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EP

# Applause

UAFS

# APPLAUSE 2013

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Dear Readers,

We proudly present this year's edition of *Applause*. These pages contain the best of all creative works submitted by UAFS students. This year we chose to present our magazine as a work of art in itself. The cover was letterpressed at UAFS's Underground Ink and hand-bound by the Applause staff.

Also remember that our magazine would not be possible without the support of Chancellor Paul Beran; Senior Vice-Chancellor and Provost Ray Wallace; College of Languages and Communication Dean Joe Hardin; English Department Chair Cammie Subblette; Applause Faculty Advisor Carol Westcamp, and the faculty, staff, students, and family members of our department. These people have given us more than we can repay, and we hope our magazine serves as a suitable token of our gratitude.

We would especially like to thank Katie Harper and her staff at Underground Ink for donating their time, materials, space, patience, and expertise to help us create this edition of Applause.

Sincerely,

Dustin C. Hilliard  
Editor - Applause 2013

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## CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST WINNERS

These six works were selected by UAFS faculty as the best of all entries submitted to our annual Fall creative writing competition. Like all submissions to *Applause*, they were entered and judged anonymously.

*1st Place - Poetry*

## SQUANDER

*by Adam Holloway*

Hear the toll call outward  
The bandstand troopers and  
Celesta intervals weave  
Great maker-patterns  
From torch lit and ruinous blight

Stricken from matches paper thick  
Amid bowls of char and shaven bits

Cope and call the industry signs  
Taken from some fortunes upon  
Futura-defined slopes aligned  
And gullies and grime take no cross  
There among the wreckage and free stews

The overgrown sinew from a lacking  
Sleeveless among dirty savage-drawn cracks  
In the sidewalk, trench coat concealing  
A scented candle and a syringe

*2nd Place - Poetry*

## UNITED COLORS VERSUS THE LITTLE MAN

*by Adam Holloway*

To a time when there wasn't  
a thing of external import.  
There was the invasion of ideas -  
they dragged their sharp knuckles  
along the membranes  
among the outer fringes.

My chewed bubble-gum fist, that wrinkled  
garbage, carrying waves of potential imprint.  
An archive of useless concessions and scant offers.

Whenever I can drown  
in corners of obscure tendency  
my voice becomes muffled from layers:  
Different voices all my own and still,  
I can drown there, let me.

In the corners I can rarely visit  
I find something existing  
in that internal ocean, that  
Extrapolation; a potential me.

In there is a giant-screened display with no flaw  
in character and situation; no context  
from which to garner bull-shit.  
And then: to remember less than such.

*3rd Place - Poetry*

HAVING CONSULTED GERTRUDE STEIN ON  
HALF-AUTHENTIC CHIVALRY

*by Jessica Weisenfels*

You occupy the corner  
Booth in black shoes  
As I trace Love Talker  
In sheets of steam

I am the half-breed child  
Adrift in pirate seas

I am the unknower  
Of our histories.

And you  
Occupy the corner  
Where I made Love Talk  
In pixel perfect parentheses

I am Mother  
Of nine saints  
On the garden path

I am leaned  
“in mint green folds  
against Sister’s sink”

And  
You  
Occupy  
The corner  
Where I scrub  
The good dishes clean

## THE MURDER BALLAD OF H. D. ANDREWS

by Jessica Weisenfels

Joanne was not one to put rocks in her pocket. She would not die the passive death of a woman out of her mind. No—she was sure that as the water began to fill her lungs, she'd change her mind. She'd fight to live. Her death would be more violent and spectacular than her life had ever been. It was a good plan, she thought. It was the most active way to die. She'd be at war with the water and she'd die a hero's death.

The day began to go terribly awry when she did not manage to die at all. It turns out dying in a flood was not as easy as the local news had made it seem. Sure, she'd been swept under by the current, but she'd swum to shore just the same. She walked home, exhausted, wet, and crawled back into bed with her husband.

"Darling, why are you wet?"

"Hmm?"

"You're wet."

"Oh yes, that..." Three possibilities flashed through Joanne's mind:

She could tell her husband the truth.

She could lie.

She could do neither, and simply refuse to answer the question.

Since options two and three seemed likely to inspire further haranguing, she sighed deeply and replied, "I drove my car into the middle of the bridge."

"Which bridge?"

"The low water bridge."

"Stupidity or malicious intent?"

"I intended to die. Today seemed a good day for it."

"I'm the only one dying today, Jo."

"Well, I'm sooo sorry. I didn't intend to steal your deathbed thunder."

H.D. breathed deeply and threw his arm around his wife. She knew the deep breath was a substitute for the loud belly laugh he'd have given her a few months ago.

"What's it like?" She whispered into his chest.

"Dying?"

"Yes, dying."

"There doesn't seem to be a tunnel or anything. Mostly it just hurts like hell. And my head is foggy from the meds."

"Do you feel peace?"

"No. No peace. Just pain."

"What's that like?"

"The pain? There's no way to describe the pain."

"Try. This is our last early morning conversation before your pancreas eats you up. I want it to be memorable."

“The pain is painful. It swallows me. It’s like a darkness. And then...it’s kind of like a person. Yes, that’s right. It’s like a person.”

“A person?”

“Yes. It’s like living with another person inside my body. And every day that person takes another bite of me. And I can’t bite back. I used to think I was fighting it, but...I’m not now. There’s no fighting left to do. What time is it?”

“Six forty-two.”

“Can you make my breakfast now? And make sure you bring an extra Zofran. I’ll need to keep it all down.”

“An extra Zofran? Are you sure?”

“What’s it going to do? Give me a headache? I hardly think we need to concern ourselves with headaches, Jo.”

Joanne did not reply. She held her husband’s face and looked at him. She felt she could almost see it there, the Pain Person who was eating him up. It lived just above his gaunt cheekbones, in the hollows around his eyes. It used to be that when she looked hard at his face what she saw was their future, the totality of a life spent fighting and loving and striving and growing. But the future no longer played out in her mind, and passed this particular day, there were no images to tide her over until the future would come. There were only blank spaces where his face should be.

She left the bedroom and quietly made her way to the kitchen. When she returned, H.D. had propped himself up on pillows. His withering frame looked impossibly small.

“Have you measured out my life in coffee spoons?”

“Yes.”

“Did you wash the mixing bowl?”

“Yes.”

“With bleach?”

“Yes.”

“And you wore gloves?”

“Yes.”

The yeses were lies. She had not washed the mixing bowl with bleach. She did not wear gloves. She did not use a coffee spoon. She consoled herself with the fact that it did not matter if she lied to him one last time, as long as the lie was for his comfort.

He ate his pancake haltingly. Joanne sat in her rocking chair and stared out into the pouring rain. Neither spoke until his fork fell against the plate with a clang.

