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Cardinal Sins

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*Congratulations to the winners in their respective categories.
†Congratulations to the winner of the Winter 2009 Cardinal Sins Poetry Slam.
‡Congratulations to the winner of the Theodore Roethke Centennial Poetry Slam.
Editor’s Note

I remember well the thrill of validation I felt two years ago when I learned that *Cardinal Sins* had accepted one of my stories. At that time, I had but little awareness of the incredible amount of effort that the *Sins* staff invested in producing each issue of the magazine.

The publication of my work in the Winter 2007 issue was the beginning of my professional relationship with *Sins*, a relationship that has culminated in my all-too-brief tenure as editor. Now, as I prepare to step down from that position, what stands out about the experience is how fortunate I’ve been to have had the opportunity to play a small role in perpetuating the *Sins* tradition of artistic and literary excellence and service to SVSU. As I’ve said before, and as I’ll say again to everyone who’ll listen, the level of talent at this institution is truly remarkable.

Of course, neither SVSU nor *Cardinal Sins* exists in a cultural vacuum. A number of literary figures have emerged from the Saginaw area over the years, most notably Ted Roethke. Last November, in honor of the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet’s centennial birthday, SVSU’s Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum hosted a poetry competition sponsored by the Friends of Theodore Roethke. Writers of all ages came to campus to read their work. The victor was our very own *Sins* staff member, Amelia Glebocki, whose prize-winning poems are included in this issue.

Since Roethke’s day, Saginaw has seen many changes, not necessarily for the better. But there are reasons to be optimistic. One particularly positive recent development has been the establishment of a thriving arts scene centered around the Magic Bean coffee shop on State Street. In January, *Cardinal Sins* was honored to have the Magic Bean host our Winter 2009 poetry slam. Because it was the first time we’d held an event off campus, a lot was riding on the evening, and I’m pleased to report that it was a huge success. I hope that it will prove to be the start of another productive professional relationship for the magazine.
Abigail Boston Canbury
Abigail Boston Canbury is my full name, but mostly people call me Abby. Or, if you happen to be my dad, you call me Mosquito. I was named Abigail after my mother who died in a car crash when I was two. My dad was the driver, and he still hasn't forgiven himself for walking away unscathed. My mom's neck snapped from the collision while protecting me. Sometimes I think my dad wishes that she would have let me fly through the window instead.

Boston
I was born in Boston, but I haven't been back there since. My dad says it brings back bad memories—aka, my mom died there.

Christians
Christians believe that God is their holy father and that He loves His children unconditionally. One time when I was ten, my dad and I were on a subway, and a man dressed in a suit handed me a pocket New Testament. My dad told me to throw it in the garbage when we got off the train, but I stuck it in my coat pocket instead. I tried to read it later that night by the light of my Scooby-Doo night-light, but none of it made any sense to me. Still, I stuffed it under my pillow every night in hopes that God might love me anyway.

Dimples
My dad has the hugest dimples. I would often see them when we were on the bus or in a plane off to another location when even he couldn't help from smiling. During those times, he'd look down and tickle me until I giggled and my dimples showed through. “See, Mosquito,” he'd say, “you got your daddy's dimples.” When we were running away from daddy’s problems, that’s when he was happy.

Eight
Eight is the number of times that we moved since I was three until I graduated high school. It doesn’t even include when I moved out on my own after school was over. My dad has this thing about adventure and new places. He said that it was boring to live in one
place for too long, and that we should trek the whole country. When we weren’t moving, we were traveling.

*Five Hundred Thousand Dollars*
That’s how much money my dad got after my mom died. Her very wealthy grandfather died when she was in high school and left that money for her. She never did anything with it, just locked it away for safekeeping in case an emergency arose; my dad didn’t even know she had it. Apparently she had hid it from him because she thought if he knew about it, he’d quit work and spend it on something like traveling the globe. Not quite the globe, but close enough.

*Grade 2*
I was playing house with my friends at recess on the playground. I was the father, and I was pissed off because I didn’t want to be a boy. The other girls laughed at me and decided that one of them was going to be my boss for my “job.”

That girl, Mindy, pretended to call me with her finger phone, and I answered. “You’re fired!” she yelled.

I picked up my jacket out of the dirt and left the jungle gym and headed over to the swings.

“Where are you going, Abby?” Mindy asked. “Don’t you want to play anymore?”

“I am playing still,” I answered. “I’m just moving.”

*Henry Gordon*
Henry Gordon is the name of my very first boyfriend. It was when we were living in San Antonio, and I was in sixth grade. It wasn’t really anything that special, but in sixth grade it was vital to have a boyfriend, even if you never went out on dates or saw each other at school. Two nights after we started “going out,” he was supposed to call me at 6 pm.

I never got the phone call. That was the day my dad decided we needed to move to Michigan.
Ice Cream Doll
When I was little, there was nothing I wanted more than an Ice Cream Doll. Its yarn hair was perfect, and its big round face was so lovable. All the girls in my class had one and played with them during recess. I got poked fun at for not having a baby of my very own. I always had to borrow the old one my friend had. She had named it “Lost Lucy” because the little ice cream cone that came around the doll’s neck was missing. I couldn’t play with an old baby with the name “Lost.” That just wasn’t right.

I asked my dad for one for Christmas. He said all I did was spend his money. He said he couldn’t waste his money on something so dumb.

That year I knew that I wouldn’t ever get an Ice Cream Doll and fit in with the other girls; that was the first time I asked my daddy if he was ready to move to another city yet.

Jackson Elementary School
One day at Jackson Elementary in fourth grade, I was called down to the principal’s office. Everyone began to whisper behind my back and make snarky remarks about how much trouble I was going to be in. I was told to take all my belongings with me.

Thinking I was in for it, I opened the door to Ms. Hawkface’s office (that wasn’t her real name, but that’s what the kids called her, and I wasn’t there long enough to learn her real name) and instantly began apologizing for whatever it was I could have done wrong.

She looked at me quizzically and told me to stop apologizing. She informed me that my mother died and that I needed to go home with my father now. He would be waiting for me outside. She gave me a little piece of yellow candy from the dish that was carefully aligned on her desk. I guess she saw it as some sort of compromise for losing my mother.

I popped it into my mouth and tasted the sourness of it, then skipped off outside. I wasn’t worried. Sure, my mother died: eight years ago.

Spotting my dad’s Chevy pick-up truck, I hurried over and hopped in, and we drove off to Florida for a week’s vacation. He said he wanted to go and couldn’t leave me by myself.
At Knoxville Elementary fourteen months later, I got called down to the principal’s office, again. I was told my mother died, again. This time, the funeral was in New York. The next time my mom died, it was in Montana, then Tennessee, then Colorado; then I was in eighth grade, and my dad just started traveling without me.

He always came back after a week or two, though; he wasn’t that awful of a parent.

Bearing no relation to Reynolds Wrap, of course. Larry was my third boyfriend, but it didn’t last long either, considering my dad moved us to Chicago two months after me and Larry started dating.

I never quite figured out this nickname that my dad gave me. I think he meant it as a term of endearment, but really, what is a mosquito? It’s an annoying little bug that likes to suck your blood. Without blood, people would die; it’s their source of survival. My dad, however, thought his source of survival was money. So I guess that in a way, I was a mosquito. He thought, at least, that I was taking away all of his precious money.

Nostophobia
Nostophobia is the fear of returning home. How do I know if I have that if I’m not sure where home is? We’ve moved so many times that I’m reluctant to call any place my home.

On the Move
On the Move is a newsletter for military brats, created because their fathers’ jobs forced them to move all over the country and leave all their friends behind knowing that they’d never see them again.

I used to love all the chocolaty ones when I was young enough to be able to eat that much sugar for breakfast: s’more, chocolate chip, and fudge sundaes. It grew into a kind of addiction, but my dad didn’t mind. It was cheaper to buy me boxes of Pop-Tarts for dinner than it was to get McDonald’s. I switched to fruit-flavored ones in fifth grade, and
practically all I ate were strawberry-crammed, frosting-covered, sprinkle-coated Pop-Tarts.

Today, I can’t eat a Pop-Tart without throwing up.

Quartzy
Quartzy is believed to be one of the highest scoring words in the English language in the game of Scrabble. Yet, when I looked the word up in the dictionary, nothing showed up. I imagine quartzy is quartz-like? If that’s the case, for something to be like quartz, it must be very abundant, because quartz is the most abundant mineral found in the earth’s crust.

My dad must have thought that his money was quartzy. He thought it would last forever. Turns out, he was wrong.

Roger Smith
Good solid name, good solid man. He was about my fiftieth boyfriend, but he was the one that ended up lasting the longest. This was, of course, because when I met Roger I lived in my own apartment, not my dad’s place.

Secretary
I ended up being a secretary, answering phones for American Airlines. I already knew where most of the cities in the US were anyway, so I figured, “Hey, there can’t be that much to learn.” It was a pretty boring job, but at least I was able to answer all the questions customers had about what the places were like. I pretty much had the tourist perspective anyway.

