

The Metropolitan



Landcycle II Acrylic on canvas, 30" x 36" Traci Osborn

A Magazine of Writing
by Students
at Metropolitan Community College

2005

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The Metropolitan 2005

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The Metropolitan publishes all types of academic and literary writing, including descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive works, as well as creative prose and poetry. We encourage writings from across the disciplines and also welcome visual art. Our goal is to showcase the best of the many voices, styles, and subjects Metro writers and readers find meaningful and to support critical thinking, creativity, and expression at Metropolitan Community College.

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The Footsteps of Maggie Dowdy

Leah Clare Hoins

2005 Writing Awards

Leah Clare Hoins is the winner of *The Metropolitan's* 2005 Prize for Student Writing, a 4.5 credit hour tuition remission, sponsored by the Metropolitan Community College Foundation. The first runner-up is Jessica Shimerdla. The second runner-up is Debbie Mansur.

Maggie Dowdy struggled through the wild vines of the western Tennessee woods. Her ankles were scratched and bleeding as the tangled weeds roped around her feet and bit into her flesh. The struggle through the woods seemed almost an allegory of the past few years of her life. A series of bitter events had changed this place where she once roamed free and happy—the most recent and the reason for this journey promised to entangle the remainder of her days. Her oldest son was buried just a day ago, a painful and solitary affair—the hasty preparation of the body without the usual grieving guests and tears shared by loved ones, not even one flower given in memory of the dead. The men carried the pine box to the grave, set it in the ground and covered it with dirt, no prayers given, and no words of comfort spoken. Maggie wanted to witness the burial of her firstborn, but her husband wouldn't allow it—whether from the immense pain of his own loss or just the humiliation of it all. So, she set out on a stealthy pilgrimage to the cemetery along this hidden trail.

Big Sandy, Tennessee, defied its name. The small community, resting beside a gentle river, was on the map with the assistance of the L & N Railroad. A few families lived in town, but the farmers who lived in the outskirts were vital to keeping the community's merchants thriving.

Putting food on the table everyday, working the land, tending the livestock, and making enough money to pay the mortgage were the farmers' primary goals. For most, life was humble, but on occasion a family would rise above their means such as the brothers William and David Lashlee. Their new wealth came as the result of a wisely invested inheritance in the railroad.

The Lashlees were neighbors of Horace and Maggie Dowdy, their farms side by side on Mansfield Road. The families were close, and the men helped each other make each farm a bit more successful. The women often did their Monday laundry together at the Lashlee's, which was nearest to the creek, making

a heavy and boring task an enjoyable opportunity to catch up on the area's gossip.

Even the children shared chores, and when they were through, the little girls played together with dolls and the boys would take off fishing, hunting, or just looking for some curious marvel to investigate. Growing up together caused the children to regard each other as brothers and sisters rather than neighbors.

Evening meals often hosted a mixture of Dowdy and Lashlee children at each home, so they devised a method to communicate who was where. Maggie would strike the porch bell twice, wait for a reply, and then strike it one more time for every Lashlee child at her table. Elizabeth quickly responded with strikes to indicate whether the missing Dowdy children were eating with them. Maggie was fond of all the Lashlee children, but one she particularly loved was Robert, who was the same age as her John and his very best friend.

When the Lashlees came into money, they did what came natural and built fine white houses in town. The children attended school full time and enjoyed owning books, trinkets and dolls, new fishing poles, and fancy dresses for the girls. They tried to remain humble in their new fortune, but at times their quick willingness to help came across as snobbery anyway. The Lashlee children adjusted to city life, leaving the Dowdy children to suffer a new challenge, for the loss of their friends and work partners left them little time for pleasure.

The two who seemed to suffer the most were Robert and John. Visions of going away to school together all but died when Horace insisted that farm boys needed to learn from the land. In a rage, John overturned the dinner table, causing a fire to ignite from a broken lantern, leaving Horace to believe he had made the right choice. John became more depressed, and his bouts of anger mixed with episodes of quietly sinking into himself had Maggie convinced that his problems were deeper than having a friend go away to school. His inability to accept the new status of his friend simply broke what was already fragile.

