

Spiritus Mundi

A Collective Memory



Honors Literary Magazine
Spring 2012

Colorado
State
University

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Cover Art:
Natasha Pepperl
“Old Town photojournal”

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Nicole Mikoni	

We hope you enjoy reading our 2012 Spiritus Mundi collection. This publication is dedicated to alumni of the University Honors Program from 1957 to 2010. Your commitment and loyalty has left a lasting legacy to the Honors Program and Colorado State University.

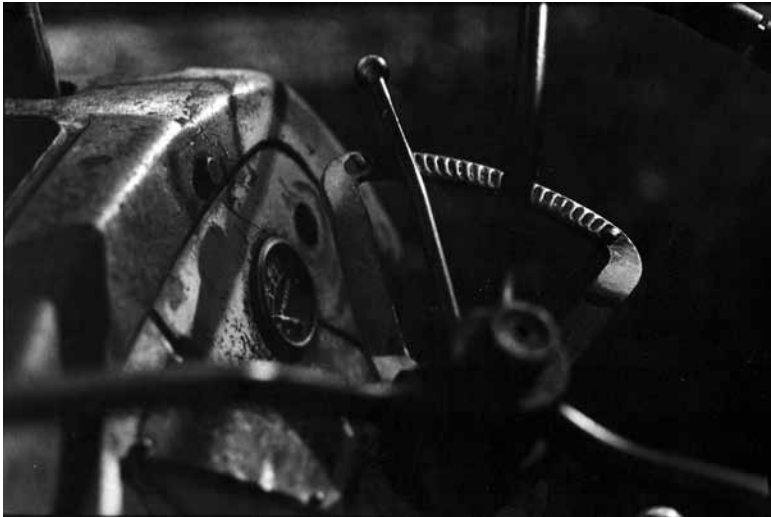
In the House of my Mother

Krista Reuther

The room is blue; not a light summer kiss, but rather like the deep haze of winter. It's sad, really. I remember when you fit snugly inside my arms.

We laughed once. It filled this very room and we were happy. We breathed in light and painted the walls with our butterfly kisses. Our jokes bounced along the walls, birthing small dents in the wallpaper. Remember how we built entire universes with our chubby baby hands? We climbed mountains, fought dragons, saved princesses together... and now you have moved beyond me, it seems.

You became distracted in your pain and I in my grief. But I am here to say 'I love you.' 'I miss you.' 'Come home.' This room is so empty and cold without your smiles, the mischievous glint in your eyes. Have your form darken my doorstep; the door was never locked, we just misplaced the keys.



Rust
Andrew Miller

Sorrow
Nicole Mikoni

Soft shadows flit across the tombstone's face
As a lonely girl pays her last respects.
She stands erect, not quite knowing her place,
While crystal tears plummet to form small specks.
There once was a time when love knew no end
And sadness and fear were left in the past.
But Death, cruel man, did his cold hand extend
And beckoned one being to breathe his last.
So now one remains where two once stood proud,
Like a doe that's lost her most noble hart.
Placing a rose on the unfeeling ground,
She whispers his name and turns to depart.
As she makes her way through the pure white snow
She fails to see the sad eyes watch her go.

Ovens
Erin Wylie

Martha loved her house. It wasn't a grimy brown, but a rich golden-brown, with a door the color of toffee. Every room was a different pastel color delicate enough to break and inhabited by exquisitely carved figurines. Her favorite was of a young woman dressed in white and blue, sitting on a bench, staring out into space. It was called "Daydreams".

Martha made certain that the place was well kept. The surfaces were always dusted, the golden draperies bright, and pristine lace doilies protected her table tops. But the one place that was eternally grimy in Martha's house was her oven. She was a professional cake baker and decorator. Every week, she labored over her extra-large double ovens, making thin, sweet batter, cakes either airy or dense, and frosting that curled luxuriantly around every rounded edge. In the evening when her baking was done, she would clean the ovens so no grime would be waiting to drop on the next morning's batter.

The oven cleaning could get tedious, especially with her back not being what it once was, but Martha found it a small price to pay. Her life was composed of baking beautiful cakes in her beautiful house and buying beautiful things with the money she made. Her life was swell, but for one thing. Martha supposed that there was always a fly of some sort in every pudding, but she couldn't help thinking how much lovelier life would be without Jenny.

She had told her niece over and over that her house was not a good place for children, but the girl had moaned and begged until Martha had given in. After all, the girl was kin, even if she was a sniveling mess. And Jenny had looked so cute in her little white dress with pink bows and her chestnut curls brushed and shining. It wasn't until her mother had left that the little monster had revealed her true disposition.