Transfer
My dad made it back to Boston before he ran out of money. I think he knew it was about up, and he wanted to go back to where it started. It was just before my thirty-fifth birthday.

He called me from a payphone, and I thought he was calling to wish me a happy birthday and tell me he was sending me a birthday card with a couple of bills of Mom’s money. Instead, I ended up transferring him some money so he could travel to come live with me for a while. He promised to find a job.
Ultimate Party Shoppe
My dad worked at Ultimate Party Shoppe for two weeks, long enough to get his first paycheck. He cashed it and then headed for the subway, yelling, “Good luck with life, Mosquito!” as he fled. I haven’t seen him since.

Vacancy

When Dad Entered
When dad entered the scene, Roger left it, to no surprise. Roger said, “You need to figure out what is more important here, me or him. Call me when you’re ready to figure this relationship out.”

Xenogeny
Xenogeny is a concept about the production of offspring that are completely different from their parents. Is it really possible for me to have wound up completely different from my dad?

Year 35
On my thirty-fifth birthday, I used my complimentary airfare tickets from working with American Airlines and flew to San Francisco.

Zany
Call me zany, but I took all my things with me, and I didn’t go back.
Never Look Back
by Samantha Prud’Homme

Black & White Photograph

Winter 2009

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Stitches
by Amelia Glebocki

After the war,
my grandmother learned to sew
and spent the rest of her life mending tears
with needle and thread, her thimble a barrier
between weapon and wound.

Each stitch
left a scar in the fabric, a latch
on the door of the past
that warned,
do not enter.

I’d watch her sew
skirts for me. They were long and opaque,
just like hers, shielding me
from what I wanted to know.

But each time
I’d ask, she’d shake her head
and measure my waist, insisting
I was too thin, like a victim
of what she’d witnessed, too small
to hold what was hers, what could not
be mine. All I could do was watch,
just as she had done
half a century before me.

When she died, she left behind
an unfinished skirt. I remember
wearing her thimble like armor, determined to
tie up loose ends. The needle pricked my skin, and
I tore the seam.

I opened the door
but could not walk through it.
Drop Box
by James Fry

Color Photograph
Particle 003

by Libby Booth

Acrylic on Canvas

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Winter 2009
Gravity

by Rachel Wooley

You’re fierce, fiery, prominent,
off on your orbit, leaving me in the shadows to trail
after you, quietly, coldly reflecting your brilliance.
I resolve to fall off course, to shy away
from your burning gaze—
we’ve been chasing each other in circles for centuries
but have yet to catch one another.
I’m ready to turn away and start anew,
but your radiance leaves me pale in comparison.
So I stay, because it’s better
than being left alone in the dark.
Crash of the Martin B-26 Marauder

by Mathew C. Easterwood

“Son. Of all the things I have ever told you not to touch—all of them—this is the one that I mean it about most. Your grandfather gave this to me. One day it will be yours, but you do not touch it until that day. You understand?”

I remember being seven years old, shaking my head. I remember my father slapping me gently on the back with a grin and sending me out of his office.

The extremity of this rule, to my father’s fault, made the breaking of it all the more necessary to a seven-year-old boy. And so a few weeks after his warning, when he wasn’t yet home from work and my mother was at my aunt’s for the weekend, I took the model airplane down from its shelf, out of its encasement, and flew it around the house.

On the plane’s third or fourth pass through the dining room, I tripped on one of the table chairs. I was able to regain my balance without falling, but at the cost of the plane. It was a spectacular crash. The 1/48th-scaled, twin-engine Martin B-26 Marauder hit the oak floor of our living room—off of the landing that rose to the kitchen—in a nose-dive. It shattered into dozens of pieces and scattered everywhere—under the couch, under the chair, onto the rug, into the corner.

The sound of shattering plastic was—in my seven-year-old mind—the sound of the end of my life. I remember feeling as though I had been in the plane, as though I had crashed and shattered with it. I moved amongst the wreckage, picked up a piece of one of the rudders, ran to my room and hid in my closet.

I waited, clenching so tightly to the small plastic piece of rudder in my right hand that it imprinted and cut my skin. I waited for my father to come home and, in all likelihood, kill me or beat me until I wished I were dead. In the darkness and stillness of my closet, I waited; the crash replayed in my head again and again and again into eternity.

At last, amidst the terrible echo of plastic meeting oak, I heard the door open. I heard his footsteps. I waited. I heard his briefcase being set
down. I waited. I heard his jacket coming off. I heard him muttering something to himself about his day at work or his intentions for the evening or about me or my mother or how the sky is blue. It didn’t matter. I heard his shoes coming off and being set down on the mat. I waited. I heard his footsteps in the kitchen. I heard the refrigerator open. I heard something being taken out—perhaps milk or orange juice or soda. It didn’t matter. I heard the cupboard open, a glass being set down on the counter, a jug being set down on the counter—it was milk or orange juice. Then there was silence. Then footsteps nearing the living room. Then silence. I waited. Silence. I had begun to cry. I anticipated the yell, the beating, the scolding, the grounding, my death, the end of the world.

All that came was the sound of one of the kitchen chairs moving, slumping, and silence. But it was not any normal kind of silence. It was as if the air were becoming heavier with it, as if it were slowly filling the house with its denseness, as if I were breathing it in and it was filling me, as if I were heavier because of it, as if the entire world were more dense with silence. And I thought I would hear nothing ever again.

But then came the deafening sound of his standing and moving to the kitchen and opening a cupboard and getting something out and moving toward the living room again and then his kneeling. And then the tinkling of small plastic pieces against a plastic container. Dozens of tinks that seemed to shake the house, the world.

And all that time, I waited. I waited for the footsteps to near my room. I waited for the yells, for the beating, for something—anything.

I’m still waiting. My father spoke to me less than ten times after that day.

I still dream of the B-26’s nose smashing to the floor. Most of the time, I see it the way I saw it that day or, perhaps, as if I’m in it. Once in a while, however, I am the B-26, and when I hit the floor, I scatter about and see the world in tiny pieces. But it isn’t the living room that I see. I see the bleeding, rudder imprint on my skin. I see my father’s fingers opening a beer. I see the laces of a football, Molly Hartley’s lips, the letterhead of Brown University, the tire of my Pontiac, guitar strings, Murphy’s ever-panting tongue, the fabric pattern of that oddly shaped couch. I see the handle of a coffin, a section of engraved stone.
Self-Portrait, 2009

by Robin Karnes

Digital Drawing

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Wish It Wasn’t You

by Lesley Stanley

I start here:
   he was a lover. Mine.

His
branchy fingers
guzzled into my long hair,
a pretzel love.
Tasting hot salt, I
blistered for a cool
glass of water, and
   white, chunky goose bumps
stood from my body,
   arching for comfort
like an erection.

I took those moves
   —my heart sharpened—
from changing brushes. Blank
worries fogged me, but
one dark kiss
   made
a morning receipt.

We waited to share more.

Waiting.

   I see a sore fantasy
waiting in line,
my number expired.
   Done.

You give me back
   the fleshy pieces,
but I beg you to take what’s left.
Put it back! Keep it safe!
I touch my face
like his hands did.
   It’s unfamiliar. My fingertips
are too frosty.
   My liquored veins obsess—
the frames snapshot in memory—
days I belly laughed on top of him.

Done.

My soul is a tiled hotel pool deck
trampled daily as
your Gemini twin tells me
   never is your promise.
The Secret Life of an Entrepreneur

by Jamie Wendorf

Molly paints her fingernails black as she lays sprawled across the couch. She begs me to sit on her feet to thaw whatever blood is left in them. Things feel unnatural, like they moved everything in the house around on me since the last time I’d been home. Lightning flashes behind the curtains. It has been pouring for five days straight now. People joke with each other, saying that Noah better get his ark ready. However, the longer the rain comes down, the less people laugh. The grass slowly drowns; the front yard looks more like a dirty pond than the perfect square of green and bricks that Dad usually has it manicured into.

We watch the Olympics in the living room, which breaks every half an hour to detail the weather. It’s the same forecast, every time. The living room is a good size, but it still somehow feels like we’re in a trailer. The walls reflect a dull white, as if even they weren’t interested in what they had to say. Dad won’t let us hang anything on the walls; he can’t stand holes in his drywall. Most of the furniture is tattered and gray, ancient La-Z-Boys that sit and reminisce about better days. The room centers on the couch, a navy blue overstuffed Art Van masterpiece. Mom saved up forever for that couch, trying to add some personality to our living room. She sits by the fireplace now, where the fake logs flicker on a timer.

