



**THE ANDREAN 2008**

*Victoria...*

# The Artists

Evan Armstrong '08	<i>p. 15</i>
Lucinda Caldwell '10	<i>p. 18</i>
Victoria Conlin '10	<i>front cover</i>
Sellers Grantham '08	<i>p. 8</i>
Tommy Hu '08	<i>back cover</i>
Maggie Liu '08	<i>p. 11, 20</i>
Breslin Modell '08	<i>p. 13</i>
Adam Sheperd '10	<i>p. 25</i>
Rebecca Smith '08	<i>p. 5</i>
Clare Thermansen '08	<i>p. 29</i>
Ford Van Fossan '10	<i>p. 19</i>
Karin Weston '08	<i>p. 30</i>



# The Andreean 2008

## Table of Contents

<i>The Cache</i>	Ruby Cramer '08	<i>p. 4</i>
<i>The Daily Special</i>	Grace Reynolds '08	<i>p. 12</i>
<i>Still Life With Fruit</i>	Mary Shea Valliant '09	<i>p. 14</i>
<i>Meet Oscar Hart</i>	Adam Kuerbitz '08	<i>p. 16</i>
<i>Room 113</i>	Hannah Darling '09	<i>p. 21</i>
<i>Artificially Sweetened</i>	Maggie Liu '08	<i>p. 22</i>
<i>Winter Story</i>	Max Dynerman '08	<i>p. 24</i>



# The Cache

Ruby Cramer '08

The month after was one of the quickest months of his life. Even now, as he sat beneath the sun roof, the gloomy half-light streaming in, he could not remember the days that had passed before him; they had all flown by so fast, and in such a hazy, undistinguishable manner, that he could find no apparent difference between this week and the last. And, this afternoon in particular, he found himself passing his time in much the same way he always did – this last month at least – fixed on his chair, pinned in the corner of the sun room, reading catalogs at his desk.

They had come to be quite the reliable companions; whenever he felt the slightest tinge of pain, depression, or angst over last year's events, he could turn to them for a quick escape into oblivion. He thought about this now as he flipped through one of his personal favorites – *The Grape Merchant* – and peered down at a happy woman sipping Chianti in a charming villa in rural Italy – Tuscany of course. He thought about how these catalogs had seen him through the hard times and he was grateful for their presence now – for their warm glossy glow, and, especially, for the sunny places and faces that lay before him.

Flipping the page with a smile, he looked down to see a man dressed in corduroy standing in a wine cellar with a glass of merlot poised between his index and middle fingers. The description read: “Smooth, deep, yet elegant, fruit-forward merlot. The party wine for exceptional party throwers. You will find weightier layers of ripeness, written songs published and unpublished, ascents and descents, happiness and sorrows. If it leaves you stuck on the sorrow, turn up the stereo and start dancing!” He laughed at this – turning on the stereo to an old album and dancing alone in his house. No – and here he settled back into his chair – if sorrow stuck to him, he would just stick to his catalogs.

As he leaned back, his chair touching the corner of the wall, he gazed up through the sunroof. It was the bottom of the day, when the deep well of shadows and dappled half-light signal transition, when the big copper beech casts ominous puddles of purple pre-dark shadow over the green grasses and shrubs, when the late afternoon becomes the early evening.

The warmth and gloom of the light settled dreamily over him, and, as he reached for another catalog, his eyes and head grew heavy with ease and contentment.

His cache had gotten to be quite large. At least fifteen came each week and that was barely enough. He spent several nights a week crouched in the corner of the sun roof, leafing through the colorful pages, dog-eared them, staring at the happy scenes dreamed up in front of him – the two newlyweds skiing in Vail, fleeced in high performance Northface – or the kids hanging red and blue ornaments on a large Christmas tree. He had dog-collar catalogs (though he had no pets). Catalogs for water canteens that would hold up in the Sahara. Catalogs of kitchen and housework tools for every occasion, in every household. He had clothing catalogs, home décor catalogs, office supply catalogs, gun catalogs, garden catalogs, catalogs for party props, posters, rare books, hammocks, weather vanes, mousetraps, bicycles. He had all the catalogs you could have, and, if he discovered another catalog, he'd send for it right away.