Maggie watched her son sink into darkness and became afraid. The change became alarming about the time of the accident, which she knew was no accident at all.

John carried a heavy load on the farm as his dad believed that keeping the mind occupied and the body tired was good discipline. But Maggie knew in her heart that John's mind was making choices beyond his control, and her husband's philosophy was only complicating the matter.

The day of the accident John wanted to go fishing, but Horace pointed to a pile of wood he wanted chopped and stacked by the time he got home. He unknowingly added offense by telling Janie, who was begging to go to town with him, that it was her duty to make sure John got his work done. But she wouldn't agree until he promised her gumdrops, a small price to escape having to take her into town. The tot instantly felt the power of her station, and John fumed as the child sat beside the chopping block, barking out orders. "Chop harder...I can chop wood...Let me have a turn, let me."

John chucked a piece of wood, barely missing her. "Go away. I got work here."

The child's face tightened, and with balled up fists, she replied, "I'm gonna tell."

John sneered at his sister, "Go ahead."

Janie stomped her foot hard on the ground. "Pa will hit you with the strap."

He stared at her in contempt. "Want to have some fun? Put your hand there," he said, pointing with the ax.

Janie innocently accepted the challenge, and she placed her hand on the block. The axe fell, and she pulled her hand away just in time to save her fingers. Her eyes grew wide then dimmed in a furious glare. He'd gotten close, but she was fast, and without a word she challenged him by putting her hand back on the block.

"Don't tempt me," he said.

She didn't so much as blink as he lifted the axe above his head and delivered another blow, her hand escaping his wrath.

John's face contorted. "I won't miss this time."

Without hesitation, she put out her hand, the axe rose—and with a scowl John brought it down hard to the left. Whack! Janie grimaced, and when she looked down, blood was on her dress. Two fingers were missing from her hand. Her eyes pleaded, and her bottom lip trembled at the sight of one finger on the

ground near her shoe.

Eula ran to assist her screaming sister, and William went on the mule to fetch his father and the doctor. Through the spilling of blood and tears, Maggie managed to get only one intelligent piece of information from her daughter. "Johnny told me to."

The process of mending the wound was excruciating for both mother and daughter. Janie, writhing in agony, shrieked as she tried to escape her mother's grasp while the doctor stitched her wound. Out of necessity Maggie trapped her daughter's little body against the table by fully laying on her, and the child finally gave up, either because of exhaustion or the suffocating weight of her mother.

Maggie rested her forehead against the table, her own tears gathering into a puddle before her eyes. Closing this type of wound properly was important as it could mean the difference between life and death. The next battle would be to keep it from infecting, which would not be easy with a five-year-old child. Her head was pounding, and her eyes burned...the thumping pain joined in perfect unison with the continuous whack of the axe. John was still chopping wood.

Janie was resting as best she could, drugged with morphine and missing two fingers. A storm raged in Maggie. She loved her son, but something was terribly wrong. She rocked her baby girl and grieved for the beautiful, wonderful child in her arms. What got into him? The cool breeze whistled through the open window, and she rested in its caress for only a moment, interrupted by John's angry cries as his father tried to beat whatever it was, out.

A few days later Maggie and Horace went to town to purchase supplies and have Doc Alsup take a look at Janie's hand. The father carried the now solemn little girl into the mercantile where they met Elizabeth Lashlee. The two women were happy to see each other and made apologies for not keeping in touch. Maggie handed her supply order to the clerk and moved to the side so that she and Elizabeth could talk. Janie's accident came up, and Maggie broke down and cried. Elizabeth gently guided her out the back door, telling Horace he could pick her up at the house later.

The two friends talked over cold glasses of tea, but Maggie was distracted. Over the last few days, her mind wouldn't rest for trying to come up with a way to help John before he hurt anyone else. Finally, she could no longer escape her convictions, and she excused herself and went on foot to talk to Doc Alsup about her son.