My dad sits at the computer, his face illuminated by the unnatural white glow of the screen. His red mustache reminds me of Yukon Cornelius from Rudolph, especially now; he’d been working so much lately that he hadn’t had time to trim it. He’s on the computer so much that I’m starting to think he leads a secret life. Maybe he’s an undercover FBI agent, or plays as a nineteenth-level elf on World of Warcraft. Maybe he watches seventies porn films at midnight. However, I haven’t been able to prove my conspiracy theory yet; the only identity I ever see is an entrepreneur with OCD. Right now, the floor around him is littered with classified bargains he clipped from yesterday’s newspaper. I want to pick one up, roll it into a ball, and throw it at him, just to see if he even notices. He clicks around eBay for the ten-thousandth time, determined to find yet another piece of equipment, perhaps a compactor or a paver. I contemplate how long it will take for eBay to give him carpal tunnel syndrome.
Molly yawns and cracks her fingers, making sure that each one pops. It’s a nervous habit of hers. She knows it’s disgusting, and revels in the opportunity. In between the cracks of her fingers, mouse clicks tap from the computer. They create a strange beat together, a worried little song. “Molly,” I say, with an only partially joking smile, “I swear, if you don’t stop cracking your fingers, I’m going to get off your feet and let you freeze.” She rolls her eyes but stops. I look out the window again, wondering if a river somehow got directed to our house.

After a quick weather update (same forecast again), a special segment airs on an Olympic athlete. The camera pans over a young girl from Russia around seventeen, showing her in a red swimsuit next to a deep blue pool. She speaks in broken English about how her parents abandoned her as a child, leaving her at some orphanage where everyone wanted her to leave, but no one wanted to take her. The segment is supposed to send a positive message about how obstacles can be overcome, how even the abandoned can become champions, but the look on the girl’s face says it’s bullshit. She strains to smile, the camera zooming in on her. Dad turns away from the computer and watches her like he’s never seen a real person in his entire life until now, until he saw this Russian swimmer. He listens to her story a minute and then looks at me and Molly. With an odd laugh, he asks, “Did I abandon you girls?”

Thunder booms, grumbling through the house. My mom speaks, her voice abnormally loud. “Does anybody know who’s supposed to win the 100-meter swim tonight?” No one answers. My throat pulls tight on itself and chokes me like softened asthma. The curtains flash as lightning streaks behind them. Molly pulls her feet out from underneath me, revealing the purple star tattoo on her ankle, the one she snuck out of the house to get. Her face twists unnaturally, an odd mix of pain and delight.

“Why the hell would you set yourself up like that? You already know the answer,” Molly says furiously, her voice strong except for a small tremble on the word “answer.” Dad’s face flushes. Mom beams us a warning glare. Molly stares at me, waiting for backup, but my hands are shaking. Molly scans Dad’s face, checking for weakness.

“I don’t know why I said it,” he mutters.
“You want to know if you abandoned us? You don’t even know how old I am! All you ever do is go on and on about your damn company. When’s my birthday, Dad? Do you even know anymore?” she shrieks, her voice a frightening crescendo. She flings her bottle of nail polish against the wall. It shatters, black streaks crawling down the drywall. Her breath comes in rasps now, as though she were drowning in the muggy air.

Mom whispers, “That’s enough, Molly. Go to your room.”

“I will, as soon as Dad tells me when my birthday is,” she seethes back.

The room chokes on silence. Nail polish continues its slow motion voyage to the carpet. The grey cat by the window yawns, stretching itself awake. Dad looks at the wall, then up at Molly. In a low tone, he says, “I don’t know.”

Molly stands up, a severe look of satisfaction etched into her face. Taking long strides across the room, she grabs the cat and tucks it under one of her arms. She marches up the stairs, cracking her fingers the whole way up. Her door slams.

Dad breathes heavily, sucking in air as though he’d been underwater the whole time. I pretend not to notice that he’s crying; tears and snot gather in his nose. After a minute of panting, he rises slowly, pushing the computer chair in. He looks desperately at me for a moment, his mouth opening. My eyes shift to the black-stained carpet. Turning around, he takes a deep intake of breath and walks upstairs.

The computer hums in the corner. My mom straddles her face in her hands. “Jesus,” she exhales. The way she holds her hands over her face makes me think of a bizarre game of peekaboo. She looks at me through her fingers, her eyes crinkling at the corners with disappointment. I drag my fingernails back and forth across the couch’s blue fabric, etching patterns and erasing them. My face flushes for a moment. Just as quickly the blood drains, replaced by an overwhelming sense of vindicated fury.

“Don’t look at me like that. He deserved it. I mean, he doesn’t give a shit about us. Remember when you and Dad dropped me off at college? I was so scared that I bawled the whole way, and all he could talk about
was his god-forsaken company,” I say, narrowing my eyes. “He didn’t even care that I was leaving.”

She sighs and pulls her hands from her face. Her eyes look tired. “That’s just how he is. He’s not good at heavy stuff,” she says quietly. The computer clicks as a screen saver switches on. In the light of the television, I see wrinkles I’d never noticed on her. She looks at me, scanning my face. “You know,” she whispers, almost to herself, “the entire way home from dropping you off, he sobbed so hard that he kept choking. He had to pull the van over just so he could catch his breath.” I gaze at the blue curtain. Rain thrashes outside, slamming against the house in sheets. Mom stares at me, her dark brown eyes piercing. I reluctantly look back, my father’s grey-blue eyes seeing something they hadn’t before. Mom rolls her weight back to her ankles to stand up, stumbling over to the couch. Sitting next to me on a blue cushion, she cries. The living room blurs as I join in.

Upstairs, Dad shuffles papers around. I can see him, bleary-eyed and trying to concentrate on asphalt prices. After all this time, I know his secret life. Thunder rumbles outside, sounding more distant than before, a low comforting murmur. The rain eases into a light series of inhales and exhales. After a moment of observed silence, my mom and I slowly turn back to the Olympics. We watch as swimmers, sharply defined and clean, line up by the pool. They slide their toes up the line and wait. The fireplace’s timer clicks, sending electric flames up to the fake logs. Shadows waver around the living room, casting furniture in and out of sight. The buzzer sounds. They dive, their hands sliding gracefully through the water in large arcing patterns, a beautifully orchestrated sine wave moving across the pool. “I can’t believe how long they hold their breath for,” my mom says, fixated as the swimmers flip to reverse themselves. I nod silently. One of the swimmers makes a desperate push to touch the wall, and the race ends. Light from the fireplace flickers across our faces as we watch the swimmers catch their breath.
Windy Day

by Kim Latuszek

Black & White Photograph

Winter 2009
Pele’s Lament

by Leigh C. Grant

“Appelata est enim a viro virtus: viri autem propria maxime est fortitudo—According to its etymology the word virtue signifies manliness or courage”

–Catholic Encyclopedia

six o’clock and a spontaneous muse ignites the end of a page

quiet creeping up of lyric-logic,
the death of a censor
ignites a spontaneous muse

walks quietly
ink-stained, earth-stained fingertips

the color of his eyes

silent stepping into that scene you’d never write,
spontaneous

song-of-words

We were finally there,
the last of the untamed ground,
the cracked park-bench at the bend
in the creek I lost Paradise,
wiping wetness from my lip:

Latin men should not kiss like the French

“soy una buena chica”

the truth:

Pele herself had not yet
set up shop, those rumblings
in the underworld,
tiny hotspots
filled with cheap beer,
fogged up windows.
But his breath was magnetic,  
and she shook the ground a bit— 
a little tectotechnotectic dance 
of hope for me yet. 

She believed in sonar, 
those waves below the surface 
of things 

the soft, hot core of magnetite 
in my heart 

his seismic wonder 
the drift of continents southward  
a los aires buenos 
filled with clove smokes and vodka- 
laced raspberry gelatin 
on a yellow bus.  

He must have waited in his dormitorio,  
still wearing that jersey. 
I rode home, 
my obnoxious teenage friends 
driving along 

the faultlines 

Pele steamed below, cursing 
my virtue 
St. Philomena of the Lost Cause. 

Then Pele, snapping her fingers, 
closed up the gates of Aremus 
deep below the sea,
those untouched places
    \textit{lugares desconocidos}

His musk and wonder,
\textit{gaucho} making rhythms
with his feet
tectotechno

he was son of fertile soil caught
beneath my fingernails
by that bend in the creek.

Artemis was granted her
\textit{“habitus operativus bonus”}
eternal virgin of the hunt
like a praying mantis
on a green leaf, hungry

for more

St. Philomena
faith, hope, and charity
the virtues of
\textit{una chica buena}
smelling of soil and musk
walking quietly above sea level
dreaming
\textit{what could have come next?}
    \textit{sueños de los ojos morenos}
Doldrums
by Dennis Rogers

Color Photograph
Judith before the Murder of Holofernes

by Robert Darabos

Woodcut
Anomie

by Amanda R. Conner

I volunteer at a nursing home
five days a week
because I’m supposed to love people.
I scrub conformity
into the walls of my clean-cornered apartment,
and I recycle the milk cartons
that promise to save lives.
I adopt brown babies
whose distended bellies
send them running from Africa
in search of McDonald’s double cheeseburgers,
and I only attend business meetings
in pantsuits.
So when the ants
crawl across my
flip-flopped feet
and newly pedicured toenails,
working
one brain, one goal,
I smear them
neuron by neuron
into the too-textured gravel of the sidewalk
and call it even.
This morning I found my husband dead in our apartment. I’d been out all night and he was on the bathroom floor, slumped over, head in the toilet, naked, and covered in his own vomit.