*Rebecca Smith '08*

Cataloguing had become more than a mere habit for him – it was a lifestyle of sorts. He would spend hours at it – fenced behind his desk, flipping through each page until his eyes grew tired and moist and he would retire to his bedroom upstairs. He liked to imagine the lives of the people he saw embedded in these glossy treasure troves – who was this woman lounging in the blow-up pool? Does she live in the suburbs, with a family, with her dog? And what, he wondered, compelled her – in this invented life – to buy that massive tub of plastic that he saw pictured on page 27? This was indeed a habit of his, as he often got lost in the lives of others. It had helped him get through the past month, and it would help him, he knew, for a long time to come.

He quickly seized on the next catalogue, picking a colorful one advertising yard décor – *Accents in the Garden* – that looked promising. “Bring your garden to life,” the inside flap read, “with garden décor art and sculpture from *Accents in the Garden*. Select from our huge inventory of garden sculpture for sale, including...” He flipped the page. There was a large man in a plaid flannel shirt with his son, it looked like, securing an outdoor quail statue into the soil beneath their patio. What happy people. He turned the page, and, as images of dove statues and oval fruit baskets passed him by, he thought of their father-and-son house in upstate New York and the work they did together on their garden. That father was a hard worker. He surely instilled good manly values in that son of his. It’s a shame how all that winter snow must undo their labor; that’s what the quail statuette is for – something that will last through the winters.

He thought of this man, probably a Paul, or an Emmett, something in that neighborhood, and how lucky he was to have his son out in the garden with him. But his own child – he ripped for the corner of the far page and turned to the next image. And what did he see staring at him from page 31, but a familiar face, his college roommate’s old girlfriend, Kitty Cooper. Yes there she was, beneath a tall elm tree admiring a marble grey statue of the Fleur de Lis, her hair and complexion both the same since he had last seen her many years ago. She had on a wide grin in the picture and he was so pleased to see her again, he felt compelled to find out what she was doing with her life.

She could tell him how she got into modeling and maybe even explain what had happened between her and Larry. In college, he had always been attracted to her, and now, perhaps he could pursue what he never was able to then. Yes, Larry never did treat her quite right. He'd like very much now to join her under the shade of that long elm next to the Fleur de Lis statue. They'd start a whole new life together in some far-away city where she lived – a San Diego or a Chicago.

He sat back in his chair, a smile on his face, and reached for his portable phone to dial the catalog's information number. It was a long shot, but why not try.

Next thing he knew, he was in his Ford Explorer pulling out of his driveway: destination Applewood, Colorado, only a twenty-five minute drive from his own house. He had received Kitty's phone number through the catalogue company and had immediately placed his call. Turned out Kitty had stayed in-state right after college and that she would love to meet him for a walk or even dinner to catch up on old times. He made a left turn out of his driveway and drove past the long line of houses in his neighborhood, the windows lit with bronzy cheer, dark cars hugging the curbs. He could almost hear their sounds seeping out beneath the crack of locked doors: the hard thwack of a window shutting, the whirring of a vacuum, a man going slappety-slap across his kitchen linoleum, laughter and glasses tinkling.

He passed the city limits and headed straight for the bridge that would take him through the gates of Applewood. Squinting out against the glare of the harsh descending sun (night would not come, it seemed), his mind drifted from the catalogs, to Kitty, back to the catalogs again. She made a good model, especially for catalogs. And he was sure that this night (would it ever come?) would be a promising one for him. The next few months he would spend with Kitty, huddled by the fire, cloaked in heavy wool sweaters – he had seen some nice ones in *Crows Nest Trading Co.* – trapped up her snowy ski-cottage on a faraway Colorado mountain. They'd unplug their landlines, turn off their cell phones (although there would not be any service anyway), sleep all day and talk all night – about their future, and why they never got rid of Larry sooner.

The sun was fading, and, as he coasted by the park, he glanced out his passenger window at two kids, a young boy and his girlfriend, no doubt, in a herringbone weave of arms and legs, like two love-stuck contortionists performing on a park-bench. This was a sight. Their backbreaking embrace sent his thoughts spiraling into the past, and he longed to be that boy on the park bench with his girlfriend. He hoped that other people would drive by in their lonely Ford Explorers, and that they would pass in sadness and envy. He glanced in the rear-view mirror, hoping to catch one last look. He and that girl would be proof that love is not confined to Saturday nights – they’d move to the city, and there would be a great mass of people all around them – people surging through streets, people funneling to their jobs, people in ironed black skirts and pressed robins-egg shirts, people with blood squeezing through their old atherosclerotic veins from too much coffee – and yet, there to that park bench he would go with his girl, about eighteen, locked in an embrace that could shake the world.