“It is finished.”

Joanne nodded in the darkness. She transported his plate to the kitchen and threw it in the trash. She returned and found him in the fetal position with his eyes closed.

“H.D.?”

“Yes?”

"I thought I had missed it. I don't know why I thought that. You'll have to digest first."

"Can you tell me again how it will happen?"

"Yes. I can do that."

"Will you come and hold me while you do? And take your clothes off so I can feel your skin?"

She disrobed and crawled into bed beside him. "First, you'll most likely feel relief. Then, euphoria. Then maybe some nausea. Eventually, you'll just fall asleep."

"Will it take long?"

"Yes, but it won't seem long to you."

"Jo, I'm sorry about this."

"Oh honey, it's not your fault," her voice began to break.

"No tears, remember?"

She nodded against his back and pressed her cheek against the skin of his shoulder blade. His heartbeat was steady under that skin. It wouldn't be for long, she thought. No, soon it would slow and stop. That great metronome which had set the pace for her life since the tender age of twenty-two would blink out of existence very soon. There would be no rhythm to dance to anymore, just the stone cold silence of decaying machinery. Neither of them knew how long they'd lain there. For Joanne, it felt like years. It might have been forever. It still wouldn't have been long enough. When H.D. broke the silence, Joanne felt relief.

"I've thought of what the pain is like."

"You have?"

"I have. Do you still want to know?"

"Of course."

"The Pain is a wall. I am the world inside the wall. I cease to be. I am not. I have never been. But then there's the nausea. I recall that it is a thing. I hear Sartre in it. From that novel you love. *'The Nausea is not inside me...I feel it out there in the wall...'* There is rhythm. There are words. Words are Things. They are worlds beyond the wall. I become the worlds. The worlds are Things. I am a Thing. And I have survived it again..." Joanne recalled that this is how he would have spoken when they were both young. She thought of how the words might have sounded on a blanket bathed in starlight. They'd be beautiful then, she thought. Not now, though. They were not beautiful now. "...but I will not survive it this time. This time it has survived me."

H.D. was suddenly still. And then, he was snoring.

Joanne saw no need to linger. She squeezed him tightly and rose to find the silk robe he had bought her seven Christmases ago.

As she walked through the forest to the bridge, she wondered who would find them. And then, who would mourn them. There would be a cat to mourn, of course. There would be faces to populate the funeral—cousins, neighbors, the handful of high school classmates they'd kept up with across the years. She

wondered if it would have been better if they had had children. Resolved that it would not have been better, she made her way to the beach where she knew she could find smooth stones for her pocket. She didn't feel quite ready for it yet. Not like the early morning hours, when she had been so sure. Removing her robe and placing it on a branch nearby, she resolved to sit down in the mud near the water and cry a while. No need to be hasty under the circumstances. There was nothing to do and nowhere to go anyway.

Joanne Andrews sat beside the creek for hours, her tears mingling with the pouring rain and obscuring her view of the continuously rising creek. He was right. The pain had survived him. It had taken up residence in her own chest. It was no less potent now that it had escaped the bounds of physical illness. Just as she decided to stand, don her robe, and plunge into the water, the rain, which had gone on for four days without ceasing, abruptly stopped. She would go out like a mad woman after all, then. She would not battle the water this time. She would sink like a stone, like the stones in her pocket, like her husband to his grave. But was she a mad woman? Was she an afflicted thing? How would H.D. feel if he knew she'd decided not to live without him? He'd make some reference to the fair Ophelia. To Juliet. To the weak, passive girl-children they'd scoffed at so often. Was she pitiful? She looked down at her mud-caked feet, at the droplets still running down her sagging breasts, and the strings of wet hair hanging in front of her eyes. She certainly appeared to be a pitiful, afflicted thing. Perhaps she was the girl child. After all, someone had to be the girl-child, didn't they? The stereotype had had to be drawn from some concrete being. Shakespeare must have known some despairing maiden who died for love. No—not a maiden. Certainly, she had been a middle age woman whose husband had died. Certainly, she was a woman who *needed him* to live.

As the sun made its first spectacular appearance after the long rain, Joanne realized that she might be a girl child. That maybe, she had been one her whole life. What books had she read before she met her husband? And before that, hadn't she gone through a tennis phase with her high school sweetheart? Yes, she had. She recounted lovers like railroad cars and found them all responsible for at least one facet of her self as she knew it—she was not the mature, complicated woman she'd seen in the mirror all these years. No, she was a composite picture of every man she'd ever loved. And suddenly, that was okay. If she was a drowning girl-child, then that's who she was—and she liked herself just fine. Even if she deserved to be scoffed at by sensible lovers and the lonely alike. Even if she *knew* she deserved to be scoffed at.

She rose to her feet and removed her red silk robe from the branch. It was heavy with water and stones. She'd been unable to bear muddying it, which is why she'd shivered in naked skin for all that time. It looked nice wet, though. The red had deepened and it had more weight than it used to. She threw it in the creek and watched it ride the brown tide until it crossed the bend in the Turner's pasture.

When she got home, he was still sleeping. She did wash the bowl with bleach after all. Then she climbed into bed, pressed her bare breasts into his back, laid her cheek on his shoulder blade, and listened until there was nothing left to hear.

## TO TAKE THE SUN

by Derek Naegle

A thin man with long black hair and torn blue jeans stepped out his front door into the bright morning light. Beneath his bare feet lay a long balcony that ran the length of the second floor of the Trackwood apartment building. The man was shirtless and smelled of chemicals. After lighting a cigarette, he sat in a folding chair next to the open front door. His long legs stretched out to the rusting balustrade. The wrought iron wobbled a little as he rested his feet on it. He grabbed at a Mt. Dew left on the balcony the night before. The can popped then hissed as he opened it. From inside the tiny apartment a young woman's voice called.

"Ronnie?" Her voice was soft and tired, as if he'd woken her. He didn't answer, so she came to the doorway and leaned against the frame.

"That sun's hot already." She rubbed her eyes and pulled at the oversized shirt she wore.

Ronnie sipped his drink and watched as cars climbed the hill that led downtown, across the river and then eventually into Oklahoma.

"Wish it'd rain." Almost under her breath she added, "Wish we could call them 'bout the air conditioner."

Ronnie blew out a cloud of smoke and watched the cars through it. "You know we can't do that."

"We'll call 'em in a week or so."

She lowered her head and ran a toe through an old stain in the carpet.

"I always think about when it rains," she began, lifting her head a little. "Well, I pray I mean. I look at that hill and pray it don't rain too hard. What with us livin' right at the bottom of it and all." A smile started in the corner of her mouth. "Makes me think of Niagara Falls and—"

"It ain't ever gonna rain that hard." Ronnie flipped his cigarette at the dumpster near the building and watched it fall short.