Everything happened so fast for us; we became the darling art couple, the poet and the painter. Critics were calling him the newest Dylan, and people were tattooing my art on their bodies. There were appearances we needed to make and appearances to keep up. We tried our best to never disappoint. We became accidental performance artists. And everyone said our work was never better than when we were together. I often wondered if that was true. I often wondered if I loved him. It’s hard to figure out what you feel when everyone is watching.

I cleaned the vomit off his chin and chest, and dragged his body into the bedroom. I slid a ripped-up pair of jeans onto his legs and lifted him onto our bed. I tilted his head dramatically to the left, crossed one arm over his bare stomach, and hung the other off the side of the bed. I took off my shoes, laid down next to him, and dialed 911. I stayed in bed with him until the paramedics arrived, and I watched on live television as they wheeled him out the front door of our building, down the sidewalk through a storm of flashbulbs, and into an ambulance.

A reporter interviewed a man on the street who set a bouquet of flowers on our front stoop. Said he was driving home from work and heard on the radio that Eric Ivan was found dead in his New York City apartment and had to come pay his respects. Tomorrow he’ll hear that Eric overdosed on heroin and died in his bed while his wife slept next to him. A rumor will spread that she has gone into hiding and vowed never to paint again. Within days, her existing paintings, including several abstract portraits of a man in blue, will sell for top dollar.

The man with the flowers will repeat for years the story of how he was outside the apartment when Eric Ivan died. He and his friends will tell their children about driving three hours to see Eric play, and that it was worth it because he changed their lives. A group of artists will paint a
mural of Eric on the side of an abandoned building in Brooklyn. Hollywood will make a film about his life, and a young blonde *ingénue* will win awards for her portrayal of Eric’s wife as a tortured artist, shattered by the death of her one true love. Teenagers who weren’t even born when Eric passed will wear T-shirts with his face on them. I’ll move on surprisingly soon.
Opening Eyes after the Rebirth of Sex

by Tornline

Humming,
the gates ope betwixt eyes,
nibbling,

touches
slight as shudder,
loud as river,
of past and present
flights to future.

Question has not escaped in word;
the closing of gates is accepted:
two keys to one garden
kicked under the bed.

Strength and weakness join in grip.
The hunch, a mere ringing in the ear,
echoes.

Commitments are nonrefundable through sacrifice.
This is not fair!

Perfection is blooming!
So awesome is this scent
settling in my garden;
I toss my key as charity already given
to me.
Iris

by Amanda R. Conner

Color Photograph

Winter 2009  Cardinal Sins 39
Idina Menzel
by Robin Karnes

Watercolor

40 Cardinal Sins Winter 2009
Kristin Chenoweth
by Robin Karnes

Fine-tipped Sharpie

Winter 2009
Shivering at the door, leaning on the buzzer, is our postal carrier, Oona. Neither snow nor wind nor gloom of night has stayed this courier from the completion of her rounds.

“I’m so cold,” she says as I open the door. No wonder: She’s wearing only a brief orange sundress embroidered with black dragonflies, and plastic orange flip-flops. Her toes, their nails painted the same orange as the rest of the ensemble, are graying with frostbite. Her extremely long neck is encircled by nine rings of bronze and polished bone, which clatter as she shivers.

With her slender gray fingers, she hands me a package, medium-sized, cocooned in “FRAGILE” tape and covered with customs stamps from countries I’ve never heard of: Upper Volta, Zembla, Qatar, Brobdingnag, Moldova. I check the return label: “It’s from Rory Lumpwell,” I say.

“Yeah? Like the wh-whatchacallit, lariat poet?” she says, hugging herself for warmth.

“Laureate,” I say. “Why aren’t you wearing a coat, Oona?”

“Zen ritual, reversed s-seasons.”

“Right,” I say, closing the door on her.

Entering the kitchen with the package, I find my husband, Percy, sitting at the table, dressed in a tattered burgundy velvet cape, drinking a White Russian from a squat tumbler. The room smells like earthworms, moss, and ripe melon.

“Who the hell’s here this time a night?” he says.

“Oona brought us a package,” I explain, placing it on the table.

Percy gets up, walks over to the knife drawer, and selects a long boning knife. Standing over the package with the blade raised, he is like a priest poised for a sacrament; his cape is open, revealing his muscular, masculine nakedness. Tenderly he pierces the tape. Box flaps part like lips; foam peanuts erupt.
The box contains a glass bottle full of milk and a rusty pistol.

“Seen one a those on th’ Antiques Roadshow,” he says, referring to the pistol. “Old West era.”

Taking the bottle of milk out of the box, I find a card underneath, on which is written in a fastidious script: “Mother, mother! Always by the banister my milk-tooth mug of milk was waiting for me.” I read it aloud.

“What the hell you s’pose that’s about?” my husband says.

“Eyedunno,” I say. “But I’m pregnant.”

“Hot damn! Always wanted a son.”

“Well, but I don’t know yet if it’s a boy or a girl. Also it might not be yours. I’ve been having an affair with an entomologist.”

He takes the gun out of the box and points it at me, but when he pulls the trigger, a miniature flag emerges that says, in the same handwriting as the card, “Pop!”

Throwing the pistol to the floor and picking up the boning knife instead, Percy lunges over the table. Leaping aside, I bash him on the head with the milk bottle; he collapses to the floor. I watch milk mixed with a little blood drip from his hair onto the kitchen floor. Then I go to the hallway closet to don my winter gear.

“Where’re you going?” he bellows.

“Out,” I yell back. “For a walk.”

"I don’t think I can get up,” he hollers. “Help me.”

But I’m already out the door, and the wind is bullying me, and ice crystals are forming on my eyelashes. I quickly become disoriented: I turn around and my footprints have been erased; there is nothing to be seen in any direction but an indistinct swirl of snow. When I cry out, the wind steals the sound from my mouth, adding it to its own inarticulate keening.
One segment of the horizon seems somewhat less featureless than the rest, so I head that way and soon come to the foot of a small hill, which I climb, trudging arduously to the top, where a decrepit Bookmobile is parked, the word “Bibliobus” decaled in peeling gunmetal gray across its side, staffed by a long-haired child of indeterminate gender, whom I judge to be about seven, wearing a shapeless brown tunic and torn jeans.

“took you long enough,” the child says as I approach. “Get in.”

Inside the cab of the Bookmobile, it is warm and dry. The child, handing me a cup of hot cider, says, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

I toss the steaming cider in the child’s face. Covering its round red face with its little pink hands, the child cries like a child.

“Shut up,” I say.

Obediently, the child lowers its hands and looks at me through puffy dark eyes. Blisters are blooming already on its left cheek and upper lip.

“What’s your name?” I say.

The child mumbles something.

“What?” I say.

“Who wants to know?” it says, rather sullenly.

Changing the subject, I say, “Do you have any books by Rory Lumpwell?”

“Eyedunno.”

“You are a very irritating child, do you know that?”

“You’re a mean old lady. I hate you. Why did you come here? You prob’ly can’t even read.”

“Of course I can.”
“Prove it.” The child suddenly ducks out through a door at the back of the cab, reappearing a minute later with a thin book, which it thrusts into my hands. “Read this to me.”

It’s a musical score, the theremin part from the great Russian ballet Rapspierre. “Not fair,” I say. “Bring me something in English.”

“No can do,” the child says, pulling an iPod from the pocket of its jeans and inserting earbuds into its ears. Faint buzz of guitars as the child curls up on the seat and closes its eyes.

The door at the back of the cab is still open, so I step through it into a large, bright room filled with a riot of books of many colors and sizes stacked floor to ceiling row upon row, books on all subjects haphazardly piled: Summa Theologica, Selected Verse of Henry Kissinger, How To Quit Smoking and Get Rich, The Mabinogion, Best of the Journal of Tension Reduction, and so on.

Although I look around for quite a while, I can’t find anything by Rory Lumpwell. And while I’m looking, the snow keeps piling up outside our Bookmobile. It’s so high now that the door won’t open, we’re trapped inside, and it’s still coming down.
Imagine
by Zachary R. Lietaert

Mixed Media

46 Cardinal Sins

Winter 2009
It’s the dark Zen of the Levittowns,
replacing a yoga mat in identical living rooms
with a crisp, cold autumn afternoon.
Shards of cornucopia confections are raked
into piles, into the gutters, in silence
as if beautiful funerals are not only routine,
but always gold and red.
Quickly usher out your dead:
hot cider and donuts await inside.
This sunset luncheon is a light cinnamon joke;
eat, drink, feel better about the bodies outside.
A Brief Conversation
across 500 or So Miles

by Christi Griffis

You told me about life in a new place—
alone in a dirty apartment,
milk crate for an easy chair,
half a joint still smoldering in an ashtray on the floor.
And how your back hurts from the air mattress.
It’s a pitiful sight, you said, and it’s not easy.