Suddenly, an orange light flashing in front of the sun’s glare appeared in the road ahead; the bridge was being raised for a large yacht to pass. The boat, white-rimmed with tall white walls upon which the words *Yardbird* were stenciled in thick black paint, was idling incandescent in the parted waters as the bridge began its slow ascent. At the entrance,



*Sellers Grantham '08*



he saw the mass of white boat – as the bridge broke apart at its center, the tip of each half slowly climbing toward the sky – inch forward on the water. There was no crossing here. Oh well, he sighed, throwing the Explorer into reverse, and made for an alternate route.

Kitty appeared on the front step of her home, the door only slightly ajar behind her. She looked exactly as she had in the catalog, under the tall elm tree with her statue, her brown hair in loose curls tucked behind her ears. It was great to see her, he said, as he peered behind her through the cracked doorway.

Since college she had been doing great. She ended it with Larry soon after graduation, and now Applewood was making her quite happy. And modeling was no big deal, just something to do on the side, mostly for fun. He nodded and wondered if she would like to go out to dinner tonight and then, maybe, afterward, they could talk some more, catch up on old times. He had some things he wanted to talk about, some plans he wanted to make, he explained with a wide grin.

“Oh,” Kitty mouthed. She took a step back, putting her hand on the doorframe. “I’m sorry. I really am. I’d love to catch up, it’s just that I – I have to cook dinner for my family. You know. My husband’s coming back soon. He’s a contractor in Glen Haven. I’ve got a large bunch in there I have to go take care of.”

He looked down at the pavement. Yes, of course, he thought. Of course.

What about you, she asked. I’m sure you’ve got someone waiting at home for you. He lifted his chin at this comment, and gazed back at Kitty. There was a warm glow coming from behind her and he heard the laughter of two, maybe three kids from an unseen room—a kitchen, or a living room. They were watching television or rolling around, howling with laughter on their rug, pretending to be Indians in some faraway land. Dinner would be on the stove, chicken or pasta, he could smell it now, and he knew that beyond where Kitty stood there existed a family, one that had probably been functioning for years. He was an invader. A foreigner on the borders of something private and real.

“Yes,” he answered, “I do.” He had his own family and his own life. He had a wife, an ex-wife at least, and a daughter, Lily, who had died in

a car wreck a month ago. He was not about to start a life with Kitty or with the woman in the park or with the people in the catalog. Shaking his head and neck loose, he turned around without looking at Kitty or her children or the cottage on the snowy mountainside or the wool sweaters they were to wear, and, as he walked toward the Explorer, he saw that the sun had finally completed its long descent. The sky was black, not a cloud to be seen, and the stars were high and in their place.

He sat in his car, turned on his lights, and drove straight out of Kitty Cooper's driveway, to which he would never return. He drove through her neighborhood, out of town, across the bridge—which was, according to the green light shining at the other end, now solidly refastened—and home. Before going in, though, he sat in the car for several minutes, sighing deep and long in the clear darkness.

The house smelled clean. Vinegar, lime, lemon juice, baking soda, pine sol. The fierce aromas seared his nostrils, clearing a path as they spread, making a tingling in his head he had to cough out his mouth. Cyndi had come, then, and she must have already left; for, as she does once every month, she had taken all the dust and garbage with her, leaving him clean gifts of citrus and balm.

He returned to his sunroom, sat down at the desk, and buried his head in his hands. His house was dark and empty and he was alone. His wife was in another house, in a different neighborhood, and his daughter in the cemetery miles away. He and his wife had not even talked about their daughter. He had stayed locked up in this house, in his dreaminess, rifling through other people's lives, with his catalogues. He glared down to the wicker basket beneath his desk, hoping to burn those glossy pages with his gaze. There was, however, nothing to burn: the basket was empty. No *Woodworker's Supply*, no *Raven Rock Outfitters*, no *Modern Wall Art*. Nothing. Every catalog was gone. His entire collection was gone. This was Cyndi's doing. She really had cleaned house this month.

He sat back in his chair, thought for a moment, and then took hold of his portable phone to dial a number he still knew by heart—his wife's cell. The dark sky above the desk was clear, the blackest black he'd ever seen. He listened to his breathing against the receiver, waiting for her answer. "Hello?" Her voice was soft, familiar. In the background, he heard

the hum of her favorite Van Morrison album, slow and swaggering melodies of blues and R&B. As they talked, he heard her slicing tomatoes in the kitchen, preparing a late dinner, no doubt.