"Just makes me nervous is all." She paused, hoping he would turn and look at her. "Wish we rented some place on top of the hill 'stead."

"Well," Ronnie rearranged his feet on the balustrade, "just keep on prayin'. Cause we live at the foot of a hill. And one way or another, we're always gonna live at the foot of a hill."

She was about to ask Ronnie a question she knew he wouldn't answer when a white Blazer pulled into the Trackwood parking lot, rolling over the smoldering cigarette near the dumpster.

Ronnie pulled his feet from the balustrade. "Get to the bathroom."

"Do you want me to go to the bedroom and get it?"

Ronnie spun around in his chair, facing her for the first time that morning. Then his eyes found hers. "Bathroom, Cynthia."

Ronnie turned and eyed the parking lot. He was about to get up and head for the bedroom himself when he saw the vehicle circle then back up,

stopping just short of the dumpster. From the driver's side a thin Latino with dark, leathery skin stepped out. The sleeves of his plaid shirt were long and moth-eaten. His dark blue jeans were stained but free of holes. When he closed the Blazer's door there was a rattle of what sounded like a thousand aluminum cans that came from the hatch. After eyeing the dumpster a moment, the man leaned over the driver's door and grabbed a dingy cap and a pair of torn cotton gloves. He covered his wiry black hair with the old cap then slipped the gloves over his hands. Tiny strands of cotton snagged on the red cracks that mapped the faces of his hands.

From the passenger's side stepped a short Latina. Her hair was long and black, with tattered waves of red coursing through the bun she had put it in. Creases the color of topaz streaked her face like the cracks running through the asphalt beneath her sandaled feet. She took a deep pull from her cigarette, stepped on it, then put her hand up to her forehead to block the sun. She stood, watching as the man climbed nimbly up and over the dumpster. He stepped lightly at first, trying to find his footing among the garbage bags, broken toys and busted appliances. As he bent to his work, warm rancid air filled his nostrils.

"Is that them?" Cynthia stood in the doorway trying to peer down at the Blazer past Ronnie, who had his feet back on the balustrade.

"You bet." Ronnie took the last drink of his Mt. Dew. "Only, they wanted to scrounge around in the dumpster for a few cans to recycle before they came up here to get their \$3,500."

Cynthia stopped trying to look past the back of Ronnie's head. "That ain't them. But don't they drive a white car like that?"

Ronnie sat and watched the happening below.

Cynthia waited a moment then left the doorway.

The man's pace was furious. He would rip open a bag then start tossing the empty cans over his shoulder. She could barely keep stride as she crouched and put the cans back in a trash bag. Both had begun to sweat. The drops pearly at the tips of their noses then fell into their work. She seemed oblivious to the eyes that were watching them with all the intensity of the sun. He could feel them, though. Every eye in the city focused on him, magnifying him, making him sweat.

She filled the first bag and walked it to the hatch of the Blazer. The sun baked the nape of her neck as she struggled to make room for it. Walking away from him was like walking away from a conveyor belt. Cans were amassing in a pile next to the dumpster. Each new can hit the pile with a hollow clinking sound. The woman wiped her sticky wet hands on her sweatshirt then pushed the sleeves up past her elbows. She grabbed another trash bag from inside the Blazer.

Ten minutes passed and the steady stream of cans had slowed to a trickle. In those minutes neither had spoken a word. The only sound was the cacophony of the cans. She tied the bag and sat it behind the driver's seat.

She wiped her hands again then went to grab another bag. He heard the rustle of the unopened bags as she began to tear one away from the roll.

“No necesitamos otra bolsa.” His voice came out sharp and strong despite his shallow breaths. He straightened his back and wiped the sweat away from his forehead with his forearm.

“Pero, al lado de esta bolsa.” She looked at the empty space next to the trash bag she had just put behind the driver’s seat. Without a word, he climbed out of the dumpster, gathered a few loose cans and began tossing them in the back of the Blazer.

“Uno más edificio, Teresa.”

She let out a shallow sigh that led to a quick but deep cough. Opening the passenger side door of the Blazer, Teresa reached for her cigarettes on the dash. She shook the empty box and watched as tiny brown specks of tobacco fell to the floorboard.

“Arranca el carro, Teresa.”

“Tienes cigarrillos?”

The man pulled the glove from his left hand then clapped it over the buttoned pocket on the front of his shirt. A single cigarette lay inside, spilling its leaves.

“No. Arráncalo.” He removed his other glove, shoving both of them in his back pocket. Behind him he heard the sharp sound of aluminum collapsing. The man turned and looked up at Ronnie, who held a crushed can in his hand. Ronnie looked down at the man from between the black bars of the balustrade. The man turned when he heard the engine of the old Blazer roar to life.

The couple were about to leave when a guy wearing only blue shorts and bright pink flip-flops walked out of one of the downstairs apartments with a single empty can in his hand. He handed the man the can and got a “gracias” barely above a whisper. Teresa stepped out from the driver’s side.

“Papi.” Teresa waved a little with her hand. “You got a cigarette, papi?”

The man shook his head. “Had to quit, too expensive.”

Teresa smiled and waved her hand as if all she had heard were no. “Is okay, papi.”

Ronnie stood and stepped to the balcony. “Amigo.”

The man was walking from the hatch to the open passenger’s door when he heard the call. Ronnie tossed the crumpled can. The man caught it and thanked Ronnie without looking him in the eye. He jumped in the Blazer and shut the door.

“Quién es el hombre?”

The man shrugged his shoulders. “No sé.”

Teresa looked up at Ronnie through the passenger window. “Conócele?”

“Prisión... tal vez.”

“Tal vez tiene cigarrillos.”

The man chucked the crumpled can in the back and brushed the air with his hand. “Maneja.”

Teresa rolled her eyes and put the Blazer in gear.

## STAINLESS CHINA

by Jessica Weisenfels

Daniel Eversole was a middle aged man of middle class stature who lived in a medium sized town in the Midwest. His wife, Mrs. Daniel Eversole, had the misfortune of having the first name Lolita and no middle name whatsoever. Her mother had always been the whimsical sort, and Lolita, her second daughter, had been born the year before that Russian fellow ruined the name for everyone. Her parents died when she was still a teenager, and never managed to read the evil book. It was for this reason that Lolita never received an apology for their transgression. Lolita herself, on the advice of her slightly older sister Candy, had made it through the first page. It was about a teenaged prostitute.

The Eversoles had become teachers for vastly different and equally excellent reasons. Daniel Eversole became a high school science teacher, as he found it suited his turbulent personality rather well. Mrs. Daniel Eversole taught elementary school because she thought that profession the most likely to allow her to forget that her first name had ever been anything other than *Missus*.