Starting over isn’t easy,
I told you from the couch
where I’d been sitting all day.
If it were, everyone would do it
all the time.
Can you imagine?
People scrambling across the country and back,
binding up every mile of road,
living out of suitcases?
Just try to imagine that, I said.

I don’t think most people get bored and lonely that easily
is all you said,
and I heard you pick up the joint and take a hit.
A Black Key Fog
by Kendra Shillair

Color Photography

Winter 2009
Old Skool Punk Reunion
by Joel A. Lewis

Digital Collage

Winter 2009
This Is How I Sleep with Myself (and You) at Night

by Seth Patrick

She was a Jezebel with fangs—my pick-up lines hung well past her age—not innocent, just young.
A female beauty drunk off her bruised ego.
“Now here we go, more beautiful angels.”

Hips swung perfectly, walked with urgency,
actin’ like eternity was in tight jeans.
Now I’m starin’, tryin’ not to care, an’
I’m thinkin’ ‘bout our future—got nothin’ to do with marriage.

More like baggage, disposable habits,
but that’s what happens when the goods get damaged.
Not to say I don’t behave like a gentleman,
but feminine adrenaline got me sniffin’ estrogen.

An’ I’m’a jump in and swim.
The girl got Prada and prolly shark-fins,
but I tread water like a marathon runner,
and I’m known for holdin’ my breath to blow kisses to daughters of pushover fathers, all business white collars.
Can’t show love—they drown strippers in dollars.

Acknowledgments:
This is to that girl who I used to recite raps to, had a tattoo of a cupcake on her lower-case back.
It’s also to a girl who bit her lip out of habit and had pierced ear plugs like National Geographic.
An’ I can’t forget that girl who smoked cloves (not cigarettes), wore black clothes, an’ took death so serious.
Then there was that hippie with no make-up on her face who would always make love ‘cause she was anti-hate.
See, I don’t mind a little weight around my baby-cake’s waist, or if it’s waist-up, silicon, an’ it’s fake.
Straight, pressed, permed, or curled—this is to every girl, intelligent, or just a shallow pool of molecules.
It’s not just about SEX, it’s about affection—one day I’ll kiss every single girl with a freckled complexion.
You drive, chain-smoking cigarettes like you always do when you’re agitated. I glance up from the crumpled map, where my fingers trace red and blue lines, trying to find the street signs you’re naming. “Euclid,” you say shortly. You didn’t want to come, and it shows, but we’ve already made it this far. The edge of the map stops just short of our destination, but we stumble across it somehow.

Ten dollars later, the car’s parked and we’re walking toward the water. You scowl at the ticket scalpers lining the streets in front of the lakeside stadium, no doubt wondering what part of all this I could find appealing. But a man standing off by himself catches your attention. He’s playing his bongos in the shade of a tiny city tree, one of those stunted trees they plant in little squares by the sidewalk—trying to keep nature in the midst of all the cement I guess. The bongo player’s caramel-colored hands tap a lively beat as we approach—he hopes we’ll throw change into his glass jar. You surprise me by dropping in a few quarters, shoulders squared in determination as you approach.

On the dock we sit close, looking past wooden posts connected with rusty chains into slate grey waves. Seagulls descend and retreat, frustrated that it’s only stones we’re tossing into the water. We’re silent over the splashing; you keep glancing at me when you think I’m not looking. I wonder what’s on your mind but don’t ask. Finally you stand, offering me your hand and gesturing back toward the city. “I’m sure there’s more to see,” you say simply. We follow the flashing orange lights of road barrels along the main road—Euclid. The asphalt has been chewed away to the sand on one side. Little blades of grass are already starting to poke through.

Strings of light stretch yellow across a dusk-colored side street lined with restaurant tables. The scent of Creole food wafts out through a set of open double doors. Music resonates into the street from a local band at a little pub next door with a decidedly Irish name. You suggest we go inside, and I agree. For the first time since we got here, you smile.
Driving Home

by Jamie Wendorf

Black asphalt fades to gravel, buildings fade to fields.
A year has passed; now I return to the place I once outran.
I slowly turn the corner with hands shaking on the wheel.

The world’s flushed effervescence, exploding verde en abril,
a semester’s worth of Spanish no one here could understand
how black asphalt fades to gravel and buildings fade to fields.

An Amish buggy sways along; neighbors’ secret lives lay concealed
behind silent woods and worn-down fences, my old forsaken land.
I slowly turn the corner, my hands shaking on the wheel.

The bowling alley’s burnt down, the ashes all congealed
in this calm little ghost town where hours seem to span
miles of black asphalt fading to gravel, buildings fading to fields.

The dust kicks off of Cade Road, settling on my windshield,
as the reluctantly dying sun trembles in its final stand.
I slowly turn a final corner, hands shaking on the wheel.

My pink sky shifts to black, the vibrant web of stars revealed.
I stop the car for a moment, count the countless soft-spun strands
that grace the place where asphalt fades to gravel, buildings to fields;
I slowly turn into the driveway, my hands steady on the wheel.
Cold

by Nadeer A. Alabdulwahab

Adobe Photoshop

54 Cardinal Sins

Winter 2009
She bore a slight resemblance to James Dean—if James Dean had been a woman. And she smoked her cigarettes right down to the filter, burning her fingers every time. I have a feeling she was only inhaling half the time, too. She was a quasi-smoker. The worst kind of person. Always living life halfway."

The woman next to me put out her cigarette, the third of what I was sure would be many, and sat back comfortably in her chair. She wasn’t what I’d call unattractive, but I was sure she’d seen better days, the lines beneath her eyes and the way her bruised mouth set hard at the end of each sentence.

"…I mean, what could you expect? Quasi-smoker. The hussy."

Her name was Carla. The woman next to me—not the woman of whom we spoke. Or she spoke. I was having a hard time getting a word in edgewise. I was, however, moved by the way her lips fell apart after each exhale, like there wasn’t more to be said, that she had said it all and that was that.

Carla leaned forward, placing her palms flat on the tabletop, fingers spread wide, her narrow shoulders nearing mine. They were hollowed, empty, exhausted from carrying the weight of her conversation.

"Do you ever see yourself in your dreams? And actually, you know, recognize yourself?" Carla had apparently tired of her previous subject.

"I don’t think I ever have, no," I said, my voice coming as a surprise to me. I hadn’t spoken in nearly twenty minutes.

"Well, I do. All the time. Just last night I dreamt I was in my apartment, and then Yellowstone, and then the National Gallery. And the strangest thing happened, Tom, I’ll tell you, the gallery turned into a painting itself. All color, light, and texture. It was absolutely fantastic. Brilliant. I didn’t want to wake up, and I was angry when I did. Angry all day so far, until I met you."
“Well, thank you, I—”

“But that’s not the thing, see. The whole day up until now I was thinking about how I was going to have to come here, meet with you, and then go home again like everything was fine and okay. And it made me think that somehow what I said to you would be like the painting. You’d write it down and it’d imitate what really went down, see? Jesus, that’s big.”

She leaned back, her hands squeezed tightly within her armpits. I had no idea what to say.

“Big. Yes. I’d say so. What else do you remember about Miss Winters?”

I decided shifting back into professional mode might be most expeditious at this point. I could hardly quote her at “Jesus, that’s big” and pass it by the editor on Monday. It was Friday night, nearing 11:30 pm, and I was exhausted from an afternoon spent in the basement of the public library, the microfilm deadening my eyes for hours on end.


“Yes, well, I appreciate your—”

“My what? My cooperation? You’re not the fucking cops, man. Lay off it.” She exhaled violently. Apparently I had said the wrong thing.

“I’m sorry, Carla, that’s not what I meant at all. I meant to say thanks, I know this is hard. It must have been horrible. I am so sorry you had to go through this, and I’m really grateful that you’re taking the time to share it all with me. I owe you one.” I immediately regretted my last statement.

“Yeah, well.”

Helena Winters was a well-known DC socialite who had recently opened up an art gallery in Dupont Circle. Despite her easy money, her artwork was fantastic. Her opening the previous weekend boasted
some big names. Apparently Carla had made her way in and made friends with Helena, had cocktails post-show with the bigwigs, and left the lounge to hail a taxi with a gentleman friend she met at the exhibit. Helena wasn’t so lucky. When Carla turned to wave goodbye, she saw Helena run into the street, white chiffon flowing behind her, to be killed instantly by the rush of Saturday night traffic.

“If you’re tired, we can call it a night. If you feel up to it, we can always meet again. Now if I can get you to sign—”

“But don’t you want to ask?” Her elbows were on the table now, her hands clasped to the side of her face like a 1940s movie vamp revving up for the kill. She even batted her eyelashes, or at least I thought so.