Suddenly, without any sort of hesitation, he blurted out, “Do you think, maybe, I could join you for that dinner you’re making? There are some things I’ve been meaning to talk to you about.” Yes, she replied; that’d be fine; come over, she said, as soon as you can.

In a hurry, he snatched his leather coat, the brown one, and ran out the door into the cool crisp darkness and hopped back into the Ford. As he drove away from his house, the stars above had promise in them, and now, gazing up the road ahead into the black sky, he felt a certain sense of freedom. He felt that thin layer, that film of dreaminess, lift off of him. He felt it in his arms, his shoulders, and his back. That film, rising off his body, was finally dissipating, and he felt it as it lingered in his car for a moment and then he felt it as it drifted out his open window into the clear, dark sky behind him.



*Maggie Liu '08*



# The Daily Special

*Grace Reynolds '08*

She glances down,  
white pad in hand:  
“Cold Fennel.”  
“Fennel soup?”  
“Yes, cold.”  
She moves the wad of gum  
to her left cheek.

The cheap lighting  
sallows her face:  
lines crease  
the corners of her mouth—  
so many cigarettes.  
She waits for an answer.

But I am  
distracted.  
A fly buzzes around  
my head, its little engine  
symphonically  
in tune with the lights’ hum.  
How irritating.

Her white Keds  
pad the linoleum.  
Soft at first,  
then louder:  
a percussive beat.

I watch the fly.

Swish—  
blurred flesh  
darts past my ear.  
Her fist clenches:  
the black speck drops  
crumpled to the floor.

The rhythm is broken—  
the choice clear:

“I’ll have the daily special.”



*Breslin Modell '08*



## **Still Life With Fruit**

*Mary Shea Valliant '09*

Her fingers skim along the table's fringe,  
exploring the arrangement she must draw:  
that molded pear, that peach with a grayish tinge.  
Each flip-flop drags behind her, tries to stall.

Her footsteps echo in the empty room,  
and a pesky scent of paint hangs in the air.  
This studio—her jail; this fruit—her doom.  
She takes some paper and begins to stare.

The pastels lie beside her, lonely, bland.  
Layer by layer, as she sifts through the mass,  
the dust of every color stains her hand.  
The seconds linger; minutes grudgingly pass.

A plum to far left snags her wandering eye.  
She picks a purple, and lays down a line—  
too blue, too black, or something, simply awry.  
She curses and begins a second time.



*Evan Armstrong '08*



# Meeting Oscar Hart

*Adam Kuerbitz '08*

Dusty, muted sunlight streamed through the Venetian blinds into the sprawling parlor. A young man of seventeen or eighteen lay spread-eagled on a long sectional couch covered with blankets. He still wore his black LL Bean parka and corduroys from the night before, a set of car keys clenched in one hand. The aroma of household coffee and slightly burnt toast weaved down the short hallway, sporadically adorned with pictures of three girls in various stages of adolescence, and hovered over the couch. Two of the girls, ordered to silence by their reproachful mother, crept behind the couch and took note of the insouciant, dangling limbs. So slowly as to make you hate him, one eye opened, then another. The children, afraid that they had done it, scampered through the cluttered dining room back to the kitchen. The young man hoisted himself into a sitting position with a polite groan, and, remembering that he was in someone else's home, immediately took a certain pride in the previous night's accomplishments. In the kitchen, a nervous mother wiped her hands on a dishrag, picked up a mug steaming with black coffee, and walked into her living room to meet her daughter's latest prospect. Hearing her footsteps, the young man picked up his wallet off the floor and shifted his feet.

"Hello there," she cooed, "I'm Maureen, Emily's mother," and smiled warmly at him.

He peered at Maureen through the cloud of memories fogging his mind just then. Sitting up a little straighter and smiling he offered, "I'm Killian."

The two sized each other up for a moment, each trying to read the other. After what should have seemed like an awkward pause, Maureen mentioned the toast in the kitchen and Killian groggily padded down the hall after her. By this time a small crowd had assembled in the kitchen. Oscar Hart, Emily's father and a locally renowned nightclub pianist, had been awakened early by his wife's discovery of the young man on the sofa. After a long night of crooning to drunks and luses, Oscar did not especially want to meet a tongue-tied eighteen year old, but the fire in



Maureen's eyes inspired him to take his seat in the kitchen as instructed.

