

The Metropolitan



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A Magazine of Writing
by Students
at Metropolitan Community College

2006

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by Students
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To our fellow student and editor, Mary Voight

The Metropolitan 2006

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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.

The Metropolitan is published once a year. The print edition includes the best selections from the full web edition which can be read at <http://commhum.mccneb.edu/metropolitan>

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2006 Writing Awards

For his essay “The Dream,” Tom Jackson is the winner of The Metropolitan 2006 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 for her poem “corpse pose.” The second runner-up is Christina Garrison for her essay “Potter’s Field.”

From “Dump Day”

Mary Voight

Dad and I are in the cab of the truck, talking about the items we need to look for, and he turns to me and says, “Mary, don’t pick up any more old books. You have so many, there’s no more room left on your bookcase to put them.” My eyes start to tear and he tells me I can get some, but I will have to keep them in a box under the bed until he can make another bookcase.

The Dream

Tom Jackson

I am so high in the sky, soaring like an eagle, yet motionless. Trees and buildings dot the landscape far below me as I gaze about the cinematic view... so high that I can see for miles in every direction, yet so near to the ground that I can see the faded, red chips of paint peeling back from the weathered barn door off to my right and the brilliant green of the infant leaves pushing skyward from the pin oak directly below me. The tree sways softly in a silent breeze. I have never been more at peace in my entire life—the absolute feeling of euphoria.

Muffled sounds awaken me from my trance-like sleep, and I try to focus my attention on whatever caused this rude awakening when suddenly a voice emerges from the din, “Tom... Tom... Can you wake up?” A woman’s voice, not one that I can recognize but definitely a woman’s voice. “Tom, can you hear me?” A different woman’s voice this time. “Can you wake up for us?” I have no idea who the hell this Tom person is, and I don’t really care; I just want to go back to sleep and continue my dream, but these women won’t leave me alone. The least they could do is turn on a light, cause I can’t see shit. “What the...?” Someone just poured warm water on my head along with some gooey stuff, and there are fingers running through my hair. “Ouch! Damn it, he still has little pieces of glass in his hair,” someone blurts out, “and I’ll bet that blah blah blah blah...” Muffled sounds again, then silence.

I can almost reach out and touch the sun, it seems so close. There’s that same pin oak over there and the old barn off in the distance. Dust is billowing up from behind a car racing down a gravel road far to the north of me, but inching closer. Even from this high distance, I can clearly make out the faces of the passengers—a scowling woman with windblown hair, shaking her finger over the seat at the grimy-faced little boy in the back seat. Another small boy in the front seat is motionless, except for the occasional flick of his tongue across the top of his Tootsie Roll Pop.

A movement to my left catches my attention, and I shift my gaze to see a smaller car approaching from that direction. I'm guessing that it's about a mile in the distance—two teenage boys, the sandy-haired one is driving with a dark-haired boy riding shotgun. The driver is tapping his hand on the outside door panel while his passenger is slapping his hands rapidly on the dashboard. "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida, I bet," I'm thinking to myself, "the best drum solo ever."

"Needles? Who the hell put these needles in my arm? Jesus, I hate needles! Them puppies are coming out!" I can't believe how weak I feel, but I have to get those needles out of my arm. I reach across my body and pull on the first one. There's some clear tape wrapped over it and down the sides of my arm. I pull for what seems like an eternity before the tape succumbs and releases its hold on my arm, dragging the needle along. I'm too exhausted now to attempt pulling the other needle, and as I lay my head back to rest, I notice blood pooling on my arm where the first needle was skewering me. "Shit! I'm going to bleed to death!" I drop my head back onto the bed and listen to the irritating ringing noise inside my head as my vision fades.

The sun warms my face as I survey the panoramic view from my heavenly loft. The car with Mrs. Sourpuss and company is much closer now, and glancing to my left, I notice the small car with the two teenagers is bearing down on the spot where the two roads will intersect. Looking directly down, I can see there are no stop signs or yield signs for any oncoming traffic and can't help but wonder which car is going to win the race to the intersection. Even from my vantage point, it's too close to call. "Sourpuss is closing fast, but here comes Andretti high on the left side charging hard! Down the backstretch and here they come to the wire and the winner is..."

