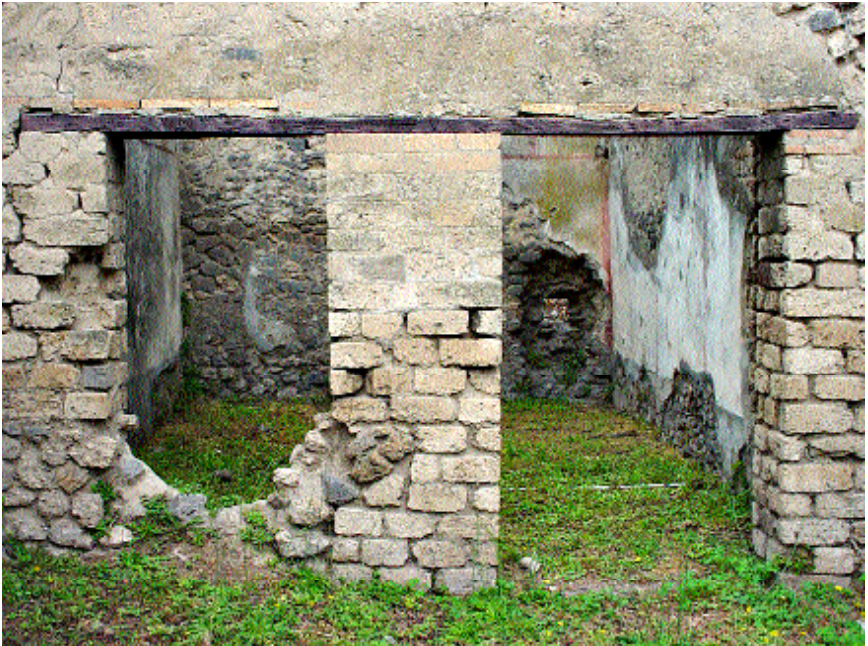
My country is not apologetic. Your country is not apologetic.

There is a map of Hiroshima over my bed. Every day it reminds me:

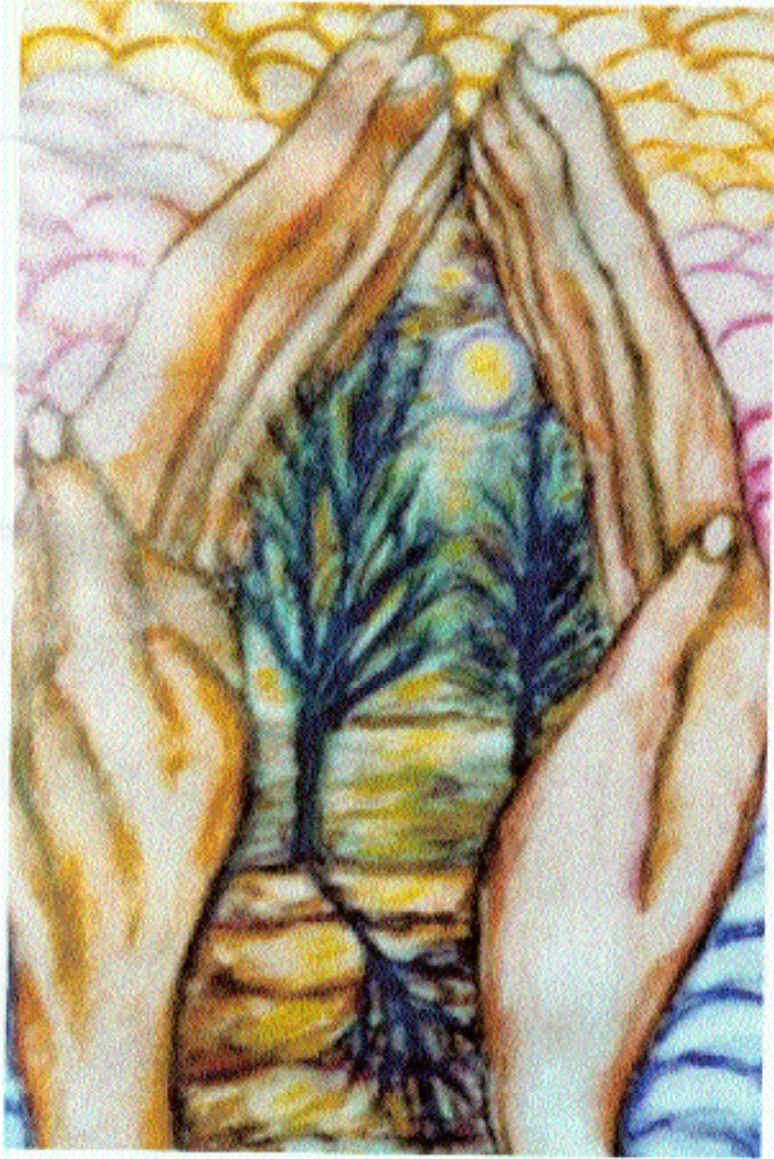
Countries mean nothing. People mean nothing.