She walked along the dusty road, her mind whirling in confusion about her son. When she arrived, Janie had already been examined and was resting on a small cot. She learned that Horace had gone to fetch the wagon, which provided the perfect opportunity for Maggie to discuss her son.

"Doc, I'm worried about my boy."

He shifted his brow in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"Something ain't right. What happened to Janie..." she bit hard onto her lip to keep the horrible judgment inside.

"He's a smart boy. But he has a way about him...He gets mad."

"Most of us do."

"But he hurts himself sometimes. And he hurts the other children."

The doctor gave her his full attention. "Go on..."

"When he was little he would bite himself when he couldn't have his way. Don't get me wrong, he's a good boy."

"That isn't normal..."

"Janie said he told her...but I don't know..."

"...you don't think it was an accident?"

She gave the question little thought. "Horace thinks hard work is the cure."

The doctor sighed and rested his head in his hand. "We have medicine for some things, but the mind..."

The open door became a threat, and Maggie moved quick to close it tight. Her hands pressed against the frame while she lightly banged her head against the wall, sobbing through her words. "He ain't right...he used to be happy...he's angry...can't manage him...Horace...tries to fix him. He can't, none of us can."

The doctor put his hand lightly on her back. "We'll get him to Nashville, I'll talk to Horace..."

Maggie wiped her tears away in disappointment; her husband would never agree to it. She'd hoped for something else, but what she did not know. She smoothed her dress.

"It'll do no good," she said as she lifted Janie into her arms. Horace was coming up the steps, and she took in a deep breath before opening the door to greet him in a cheerful voice.

That evening Maggie knelt beside John's bed and placed her hand on her sleeping son's chest. He woke and looked into his mother's eyes. "I'm sorry Mama..."

Maggie laid her head on his arm and wept for both of them. Grasping his face in her hands, she looked deep into his eyes for some indication that her sweet little boy still lived there. She rose and stood for a moment, then left the room, void of emotion. Her boy was gone.

The weekend came, and Robert surprised them with a visit on Saturday. They had a lighthearted day as John and Robert reminisced about the antics they pulled as young boys. John's laughter warmed Maggie's heart. She had not heard him that happy in a long time and considered that perhaps her judgment of the night before was hasty.

She outdid herself cooking a meal of fried squirrel, pinto beans, sliced tomatoes, and corn bread with apple pie for desert. Stomachs full, the two boys set out for town where the two would spend the night at the Lashlee's before rising early to go fishing, then meeting their families at church. Maggie folded her arms in front of her as she watched the two young men walk down the road, a peaceful smile on her face.

The next morning the family took off on foot to the small country church in Manlyville, minus William who convinced his pa he was sick enough to stay in bed. A commotion was happening out on the church lawn when they arrived. Through waving arms of grief and crying, Maggie noticed Horace's brother Tom and his wife Annie rushing in their direction.

"Come with me dear," and her sister-in-law steered her away from the crowd. Horace's brother had taken him in the opposite direction.

Maggie dreaded what would come next. "Just tell me. What happened?"

"John killed Robert last night."

Maggie wrinkled her brow in confusion, let out a short breath and leaned heavily to one side. Annie continued, but the

words were all mumbled, and nothing she said made any sense. She clutched her chest, struggling to fill her lungs. She fell forward and landed on her hands and knees, forcing the words through the vacuum.

"Where is John?"

"We don't know... The Sheriff got into town this morning."

She swung around in a daze, recognizing her husband's angry voice.

"Who would put boys in a poker game? I've never taken my boy into a saloon. He's just a boy, for pity's sake!" He fell to his knees, sobbing uncontrollably.

Maggie gathered her husband, and together they turned their back on the crowd and headed for home. They carried each other until she could no longer keep up with Horace's wide stride, all the while he was plotting his son's defense.

As they neared the farm, William came running wildly and screaming hysterically. Horace and Maggie ran to their son. A streak of fear ran through her; she knew it was about John.

"Where is he, William—tell me where he is!" Maggie shrieked.