"Tom... Tom, can you wake up? You have some visitors," the nurse says as she cranks up the back of my bed. With sleep laden eyes, I peer through the tiny slits of vision to see who these dream snatchers are—two older couples, possibly in their forties and a really good-looking younger gal. Their faces are all smiles, but their eyes tell the real truth. It's a cover-up, and I don't know why. They all approach the bed and begin touching my arms

and stroking my hair, each with their own little message. "I'm so happy to see you awake." "Be strong." "Keep your chin up." "We love you." "I love you..." My emotions take over, and the tears begin to well up in my eyes. I open my mouth to speak, but the only thing to escape my lips is short bursts of exhaled air, and my eyes open like floodgates with tears streaming down my face. I feel like a blubbery pantywaist watching *Brian's Song* for the first time. The strange part is that these people look very familiar... I just can't put names to the faces, so I begin an intense "stare off" with each one of the faces, hoping to trigger something in my head or jog my memory when one of the older ladies reaches for my hand, stroking it ever so gently and says in a cracking voice, "I'm your mother, Tom, and standing right next to me is your father... do you understand?" Here comes Mr. 'I think I wet my bed' blubbery idiot, tears streaming down my face again with the guttural exhales of air. "And over here," my mother continues, "is Willard, Eleanor, and Jane. Do you remember them?" Still blubbery, I shake my head, no. "Jane is your girlfriend, and Willard and Eleanor are her parents... You look tired... Why don't you rest for awhile. We'll walk down to the coffee shop and come back after you've rested." Mother turns and quietly walks away with the other people following. Too weak to watch them leave, I close my eyes and drift off to sleep.

As high in the sky as I am, the crash is deafening: metal mashing against metal, twisting, tearing and ripping, then the entire wreckage leaping off the ground like some deranged bull lurching forward with one final thrust of his horns. Hovering above, I watch, dumbfounded, as a tire breaks free, caroms off a telephone pole and flies into the bean field. The screeching noise of the tearing metal, the exploding glass, and the screaming sounds of an engine racing past the red line on a tachometer are more than I can stand. I don't like this dream anymore... it was always so quiet and peaceful before; now, for some insane reason, the dream has to come alive. "Let's get this party going... throw in a kick-ass stereo system with a booming bass, add some drums, maybe throw in a few explosions, and we'll scare the shit out of everybody!" No, I don't like this at all. My palms are sweaty, ears are ringing, and I start to hyperventilate.

“Tom...Tom...wake up. You must be having a bad dream.” I open my eyes to find a nurse holding a cool, damp cloth on my forehead. She doesn’t look old enough to be a nurse, but the pin on her uniform has her name written with the letters R.N. underneath, so she must be a nurse. She grabs another wet cloth and dabs about my face. “I don’t want to rip any of those stitches out, so I’m just going to dab around gently to cool you down, okay Tom? You do know that your name is Tom, right?” I nod my head to acknowledge her. “Can you say your name for me?” I take a deep breath, trying to remember where to place my tongue on the roof of my mouth and give it my best shot, “Tuh...Tuh...Tom.” “Oh my God...” she stammers, “Wait...wait right here! I’ll, I’ll be right back!” “Yeah, like I’m going anywhere,” I think to myself, and before I can get the last word of thought out of my head, the room begins to fill with nurses, jostling each other for position around my bed. I feel like I’m the last clothes rack at the J.C. Penny half-off sale, with ten frantic women fighting for the remaining five dresses. And in that melee, the nurse that prompted me to speak for the first time bends over my bed until her nose is almost touching mine and says softly, “Can you say your name again?” “Tuh...Tom,” I utter feebly. The room explodes in giggles, cackles, and nonstop chatter. I close my eyes and think of that damn turkey farm I worked at the summer before my junior year in high school; the only thing missing here was the sea of white feathers. The commotion starts to fade, and I close my eyes.