The Eversoles had one child. Danielle was twenty-three years old. The Eversoles had not seen or spoken to her for three years. The day she turned 20, she had suddenly announced that she was a lesbian and moved 429 miles away from her parents, back to the town where Mrs. Daniel Eversole had been called Lolita, into the house where Lolita spent decades of early morning hours crying about it, where Danielle's thoroughly modern Auntie Candy still lived. Mrs. Eversole blamed her husband for giving the child a boy's name.

"Names are very important," she had said flatly, and then yawned and retired to her bedroom to inspect the Reader's Digest.

When Mr. Eversole gazed at the door through which his favorite child had just made her dramatic exit, he attempted to decide how he felt about the matter. He discovered he was not surprised or disappointed about the announcement, but rather angry that she had thought he wouldn't understand, and furious that she had left him alone. Several hours and a bottle of scotch later, he dried his tears and went upstairs, where he removed his wife's glasses, turned off the lamp, and crawled into the cold space beside her.

The progress of their only child was reported to the Eversoles by the child's only other relative. Candy called her sister once a year. Always, it was the Saturday after school adjourned for Christmas break. The call was in reference to some gift that Candy had sent for the family, which never arrived until three to five days after the phone call.

"How did you Eversoles enjoy the knives I sent you? They were Danielle's idea."

"Oh Candy.....they're very nice."

"Lola, when will you be a better liar? They haven't arrived yet, of course. They never do arrive when I'd like them to."

“Candy, if you call me Lola or any other derivative of that dreadful thing our parents named me, I will hang up this phone straight away.”

“Alright then, baby sister, it will be *Dolores on the dotted line*. Missus seems too formal for sisters. I try this every year, you know, to get you to accept what is yours, and every year I wind up calling you a name that doesn’t belong to you. Then you call me Candace, which is not my name. We are quite a pair, Dolores.”

The sisters laughed, as was their tradition, and continued on about politics and work, about the way the time had passed for each in the months between their annual phone meetings. Danielle had finally completed her studies and begun teaching at the local elementary school. She had dinner with her aunt on Sunday nights. She had yet to meet a nice girl. Mrs. Eversole listened to the yearly update on her daughter’s affairs with exactly the interest she would have had in a niece, if she had ever had one. There were some subjects the sisters avoided. Candy never discussed her love affairs and Mrs. Eversole never discussed her husband’s yearly visit to the high end mental facility two hours from their home. Neither sister thought these subjects were important enough to enter into the three hour conversation which composed their entire relationship—though both would have gladly listened to these developments, had there been a third sister to dispense the information to the other two without the two themselves seeming too interested in the other’s private life. Their relationship had suffered a blow to its intimacy when their mother died.

The knives arrived earlier than any gift ever had, on the Monday following the conversation. Mrs. Eversole was away having her hair done. Mr. Eversole stood alone in the kitchen, opened the mahogany box and ran his fingers across the glittering silver. He found his reflection repeated 12 times inside that box, in the silent splendor of the smooth surfaces, with the words “STAINLESS CHINA” superimposed on his flesh, like it was what he would have been called in the strange universes where these spectacularly warped, tiny versions of him existed in their own distinct and separate realms of glistening glory. Like it was what he was called in the time before time. He closed the case and took it with him to his study, where he sat it before him and stared at the latches while he puffed on his pipe and drank three stiff scotches in quick succession.

By the time his wife arrived home, the case of knives had been stowed in the bottom drawer of his file cabinet, which was locked with the key he kept in his desk. He went to the mall the following day and shuffled through the Christmas crowds. He found many boxes of knives, none as wonderful as *his* set. Nonetheless, he found twelve knives in a mahogany box and purchased them. He put the note he had retrieved from inside his box into the new box, had it wrapped up in red by some charity, waited two days, and told his wife he had removed the brown shipping paper because the underlying red foil seemed more festive.

“The note says: *Danielle said you needed good, sharp knives. Love, Candy.* Danielle always was the thoughtful type. The apple of her daddy’s eye.”

“That’s right. The apple of my eye,” he said. He thought: *Little blue rivers,*

*pouring me out.* It was a line from a very odd play Danielle had starred in when she was 17. He had a vision of opening his mahogany box and seeing adolescent Danielle there, divided into twelve twisted little forms, mouthing the words: *Little blue rivers, pouring you out.* He wondered if her name in the box-worlds would be STAINLESS CHINA or something else. He thought, *Something else.* And then, SOMETHING ELSE appeared on the forms of her who lived in the box, which sat open, on the kitchen counter, in his head. "She was always something else, that one."

"That she was, Mr. Eversole. That she was," his wife replied, and closed her box of knives, the box that was not miraculous, not *his*, "We sent Candy and Danielle the fruit of the month club, again. We wouldn't want them to get scurvy, would we?"

"I should think not," he said, but it was unclear as to whether or not he was addressing his wife. The comment might have been to the microwave.

"You are the one who needs vitamins, dear. You always get so morose in winter. You need some vitamin D."

"Well now, *dear*, I don't recall all the vitamin D I received last May preventing me from spending four thousand dollars on collectable stamps, falling into despair, drinking a bottle of wine for each thousand dollars and wrapping my car around a tree with the stamps in the trunk," he replied.

"Oh Daniel...that's your problem, you know. You're named for Daniel the prophet, who had visions. No good ever came from naming a man for a prophet," the comment might have been to her Sunday school class.

"I should go to bed. I am not feeling well."

His wife picked up the box that was not *his*, the box that had no worlds, and put it in the attic, which she locked with the key she kept in her jewelry box. This was her procedure for the storage of sharp knives every time that her husband wasn't feeling well. In a few weeks, when he was skipping and singing and embarking on new hobbies, she would retrieve the sharp knives from the attic and start cooking proper meals again.

It was six months before Mr. Eversole opened his box for the second time. He did it on the kitchen counter, the way he imagined, with STAINLESS CHINA etched in his flesh 11 times, with the memory of his lost daughter's adolescent mouth describing the event. Before it was over, he caught his wife's reflection in the 11 remaining worlds. In her flesh, it said LOLITA.

Instead of sending him to the facility at which he had convalesced for the previous twenty-three Junes, Mrs. Daniel Eversole threw her husband a funeral. Friends, family and former students came to pay their respects, to whisper in the back of the church about whether or not it was an accident, to tell Missus how sorry they were.

Danielle and her mother were alone in the family car. Candy had died in a car accident that May.

"I'm so sorry, Mama." Danielle looked very pretty in black.

"Well, yes. It couldn't be helped. Not really."

"Maybe not. I just...I don't...I wish I had known about the knives,"

Danielle said. She thought: *How could I have not known? All those years of plastic ware...* and swallowed the knot in her throat.

"You know, Danielle, names are very important things."