But the name of a city will go into history forever.

Athens. Alexandria. Rome. Pompeii. Calcutta. Chicago. San
Francisco. Tokyo. Dresden. Hiroshima. Nagasaki. Managua. Mexico
City. Los Angeles. Rise from the ashes, bitter and filled with love.



Once, barren, I dreamt of
a landscape between hands.
Then creativity came.



art by Mead from State Desitre Being



art by Xanadu

The Book of Matthew

Jessica M. Stilling

His entire body trembled right along with the tremors of the train. He seemed to hang suspended, crucified and Christ-like as both hands clung to the metal pole above his head. He tried to stay focused, his head jerking back and forth like a weathervane, his body whipping side to side, obediently following every snap of the subway. At that moment he was one with the train. He wasn't thinking about work or his brother whom he was on his way to see. No busy streets, bustling passersby, lights blaring like a summer carnival, saxophonist carrying on like he's Miles Davis in the next car over. No thoughts, no frantic Penthouse fantasies playing out as the hot blond chick enters no worries about what mom would say if she saw his rough tired eyes. No thoughts, no noise. Quiet. His mind was empty, focused entirely on every jerk of the subway rushing through him filling his lungs with the rich taste of oxygen.

A man came crawling towards him. He looked Casey right in the eye. His clothes were all torn up and Casey could see through the man's torn pants to the open wounds, red and sticky, like a fine wine glazed over an animal carcass. Casey strained to make out his features but everything blurred. He stopped in front of Casey and dropped to the ground in one soft eloquent motion that stumbled into eternity. There was no struggle, no frantic last-ditch effort; he simply collapsed dutifully, quietly, like a mother bowing out after baseball practice. Casey watched reverently as the man's chest began to convulse, calm itself and then simply stop. A moment so still, so precious, Casey couldn't help but stare. His job as a journalist had taken him into many dangerous situations. He had seen men go down in showers of gunfire and crowds trampled in protests gone bad. But they had all struggled, were all taken by surprise unlike this man who simply gave in.

Casey jerked forward suddenly, his head rushed back as he took one swift breath. His hands were red and his clenched fist had left an indent in the side of his face. It was almost time to go home when he awoke with a start to find himself alone in his office surrounded by papers and memo pads. He had been researching an article for the morning news when he had fallen asleep. He tried to go back to work but his mind just wouldn't focus. He kept watching the man stop, just stop in front of him and then that was it. Gone. When he looked down at the sheet of paper he had been absentmindedly scribbling on he was startled to find that he had written in huge black letters, "Go see your Brother!!!"

Casey stared up at the immense stone walls of the church. He gazed intently at the bright purple and yellow stained glass windows looking down on him

with heavy, disapproving eyes. Matthew greeted him warmly with a kind genuine smile. He reached out slowly, grasping his brother's shoulders as Casey stared into his brother's tranquil, lost boy eyes. Matthew had always been different. He had the face of a child, bright-eyed and innocent. In the summer while all the other boys were out playing Matthew would simply pace back and forth talking to himself near the front of the house. When someone would approach him Matthew would hide until his brother ushered them away. For a while Casey was convinced his brother was a zombie. "Should I call you Father?" Casey asked nervously as he scanned his brother's attire. The black slacks and proud Roman Collar sent shivers through him.

Casey had snapped the last time he had been in a church. It was after the services had ended and everyone was up mingling. The thick stuffy air and the mass of bodies, which spoke in hushed whispers as they bent down to hug Casey, suffocated him until Casey instinctively felt he had to fight his way out. He ran for a ways until he saw Matthew the zombie child, still and submissive as ever, waiting patiently in that hot stuffy cage. A hot trembling rage suddenly ripped through Casey. "Get up and do something!" He had screamed in his brother's face. "Run around!" He had screamed before he was ushered out. Matthew did not flinch, he stayed perfectly still throughout the assault. "He's not my brother," Casey had called from the open doorway of the church before his father carried him to the car and drove away with him.