The sky is crystal clear, and everything is peaceful again—except for the wafting fumes of spilled gasoline somewhere below. I’m afraid to look down, remembering the horrible event that had taken place in my earlier dream. I can hear the faint sounds of sirens in the distance, and as I look around from my hovering perch, I see two ambulances approaching from the south and two more, along with a fire truck, approaching from the north. In mere seconds, they arrive, and I force myself to look down. I hadn’t noticed the highway patrol and the sheriff’s cars until now; with the lights still flashing on top of their vehicles, they’re out directing the ambulances and fire truck and pointing to where each should

park. The whole place is abuzz in activity, as paramedics run frantically to the wreck site and the firemen pull a hose from their truck to wet down the area surrounding the wreckage. I can hear muffled screams coming from both vehicles. A fireman and paramedic pull the lady and a screaming child out of the larger car, place them on stretchers, and scurry towards one of the ambulances. I distinctly remember two children in that car and am wondering if the other child is already in the ambulance. Someone is still screaming in the smaller car, and I watch as the firemen tug and pull on the twisted remains of the car to free the teenagers. Another fireman approaches with a large, wedge-like contraption, dragging hoses behind him and shoves the device in the small hole where the windshield used to be. The machine roars to life, banging and chewing away at the metal as the fireman guides it around the vehicle. In minutes, the metal eater has chewed its way around the car, and four firemen lift the top off. The screaming starts again as paramedics reach in and pull a bloody broken body out and place it on a waiting stretcher. The boy is not making a sound as a paramedic checks for vital signs. Two firemen are on the other side of the car attempting to free the other teenager. He’s still screaming as they lift him out, place him on a stretcher, and race for the ambulance. I look back to the place where the first boy lay on the stretcher, his body now covered with a sheet. Sirens start blaring, and the two ambulances tear towards the nearest hospital. They pass a wrecker arriving on the scene, then another, and I lose sight of them in the erupting cloud of dust spewing from the backs of the vehicles. The two wrecker drivers exit their trucks and confer over which wreck each will take. The firemen are loading their equipment. The sheriff is walking up and down the gravel road with a measuring wheel, stopping to take notes, and the patrolman is talking to a news reporter. The area is returning to normalcy save for a few people milling around the wreckage. I glance back to the boy under the sheet.

“Morning, honey,” she says and gently strokes my hair, “How’d you sleep?” “Mom, I’ve been having this dream.” “Well, we’ll talk about that later, okay? I think it’s time to let you know what happened...you think you’re up for this?”

I nod my head and she continues, “You were involved in a very serious car accident and your friend, Ron, was with you.” Tears begin to trickle down my cheeks, and I start to gasp for air. “What...how...is Ron okay?” I ask hoarsely. “He’s recovering in another hospital. Now, I want you to relax—you’re getting yourself worked up.” Fighting back the tears, I whisper, “What actually happened to me?” She strokes my hair again and instead of answering, leans down and kisses me on the forehead. “I think that’s enough information for now... try to calm down.” She stares intently at me for a few minutes, stands, and says, “I’m going to see if the nurse can give you something to help you sleep.” “But Mom, I don’t want to go to sleep...the dream!” I’m sobbing uncontrollably as she walks out of the room, and the thoughts are pouring out of my head, “My God, car accident...how...Ron... anyone else get hurt?” The facial water bath starts again; my heart is trying to pound its way out of my chest, and there’s a five-hundred-pound fly in tap shoes doing a jig on my head. A nurse rushes in, jabs a needle into my I.V. tube, and presses the plunger. Out of nowhere, my mother appears and places a damp cloth on my forehead. Still crying, I beg my mother, “Please don’t let me sleep! I don’t want to see the dream anymore! I just...”

The two paramedics reach down to pick up the stretcher holding the lifeless body when, “What was... did you hear something?” The paramedics stare at each other, then one reaches under the sheet and gropes to find the boy’s neck, holds his hand there for a few seconds, and yells, “Shit, this kid’s got a pulse! Get on the radio and call that hospital and tell ‘em we’re heading in with a live one!”