"God is my judge," Danielle muttered. The comment might have been to her sensible flats.

"What was that, dear?"

"Dad's name. It means, 'god is my judge.' Perhaps things would have gone differently if he had been his own judge."

"Danielle, I do not know what you're talking about. I meant that it is never good to name a man for a prophet. Your father would have been *different* if his name were William or Percival or Jeffrey or something else."

"I know, Mama." She squeezed her mother's hand in resignation, and had a vision of how things might have turned out if her father had been Something Else Eversole. She scrubbed it from her mind and recalled her father as he was, turbulent and well dressed, yelling and crying and drinking and laughing and taking her fishing on Sunday mornings, retreating to his lakeside cabin or friend's timeshare every June, buying her a pony for her fourth birthday. "He always was something else," she said.

Her mother frowned. Ronnie fumbled in the pocket of his jeans for another cigarette. When he sat back in his chair he stared down into the dumpster. Garbage and filth were strewn about inside it like a grenade had exploded in there. Ronnie noticed, though, the only trash around the dumpster was his now flattened cigarette.

Cynthia leaned against the doorframe, watching the Blazer pull out of the parking lot. "First time I ever seen that."

Ronnie sat and smoked without a word.

"Them rummagin' through the dumpster's and all I mean."

"I know what you mean."

Cynthia was quiet for a second, waiting. Then she said, "It's just weird is all. I mean, I seen 'em workin' almost every job you can think of, all over. Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, everywhere we been. But I ain't never seen 'em doin' that before; ain't never seen anybody doin' that before. Just seems like Mexico's a long ways to come from if all you're gonna do is recycle cans, don't you think?"

Cynthia gave him a few seconds to say anything before the silence got the better of her. "Daddy always complained that they's so many of 'em. That they're takin' over."

"Always quotin' that dead old man. Suppose they are takin' over." Ronnie stood up and put his cigarette between his teeth. "Look at what they're takin'." His hands cut the air in front of him.

Cynthia looked at the other apartment buildings, the used cars lined up to the curb, the potholes in the street. In the distance she could hear the muffled voice of a woman screaming first at her husband then her child.

"Everything west of here was theirs anyhow. Let 'em *take* it back."

Cynthia was quiet.

“And what makes you think they’re Mexicans, anyway?”

“I don’t know. I mean, ain’t they the ones that come over here?”

“They are. But *they* weren’t.” Ronnie watched the white Blazer approach the hill then head south on a side street. “They were from El Salvador, maybe Guatemala. Even the poorest Mexican would look down his nose at those two for no better reason than that.”

Cynthia bit at one of her thumb nails, afraid to let the air between them grow silent again. “Is that somethin’ else you learned,” Cynthia paused, “while you was away.”

“Somethin’ else, huh?”

“I just mean-”

“I know what you mean.” Ronnie pulled his feet from the balustrade and leaned forward in his chair. “Geography, history, what do ya call it -sociology.”

Cynthia took a deep breath then said, “Chemistry, too.” Immediately her eyes fell to the floor.

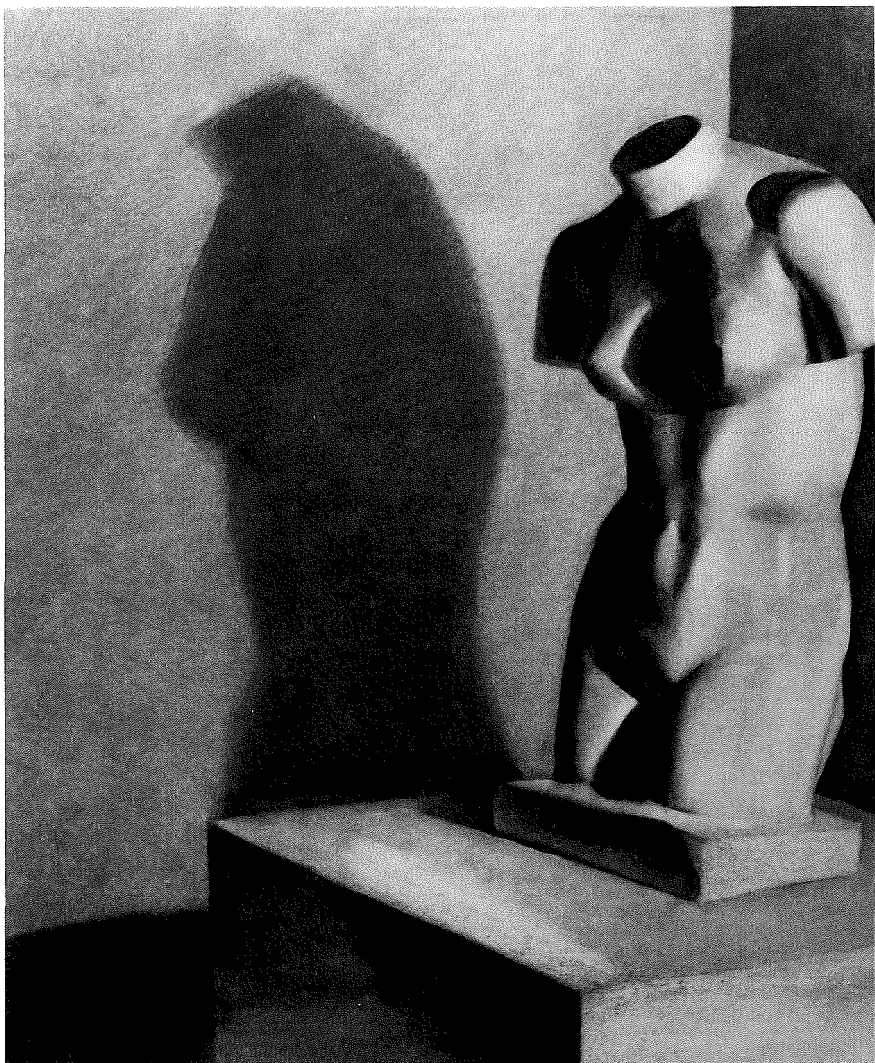
Ronnie laughed a little then fixed his sharp, bloodshot eyes on the hill. “They educated me. They didn’t fix me, but..” Ronnie let his words die there.

“Get to the bathroom.”

Confused, Cynthia pulled her hand back then saw the white Blazer turn from the street into the parking lot.

## SELECTED WORKS

The following works represent the best creative writing and artwork submitted to Applause this year.



PLASTER CAST

*Charcoal by Dustin Beck*

# NOIR

*by Andrew C. Releford*

There is an oval opening in my pen  
I can see how much ink's left in it  
this image of ooze within  
plastic tubing, I watch it as the countless specks  
of time  
sand dunes of a barren  
world, a bell  
tolls--see how the light plays off the curved  
side? This is the model of beauty we don't watch.  
The mound of skin at the woman's hip: we do watch  
each sparkle drop from that zenith  
of the bell one dune  
to another  
soundless slaughter which we all do.