"Whatever makes you comfortable," Matthew said, shaking his brother's hand. "It's good to see you. I'm glad you came. I've been meaning to talk to you about something."

"What's going on, Matthew?" Casey asked, suddenly feeling foolish that his dream had seemed so important up until a few moments ago.

"Do you remember that tennis match your senior year, the one when they stopped the match for a few minutes because the ball retriever got sick on the court? You stood in the sun a while and watched a moth walk by you as you waited for the game to resume."

That had been Casey's last big tennis tournament of his senior year. He had been standing off to the side, clutching the fences as the heat pressed against his soaking wet t-shirt, when a large Monarch butterfly had caught his eye. He observed it for several moments before it stopped dead in its tracks on the baking concrete courts. After a while Casey lightly tapped the Monarch with his racquet. The crisp brown bug did not flinch and finally crumpled like dry parchment against his racquet.

"I never told you about the bug," Casey began. In fact he had made it a point to tell his brother as little as possible while growing up. "But now that I think of it I had a dream like that a little while ago."

"Things bother you that don't bother other people," Matthew said suddenly, as if he had been trying for several minutes to change the subject. "I want you

to think about the world from now on, Casey.”

“What do you mean, think about the world? Don’t you like my brand of journalism?”

“I didn’t mean it like that at all. I just think that...I just know that if you thought about the world for a little while you’d see something bigger than what they see. There are messages sent through the universe all the time and it doesn’t take a man of the cloth to understand them. There’s something inside you, brother. Remember when they found out the Attorney General was stealing public funds? You saw that before anyone did and broke the case.”

“That doesn’t mean a thing, Matthew. There’s nothing inside me, I just know how to follow my gut.”

“Yes, you follow your gut. I follow my gut too, but my gut didn’t tell me that if you tear up housing downtown it would lead to a mass exodus.”

“No, Matthew, my brain told me that, now get off my case.”

“No one else’s brain told them that. Then why did it happen anyway?”

“I think you should visit Mom more,” Casey stated defensively changing the subject. His brother’s naiveté had begun to get to him. Matthew looked hurt.

“You should visit Mom tonight, Casey. She’s going to need you soon.”

The water felt cool and fresh upon his face as Casey twirled around near the bottom of the pond. The mud squished slowly between his toes. It clung to his feet like the thick paste on the walls of their new house. Casey was five years old. He was full of pent-up energy from the long drive into town from the city and ran straight for the pond the moment he was let out of the car. His older brother followed timidly behind, bashfully dipping his feet into the icy cold water. It took a while to get Matthew to swim, but once he was in Matthew seemed at home.

“They turned off the phones last week, that’s why I haven’t called you,” Casey’s mother said as she put out a cigarette. “It’s nice to see you, though. I would have called when you moved back to town but the phone was off. So, how’s work been?”

“Work’s been fine. Here, Mom, take my cell, just in case there’s an emergency,” Casey said as he casually tossed the phone to his mother underhand. “I’ll get your phone back up as soon as I can. You should have come to see me. I could have fixed this.”

“I’m doing all right. It’s nice that you came to see me, though. I haven’t heard from you since you got that big promotion at the station.”

“Things have been pretty crazy there lately. They’ve been sending me all over the place, but that should settle down soon.”

“That’s good to hear. It’ll be nice having you back; perhaps now I’ll have some company around here.”

“Of course, Mom,” Casey said as he took his mother’s hand. “What about Matthew, Mom. Has he been around? ‘Cause he’s been acting kind of strange.”

His mother stared at him for a moment with worried, questioning eyes. “You

think he's acting weird. How would you know?" she asked angrily, throwing his cell phone at him with a tired, lifeless arm. Suddenly Casey's mother fell forward. She hit the floor with a thump as Casey rushed to catch her. "Call a doctor!" She cried. He dialed 911 with his cell and stayed by her side until the ambulance came.

Casey gazed down at a timeline he had written out in the waiting room of the hospital. His mother had had a mild heart attack and would be in surgery for some time. While he waited Casey began a timeline chronicling every major event that had happened from the end of World War One to the present. "I want you to think about the world from now on, Casey." He then clumped together the events directly before and after a war and compared them to the events going on in the world. The terrorist attacks, the small "invasions" and civil wars suddenly came together like the pieces of a giant cosmic puzzle. "There's gonna be a war soon," Casey pondered mater-of-factly.

All of a sudden the television caught his attention as Charles, a collogue from work began a report. "Breaking news, there has just been a deal struck overseas which will allow certain hostages to go free in exchange for classified information dealing with the arms programs implemented elsewhere."