Two Motorcycles

Karen Kozak

Two motorcycles swept past
 Tearing down the hill;
Their noisy wake swallowed up
 By howling Spring winds...
Proving again, as always:
 Nature provides the superlatives.

Stinging March Snow

Karen Kozak

A predicted, late March storm:
 Stinging snow in the headlights;
Visibility just one car length
 On the dark dangerous interstate...
I never felt so close to you,
 Never loved you, trusted you more—
The Universe shrank to our front seat...
 Equally amazing—we let it slip away.

Potter's Field

Christina Garrison

Roughly on the corner of Young Street and Mormon Bridge Road lies a cornerstone to the history of Omaha. Bordered on three sides by Forest Lawn Cemetery, Potter's Field doesn't seem like much to look at. The front gates are adorned with a red cross made of plastic roses. Directly inside, a dedication stone and several larger stones form a memorial just a few feet away. The memorial stones are arranged in a circle with a small flower garden and sundial in the middle. The stones are inscribed with the names of the known people over the age of two who are interred there. Two stones on the far right of the circle provide a brief history of this cemetery.

The term "Potter's Field" comes from the biblical passage Matthew 27:7. A priest receives 30 silver pieces from a repentant Judas. The priest uses the money to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. It was not called potter's field to denote ownership. It simply was called that because it was unsuitable for crops and could be used only to dig up clay for pottery. In modern times, the term signifies a county-owned graveyard or the "poor farm" cemetery.

As with other Potter's Fields, this one was used to bury the poor and the unknown. The five-acre plot is scattered with a few trees, an abundance of underbrush, and only a handful of tombstones dotting the hill. The hill is dimpled by sunken and uneven ground in vaguely rectangular shapes. Most of the poor were buried in wooden or cardboard boxes, if any at all, and as they decayed, the ground sank. In some places, these sunken shapes are headed by gravestones.

Looking up from the memorial at the entrance, I see only two or three markers that are easily visible. It's only after combing the land that I find several more flat grave markers. There may have been more at one time, but most of the plots have always been unmarked. The county discouraged families from putting up tombstones because, as they put it, "If you can pay for the stone, you can pay for the funeral" ("Beauty").

In many cases, they went after the families for reimbursement of funeral costs if they improved the plot in any way. In recent years, some surviving family members have commissioned tombstones for their loved ones. A few stones look much too new to have been erected near the person's time of death.

Omaha's Potter's Field was used from 1887 until 1957. During the fifties, society began to frown upon the idea of poor farms and potter's field cemeteries. The county decided to pay for indigent and unknown persons to be buried in the numerous cemeteries throughout town. They were still kept in isolated sections to avoid offending the "decent" folk ("Potters"). After Potter's Field closed, the grounds were neglected and fell into disrepair. In the summer months, visitors couldn't even tell it was a cemetery because the weeds were sometimes waist deep. Late at night, teenagers gathered in the abandoned cemetery. Drinking and partying led to the desecration of many gravestones. The land was often littered with beer cans and other "souvenirs" of the night before.

A farmer who lived at the top of the hill attempted to scare away the teens, but his efforts proved futile. At one point, he tried to repair the grounds by clearing downed trees with his tractor. In the process, he knocked over several gravestones and disturbed many graves. His intentions were well meaning, but he did more damage than good ("Beauty").

In the 1970s, Boy Scout troops cleared the grounds to make the cemetery presentable again. The young men worked hard for several years to keep up the grounds, but their efforts waned, and the grounds eventually fell into disorder again ("Beauty").

In 1985, a drive was headed by Richard Collins, former Douglas County Sheriff, to restore the old cemetery. It had become an eyesore, and many community members wanted to clear the land and build it over. Collins couldn't abide that, so he raised the \$22,000 needed to properly restore the grounds ("Beauty"). In September of 1986, Potter's Field was re-consecrated and the memorial erected ("Potters").