"Tuck in your shirt," she hissed on her way out. Oscar retorted by leaning over to light a cigarette from the gas stove and then reclining back against the refrigerator. A moment later, Killian followed Maureen, anxiously wringing her hands on a dishtowel, into the kitchen, where she ushered him to a seat and went about thrusting toast at both of them. Crumbs flew off the bread and bounced on the plate and table.

"Hi, I'm Killian, it's nice to meet you Mr. Hart."

"Oscar. Good to know you." He transferred the cigarette into his left hand in an effort to shake Killian's with his right, but the glare Maureen shot him from just over the refrigerator door persuaded him to crush it on a small coffee saucer.

"We've heard so much about you from Emily, but remind us where you live again."

"Calabasas. Just outside of L.A." Oscar almost choked on his wife's projectile toast and struggled to regain composure. He took a sip of coffee and managed, "You drove here from Calabasas? Jesus man, how long did that take?"

"About nine hours," Killian replied. "The snow didn't get heavy until east of Monterey." Oscar exchanged a brief look with his wife, raising his eyebrows with the forty-eight muscles that defined the upper part of his face. It was the same look of which his mother, after returning one evening from her shift on security at the local laundromat, had warned him so many years ago, *Stop doing that or you'll turn into your father!* Noticing what Oscar had thought was a subtle glance to his wife, Killian watched his sentence slowly trail off into silence. Embarrassed, Oscar leaned forward and pretended that he had a little bit of sleep stuck in the corner of his eye. Massaging the corner of his eye with a finger, Oscar asked, "How did you stay awake for so long?"

"Well, I didn't want to wake up Emily, so I clipped a clothespin to my ear and the dull aching pain kept me from falling asleep." Clearly impressed by such thoughtfulness and caution, Maureen dumped three scrambled eggs on Killian's plate as if to reward him. Without asking, she covered them in pepper and handed him a fork. Killian shifted his weight uncomfortably on the green vinyl upholstered chair. He imagined that this was the sort of scrutiny to which animals in a laboratory were

regularly subjected.

As Oscar leaned back again and lit another cigarette from a pack rolled up in his shirtsleeve, Killian studied him closely. He could see Emily's delicate nose and thin eyebrows in him but could not see her in this kitchen. The house and the people in it seemed so different from her. Mrs. Hart pattered about the kitchen scrambling more eggs and brewing more coffee while Mr. Hart blew smoke and summoned the energy to pick up the Chronicle from his doorstep. Oscar suddenly broke the silence with a loud snort and then leaned his head back against the corner of the wall and the refrigerator much as Emily had done the night before, worming in between the window and the seat of Killian's coupe.

"Dear old Mumma..." Oscar trailed off. Maureen glanced at him anxiously as if trying to shut him up with her glare. "My ma was a saint you know, just like Emily's ma here. Always put up with me at least." Unsure of where to look, Killian picked imaginary lint off his parka. When he had picked off more lint than any dryer could produce, his nervous fingers grasped at his coffee cup and tilted it toward his mouth. "Lord knows I tried. But playing the piano for a bunch of luses in Salinas don't pay the bills." Killian missed his chapped lips by half a centimeter



*Ford Van Fossan '09*

but no one noticed, partly because the cup was empty, partly because Mr. Hart was soliloquizing his memories to the crack between the wall and refrigerator. The awkwardness was becoming unbearable. Killian looked at Mrs. Hart, who stood over her sink scrubbing a dish so hard that the enamel was beginning to fade at the center. Sensing that her young guest's eyes were on her, Maureen looked up.

"Kevin," she began, choking back tears.

"Actually, it's Killian." At that moment, Killian pushed

back his chair and paced into the living room, grabbing his jacket and keys from the couch.

“Is everything all right?” Maureen called out, trying to hide the hysterics slowly building.

“I’m fine,” Killian shouted, “I just need my morning vitamin supplement. I forgot it at home, but I saw a drug store on the way in.” His voice cracked as he struggled with the front door, coat firmly wedged between his collarbone and cheek. A shrill squeal was emitted from behind the piano as Emily’s two small sisters ran out giggling.