"I tried, I told him not to. I told him he'd go to hell. He said he'd kill me, too. He's dead...he killed his self with Pa's gun."

The boy fell to the ground, muddy streaks of tears running down his face, out of breath and nearly fainting. Horace ran the rest of the way leaving Maggie and William holding tight to each other as they closely followed.

The next thing she knew, she was at the barn door, which was flung wide open, the wail of her husband coming from inside. *Oh, God...oh, no, no, no.* Her mind whirled, and she started to turn and walk the other way. Her hand was shaking as she wiped the sweat from her forehead, the other hand clutching her middle as she bent forward and let out a scream that hung like a thundercloud in the humid air. She stumbled to the doorway and saw Horace cradling John's lifeless body and could bear no more, collapsing in an unconscious heap.

As Maggie neared the cemetery clearing, she saw the Lashlee buggy stop at the gate. Elizabeth walked ahead while he lifted a stone from the buggy, and they made their way to one

of the fresh mounds of dirt. She supposed they were marking Robert's grave until a more appropriate stone could be made.

Maggie stepped back to hide from her friends. Her son caused their pain, and she failed to address his problems properly. Another step back—as she watched the Lashlees holding each other and crying. Another step—when John's name was spoken and she didn't have the courage to hear any more.

The rock was set, and the Lashlees soberly left the cemetery. Maggie walked into the clearing of the peaceful resting place. Lilacs and magnolia trees were in bloom sending a sweet fragrance all around, and a warm gentle breeze made the leaves rustle like the sound of running water. She thought about John and his sin and hoped God would take into account that his mind was not right these last years.

She stepped around the mound of dirt being careful not to step on the grave of Horace's mother. She so wanted John next to his grandmother Dowdy, who he dearly loved, but the Lashlees had family here too, and they were within their rights to take the sacred plot. She moved around and caught sight of the rock that was on the grave. The hand carved message shocked Maggie, and she was barely able to swallow. They were not marking their son's grave as she had believed.

Here lies John Adrian Dowdy
who took the good life of my son
W.P.L.

She laid her body across the grave and remembered the sweet dark-haired boy whose mind thought faster than he could talk, who couldn't say his "s's" and who was afraid to learn to swim. They called him "Johnny the snake wrangler," but he feared the sting of a bee. The little boy who wanted to learn to spell his name so he didn't have to sign with an X like his grandpappy. Her boy, her firstborn. She did not understand him, but she loved him thoroughly. She put her fingers on the grim epitaph. Wiping the tears from her face with her skirt, she made her way back into the woods upon a path that soon would be clear by her footsteps.

A Runner's High *Jolene Moseman*

It's best to start out early as the sun rises
when the birds first begin to take wing
off darkened branches filling the sky
with their songs. This is the time to catch
the cool air and run down roads not yet heavy
in traffic past houses still dark with sleep
where newspapers wait in driveways
and abandoned tricycles, balls and jackets
lay scattered in lawns left behind by children
called inside the night before.

At this hour it's possible
to own the winding trail through meadows
where fog swirls close to the ground
and then ascend the hilltops with a view
of commuters driving into the city
their car lights linked together
like a necklace of diamonds
sparkling over the miles.

You
Natalia Paz

i watch you get in the car, your legs as thin as a ten-year old's, black boots hiding beneath the rain-splashed edges of your jeans and your tight blue sweater that brings out the sky in your wide eyes, and you turn to smile—a beautiful smile—lips stretched from cheek to cheek and perfect teeth, except the one that is turning yellow from the cigarettes you smoke. the scent of your last joint fills my car, clinging to the seats, floating around my head, seeping sweet tobacco through my skin.

i watch you fight to light it, the wind flapping out the flame of the lighter and the flash of sparks against the white butt of your cigarette, but your small, thin hands with the penny shaped scars and the chewed down nails protect the flame, and your patience is rewarded. the lighter flicks out and you draw your first breath, shoulders relaxing the moment it hits your lips, and a stream of gray smoke flows from your mouth. you tap the ash out the window into the rain.