There are 3912 souls interred beneath these five and a half acres of soft and uneven ground. Walking across the

cemetery, I find it hard to comprehend that someone is laid to rest beneath almost every footstep. Many people interred here remain unidentified. It was not uncommon in the early years of Omaha to find bodies along the riverbank. Bodies of unknown people were also found in alleyways and tenements, and railroad accidents were numerous. In most cases, these bodies were never claimed and remain unidentified to this day.

Nearly half of the burials here were for infants and toddlers under two years old, almost all of whom were unknown and abandoned. The interment list includes pages and pages of entries that simply state “unknown baby.” The heartbreaking part is that many of these entries are followed by the simply stated information known about them. The words “found in garbage,” “found in brickyard,” “found on riverbank,” “murdered,” “strangled,” linger on the pages and in the minds of all who read them. The sad, brief existences of these little lives and their unmarked resting places are a testament to the hardships of the time.

Even for the known people buried at Potter’s Field, there is precious little recorded of their lives. Many names listed have no traceable connection to the families of present-day Omaha. Several local historians have tried to find ancestors of the interred with little success. It would seem as though these souls were all but forgotten, and their memory was left to fade away in this lonely place.

Halfway up the hill on which the cemetery is situated, the plot of William Brown is cordoned off by wooden stakes at each corner. It has no gravestone, but a single red silk rose is wrapped around one of the stakes, a simple statement of tribute and remembrance. This is the final resting place of a man who played a considerable part in Omaha’s history. His death, if not his name, will be forever remembered in the city’s racial history.

On September 26th, 1919, William Brown was arrested for the sexual assault of a young white girl named Agnes Loebeck. She had been accosted the night before in a park near Brown’s residence (“Mob”).

Two days later, on Sunday, September 28th, a mob of people (eventually growing to almost 20,000) surrounded the

courthouse where Brown was being held. Although they had seemed peaceable at first, they eventually became impatient and increasingly violent. At one point, when the mayor tried to reason with the crowd, he was attacked and hanged from the nearest light post. After three attempts, several bystanders finally freed him and transported him to the hospital.

Despite the efforts of many, William Brown was eventually handed over to the angry mob. The mob beat him unconscious, and in all likelihood to death, before dragging him from the building. He was strung up as if to be hanged and riddled with bullet holes by armed members of the crowd. If that wasn’t indignity enough to be suffered, he was cut down, dragged two blocks, and lynched upon a waiting pile of railroad ties. His charred remains were dragged around the business district for hours afterwards. The lynching rope was later cut into bits and sold for a dime a piece. Early the next morning, the army was called in to restore order in the city (“Horrible”).

Over 2000 black citizens of Omaha left town that night, never to return. The riot led to a legal segregation of the races throughout the city, and the black community was allowed to live only in North Omaha. Although these restrictions were eliminated decades ago, the majority of Omaha’s black population still resides in this area.

Brown proclaimed his innocence to the end, and many believe it to this day. It was later learned he was plagued by rheumatism and likely could not have overpowered even a young woman (“Horrible”). He was a victim of the tumultuous summer of 1919, which saw eleven people lynched in nine different cities across the nation. His body was laid to rest in Potter’s Field on October 1st, 1919. His entry in the interment list states only one word: “Lynched.”

The great-niece of Agnes Loebeck is currently trying to raise money to erect a gravestone and small memorial in William Brown’s memory. For now, the single rose marks the spot where his body was laid to rest.

Eleven discernible headstones still stand in Potter’s Field. Several more are worn so badly I can’t make out any of the etchings. Even for those still standing, we may never know

a history. Some would say that is because there was nothing remarkable about them. They just lived and died. Because of the nature of this cemetery, many of the adults buried here were penniless and viewed by the people of the time as drunks and bums. Many others were innocent children who were premature, stillborn, or had fallen victim to disease or a mother's inability to handle an unwanted pregnancy.

The names and dates on the remaining headstones seem to whisper of a history we may never learn. Iva and Sadie Clark were thirteen and eleven, respectively, when they perished in 1890. They died within days of each other. Stella and John Chapman, ages three and ten months, also perished within days of each other in 1891. These siblings were more than likely the victims of the influenza epidemic, which killed millions worldwide from 1889-1891. Near the top of the hill are two headstones, side by side. Mary Bain and John Snow were both sixty-one years old when they perished in 1941. Mary went on the ninth of April, and John followed on the eleventh. Both gravestones are newer, obviously updated, and have vaguely similar styles. The connection between these two people, as siblings or spouses, we may never know.