# PUPPIES

*by Staci Holloway*

You dogs are not  
queens of these covers  
I own you

I feed you  
I wash your little  
black spotted feet

with tangerine soap.  
I send you to church.  
I bought you

your orange striped  
white Camaro  
Little brindle bitch

I send you to school  
pay my money,  
nine thousand

dollars on  
a faded green check  
you ungrateful bitch.

You do what I say  
Heel, puppies, heel  
I feed you

I own you.

## VISITATION

*By Staci Holloway*

Standing outside the fence  
I am not a criminal.  
But the gate slides open  
I walk inside  
And become one.

Take my shoes off. Put my hair down.  
Keep all money in a clear plastic bag  
(silver only, nothing green).  
Be still behind the cage.  
Is it here boy? Do you smell anything?  
Find a table with a chair facing forward  
and wait.

He walks in, giving his tag  
to the man behind the table  
before we hug

This lunch is special:  
a bacon cheeseburger  
from a vending machine.  
those rules have gone from  
“Inmates may not handle money”  
To “Inmates may not cross the yellow line”  
Now “Inmates must stay seated.”

“It’s been three months.”  
He doesn’t say it casually  
He can’t understand why  
I don’t enjoy a two hour drive  
To feel like a criminal  
For something I didn’t do  
For something “he didn’t do either.”

Sitting inside these cinder block walls  
Walls as thick as the weight they impose  
The innocent criminals  
and their shitty cheeseburgers



SELF PORTRAIT  
*Oil by Dustin Beck*

# FORGOTTONIA

*by Andrea Bowers*

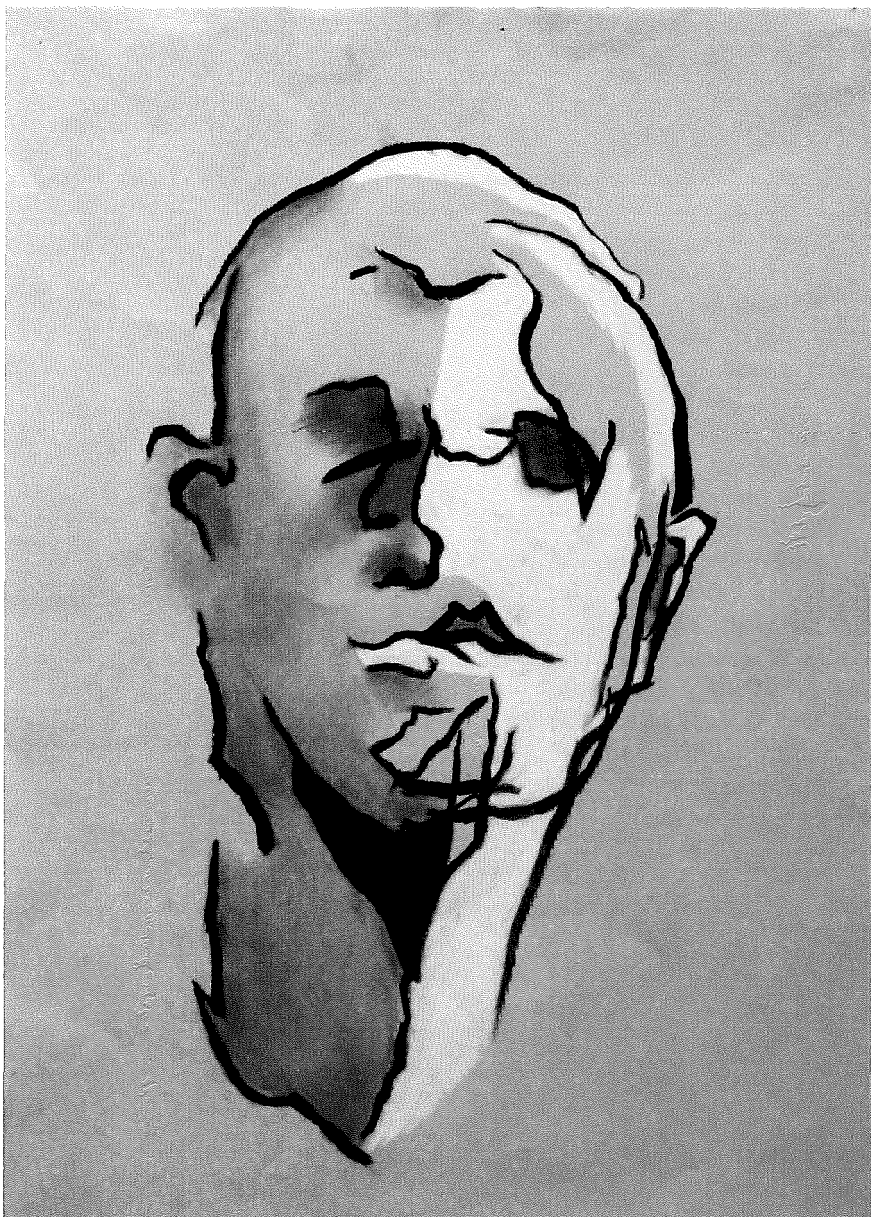
Disaster upon day after day.  
New addition to a heavy load.  
Get through the day  
any way you can.  
Marking life by hours out of bed,  
to hell with tasks  
accomplished  
or not.  
I don't care.  
I'm still alive,  
and I don't care.  
The coffee pot drips  
and I remember  
that I drink coffee.  
I pour some into a faded blue cup  
with unicorns and no handle.  
The warmth and the unicorns  
remind me of a summer down the street  
spent pretending  
I was a pony  
alongside the girl with long braids.  
I didn't forget how to pretend,  
I never stopped.  
The mask became real  
and I didn't like  
who hid inside.  
I took it off and ran.  
I went so far  
and when I got there  
it was home.  
I knew where I was.  
I was real again,  
but I didn't forget how to pretend.  
Now the unicorn  
on the cup with no handle  
reminds me of all the things  
I can't be anymore  
and it is not ok.  
I can't run,  
strip off my mask.  
I am already home

but the electricity is out.  
I am stumbling in the dark.  
I didn't forget how to pretend that I'm ok,  
but I'm not.  
The hours pass  
and I don't care.  
There is nothing in the cupboards  
and I'm still alive,  
with a unicorn cup with no handle in my hand.  
I drink the coffee like a magic potion.  
Scald my tongue,  
make me feel  
alive,  
and I don't care.  
    No mask.  
I didn't forget,  
    I don't know how.  
Unicorn cup.  
What the hell am I  
if I'm not a pony?  
I glued the handle back on,  
but I can't forget that it's broken.