“I suppose I do. So, yes. What?” I had no idea, but I wanted to know.

“Did I make it home with my gentleman friend?”

“Oh. Well.”

“Isn’t that what you have written there? Gentleman friend?”

“Yes, yes, I do.”

“You want to know?”

“Sure.”

“I did.”

“Well, I’m glad.”

“Thank you.” She stubbed out her fifth or sixth cigarette.

She was thrilled, then furious, then upset, and now a coquette. I wasn’t quite sure how sex could have factored into her night after witnessing a young woman’s life cut short.

“So good night then, Tom.” She stood and held out her hand, which I shook, weakly.
It’s a damn thing to mix the pastoral of a young talent with social exposé, death, and the quotations of a stranger, but I did it. I did my best to make Carla into a sympathetic, upstanding, artistic soul. It went to print.

On Tuesday, when I arrived at the office, the day’s paper in hand, Carla was there, sitting on the stone bench at the foot of the stairway, smoking, of course.

“Hello, Tom.”

“Carla.”

“Do you know what I forgot to tell you?”

I waited.

“I think Helena wanted to die, Tom. I think she wanted it beautiful like that, her white dress, the dark night, the rain, all of it. I really do,” she exhaled, upward, “and if I could paint it as well as she could have, I would.”

I had no response for her. Once again, Carla had said all there was to say.

“And I wouldn’t chalk it up as suicide either, Tom, so don’t even write the word. Suicide. She passed. That’s all. And it was beautiful.” Carla was wearing green: green denim pants, green knit sweater, green fleece scarf.

“Well, Carla, I think that the police still—”

“You’re not the fucking cops!”

I had said the wrong thing again.

“Yes, I know. What I’m saying is—”

“That they haven’t ruled anything out. What, that she thought she might hail a freaking taxi from the turn lane? Come on, Tom, don’t get naïve on me. We both know better.”
“Right.”

“Imagine it. White on black, marred by rain. Blurred-like. Water-color.”

I felt queasy.

“Yes, well, Carla, I’ve got to get in and—”


I nodded and ducked in the door, the newsprint I carried a mess of black on white, staining the palms of my hands.
Yester

by Jacob Ferrier

I saw a book from my childhood, 
a trashy pulp with creased cheap binding 
that my best friend read while we were at Boy Scout camp, 
our dreary green tent illuminated 
by an over-bright florescent flashlight. 
I read something too, something equally 
weightless.

The glitzy cover, 
an artless painting of robots and men, 
holds me, and I stare 
as I try to place 
when I grew out of such things, 
the envy for a better book 
I never ended up reading. 
At camp we hid from suburbia, 
pointless schooling or 
summer days that passed without merit; 
among the stars we failed to sleep, our weary heads abuzz 
with deliberate fantasy.

The book will stay on the shelf, 
begging me to indulge in that meaningless innocence 
I had in those northern woods.
Birdman
by Robert Darabos

Etching

Winter 2009  Cardinal Sins 61
Fallen Barn

by Jamie Wendorf

I shiver at strewn 2 x 4s, 
your fragmented skeleton. 
Red paint chips, 
your old blush and rouge, 
lay scattered like ashes.

We built you up strong once, 
solid pine knotted walls, 
but time attacked. 
Winds cracked around you, 
wrinkles carved your face, 
and all abandoned you.

You shuddered under the burden, 
dropped to your knees 
splintered, ragged, collapsed. 
Nobody moved to help 
when termites poured into you 
devouring, demolishing, destroying.

How many lives did you protect? 
How many began inside you? 
How many of your children 
were roped up and led to slaughter? 
Is that why you lie here now, 
rotting in the shrapnel of your grief?

I shiver at strewn 2 x 4s, 
your makeshift grave marker. 
I mourn irony’s intentions. 
You were protector of all, 
protected by none.
TV Tray

by Libby Booth

Acrylic on Cardboard

64 Cardinal Sins Winter 2009
Wormwood

by Amanda Merrill

Invisible death lurks in dark fertile earth, as clear poisonous water reflects lush secrets in infected green. The sun hides casualties of rain, while jars of last year’s peaches produce silent tumors under virgin flesh.

Peel off the metal in your mouth. Wear a scarf around your neck. Scrub your flesh until it’s raw. Drown the fear in irradiated wine.

Chalky whispers tell half-truths as proud marchers wave to the crowd. Little sterile soldiers play in foamy gutters as they hear the thud of dead birds dropping from the sky.
How To Forget
by Amelia Glebocki

Listen to songs
without lyrics. Run your fingers
along smooth surfaces. Spend time in the city, where the sky
has no stars. Drink your coffee black.

Be the ash that falls
from the lit end of a cigarette; blend in
with the ground.
Your parents met at a bar or a party or some other alcohol-fueled event. The specifics are a point of contention. Your dad didn’t have any pick-up lines; he just sort of waited until your mom was drunk enough to make poor decisions and began chatting her up. He tried to be poetic, told her she was beautiful. She was beautiful. Back at his apartment, he divulged his secret plan to move to California and she laughed at him. If this were a drama, he would have retreated. If this were a comedy, she would have thrown up on his shoes. But it’s neither. He offered to take her along. Her shirt was already off and he was unbuckling his belt. He fumbled with the clasp on her bra. Odd, because your dad had myriad previous sexual partners. Likewise, and even more so, for your mom. Some of them were even friends of your dad. Two of them were at your first birthday party and high school graduation. None are the one you’ve always suspected.

The act itself was quick and sloppy—that they agree on. Your dad still blames it on the whiskey. The sun came up and they didn’t have much to say. He slipped her a phone number she kept crumpled in her coat pocket until several weeks later when the swelling could no longer be denied. Sitting cross-legged on the floor of his apartment, the heavy word just dropped out of her mouth without much warning. He missed the gravity of the situation, asked, “What about California?” If this were a comedy, she would have thrown a book at his head and he would have explained the joke. If this were a drama, she would have burst into tears and he would have held her. But it’s neither. She simply replied, “I don’t know.”
Welcome Home
by Samantha Prud’Homme

Black & White Photograph
Portrait of My Mother, 1994

by Amelia Glebocki

Each night, I'd watch you
pour yourself a glass of wine and sit alone
in a room littered with reminders of us, pictures
my sister drew for you and
little scraps of paper. I'd written “I love you”
on each one.

You tell me now
that you wish you had kept them, proof
that I once loved you enough
to write it down.

But you’re a poet too, you know,
and wrote these lines for me, a promise that you’d keep me
from turning into you, thirty-one and married,
with two small children who you hoped
would never acquire a taste
for red wine.

And you regret not having raised me
Catholic, carrying your belief in God
just as you carried me for nine months, a burden
worth keeping.

Tell me if you can taste
the merlot in these lines,
dry and dark—

It suits you.
Bending Light

by Amanda R. Conner

We can only know a star
by its distance in negative age.
“Anything above absolute zero has heat.”
Can I climb under the blankets with you?

She left the light on in the bathroom.
“Who were you talking to?”
She says she saw her mother in the mirror
and welcomes the company.
She asks if I understand forever.
I don’t, but I lie,
“I’ve been around as long as I can remember.”
“Is a diamond really forever?”
“No, love is a lie of omission.”

The universe is flat
like the earth used to be.
But I only understand time
in analog.
“It took me four days to hitchhike from Saginaw…”
—Paul Simon

Heartland
by Chris Giroux

Here, hope is a memory, gone like Roethke’s greenhouses
that cracked, clattered, wheezed in the wind that brought rain that
took water—
pipes bursting in their emptiness.
Now only boarded-up bungalows bloom around his homestead;
the nearby factory sinks like a headstone.

A rusting monument to Moloch,
the plant hovers over industrial waters, now able to freeze,
while docks, low and empty,
grey posts standing straight as sentries,
anticipate the Army Corps of Engineers carrying silt, sludge in its wake.
Patience, politicians preach.

Progress, they say, is like the river,
now the color of coffee with cream,
and so we await jobs, snow, melting ice floes.
With spring far off, we burrow in muddy banks,
drown in this American still water.
Warning Persons Possessing
by Jacob Ferrier

Color Photograph

Winter 2009
Full Body

by Zachary R. Lietaert

Colored Pencil

Cardinal Sins Winter 2009
Piano Lesson

by Noah Essenmacher

The private room. A broom closet stocked with two old wooden chairs and a table. No nature motif posters with little Zen nuggets like “healing starts from within” or “courage is a constant state of hope.” No Highlights or Doctor Seuss in here. Four blank walls. Two chairs. One wobbly table. It’s the farthest room from the waiting room for a reason. Every specialist has a room like this. This is where they sit you down to tell you the really bad news. The brain cancer and malignant tumor news. The AIDS and Alzheimer’s and Lou Gehrig’s disease kind of news.

I’m here because I’m going blind.