Most of the adults buried here died destitute and disgraced, but they were still once people just trying to get by in life. In some way they were each loved and missed. Many were present in Omaha when the city and the West were still being settled. As the dedication stone placed at the cemetery entrance states, "These nearly forgotten citizens of past history were, in their own way, responsible for the building of the West." In that way, they contributed to history and to the world we see today. As long as a record of these people exists, we may someday know more about them. Someone may come upon the record and recognize a name or a history. In that way, they may never truly be forgotten.

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for L. #3 (he melts my pride with his apathy)

Jessica Shimerdla

he orchestrates my every stroke
as I paddle through this cold
gold sea of wedding bands.

my limbs break and tangle
as if attached to his stories.

he grips my tongue with icicle fingers
breeds my fascination
with my fear of failure.

yet he remains removed
from my clumsy affections.

Austere,
there to see, but not to touch
as if on display in some fetishized diorama
mischievously spying me from somewhere
behind beautiful plastic eyes

slaughtered...

stuffed...

encased in glass.

corpse pose.

Jessica Shimerdla

the doves spin around his bleeding head
white feathers stick to his wounds
as I watch his halo bend.

butterflies with twisted wings
swarm
on his tongue,
fall awkwardly
out of his jaws, and
crawl down my throat.

[from dust you came, to dust you shall return]

my chest explodes into a
rainbow of dust—
a kaleidoscopic murder scene.

I reached for his hands
but found
straight razors
instead.

The Ethics of Using Digitally Altered Photographs in Photojournalism

Carol McCabe

Niecephore Niepce pointed an apparatus out his studio window in France and revolutionized the view of the world by creating the very first photograph. A century and a half later, digital photography again revolutionized the way the world was viewed. Creating photographs became instant, the speed of transmitting images became lightning fast, and the ability to massage, manipulate, and maneuver content became available to every photographer, picture editor, and art director.

Twenty five years after the first digitized image appeared, photojournalists still struggle with the impact of the malleable digital image. The bedrock of the profession of photojournalism, credibility, has been challenged (Leslie). The confidence and trust of the public has steadily eroded because of the many documented examples of digital manipulation and tampering. Most major publications have had to apologize, explain, or defend themselves over altered images.

A 1994 issue of *Time Magazine* featured on its cover an enhanced mug shot of O. J. Simpson which *Time* explained was a photo illustration. *Texas Monthly* in 1995 featured a cover shot of the then Governor Ann Richards straddling a Harley-Davidson. It was actually a digitized composite of Governor Richard's head on the body of a model. The magazine explained that the production of the image had been fully documented. The documentation consisted of a standard list of participating photographers, set designers, art directors, and artists, and was printed in small type on an insignificant page (Long). *Newsweek* admitted making a mistake for its March 2005 cover photo of Martha Stewart. The photo was actually a composite of the body of a model and the head of Stewart. Stewart had not yet been released from prison.

With the many examples of manipulated images, it became inevitable that the public would begin to easily doubt and question published photographs. This appears to be the

case with Congresswoman Katherine Harris of Florida. Harris is currently running for Senate and has complained that she is the victim of digitally altered photos. She accuses newspapers of distorting her makeup. "... They're outrageously false, number one, and number two, you know, whenever they made fun of my makeup, it was because the newspapers colorized my photograph." Harris became the brunt of jokes over her use of cosmetics when, as Florida Secretary of State, she oversaw the recount of the 2000 presidential vote (March).

In 1992, a photo on the cover of *Texas Monthly* was wrongly suspected of having been manipulated. The art director for the magazine, D.J. Stout, stated, "I realized at that point that the altered photographs were really hurting the integrity of the magazine's cover, to the point that when we had a great photograph, nobody believed it" (Leslie).