"Nuclear weapons," Casey whispered as he stared down at the information before him. "There's going to be a war and its going to bring about an unprecedented spread of nuclear weapons." Suddenly a vision of two men in black suits shaking hands against a backdrop of rows upon rows of dark green missiles flashed before him. The weapons were endless; they went on forever in a march of power and order. And then he saw chaos. And then he saw black. Casey began to shake uncontrollably as he ran out of the hospital and into the flashing New York night. The streets seemed to be calling him. He could feel his feet pounding across the concrete as New York City lay sprawled out before him.

"Remember when you were little and I used to tell you stories while we were swimming in the pond?" Matthew asked as he let Casey into the church.

"Do you have a room or something, a place where you live where we could talk?"

"I live here," Matthew responded as if Casey should know better. "Remember Cassandra? She was Apollo's lover. She was just a mortal woman until Apollo blessed her with the gift of foresight granting her vision into the future. But after Cassandra left Apollo he tried to take her foresight away. When he realized he couldn't he decided to curse her another way, by making it so that no one would ever believe her when she predicted things. Cassandra foresaw wars and traitors, she even saw her own death and the deaths of those she loved but there was nothing she could do to stop it because no one ever believed her."

"Matthew, Mom's in the hospital. Her phone had been turned off and she had a heart attack while I was with her. She needed me, just like you said."

"Nothing she could do to stop it cause no one believed her," Matthew seemed a bit angry as he repeated the last lines of his story. There was a glare in his tranquil

blue eyes Casey had never seen before. “But seriously, I’m glad you were there for her. Obviously if you’re here she must be all right.”

“We’ll see. She’s still in surgery, but the doctors said it looks good. Still, it would be nice if you came back with me.”

“She’ll see me later,” Matthew replied reverently.

“What kind of priest are you? You won’t even see your own mother after she has a heart attack?” Casey asked, infuriated.

“Do whatever it is you need to do. We’re at a threshold, Casey, and you can see it. You know something’s going to happen.”

“I highly doubt that I have any control over what goes on in the world. You need to be thinking about your mother, not Cassandra the prophetess.”

“Most people need cameras and flashing lights in order to figure out what’s going on. Most people see only what is spoon fed to them. No one will believe the country’s planning on getting into a corrupt war unless it’s spelled out in nice, neat, easy to understand phrases. Not even when it’s too late.”

“Yeah, well what are you going to do? I don’t have a spoon. Now, common Matthew, come with me to go see Mom. She should be out soon. She needs us.”

“No, she needs you. You go to her.”

Matthew slipped when he started splashing with his brother in the pond. His feet slid with the thick slippery mud and he flew backwards as Casey rushed to the other side of the pond to catch a frog. He didn’t see that his brother had hit a rock. He didn’t notice that Matthew never came up for air. It wasn’t until he heard his mother’s screaming that Casey realized something was wrong.

“I need to talk to you,” Casey’s mother said as she clasped his hand. Her face was pasty, covered with a thin film of sweat, and the harsh fluorescent light reflected a sickly yellow glow upon her face.

“Its okay, we don’t need to talk about him,” Casey said as he grasped his mother’s hand.

“You haven’t spoken of your brother in seventeen years. You were so young when it happened and after your outburst at the church you completely denied his existence altogether. We took you to doctor after doctor but they only made things worse for you. You just stopped accepting that he was ever real. You told me I was crazy for making up an older brother you never had. Perhaps we shouldn’t have given up so quickly, but it was just easier to let you believe nothing had happened.”

“What are you talking about? My brother lives in a church and thinks I’m a prophet.” It was as if the subway tunnel was closing in on him and the bright lights of the city were becoming closer and closer, coming at him like a bullet on a battlefield. All at once Casey could see his brother, splashing with him inside the pond. He saw his brother, cold and stiff lying inside a box of blue silk. He looked like wax sculpture all nice and neat in a black suit with neatly folded hands. “That’s not my brother,” Casey had said as his mother tried to explain to

him why Matthew looked so still. "My brother doesn't look like that."

"Honey, what happened? What made you think of your brother after all this time? Maybe it's being back home?"

Casey looked hard at his mother. He stared her down John Wayne style as she lay in her bed. She looked weak and frail for the very first time. "He's not my brother," Casey said slowly and then bolted out the door.

Casey spent the night at the station, working on a piece that had to be in for the evening news. His hands shook as he took notes. They felt like ice, his entire body felt frozen solid. He couldn't write a thing and so finally he closed his eyes. He began to see pictures of men in battles, still-life's of crisp uniforms laid out on blue cotton sheets. Casey looked down at the sheet of paper in front of him and realized he had been writing again.