# IT WAS MINE

*By Andrea Bowers*

Kiss me,  
Taste the sins of my lips,  
The temptation of tongue.  
Wrap me in your nothings  
And let me slumber with emptiness.  
In the morning  
I will kill you again  
With nothing  
But a smile  
And a shake of the hips.  
Your love,  
Your blood,  
A color on my canvas,  
Spotched with dreams abandoned,  
For the curve of my cheek,  
The swell of my breast.  
I will recreate you  
Out of bits of colored glass  
And you will never know  
That I smothered you  
In your sleep  
Over the last damned  
word.



SELF PORTRAIT

*Charcoal and Chalk by Dustin Beck*

## HIGHWAY 69 TO DALLAS

*By Shawna Mason*

South of McAlester the land rises—  
long fingers protruding,  
as scrubby cedars fight for footing  
amongst angular limestone  
thrust from the ground,  
exposed ridges of backbone eroding.

A copper-skinned beauty on a low-slung billboard  
urges her tribesmen to honor what is sacred,

While dying towns boast  
pawn shops, seedy gas stations, and Calera—  
Home of the 1956 Class B Boys State Champs  
painted failure fresh

Rising obscenely out of rural decay,  
the casino's neon crescent  
crouches above asphalt.  
Stale gray air flees its wide maw,  
shadowing the noonday sun.

## #BFF

by Staci Holloway

“Fuck you if you don’t think Bukka White is a legend!” The wrought iron table clanged as Jessa slammed her mug of Diet Dr. Pepper spiked with gin into it. Jessa hadn’t looked up from her cell phone in a few minutes and had failed to realize that Amanda returned to the kitchen to get another drink leaving Jessa alone outside save for the two toddlers chasing each other in the sandbox on the other end of the yard.

*That shit is too good to waste.* She tweeted it.

Amanda returned to the table grasping a wine glass just as Jessa sent the tweet. Jessa knew why her friend wanted to see her today so when Amanda finally got up the courage to ask “How are things between you and Nick?” Jessa spouted off her preplanned response.

“Well he’s only called me a selfish cunt once today and has quit trying to hack into my Facebook, so I would say better than last month. But he still tries to play ‘Good Dad/Bad Mom’ with Coen by feeding him Nutella for dinner, so I guess we’ve got a ways to go.” Jessa didn’t want to talk about Nick. She wanted to get drunk and screw someone and forget about Nick. Unfortunately the only people Jessa actually spoke to were her four year old, drag queens, and her 2,000 Twitter followers.

“Hmm,” Amanda didn’t seem impressed, “what about school? I know you had some serious worries after the divorce.” Jessa knew Amanda didn’t really know about “major worries.” The first month at university, Amanda met a rich doctor at a nightclub and Jessa met a senior philosophy major. By second semester, Amanda was picking out a three thousand dollar wedding gown and Jessa was eight weeks pregnant.

“I’ll still be able to go. My mom is going to watch Coen on the days that Nick doesn’t have him.” Jessa took another sip of her drink. Tanqueray and Diet Dr. Pepper. She preferred her usual Seagrams.

“Jessa, you know I really worry—”

Jessa interrupted her. “Hey does Josh ever mention women coming into the office vagazzled?”

“Vagazzled? What does that even mean?”

“You know, like designs made out of rhinestones? On their crotches?”

“Jessa! That’s fucked up! Where do you even come up with this stuff?”

Jessa could tell Amanda was holding back hysterics.

“You’re the one married to a gynecologist! He has to see some freaky stuff.”

Amanda did laugh then. “Well even if he did he couldn’t tell me. We don’t talk about his work much anyway.”

Jessa was typing furiously into her phone. *do a vagazzling pattern in the likeness of your gyno’s wife, he will b flattered + might comp your visit.* She tweeted it.

“Why do you keep looking at your phone?” Jessa could tell Amanda was becoming annoyed.

“Twitter. Instagram. You know.”

“Jessa, I’m really worried about you. You were always kind of stuck in the Internet before, but since you and Nick split it really seems to be taking up a lot of your time.” Jessa knew this was the speech Amanda had been eager to deliver all night. She sat back and let the gin burn her tongue for a while.

“I mean, do you have any real friends? Besides me? Drag queens don’t count.” Amanda paused. Jessa could see Amanda was trying her best not to look too much like a concerned mother. She did look like a concerned mother.

“Hey Mandy! Don’t worry! Look I’m taking Coen to Nick’s house tonight and I’m going out with some real friends. And not to gay bars. To dinner. And I swear that isn’t code for ‘I’m going to go home and masturbate furiously.’”

“Goddammit Jessa! Do you have to ruin every serious moment ever?” Amanda was quiet and red with anger for just a moment until the two women looked each other in the eyes. Then they both laughed. “I wish I didn’t love you so much, Jessa, I really do.”

“You mean, ‘You don’t know how to quit me?’ What a lesbo! Get over here bitch!” Jessa whipped out her phone to take a picture of herself with Amanda and posted it to Instagram. #NoFilter. #BFF.

“Well I guess I need to get Coen to Nick before he starts busting my balls.”

Jessa was across the yard and brushing the sand off her son when the concerned mother look returned to Amanda’s face. “Are you sure you’re okay to drive?”

“I barely had one drink Mandy, I think I’ll be fine!” She carried her son over to her Honda Accord and buckled him into his carseat.

When Nick came out to the car to get Coen he ignored Jessa. “Come here, big boy!” Nick said to their son as he kissed him on the lips.

Gayyyy, Jessa thought to herself. She tweeted it.

## THE PURSE-HOLDER

by Jessica Weisenfels

Eric was a purse holder. He knew this because he often found himself holding a purse. He also knew because of his father told him the night before his wedding.

"Son," his father had slurred, "You got both rings, right? Your sisters gonna be the walker downers, so I know you got 'em. You gimme them rings."

Eric handed the rings over to his father, with trepidation nagging at the back of his mind and a sad, sorry smile tugging at his lips. His father took the rings, and after three attempts, easily passed the smaller one through the larger. He smiled and crossed the driveway to sit on the curb beneath the street light to further contemplate the jewelry. Eric followed him.

"Well, I's worried 'cause your Doreen is such a big tall girl, and you—well you look like you look. And them goddamn girl hands," his father let out a peal of cruel, drunk laughter. "But you know, son, hers passes right through yours. Look here."

His father once again passed the smaller ring through the larger one, this time more gracefully. Eric held his breath. His father's drunken eyes then caught the glint of the stone in the street light.