The ability to digitally manipulate photographs opens wide the possibility of damage being done to reputations and personal harm being brought to subjects. With the click of a mouse, images or parts of images can be moved or masked, colored and cropped, flipped or flopped, and dodged or completely distorted. People can appear where they have never been, shake hands with people they have never met, and look to the right when they were actually looking to the left. Bobbi McCaughey, the Iowa mother of sextuplets, could legitimately conclude that her physical appearance was not suitable to grace the cover of a national magazine when *Newsweek* used digital wizardry to straighten her teeth (Farid). The *Time* cover of O. J. Simpson, which was manipulated to give him a darker, sinister look, could have contributed to his being prejudged for a crime that, at the time, he was only accused of.

History is also at risk of being altered when the visual record of events can be so easily manipulated. A widely published photograph by Brian Walski shows a British soldier gesturing to Iraqi civilians. The photograph is made powerful by the soldier's gestures and a crouching man holding a child. Unfortunately, the image was a fabrication using two of the photos Walski shot at the scene. He merged the two photos in Photoshop in an attempt to enhance the image and apparently to enhance the

message he was trying to convey. This lack of judgment cost him his job at the *L.A. Times* when the fabrication was revealed (Van Riper).

Our society is saturated with visuals. We are inundated at every turn with images that are meant to entertain us, persuade us, motivate us, and sometimes inform us. In this daily sea of imagery, photojournalism, in the true sense of the word, is being buffeted. Communicating news through the use of photographs is almost as old as photography itself. But the digital challenges that photojournalism faces, the erosion of public trust, damage done to reputations by unethical journalists, and the altering of history are also as old as photography itself.

Looking back to the Civil War, one sees that Alexander Gardner, a photographic assistant to famed photographer Mathew B. Brady, is known to have embellished and lied in his descriptions of photographs of the battlefield. It is strongly suspected that he, at least once, actually moved the body of a soldier, using it as a prop to create the image he wanted to convey (Frassanito).

The underlying truth about photography is that it has, from its very beginning, been a subjective interpretation of reality. From the angle of the camera, to the amount of exposure, to what is included in the scene, photographers have almost always been confronted with choices in their picture making. Photographs produced traditionally in the darkroom provided further opportunities for interpretation using the standard techniques of cropping, dodging and burning, or lightening and darkening. Digital photography has made all of those choices much easier and has provided the photographer with many more ways to interpret and manipulate.

With the variety of tools available, the possibilities to manipulate the truth, damage reputations, and alter history are great. However, most photojournalists are in the profession because they have a passion for being able to communicate through photography. Most photojournalists also understand the threat to their profession when their credibility is challenged. As Brian Walski, the *L.A. Times* photographer answered when asked “How could you do this?” by a fellow photographer, “I —ed up,

and now no one will touch me. I went from the front line for the greatest newspaper in the world, and now I have nothing. No cameras, no car, nothing” (Irby). Walski was fired immediately after the manipulation had been discovered and was left to find his own way home from Iraq.

Working photojournalists are well aware of the ethics involved with their profession. They have, as one of their guides, The Code of Ethics for Photojournalists through the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA). These codes define the difference between editing for aesthetics and editing or manipulating content of a photograph. In addition to NPPA, photographers have available many other professional organizations which have established codes of ethics and routinely hold seminars and workshops on contemporary issues of photography and news gathering. In addition, most newspapers have also established codes of ethics or guidelines for using digital images.

News organizations have been at the forefront in dealing with the issues involved in digital imaging and manipulations. There have been many examples of bad judgment being used by photographers, picture editors, and publishers. But the instances of bad judgment have also had consequences, and if nothing else, generated much discussion about the ethics in photojournalism. Credibility is under attack in all structures of our society from politicians, CEO’s, lobbyists, athletes, creative writers, and journalists to name a few. Ethics and principles are being discarded or stretched thin. It is up to individuals to honor the ethics of the professions they are involved in, and it is up to the public to demand integrity.

“During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.”