the lights shine on the streets, flickering, sliding from gray into lavender, from pink into shades of silver blue, and the clouds in the sky are thin and cold, stacked against each other for warmth, close to the streaks of faint gold, and they open to the mouth of the weeping heavens, who sings her sorrowful songs into the silent atmosphere, where few, if anyone, hears.

you talk on and on, pushing back your curls behind your ears, staring out the windshield as the wipers travel back and forth, squish and squeak across the rainy pane of glass, and the windows fog from the chill and heat, and dusk falls across the streets.

you talk of death and all you've lost, how you and jordan planned a million things to do after her vacation, and you had lifetimes still to spend in dance and glass-blown art, but she never made it home.

you tell me "this moment's all we've got." you speak of cicily, your niece, just a baby when she died, how at her funeral they played "the rose" and how the soul afraid of dying, never learns to live, how your brother, just a child, would listen to the song and cry when he was alone.

clarence and his boxing gloves that they hung out on the tree, and how you saw the car parts lying at your feet and turned away. "it wasn't ***** fair," you say. "they left me when I needed them." and you smile now, but your voice is raw, and your hand lifts your cigarette to your parched lips. you inhale deeply as the rain patters down outside and we watch the headlights shine and in the silence pass the time.

you, with your passion for beauty and the way texture and shapes are made. you, with your love for color, the pastels, the bolds, the grays. and you, with your eye for movement, how beads can make you gasp. lastly, you, with your love for french fries and taco bell and pot. i drop you off at the driveway. you tell me "thank you," give a wave, head bowed beneath the rain, and i watch you walk away, stick legs and sunken cheeks, and wonder how someone as beautiful as you can already be dying.

You Left
Natalia Paz

you left me for
beer,
a liquid
that will drown out
all of your fears.
you left me for
song,
a rhythm
that will fill the silence
in your ears.

you left me for
a glance,
a dance,
a night that
gasps for pleasure.
you left me for
him,
her,
for someone
who will tell you
all you want
to hear.

you left me for
vomit, headaches,
repetitious songs
of love
that sing to you
as you make love
and taunt you as you
fall back on the bed
panting
with thirst.

you left me for
dung
when I was
offering you
pearls.

Sarcophagus

Jake Perrigo

Nestled in the backwoods of the rural community of Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, lies a place of solitude and desolation. This place was first settled by Frank Sert, who built a house on the property with the profits of bootlegging moonshine during the days of prohibition. That house quickly turned into a home when the Ohrt family bought it and the 488 acres of land surrounding it. With a little experimenting and many laborious days, that land became the first farm in Nebraska to grow soybeans.

Accompanied by his newly adopted stray cat—appropriately named *Cat*—Randy Truhlsen, standing in front of the house originally built by Sert, squints into the sun. Proprietor of the Museum of Automotive History/Machine Shop that now occupies the land, Randy recalls, “My first was a 1955 Chivy. I used my grandpa’s Studebaker tow truck to haul it out back.” On the last syllable, he smiles and points behind him at a fatigued-red, ox-like creature that almost seems to be waiting for the order to start its rampancy once more.

Overcome again with a youthful grin, he cocks his thumb over his shoulder and reflects, “At one time I had more’n three hun’rd of ‘em back there.” Looking at this bullish-bear of a mountain man, I can’t help but notice how years of excessive labor have turned his once dark brown hair and thick mane of a beard into a tired gray, making him oddly resemble Santa Claus—that is, in a Grizzly Adams sort of way.

As he leans against the front of my car, Randy gently places his hands down on the hood. Almost instantly, I notice the scars of manual labor, and I think that every faded scratch could probably tell its own epic—like the winter he rebuilt 200 transmissions. Taking another look at his eyes, I can’t help but notice a certain sadness, and it somehow clings to me like the dust on these lifeless automobiles.