*Lucinda Caldwell '10*

Startled by the noise, Killian barely turned toward the disruption. Mounted above the piano were eight dusty framed photographs of an elderly lady with features clearly defined by years of honest labor. In the last one, the woman was still middle-aged, possibly mid-forties. She sat perched on a dryer with an eight-year-old Oscar beaming beside her. Through the haze of cigarette smoke above their heads, Killian could barely make out her nametag. In large capital letters it read “EMILY.”

“Well don’t be silly dear, we’ll buy some when we go out. Now sit down and eat some more eggs. Emily will be up soon.” Maureen’s voice brightened at the end of her plea. At the mention of that name, Killian jerked the door open with one tremendous tug that could have damaged a weaker doorframe. He bee-lined for his Mercedes, frantically clicking the remote lock with his thumb before vaulting off the porch.

“Toss in the paper, will ya?” Oscar broke his trance to utter one last cry. With Oscar’s shout heavy in the morning fog, Killian kicked back his heel and sent the paper shooting down the hallway, bits of moisture flicking from the thick plastic wrapping onto the furniture and walls. When Oscar leaned over to pick it up, he didn’t notice the clouds of exhaust the Mercedes left behind slowly dissolve in the bracing early air.



Maggie Liu '08



## **Room 113**

*Hannah Darling '09*

Fluorescent light gives off a chronic buzz.  
The room in which you sit is always cold.  
Your arms are crackling, pricked with static fuzz,  
charged by the fear of what you might be told.

As the door shrinks in artificial light,  
your feet tap, tap upon the checkered floor,  
like rats the cage bars block from fight or flight.  
They skitter and tremble in your deep heart's core.

White walls, white coats. You're in a blue dress gown,  
an icy stethoscope chilling your chest.  
The rhythm stutters and stalls; the doctors frown.  
Now glazed and blank, your mind ignores the rest.

The space surrounding each clock tick seems wide  
—sixteen, seventeen eighteen beats and counting.  
The doctors leave your mother bleary-eyed  
and you still waiting.



# Artificially Sweetened

*Maggie Liu '08*

Coffee on a dreary Monday morning,  
the sky a placid gray.  
Torn sugar packets, discarded on the counter.  
Stirring the murky liquid slowly—  
so opaque you can't see the bottom—  
apparently careless, I clasp  
my fingers around the mug,  
stare down at the cherrywood tabletop.

The warmth seeps through the ceramic,  
the steady glow pooling in my stomach.  
I tilt the mug slightly,  
and the deep mahogany sloshes the sides.  
Why do you always drink it  
if you taint it with sugar?  
An unlit cigarette between your fingers,  
you sip tentatively, delicately even,  
as if you were really drinking coffee.

Why do you always order it  
if you only distort it  
into a concoction of milk and sugar?  
For once, your eyes lose their sheen of practiced boredom.  
You tell me that  
you hate the taste of coffee.  
The mouth goes dry, and there's a hint  
of something alien, not quite pleasant,  
but constantly lingering.

The sugar dulls the acrimony  
to a throb in the mouth,  
while a vanilla-glaze  
touches the tongue with sweetness,  
before the bitterness sets in.  
It lingers, cloys, curls around the tongue,  
refuses to let go.

The aroma draws me in,  
like a desire I can't ignore.  
My lips part and take in more.  
Despite the sour aftertaste,  
I still need more.  
You smile and rip another packet,  
the sugar sliding through your fingertips  
like sand.

I bite my lower lip,  
And quietly stir my coffee.  
Its suffocating richness wraps around me,  
blanketing us both.  
The innocuous pink packets  
make me startle.  
Sometimes the sweetness  
doesn't drown out the bitterness.  
And when it does,  
it's not the same.



# Winter Story

*Max Dynerman '08*

Dew clung to the street lamps and news stands in the early morning. Orthodox Jews walked silently down along the buildings, their black coats hanging behind them. The vanishing darkness gave way to a reflective sunlight. Bullets of misty light shot across the streets, cutting the city air. The air was still soft, even as it moved into the Russian neighborhoods, filled with brooding orthodoxy and imposing beauties.

Seamus always saw this time. This was his time. There were no people to be funneled and directed by the streets. The noises of the city hadn't come out of their slumber yet. This was the baptism of the day witnessed only by the most dedicated. Seamus walked with purpose and awareness, catching the glint of rising sunlight off the hoods of parked cars and seeing his reflection in the endless walls of windows that bracketed the streets. He could rarely afford to take the bus, so he walked the forty blocks to work almost every day. The morning kept him company. That's all he wanted: to live the solitary morning and go about his pack-a-day life. He lit a cigarette and smoked it to the filter.