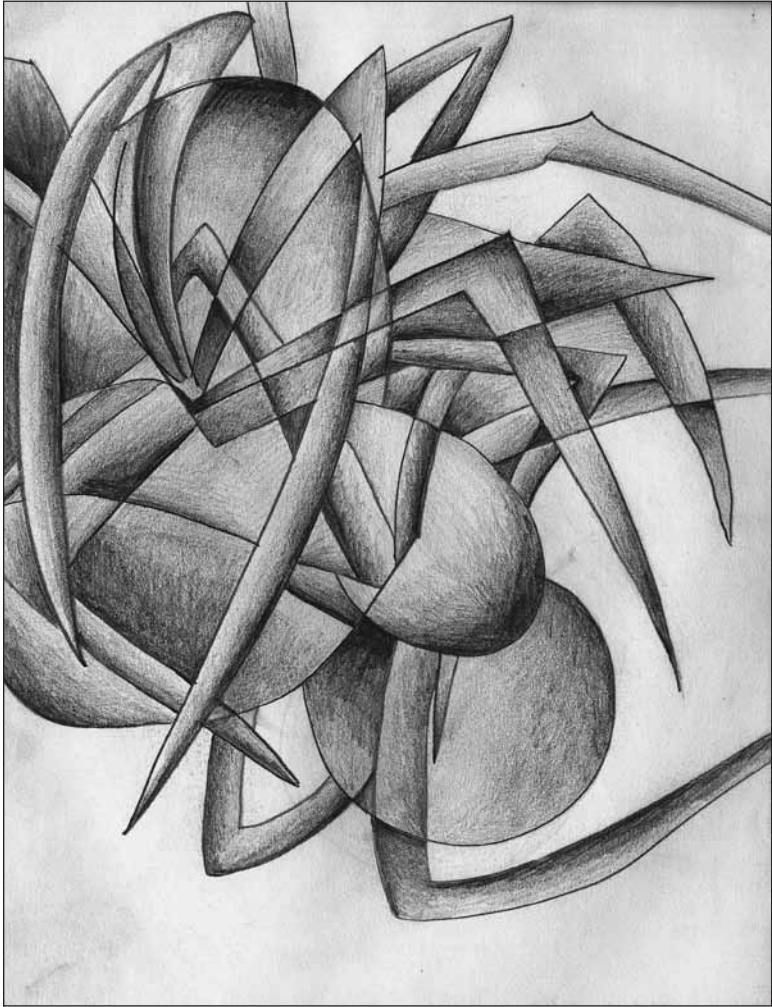
She stuck her sticky little hands all over Martha's shining tables. She tried to play dolls with the figurines. If she turned her back for a single second, Jenny would snatch at one of the little candy bowls and gobble a mouthful of chocolate. Martha simply did not know how to cope with such devastation. But now that empty-headed niece of hers would show up on her doorstep every couple weeks and beg that Martha keep Jenny for just an hour. Every time Martha would acquiesce and regret it.

It happened again just that evening. Martha had suited up to do her nightly cleaning and that chit had shown up again wearing a tight sparkly dress and a woeful expression with the imp under one arm. Martha thought that she finally had everything under control this time. Jenny was settled in front of the TV with cookies, staring raptly at the screen. Martha watched her for a moment, and the rascal showed no signs of moving.

"You stay right there, all right?" Martha said. "If you need anything at all, just call me, okay?"

"Okay," said Jenny, not taking her eyes off her program.

Martha was grinding her sponge into the back wall of her oven when she heard the crash of glass breaking and the pitter-patter of tiny candies hitting the floor and spraying in all directions. Martha looked around in her oven and realized for the first time how big it was, and how easy it would be to fit a four-year-old inside.



Trapped Spider
Matthew Weiderspo

Selling the Gathered Cole Buckon

“I thought I told you not to come back in here.”

“Yeah, you’ve told me that a couple of times,” I reply, not budging from my spot before the counter.

I should warn you beforehand that Darius Mendel is neither human nor pleasant to look at. He’s a priok ul so withered by age I’m amazed he can still run the shop. My fastest description for him is a four-foot humanoid iguana without the crests and frills and possessing what was once a mouth of proud carnivorous teeth but now is a museum of decaying or missing exhibits. He glares at me across the wooden counter of his workshop from his seat upon a wooden stool – the only pieces of wood in this cavernous shop full of metal and glass.

I’m not pleasant to look at either. Being human may make you the hero to human beings, but in a trade with very few humans, I’m the ugly hairless ape. Currently, I’m also smeared with soot and grime, and the beard I’ve spent two months cultivating into something worth wearing has been burnt down to stubble on the left cheek and the right side of my chin.

Darius leans across the counter, displeased that I still refuse to leave his shop. “Then you’d better have brought me something good today. I’d love an excuse to kill you; I’d love your scalp as a trophy.”