“I’ve only got maybe seven’y-five to a hun’rd now,” Randy confesses. “I sold ‘em. Knew I’d be gettin’ out of the business.” After twenty-five enduring years, Randy sold the bulk of the relics he possessed to a scrap metal entrepreneur. The cars he’d devoted himself to for an era just weren’t the same anymore.

I walk behind Randy’s home and then past a corrugated metal house—this is the shop that he reconstructed after his first one burned down some time ago. The white gravel crunches with a *karak-karook* under my feet. Abruptly the gravel stops, and all that lies ahead is a road of red clay and dirt that twists and turns like a radiator hose.

The bodies now lie muffled, unnatural: corpses bereft of any apparent congruency. Finality consumes them in their rusted condition. Their headlights are eyes that no longer have the high-beam ferocity to startle four-legged creatures absentmindedly straying onto the road. Horns, which were formerly voices that used to honk out in rage or catch someone’s attention, now have succumbed to a stifled murmur, a last terminal effort puffing out a single tuft of air. The rusted frames seem more tranquil than the whispering wind through the wall of trees.

Rows of victims peer at me through their hollowed out sockets, sending a sense of sorrow straight up my spine; I cannot help but speculate what brought each one here.

As we continue the exploration through the trailed out catacombs, several of the inhabitants explain their tales of how they achieved this dissociative nature without uttering a syllable: that pick-up with the cab-level bed was rolled; apparently that green van was hit T-bone style on the passenger side. I see an antique limousine, made completely out of steel, which was once befriended by a prominent family from Omaha, is now a crumpled configuration of its former self. For some dwellers, however, their tales are not as simple as show and tell.

There is a select bunch whose illnesses went on unbeknownst to anyone. Perhaps just one part of the larger whole gave up. Nonetheless, it is easy to see where some of the cars have had their organs removed in a surgical manner, most likely to rejuvenate another being. There are others that possess even more haunting tales.

Several years ago, a young woman was abducted from Blair. The kidnappers actually locked her in the trunk of her car and drove the car into the Missouri River. After it was pulled from the restraints of the current, it was laid to rest here, creating a melancholy ambiance to what is labeled a “junkyard.”

The chalky, graveled path dissects the land into a cul-de-sac. Standing amidst the roundabout in a mausoleum fashion are three buses, once employed by the city of Lincoln. Even through the holocaust-like surroundings, I can't help but breathe and taste the freshness of the oil-infused sage, the crispness of the gasoline and diesel powered jasmine. This succulent sensation is not duplicated anywhere. Just inhaling one quick gasp of air from this memorial yard is enough to make anyone feel more youthful and more alive than ever before.

His wrench of public service now at rest, Randy presently devotes his time to restoring cars for his wife, his daughter, and himself. Yet, he still wonders if he'll run into Wayne Newton at another auction around here again; maybe Wayne will need to store another artifact at the old Truhlsen place again. Perhaps Warren Buffett will be inclined to retire another cadaver with Randy. He would certainly be happy to oblige.

Nestled in the backwoods of Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, atop the smallest mountain, the biggest hill, lies a place that many call a junkyard. For those with a more optimistic perspective, however, it's a salvage yard.

Trigonometrical Cat *Jessica Shimerdla*

A one-nippled cat
sheds fear on me
tongueless jaws spout:

"The tail of me to the head of you,
the head of you to the tail of me,
nose to tail, nose to tail
vector you, vector me."

At this my eyes grow wet and wide.

*Is he here to salvage me?
Or in that snout do secrets lie?*

My direction reverses back to bed—
shaking fists and footless toes,
haunted dreams and bodiless clothes.

Austin Bats

Sheila Magnuson

At dusk, a million and a half
Mexican free-tail bats
Begin to stir within the crevices
Of their concrete prison
Under the Congress Avenue Bridge.

Held captive by an unrelenting Texas sun,
Sleeping all day snugly tucked
Into the dark recesses of the pylons,
Until purple twilight and rumbling guts
Rouse them to flight,

Streaming tendrils snake out Medusa-like,
Swirling and curling round the crown of the city
In a flurry of furry little spit curls,
Ringlets of teeth and sonar,
Wisps of claws, wings, and strands of undeserved reputation.