As he arrived at the back entrance of the restaurant, Little Odessa, he extinguished his cigarette in a grey puddle at his feet. Seamus had worked as a line chef at the small Russian place for almost five years. He could have found another job but he liked this one. The patrons of the tiny operation were interesting to watch on breaks from the kitchen. Seamus would cook himself fish and potatoes and sit and smoke and eat at the small table in the far corner. This spot gave him the best vantage point from which to observe and judge. The woman in the long, shabby fur coat always sat close to the door, behind the foggy window. An ancient transplant from an ancient country.

Two businessmen, one bald, the other with dyed-black hair, sat at the bar, sharing a bottle of vodka and speaking in filthy, broken English. They laughed, gold watches flashing on wrists as they patted each other on the back, loosened ties hanging around their bully necks. They moved slowly against the background of urgent traffic, which could now be seen through the window behind them. Seamus wondered what they did. He would avoid that profession.



And then there were those for whom the restaurant was special. Baptisms and funerals brought sons and daughters of the native land to this little place. They smiled more at first if the occasion was a baptism. But even during the more somber of rituals the drink provided happiness and companionship. Seamus watched them all. He watched the children chasing each other around the table. He watched the mothers try to calm and soothe the babies, and the fathers point and laugh and chide their clucking wives. He watched them finally leave in one black-clad exodus. And then he went back to the white, sterile kitchen.

This day, as with many others, Seamus took his break and sat at the table in the corner. He smoked his cigarette quickly, down to the filter, and returned to the steamy kitchen. For the remainder of the day he plied his trade with tired hands. He sent the meals out, one after another, to those whom he had watched before. The rest of the staff did their jobs as Seamus did his. And, as always, they didn't talk. There was too much work and too few people to do it. Even though the restaurant was small, everyone was busy and immersed in his job.

Seamus' shift ended, as always, around ten o'clock. He stepped outside into the grey night and pulled out a cigarette. It was too cold, and the high-walled maze of the city trapped the cold, just like it trapped everything else. His bare hands were immediately numb and he couldn't light a match. Stick after stick broke in his hand. Seamus couldn't walk tonight. He wouldn't walk. He would pay for the train. The walk to the station would be long and cold but he would force himself to make it. He had to.



*Adam Shepherd '10*

Hardly anyone was on the street. Seamus liked it that way. When people passed by he looked down and dug his hands deeper into his pockets. He would listen to make sure the person didn't stop to look into a store window or open a car and then he would raise his head against the cold once more. Now he walked down the steps of the lonely station.

Seamus sat on a cold bench and lit a cigarette, despite the sign that warned him not to. He closed his eyes. He shut out the world. "Hey, my man. Got another smoke?" A bum, dirty and disheveled, clearly homeless, was breathing on Seamus, who opened his eyes and tightened his fists. "Can I have a smoke," the man repeated. "It's cold and"—

"Fuck off," interrupted Seamus. He pretended to close his eyes again and secured the cigarettes in his pocket. But the man persisted. "It's so cold out and I could really use a smoke. I'll give you fifty cents." Seamus could see the tattered edges of the man's cuffs. His right eye contained a brown spot, rooted under the eyelid and climbing to the center of the eye, invading the pupil, which was even darker.

Seamus was beginning to get annoyed. The stranger seemed to be getting closer and closer and his voice became louder and louder with each begged request. Seamus wanted to get up and run. He wanted to push the man away, but he couldn't touch him. "Alright. Here's a cigarette. You know what? Take two. Here's two cigarettes. Have a nice night and please leave me alone." Seamus left two cigarettes on the bench and closed his eyes again. He didn't wait for the man to pick them up. Relief washed over him when he heard the slow, unsteady footsteps grow fainter.

Again, he relaxed. He leaned his head against the smooth tile wall behind and slid his scarf further up his neck. For the first time since his break, Seamus was genuinely comfortable. There were no distractions, no words, and no people. Then he heard those uneven footsteps once again.

"Jesus Christ! I already gave you two cigarettes. What the hell else do you want? Why don't you just get a job like everyone else?" Seamus was more nervous than angry. He didn't want anymore contact with this guy.

“Listen man,” said the stranger. “I was just wondering if you knew that the last train left at least fifteen minutes ago.”