"Wait a second here, son. Why yours got a rock on it?" The man looked up at him from the curb, his face red with whiskey and the heat of the sultry Southern night. *Don't panic. Don't panic. Don't panic.* The twenty two year old Eric chanted to himself, as he did he felt himself shrink eighteen years. Suddenly, he was four, looking through slats in a door to see his mama and oldest sister squeal beneath the unsure swing of a drunk man's belt. "Don't panic, baby brother," his sweet sister Sarah had said as she stroked his hair. He may have been full grown and educated, but beneath his father's gaze, he still cowered in the closet.

Another peal of laughter broke the relative silence.

"OH MY GAWD! You mean to tell me this big ole ring belongs to that cunt you're marryin'? I had misgivins from the start. A boy like you don't belong in that world. They're not our people, son. It don't matter if you's smart. You ought to be drivin a truck like a man does. Not teachin little baby children at some goddamn school. You're already a nursemaid...but now...now you're marryin this hoity toity rich bitch whose Daddy owns half the county? You're already wrong in that. Rich women don't know how to behave. And this...now, son...your ring slips in through hers..." his father paused to catch his breath. Eric thought of Sarah's hand stroking his hair, "you know what my granddaddy told me the night of my weddin? He said, 'Good job, Ricky boy. You see how her ring slips right through yours? That means you'll be married forever.' He took me outside just like I'm doin for you. He told me a man's place. But I ain't tellin you. I will tell you that marryin a woman whose got bigger fingers 'n yours is gonna make you things."

Eric felt relief that his father had stopped talking a moment. He used the

relief to steel himself for the coming onslaught. He knew, just as he had known forever, that his father would work up to furious violence until all the alcohol he had consumed had finally entered his blood stream. He would fight off the sleepiness for some time, but eventually he'd succumb to the warmth inside him, and he'd go inside to pass out. This pause marked the decline in his fury. Eric knew that. He read it just like he'd read his handwritten wedding vows at ten a.m. the following day. He knew it like it was a part of him.

"You know what it makes you? A faggot. A goddamn henpecked faggot. A fucking purse-holder. You take a woman like your mama, tiny little thing. I know she's got real fat now, but when we made your older sisters, she had this tight, supple little ass. I wish you coulda seen her, boy. She weren't real big and showy like your rich cunt, but she was small and I was big. Like a man and wife's 'sposed to be. You mark my word, son. When you move into that faggoty little three bedroom brick you gotcher eye on, she's gonna start it. Just you wait. She's a shrew just waitin' to harp, wantin to rule your life, thinkin she can and has the goddamn right to. In a few years them children gonna come along and fill up that space, you gonna be pushed out into the garage. It happened to yer uncle. A man can't be a man unless he's the lord and master, and son you cain't be the lord and master of much 'cept oil spots in a garage. OH! And the purse! You can be LORD OF THE PURSE! MASTER OF THE PURSE-HOLDERS!"

More laughter resounded through the darkened street. This laughter was more jovial. He was winding down, Eric thought. His father was suddenly very still. Suppressing the oft-unfounded spark of hope that perhaps he had finally died, Eric nudged him. He then jumped three steps backward. His father always woke up swinging, even when mostly sober.

"SON! You go fetch yer mama! She cain't leave me out here like this. I need my bed. You got get 'er now."

Eric, now middle aged, still heard the bellow resound in his garage. Just as he'd still been five at twenty-two, he was still twenty-two at fifty-three. It didn't matter what he did to silence that godforsaken bellowing. He always heard it. At the mall at Christmas time, *fucking purse-holder*. Standing next to his statuesque daughters, *faggot*. Teaching his students, *nursemaid*. He climbed into his luxury sedan on the passenger's side. She nagged him about the state of his workbench. *Shrew*. She never let him drive anymore. *Bitch*. She always left her purse in the car and sent him out after it. *Cunt*. He picked up the purse from the console. There, now he was more comfortable. *Goddamn motherfucking faggot nursemaid purse-holder*. He smiled into his drink. His daddy might be dead, but he'd never be gone. No, he was not gone. Eric gazed into the last of his scotch. He could almost see his daddy's face in the golden glow of that streetlight, reflecting back from the liquid.

The driver's side door opened and his oldest son slid in next to him.

"Dad? Mama said you wanted to see me? I brought the rings."

"You look around here, Junior. What do you see?"

"Ummm? The garage?"

Eric laughed. His son did, too.

“But what’s in it, son?”

“Your stuff, mom’s car.”

“Where’s my car? Is it in the living room?”

“No, Dad. It’s in the driveway. Dad, don’t you think you ought to lay off the scotch? We need you fresh for tomorrow.”

“I’m celebrating. My oldest son is getting married tomorrow. To a damn fine woman. A damn fine woman.”

“Pops, I hardly think drinking scotch alone in the garage constitutes celebration. Come back inside. Mama’s baking apples and we’re going to watch AFV, like we used to when we were little.”

“What did they teach you at that school, anyway? Economics and what’s the other one?”

“Economics and Political Science, Dad. You know that.”

“Oh that’s right. You’re gonna run the world. Gimme them rings.”

Eric Jr. passed the rings to his father. His father took the rings and tried to pass them through each other. It took three tries before he realized they wouldn’t fit.

“My god. They’re exactly the same size.”

“Yeah? Well you know I have piano hands. Long, thin fingers. Like yours.”

“Yes, like mine,” Eric muttered, contemplating the length of his fingers as he did so.

“What does that mean? The same size? Is this some kind of father-son ritual thing we’re doing? If so, let me go grab some cigars. Aunt Sarah gave me Cubans for a wedding gift.”

“You know, son, I don’t have a damn clue what it means. Not one single goddamned clue. You run and fetch those cigars, and see if you can’t rummage up some coffee, too. Tell your mama we’ll be in in a few minutes. No, forget about the coffee. I’ll get the coffee. I want to hug that mama of yours, even if I do stink like whiskey.”

Eric Jr. grinned and opened the car door. His father spoke before he shut it back, though.

“You just...be partners, okay? Love each other. Fight with each other. Love each other some more. Don’t be an asshole. Listen to your wife. You both let each other win sometimes. You’re not a despot. She’s not a shrew.”

Junior grinned. Eric remembered him as he was at four years old, the way he’d stroked his daddy’s hair when they passed by the casket of his grandfather.

“Oh Dad...you know what I think? In the voice of every shrew rings the grace of a castigated goddess. “

“Yes, son. I guess that’s right.”

Eric picked up the purse and sighed as he headed toward his wife. She’d be in the kitchen, her long grey hair twisted up in a bun, swaying to the rhythm of the music in her head. She’d be glad to see him, he’d read it in her eyes. He’d pull her close and whisper that she might be Aphrodite—bare foot with that flowing white dress on. She’d fuss about his liver and ask him to put the

purse on the counter. He would do it, because he was Eric: Lord and Master of Purse-holders. And for the first time, he'd hear those words in his own voice.



UNTITLED

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