I know this before Doctor Talbot, my old friend, comes in with his trunk-like arms full of test results and charts. I know this before he sits down across from me and pinches that chubby place between his dark eyes. So when he breaks the news to me, in this slow and deliberate tone, about extensive nerve damage and retinal scarring, I’m barely listening. I look at the blank wall behind his head. Just another canvas I will never paint. While Talbot explains why transplant surgery is not a viable option in my case, I’m admiring his golden pen, jotting precisely across a bright yellow legal pad. A week, a month, six at the most. I’ll lose my sight completely.

God is going to turn the lights off. It could happen any time.

“Graham, you need to consider what I’m telling you,” says Talbot.

I look up at him through glasses that are thick as bank-teller glass. Through them, Doctor Talbot looks like an inkblot in a white lab coat. The details of his features are smeared across his face. He is the blur with my best interests in mind. He tells me about a therapist he knows, a personal friend, who can help me through the life changes. There are classes for learning Braille, but it is hard for people over thirty to pick up. He suggests learning to walk with a stick now rather than later.

A week goes by before Talbot calls me at home. He wants to know why I have not gone to my follow-up appointments at the clinic. He says that my sister called him from Boston and that she is concerned about me.
How thoughtful. He wants to know why I haven’t talked to his therapist friend. He asks if I have been painting.

I tell him I’m busy selling off everything I’ve ever finished. I’m selling anything that will sell. Everything new is crap. I can’t see the lines anymore. I’m seeing splashes of color and no shapes, like someone has been coloring outside the lines everywhere I look. Last year, I was putting out my best work, commissioned pieces, auction pieces, bringing up to ten thousand apiece! Now, when I’m in my jeans and T-shirt, splattered and crusted stiff, I’m struggling to paint scenes from memory. The only clear pictures left are in my head. I paint with my nose half an inch from the canvas. Paints dry on my cheeks like wild stage makeup. Everything gets dimmer and fuzzier every day. Sometimes my head aches from the concentration, straining my eyes to focus, even with the Coke-bottle glasses slipping down my face.

Claude Monet, the French impressionist master, went blind slowly. You can see his series of water lilies that he painted in his garden became darker. Obscured. Smeared. He worked until he lost his sight completely. What did it feel like, the first time he sat down in front of a canvas to discover that he could not paint another stroke for the rest of his life? I’m on my way to finding out, and I’m terrified.

Another couple weeks go by, and Talbot calls again about the classes for the blind. My sister is behind this. Talbot is pushing his therapist on me again, but I don’t want to talk to anyone about this anymore.

I don’t want to tell anyone how I’m becoming lost in my own apartment. I follow the walls with my fingertips, venturing out like an explorer. I’m afraid to go outside. The boy across the hall has started doing my shopping. I’m losing every little thing I cannot see, like my cell phone, cigarettes, paints, and brushes. I’m a grown man who cannot tell that his coffee mug is full until it is spilling on the counter. I’ve overflowed the bathtub three times. I have a collection of takeout boxes because I’ve gone from a gourmet cook to a fire hazard in my own kitchen. I can’t let anyone know that I’m losing my art, the only thing I have ever loved about myself and the only thing I know. I smashed an easel the other day, threw its broken frame into the corner of the studio. I stabbed through a half-finished painting with a pair of steel scissors, tearing it apart. All my efforts mock me. If I’m not a
painter, then who am I? Who the hell am I? And how do I express any of this now?

Days go by. Headaches get worse, more frequent. That is when I scrap the glasses. I give up on focus and straining. One morning, I wake up and find that I can’t see at all. I’m scared shitless when I realize that, even with my eyes open wide, everything is black. For the first time in my life, I’m afraid of the dark. My heart pounds hard, like an engine, in my chest. I panic, stumbling in a void, crashing and bleeding against some unseen furniture monstrosity. My head slams into something solid, and I slump down to the floor, near the wall, frustrated and utterly defeated. I’m lost. I rub my eyes, rub hard, as if it would help. I sit there for what feels like a lifetime, with only the sound of my breath and my heart beating. Eventually, I can see again, somewhat, only in blurs and shadows. Quiet. For the first time in my life since I was ten years old, I pray out loud. Dear God. My soul. For a miracle. Amen.

Talbot phones on a Friday or a Saturday. The machine picks up the call, and he says that he is coming over for a house call. Some time later, there is a knock at the door. It’s Talbot, and he is bellowing gruffly until I finally answer. I wonder how he knew I was home. I never answer the phone or the door anymore. I don’t see anyone.

“Listen, Arthur,” I say. “I’m fine, and you’re just wasting your time coming here.”

“I’ve come on business,” he says as he squeezes past me through the doorway. I get the feeling that he is looking around my place, appraising the clutter and general disarray.

He says that a woman, a dear friend of his, is an admirer of my work. She wants to purchase a piece before they have all been sold.

“I’m down to a handful of paintings and some old charcoal sketches,” I say. “They’re in the studio. You know where it’s at. Knock yourself out,” I tell him. “Go pick out whatever you want. I don’t care.”

I manage to find the sofa, and I wait there for Talbot to return from the studio down the hall. I can hear him shuffling through the scraps in there. There are shreds of canvasses and splinters of wood strewn
everywhere, I know. I can hear him trying to right the broken easel and then giving up as it clatters upon the hardwood floor again. In a few minutes, Talbot comes back, holding two indistinguishable blobs in his hands.

“\textquote I’ll take these two,” he says. “I have a painted scene of the city skyline from the top of the Warner Building and a sketch of a woman and a child.\textquote”

“Take them both,” I say.

“For what price?”

“For no price.” What he has is nothing special.

“You should come with me,” he says, “to deliver these this afternoon. I told her that I would be seeing you, and she asked me to bring you along. She is very interested in meeting you, Graham.”

“Who is?” I ask.

“Madeline Bristol. She has heard much about you from Helen and me. Miss Bristol would only like to sit and meet with you.”

I tell Talbot that I’m not going anywhere. I’m not dressed for going out. I don’t care to see anyone. I don’t want to answer a lot of personal questions to a complete stranger. I don’t want to talk about art. It kills me.

I’m coming up with every reason I can think of to get out of this, but he won’t take no for an answer. “What are you more afraid of,” he asks, “meeting an old woman or becoming a shut-in, Graham? Really, now.”

So when Talbot finds my jacket and shoes and keys, I don’t fight him anymore. We step outdoors, and the air is damp and fresh like rain. I can hear the birds calling and the people bustling in the street. The sun feels warm on my face. I’m clutching Talbot’s coat sleeve all the way to his car.

We’re not driving for very long. Shadowy giants that must be houses float by the window. We pull up to a shady place in the suburbs. I can
tell because of the calm, quiet air that settles in places like this. Talbot leads me up a brick path to the house of Madeline Bristol. I smell fresh sunflowers, moisture, and damp soil from a garden recently worked.

A woman answers the first bell, as if she were waiting for us to arrive. She welcomes us inside, and her house smells clean and lemony. There is jazz music playing softly somewhere in another room. Miss Bristol, I can tell, is an elderly woman. Her voice is a little rough, but she speaks to me softly, with a quiet grace. She reaches out to shake my hand, and when she cups my hand in both of her leathery ones, I know that she is blind.

Miss Bristol leads Talbot and me to the dining room table, which smells of fresh fruits and freshly cut violets. She serves us coffee and tea with honey. She doesn’t spill a drop.

I ask her why she wants my art. I tell her that I know she is blind. I can sense her smile as she dismisses this. The pictures are for her sister. We don’t speak any more of art after this. We talk of travel and family relations. We talk about politics. We talk about music. Madeline adores jazz and classical. She has an impressive collection of records, which she knows by heart, and she entertains us with her favorites. We’ve been talking for some time before I realize that I have not heard Talbot’s voice in the room for a while.

“Arthur,” I say, and when there is no response, I know that he has left us here alone. He planned this. Madeline Bristol. The damned therapist.

“Arthur has stepped out for a moment,” she says. “He is on an errand for me, and he will return soon. Let’s take this time alone to talk, just you and me.”

She takes my hand and leads me over to her piano, her baby grand, and I sit beside her on the stiff polished bench. She begins to play softly. The melody, sweet and light, brings to mind a place out west, near Colorado Springs, where I first started painting. I was a young artist then, just out of high school and learning what I was capable of amid the cascading rivers and sprawling mountains and glorious evening skies. It was a time of inspiration and wonder for me. I can never forget. Madeline pulls me back from that place by saying, “I wonder how a painter might play upon a piano.”
Still, she plays the bewitching melody. I can smell the cool mountain air. “I could teach you to play,” she says. “Will you let me teach you how?”

My hands are shaking as they reach out to the ivory keys. They feel cold and smooth on my fingertips. “Yes,” I say. “I would like that. Very much.”
Biographies

Nadeer A. Alabdulwahab is a Middle Easterner who appreciates beauty in a different way. His art is dedicated to the past, the present, and the future.