“That’s . . . unnecessarily gruesome. And yes, I have,” I answer, lifting up my beaten-up pack.

On the outside the bag looks like a standard-issue backpack out of the Vietnam War (the first one, which the Americans lost). But the material heals itself over time, and each pocket has more volume than the entire bag should be able to hold. It was passed down to me from my grandmother, who got it from her father. It’s the most valuable thing I own, a tool which makes my job as a Gatherer much easier.

I hope the things it holds are valuable enough to satisfy Darius. Without Merchants to buy the items Gatherers scrounge up on the immense numbers of worlds populating the mad universe known as Shatterdream, my profession is reduced to a collection of hobbyists and rich people seeking collectibles. And if we get reduced to that level, Shatterdream's primary trade – selling the products collected from the tangle of worlds to denizens of other universes – dries up, and that sector of the economy tanks. On a personal note, Darius is the only Merchant willing to deal with me at the moment; if I lose him, I'm looking at weeks of job hunting while I return to mixing laundry machines.

Reaching into one of the side pockets, I shove my arm in deep and rummage about. After a moment I withdraw some stone totems and set them on the table. Each of the five iron-grey figures is carved in the form of an alien beast; the only one I can identify is the Brazilian slime-dragon.

Darius looks at the totems, then at me. He reaches a claw under the desk and touches a button I'm sure is the intercom because his next words are, "Lucius, bring me my skinning-knife."

I roll my eyes and whistle a short, specific tune.

The totem of the slime-dragon begins to waver, the frozen forms coming to life. Hefting the totem – easier said than done, for its weight is rapidly increasing – I toss it into an open space on the workshop floor.

As it rapidly grows and the grey stone turns the color of a banana slug, Darius orders, "Enough. Make it stop before it breaks something."

"Of course." I whistle the next tune. The transformation reverses, and within moments the totem is cold stone again.

Darius sighs. "Very well, you aren't wasting my time." He takes a metric ruler and moves the totems to the side of the desk. "Do you have the activation . . . tunes for all of them?"

“I do. I’ll hand those over once we discuss payment.”

“After I see the rest,” he says.

I almost wish he’d asked me how I got them. It’s an exciting story involving a game of blackjack and some explosive-laden shuttles. But I know Darius doesn’t appreciate my stories like the nieces and nephews do, so, in the interest of maintaining a stable business relationship, I keep it to myself.

The next few items are less interesting. I produce a hard-light carbine I dredged up in the ruins of a Chaos-era galactic empire, a bag of half-melted computer chips I pulled from the radioactive ruins of a wormhole facility on Umm-Geladr, and a couple dozen odds and ends I’m sure would excite the human scientists on a post-Industrial version of Earth but only earn me a bored look from Darius. His son, Lucius, comes in while I present a coil of adamantine-dense wire I’m sure has grown since I first put it in the bag. The middle-aged priok ul holds a skinning knife long enough to be used on the slime-dragon I almost summoned. I keep an eye on him as I continue my presentation.

Despite his annoyance, I can see Darius likes some of the items on the table. I’m sure his R&D department will be putting in long hours to reverse-engineer the things I have today. And, like I’ve said a couple times, I need him happy. After making the mistake two years ago of accepting advance payment and then failing to deliver, I’ve earned his enmity and sabotaged my chances of getting hired by someone else (I can’t quite explain what I promised to deliver since whoever was guarding said item had my memory of the job erased). A good delivery today is critical.

I’ve hold back my big-ticket items until last. Darius senses this. As I finish the last few side pockets and come to the main compartment, he leans forward ever so slightly, a serpent ready to strike.

“And, for my final products,” I say. “I have these.”

The purse I pull from my bag is made of chocolate-colored silk tied with lustrous blue beads. Settling it delicately on the counter, I pull on a pair of black gloves from my pocket. “Just for safety’s sake, I’d advise not touching this directly to your skin.”

I undo the knot and open the purse. The scent of fresh-cut grass and seepage from a garbage bag both emerge; Darius’s son, who was tasting the air with his forked tongue, chokes and quickly shuts his mouth. Darius’s expression creases with a disgusted frown, but he otherwise keeps his composure.

The broken-off chunk of stony substance is the size of one of my fists. It has the texture of a scab and is the white shade of a hen’s egg. I hold it up delicately and say only, “If you can’t smell the raw sewage of Turvian healing magic, I’m taking this elsewhere.”

Darius begins to chuckle, but quickly shuts his mouth to shut out the smell. He gestures for me to put the object away.

When I have, he concedes, “You’ve done well. I didn’t know any of those power cells could survive being away from their Source for long.”