Seamus was bewildered. He felt sick. He worried now and truly wanted to run. “How the hell do you know about the trains? And why are you down here?” Seamus knew the answer to the question but wanted to hear that the man slept down there. He wanted the man to tell him of his poverty.

“Look at me,” said the man. “You think I can afford to take the train? You know I sleep down here, and tonight you gonna be sleepin’ down here too, unless you wanna spring for the cab. The last train’s already left.” The man cracked a smile.

Seamus, however, found no humor in the situation. “I have to get home,” he yelled.

The man, still wearing a subtle smile, tried to calm him down. “Don’t worry man, you’ll get home. It’s almost one now, so the next train’s gonna come in four and a half hours. That’s all you got, four and a half hours and you’ll be home.” Seamus couldn’t fathom waiting in the station for such a long time, especially with this man who seemed so at home with the idea.

Seamus would not stay in the station with the stranger that night. He got up and walked briskly to the steps leading up to the street, ignoring the hum. As he emerged from the station, he felt the cold batter and blast his face. His lips and eyes became dry and his ears were immediately numb. But he was relieved to be out of the tunnel and away from the stranger.

Now, several blocks closer to his home, Seamus felt a hand press his shoulder. He knew it was the man from the station and he wondered how long he had been following him. Seamus pulled away from the man and turned around to face him. “Listen,” Seamus whispered. “I just want to go home. I don’t have any money to give you. Get the fuck away from me.”

The man stood there for a moment, looking at Seamus like a child punished by a parent. “I just thought you might like some company,” he said. “It’s so cold out here and I know I could use some company, and I

was just thinking, you know, I might walk with you for a while. Hell, I don't have any place else to go."

Despite the stranger's calm tone Seamus' surprise had morphed into a kind of confused anger. He couldn't escape and he could only focus on getting home. He couldn't run. It may have been a combination of the cold and fascination, but Seamus could not run. "Alright," said Seamus. "I will walk with you as far as the stop by my house."

The two waded through the urban cold. Both were used to the weather, but Seamus did not know how to keep somebody company or how to be kept company. The men walked in silence and with effort against the cold, the stranger walking slightly behind.

As they came to the 54th street station they heard a loud noise coming from an alley off to the right. The noise cracked the concrete cold and jolted them. The shots echoed for a short time and then flew off into the grayness of the city. Seamus and the stranger stopped, still not knowing what the sound was but only where it came from. A second crack shot from the alley, then a third. The men quickened their pace and softly hurried across the barren street. By now they knew the sounds to be gunshots. Seamus and his stranger moved closer to the edge of the alley, seeing flashes bursting from behind a dumpster. They stopped counting at five muzzle flashes.

As the men peered around a concrete corner the stranger, by means of a nod, silently indicated the silhouette of the gunman, reloading his weapon and resuming firing into his victim, now undoubtedly dead. "We have to do something," whispered the stranger. "Let's go get someone, the cops or something. We just need to go get some help." His voice was choked and frantic but never rose above a frightened whisper.

Even though the body in the alley was lifeless, someone had to be called. "I know," Seamus said, "there's a station ten blocks from here. We can make it quick." He barely had time to finish his sentence.

Another shot pierced the frozen air, this time accompanied by a spray of hot concrete from the corner. The two men fell to the ground, shocked and numb with fear. The stranger was the first to get back up, just as another bullet tore away more of the wall between them and the gunman. The stranger pulled Seamus from the wet ground and onto his trembling



*Clare Thernansen '08*

feet. The men began to run, desperately seeking traction on the icy ground. Before they could gain speed or force, the gunman, still a shadow, emerged at full sprint from the alley. As he crossed the plane of the wall he let loose another terrible shot and ran into the empty city. The winter swallowed him.

Seamus lay on the ice, eyes closed and tense in every muscle. For a few moments he made no sound or movement. His breathing, which had been heavy and harsh only seconds before, had stopped. Then, he slowly turned his head to his companion, who lay in the same position as he, also tense, also not breathing. The bullet had torn through his neck and continued on its way, leaving its victim in a pool of warm blood. Now the man lay there, a tiny speck in the walled grid of the city.

He was dead. Seamus turned his dead companion, cradling the lifeless head in his hands. His eyes, still open, were frozen. Seamus closed the man's eyes and laid his head on the icy pavement with bloodstained, trembling hands. He crossed himself and, leaning against the pockmarked wall, began to cry.



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