"You're a little young, don't you think?" Casey's station manager said to him the next day.

"Yes, but I've done so much for you already. I'm the one who tore the lid off the Credence Case. I exposed the Fillmore scandal on a hunch and figured out how to get into the mayor's office for an interview. I get the most fan mail. Our audience loves me."

"I could send you overseas, kid, but there's really not much going on over there right now. Just a few civil disturbances and that new treaty they just signed. I don't understand why you want to be over there right now when there's so much more going on right here."

Casey laughed. All of a sudden it seemed ridiculous that his boss couldn't see it. "Something's going to happen soon. I want to be there when it goes down."

"Well, kid, I can't say I believe you but I'd like to prove you wrong anyway. Are you sure you're up to the challenge? You'll be overseas for a long time."

"I have a hunch, sir. I think you should let me go with it."

"Look kid, I don't want you doing anything crazy over there, or saying anything stupid or miscalculated, you understand?"

"Yes, sir. I'm fully aware of the consequences."

"Alright. You're damn lucky we need your face on that screen no matter where it's coming from. Be careful over there. We can't lose our best reporter."

War had come sooner than expected. It caught everyone off-guard. Casey gazed out at the battlefield. It seemed as barren and dry as the biblical wasteland where Cain slew his brother. Soldiers ran about him hurriedly, their tanks following in slow pursuit. The sun baked down upon the desert. It was a harsh sun, a bully sun unlike the soft Connecticut rays he had felt as a child. America entered the war a couple of months after Casey arrived. Bombs went off every few minutes, but he paid little attention to them. He just wanted it to fade away. He didn't want to stop anything anyway.

Casey glanced over the notes he had been taking. He had given up on investigative journalism one morning and had begun sending his boss bad poetry and



jumbled journal entries in the middle of a war. “I have truly been dying since the day I was born. The headaches are real, the dizziness is never psychosomatic. All of it’s a death march. Isn’t there always a possibility that my head could explode? Perhaps I’ve already passed and I’m experiencing memory now in some kind of flash. A three hundred and sixty degree tunnel just pulling us in at a million miles per hour. Perhaps right now, we’re just rushing through our memories. No wonder everything seems to go by so fast. As I get older it all seems to fly by quicker, like it’s going into overdrive. Maybe the plane’s going down, or the air supply’s lessening. I wonder what

it feels like, this heavy moment with its heavy air and heavy thoughts circling about like a mid-western tornado. The universe, it’s got me, just like it got my brother. I can feel it all around me, in tiny whispers and roaring waves...it’s like thunder.”

The rains came down about the same time the gunfire began. Bullets intersected the pouring rain, they flew through the atmosphere like a train in a subway tunnel headed for the bright lights of New York City. The ground seemed to cave under him as Casey fell to his knees, his head spinning. His legs slid through the earth as he tried to move himself out of the shower of gunfire. His legs were numb and heavy, it was no use to try and stand. Slowly Casey fell forward. The mud felt like a blanket against his skin. It covered his lips and climbed up his nose. He laid there for several moments with his fists clenched, his mind racing as his legs struggled briefly to be free of the grasp the thick heavy mud had on him as he sunk further down. Suddenly he could feel the quick sharp tremors of the subway, the bright blue saxophone notes spraying him with cosmic vibrations, the lights flashing walk/don’t walk as he watched his brother slide slowly beneath the water. It all came together, colliding in a mesh of molecules, sound waves permeating his skin, colors blinding him through the darkness. It was all

Coffee

Shari O'Brien

I inhale the steam as it floats
 from the shiny black pool of coffee,
 and hope the rich vapors will decongest
 my clogged and cluttered head.
 As I take a bittersweet sip
 from the thick ceramic mug,
 I think of the pairs of hands it took
 to make this drink:

those of the Peruvian farmer and his sons
 in a fog-hugged plantation
 Where the Andes kiss the clouds,
 And the trucker, who, like me,
 Must caffeinate himself to work.
 And who stays awake
 By singing out loud to the radio,
 And the packer with brown-skinned fingers
 Who has touches so much coffee
 that its smell can't be scrubbed from her skin,
 and of the lanky kid with the crooked grin
 who puts himself through school
 by scooping from bins lustrous beans to grind and concoct
 into House Latte and Brew of the Day
 for the regulars through whose veins it flows
 like ink through pens.



children churches & daddies

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