Boiling black lava erupts from sheltered roosts,
Flowing steadily and ceaselessly
Silhouetted against the neon Austin skyline,
Reflected in the calm, dark water of Town Lake,
Imprinted on the faces curved skyward.

The Visitor

Debbie Mansur

A faint silhouette emerges through the frosty glass of the front door. Lifeless as a concrete statue, the scruffy, white cat is crouched on the icy, snow-packed welcome mat.

As I reach for the doorknob, he is startled and jumps back towards the black railing. A ruler thin layer of snow clings to the cold iron. Instinctively, he draws back his lips and hisses, exposing his decayed, broken fangs. His breath and the wintry air collide, sending a steady stream of vapor and spit from his mouth. The cat displays fresh wounds on his thin body, perhaps caused while defending his honor on the feline battlefield. He begins to shiver. His legs grow weak. Ultimately, he must decide whether to trust a human.

Trusting the enemy may be his only chance for survival tonight. His mesmerizing, sky-blue eyes are watery and red from the biting cold and feline conjunctivitis. As he looks toward the door, the porch light turns his tears into shimmering pools of stardust. His eyes have a desperate look about them, as if to say, "I need your help."

I have seen him before. He is the old, stray tomcat who patrols the neighborhood. Roaming from street to street, on the prowl like a fierce lion in the wild, he hunts for any scrap of food he can salvage. His long, tangled hair, once white as the freshly fallen snow, has become a dirty grey, while his limp, stubby tail drags the ground behind him. Tonight, his condition reveals a difficult life. A life filled with pain, anguish, fear, and loneliness. Tonight, he is reaching out.

It is frigid and dark. There is eight to ten inches of new snow blanketing the ground, causing an eerie silence in the neighborhood. The wind catches the light, fluffy snow, producing miniature tornadoes that whirl towards the heavens. Blowing snow beneath the streetlamp sparkles like confetti dropping from the sky in New York City on New Year's Eve.

I stand in the warm, safe shelter of my house, knowing the cat has to be cold and hungry. I want to invite him in, to escape the brutal reality of the outside world. We could initiate

a friendship and share our loneliness. I would offer him the best blanket in the house, fit for the king of our neighborhood. He could find solace here. I would caress his tortured body and soothe his fears until he descended into peaceful slumber. Then, we could continue our journeys together.

Quickly, I make him a plate of food, carefully slipping it just outside the door, so as not to frighten him. He inhales huge bites without taking a breath. After each bite, he stops to look up, making sure I am still a safe distance away. Fear still glazes his eyes. Before he finishes the last bite, I make him another plate, and another, and finally one more. Gently, I move a fresh bowl of water close enough for him to see. Why is he here on this particular night?

Earlier, I welcomed another guest for dinner. She is a gentle, black and white feline who lives up the street. I call her Precious. She has also had her tummy filled with delectable salmon and tuna. No doubt, her scent has brought him to my door. When I let Precious outside, she timidly passes the tomcat. Scampering up the street, she weaves her way through the tire tracks in the snow. He does not follow. Instead, he continues to eat, lifting his head occasionally to watch her. The tomcat decides tonight his appetite is more important than his instinct to mate.

He seems satisfied now, yet I decide a little brick cheese might top off the meal. I return to the door, where my nurturing heart suddenly sinks. He is gone.

I step into the bitter night for one last chance to see the cat. The streetlamp shines down on the mountains of snow lining the roadway. From a distance, there comes a familiar sound. One lonely “meow” pierces the silence of the night. I turn to see him crouched in the drive across the street. Under the dim streetlamp, his fur blends with the snow making him almost indistinguishable.

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Leah Clare Hoins

Sheila Magnuson

Debbie Mansur

Jolene Moseman

Natalia Paz

Jake Perrigo

Jessica Shimerdla

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<http://commhum.mccneb.edu/metropolitan>



Wind Whispers Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 36" Traci Osborn