“It’s the bag,” I say. “Plus, I took a chunk of the Source with it. That’s why you don’t want to touch it.”

Pushing the bag aside and pocketing the gloves, I bring out the final item.

“You know I trust you, Darius,” I say in prologue. “I know you have a lot of contacts with the Dreamers and the other groups that keep Shatterdream stable.”

“Communists and spooks,” he growls, but does not deny it.

“So,” I say, setting the red metal briefcase I’ve just retrieved on the counter and popping the locks. “I know you’re going to make a tidy profit off this.”

Within is only a single sheet of white paper – or so it seems to my eyes. I can’t read far infrared. Darius’s eyes, however, widen. “How did you get that?”

“It’s a long, exciting story,” I answer. “I’ll spare you the details and say I’m sure it’s the real deal; for the profiles on this sheet to be any more accurate, the Torox Seer itself would have to have written it.”

Darius only stares, breathing hard. After moment of silence, he asks, “What’s your asking price?”

“Your goodwill,” I say, closing the case and pushing it with a loud scrape across the counter. “Plus, your promise that you will give or sell it to the “Communists and spooks.” You know they don’t deal directly with Gatherers unless they have a reputation.”

Darius nods. “I can pay that price.”

I smile. “All the things that come across your desk to be sold and make other people’s stories, and here I’ve made you a part of the tale.”

The priok ul nods again, this time very old and weary. “And now to payment.”

The negotiations take another hour. By the end of it, my pack is empty, and I have enough cash to feed my savings and keep my operation running for another four or five years.

“It’s always a pleasure to do business with you, Mr. Mendell,” I say, stashing the wallet in my coat.

Darius eyes me. “You should consider contracting with me, Therring. Less animosity and a larger budget.”

I laugh. “No, it’s better I do things this way. There’s the loot of a million worlds and a million stories out there and picking it all up brings a kind of trouble you don’t want in your shop.”

The priok ul smiles. “A pleasure doing business with you as well.” Like flipping a switch, he resumes his typical business decorum. “Now, unless you have something else, get out of my shop. I’ll have an excuse to kill you if you come back without something good.”

I mime tipping my hat to the Merchant and his son. Without another word I stride out of the shop and into the sunlight of Tethys, plans for another Gathering already springing to mind.



Into the Wild
Kasey Broscheit

Paper Bird
Jeff Geiger

the Blue Motown Man
with Bells and Pennies
Livin' on a Train
in St. Louis
he drinks
his Coffee Black
and Grey and Blue
with Blue Sparks
she
 knew The Structure Of Love
 lived in Colorado
 Dead As A Deadman's Bone
 was carried away by a Band of Angels
the Steady Yellow Sun
beats on the Sailor
among Boxcars & Thistles
he sings a Lullaby to the Bumblebee
gone from Riches to Rags

Dawn
Natasha Pepperl

To fully grasp the electric
power of light, and still
its reverberating
particles within soft
fingers and ravenous fist,
you must first be nearly eaten
alive by darkness, have slippery
veined slivers ripped apart,
sanity fed on, black acid
injected into bone marrow, blood
and mushy brain, until the heart
must urge itself to pump
oxygen, even though each breath
means further hemorrhaging
of scarred tissue
and lungs.

Come and trace my bruises,
lightly,
with your fingertips.
Slower. See their lavender
and deadly beats of black.
Reach beyond yellow rims
of gaping sour holes,
before they are sewn shut.

Feel the warmth of my face,
sun's white exhale spreading
through tendons and tissue,
spilling salve over skin, rocking
body to the rhythm of illumination.
Darkness condenses into smoky spirals
as light's tender glow steadies
deep inhales of unshakeable sunrise.

Silent Despondency
Ariana Dickson

She sat silent on the stool.
 Little he knew.
 Little he knew.
Stoned silence hid the noise,
of waves crashing in her soul.
 Little he tried.
 Little he tried.
She draws the parallel lines,
the parallel lines,
that drew them close,
that kept them far.
Head spinning.
 Heart aching.
She sits. paralyzed
 inebriated,
 captivated,
 fascinated,
 by him.
and little he knows.
 little he tries.
 little he can do,
For all the books and facts he knows,
He knows none of this.
Nothing he diverges into,
The experiments
nor mathematics,
Can set him up for this sticky path

He sank silently away.
Little she knew.
Little she knew.
Heavy burdens kept him distant:
love lost twice before.
Little she tried.
Little she tried.
He traced the parallel lines,
the parallel lines,
that drew them close,
that kept them far.
Missed calculations.
Abandoned hopes.
He leaves. Disappointed.
intrigued,
ambivalent,
fascinated,
by her.
and little she knows.
little she tries.
little she can do.



Permanent Stripes.
Anne-Marie Kottenstette

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