Josh Balabuch reminds you to “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die, ’cause we are all tripping billies.”

Britt Barnett is here in body. Mind and spirit have gone on ahead.

Peter Brian Barry “is fated to pretend.”

Libby Booth enjoys life to its fullest extent. She has recently graduated from SVSU and is now residing in Chicago as a poor post-student and not much else. Her artwork will continue to progress, due to the inspiration of a new atmosphere and the continuing support from loved ones and friends, including her fiancé (Joel) and her pet frog (Biscuit).

Amanda R. Conner, a Saginaw Valley alum, currently lives in Grand Junction, CO, where she enjoys her job as a massage therapist. Although she greatly misses the creative writing community at SVSU, the mountains and blue skies help make up for it.

Josh Crummer was the only person in the Fox newsroom who said nothing can travel seven times the speed of light, before they hastily posted it during the space shuttle Challenger tragedy; because of this, he now wonders how fast universal expansion travels, and if he can get a ride away from all you lightspeed people.

Robert Darabos is a senior studying fine art with a focus in printmaking. After graduation, he plans on moving to Chicago to continue in his art education and career.

Mathew C. Easterwood has, due to recent experience, compiled the following materials list for those “turning over a new leaf”: spring jacket or sweatshirt, hat (optional), outdoor gloves (optional), extension ladder (recommended), book on dendrology (recommended), Flonase or Claritin (as needed), and glycerin (for future proof of the turning).
Noah Essenmacher is a staff writer for *The Valley Vanguard*, coordinator of the Cardinals’ Creativity Camp, a Writing Center mentor, and a member of the Roberts Fellowship Program. Noah enjoys the tradition of storytelling and challenges others to find the stories worth telling in their own lives.

Matthew Falk is not who he thinks he is.

Jacob Ferrier has a blank space next to his name.

James Fry is a Christian. He is a Christian apart from the stereotypical idea of a “Christian.” He loves God, loves Jesus, and loves people. James has a sister who inspires him to press toward the mark. His sister taught him that the universe is the limit.

Tyler Germain is a literature major at heart.

Chris Giroux is not a pseudonym.

Amelia Glebocki is far more patient with others than she is with herself. She loves seafood and the Shangri-Las.

Leigh C. Grant loves teaching at Oakland and Macomb Community Colleges. She’s received mention from Springfed Metro Detroit Writers, scholarship monies from UM’s Bear River Writers’ Conference, and fellowship monies to pursue her PhD. Her work has appeared in *The Bear River Review*, *Controlled Burn*, *The Tridge*, and elsewhere. Leigh’s poem “Pele’s Lament” previously appeared in both *Controlled Burn* and *The Tridge*. Her story “White on Black, Marred by Rain” also appeared in *The Tridge*.

Christi Griffis would prefer a Jesus dolphin on a unicycle.

Robin Karnes has spent the last three years at SVSU accidentally murdering various aquatic pets. She hopes that her current fish, Roxanne, will break the curse. When not focusing on her future application to the BFA program, she enjoys watching classic films, hanging with brilliant roomies, and falling up the stairs.
Kim Latuszek is like a picture book: she is usually pretty easy to read, quite predictable, and colorful; and she tries to have a happy ending.

Joel A. Lewis is moving to Chicago with his Libby and his Biscuit, where he will sit on the beach of Lake Michigan all summer painting, writing, sipping merlot, and enjoying this amazing new life God has offered him. Sometimes a shooting star can tell you all that you need to know about your world.

Zachary R. Lietaert of Mount Clemens is a nice bloke, full of life and wit. You can find him past the shires and marshes, residing in the Castle of Grayskull—not to be confused with the Castle Grayskull of Skeletor in the land of Eternia. He is also a fine artist, among other things, majoring in fine art and graphic design.

Kirsten McIlvenna is a big fan of Dr. Pepper, the movie *Anastasia*, and mint chocolate chip ice cream—but apparently not of the letter W.

Amanda Merrill hasn’t been the same since that house fell on her sister.

Nicole Pfeiffer doesn’t understand this book.

Samantha Prud’Homme enjoys many things, such as philosophy, photography, euchre, and chasing gnomes with sporks.

Dennis Rogers took a break one day from inventing the wheel to look at the sun. He realized there were circles everywhere and that without shapes, we had nothing. He spent his best years making shapes and humming melodies on street corners. When the right side of his brain ate the left side, he simply smiled.

Kendra Shillair can sound like a goat, wishes to one day hula on an island of cheese, and is completely obsessed with the CW show *Supernatural*. She is currently writing a fantasy/fiction novel and is enjoying the creative process.

Alex Soares is a Brazilian who has a passion for Christ!
Lesley Stanley was born and raised in Michigan. She currently lives in Chicago, where she is writing a lot of brilliant stuff.

Tornline will write poetry for food or shelter.

Jamie Wendorf is a sleepy literature major who loves her friends, ’90s music, James Franco, brilliant novels, caffeine, political science, springtime, Spanish, and hugs. Especially the hugs where people pick her up and spin her around. They’re her favorite.

Rachel Wooley has never been to Mexico, ridden in a hot air balloon, or had much luck keeping her strawberry plants alive. She hopes someday to accomplish all three, though not necessarily simultaneously.
Acknowledgments

Without the efforts of the following people, Cardinal Sins would be greatly impoverished: Alex Baumgardner, Tim Ashley, and the staff of The Valley Vanguard; Student Technology Center; Trish Gohm and the Student Life Office; Brittany Giordano; Ryan Kanine and the Student Association; J. J. Boehm and the PJPC; David Eudosio Smith; Perry Toyzan, Angela Bublitz, and the Graphics Center; Gabe Soto; Dean Mary Hedberg; Linda Farynk; Anita Dey, John Mauch, and the Reference staff of Zahnow Library; Suzette Zimmerman, Emmie Busch, and Jane Anderson; SVSU’s English and Art Departments; Melissa Seitz; President Eric Gilbertson; Dr. Donald Bachand; barista-in-chief Tracy Thiel; Pat Latty and Sharon Opheim; Emily McGuire; Samantha Prud’Homme for the cover; our multi-talented faculty adviser extraordinaire, Chris Giroux; all our benefactors; all our contributors; and our dedicated staff.

I’m also tremendously grateful to everyone who helped make the Winter 2009 poetry slam a night to remember: Lisa Kusey-Rechsteiner, Gary Rechsteiner, and the staff of the Magic Bean; the illustrious panel of judges; all the performers and contestants; and all those who braved the snow to watch and cheer the poets on.

With kind regards,

Matthew Falk
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Submission Guidelines

For deadline and drop-off location, visit www.svsu.edu/cardinalsins.

Entry Requirements

All submissions must
• be accompanied by a completed cover sheet.
• be submitted on a floppy disk or CD in the format specified below. Please do not submit any disk or CD with unnecessary files, e.g., class papers.
• have titles. The file name must be the same as the title of the work.
• not contain any contact information within the entries. This information should only be on the cover sheet.

All text submissions should
• be in 12-pt. Times New Roman font, single spaced, with one-inch margins.
• include the title at the top of each page.
• be on a 3.5-inch diskette or CD, in either .rtf or .doc format. Hard copies will not be accepted. Diskettes and CDs will not be returned.

Poetry should be no longer than 70 lines.

Flash fiction should be 1,000 words or fewer.

Fiction and creative nonfiction should be between 1,000 and 2,500 words.

Artwork/Photography submissions should
• be 300 dpi or greater, with high contrast and sharp definition.
• be on a diskette or CD, in either .tif or .png format. Hard copies will not be accepted. Diskettes and CDs will not be returned.

Photos that have been manipulated with a computer program should be submitted as artwork, not photography.

Number of Entries

• Submit up to 5 poems, 3 flash fiction pieces, and 2 pieces of fiction or creative nonfiction.
• Submit up to 5 artwork and/or photography pieces.
Prizes and Judging

- Prizes will be awarded in the following areas: poetry, fiction, flash fiction, creative nonfiction, black & white photography, color photography, black & white artwork, and color artwork.
- The winner in each category will receive $100 and recognition in the Fall 2009 publication.
- All submissions will be entered into the contest unless otherwise requested.
- Judging is done through blind, anonymous voting by the editorial staff.
- Staff members are excluded from winning an award in any category.

“I, ______________________________________________, do affirm that the personal information given by me is accurate and correct, and that the work attached is solely my own. I understand, accept, and agree to abide by Cardinal Sins' requirements governing submissions. I understand that the decisions of the Cardinal Sins staff regarding submissions are final. If my work is accepted, I grant permission to Cardinal Sins to publish and distribute my work, both in print and on the Cardinal Sins web site. I also grant Cardinal Sins permission to edit my work. I understand that I will retain all future rights to my work.”

Thank you for submitting to Cardinal Sins, and good luck.

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For deadline and drop-off location, visit www.svsu.edu/cardinalsins.

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