George Orwell

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Magnifico's Secret Name *A.J. Bernhagen*

"My friends, my enemies, and those in between," the clown said as he twirled and whirled and swirled across the broad and very littered street corner. His words rose to their peak—quite nearly a squawk—and then descended to a lower, more ominous tone, and he continued, "My name is Magnifico Maykar, if you will believe. I'll trouble you not with long histories, nor utter my story, boring as it is, to refrain your amusement any longer." He tapped five or six steps forward and struck a pose, extending his pipe-like arms in a broad, embracing gesture.

"You now know my name, you know that I am. You see what I am and hope that I can—please you that is; it is too my hope. Join me my friends, my spectators, I pray, join me at once!"

The clown twirled and whirled and swirled again, and Mr. Pritcher was watching him. He did not smile, he did not know why, but the twirling clown's pale, pathetic form, with his slender face and hooked nose, brittle limbs, and nimble steps frightened him. He had never seen such a creature, nor heard such a voice, high and low at once, boisterous and silent. Everything about him contrasted another portion.

"Do you wish to see me do a flip, perhaps?" Magnifico wailed, and flipped backwards, landing on his feet with his arms folded simply, smiling and goggling at the small crowd before him. "Walk on my hands, like a monkey?" He performed this gesture as well, to the delight and amusement of a few little girls, whom he blundered over to and patted their heads with his feet.

The crowd whistled and cheered and applauded. Mr. Pritcher stood quietly and observed the funny little man, who proceeded with a succession of dexterous feats, including hopping on one hand, curling himself in a wheel and rolling around the small circle, and turning cartwheels without end.

"I see by your faces, by the way they shine, you are pleased with my tricks, poor as they are!" Magnifico squealed, and smiled broadly. His teeth were crooked, and his lips were thin lines

covering them. "But I'm afraid for this day I have much work to do. Too much, that is, to dance now for you."

The children, especially the two little blonde girls, took to pouting upon hearing that, but more than these, Mr. Pritcher noticed, were the silent lamentations of an old woman sitting on the stoop of the nearest housing block. She clutched a white-tipped cane in her wrinkled hands and wore a scarf around her neck though the weather was quite warm. She said, "Will you come dance for me tomorrow, Magnifico?" And when she spoke, she did not look to anyone in particular, but knew somehow that the clown heard her.

Magnifico twisted his head so it nearly faced backwards. His large eyes grew even larger, and he tiptoed closer to the old woman. "Do you, my dear, wish to see Magnifico, poor and frail, another time in the future, perhaps?"

"I listen for you every day, Magnifico," she replied. "I love to hear you dance."

The clown laughed at that, shrill and high, then his voice dropped thematically, and he came closer. "Every day, my darling, my precious, my dear! Magnifico has not seen you, nor known that you hear." He moved even closer and plucked her cane away and took her hands in his. "It was you who left the water for my poor, withered throat to drink?"

"Yes," she said. "But it was nothing."

"And you left the sandwich on your stoop for me, hungry and sickly as I am?"

"Oh yes. I wouldn't stop your dancing, my Magnifico, so I left it for you."

Mr. Pritcher saw that the clown had tears in his eyes, and he kissed her hands together and touched his forehead to hers. "Then you shall not see me tomorrow, my dearest of friends. But tonight you will see beyond sight what no eye can see. You will dream a true dream and fly through the night. This I will promise, weak though I am, and open your eyes so you shall see me no more. But fear not, my child, my love, my true friend; Magnifico will leave you with one final dance if only a friend among us would chance."

The clown reeled backward, his smile returned and that in full. He goggled at each of the crowd in turn until he found Mr. Pritcher, who would not face his eyes. But the clown called, "You, sir!" and hopped three large steps and stood at his full height before him, one arm outstretched. "Yes, it is you, my good man! I'd be delighted this day if you'd take my hand!"

Unsure, Mr. Pritcher glanced around at the eager faces pressing in on him. Their eyes egged him on, but he said, "I don't think so, sorry," and stepped backward.

All the life fled from Magnifico's eyes. His brows furrowed, and his thin lips drooped into an impossible frown. "Does my poor self offend you, good sir and my friend? I am but a poor sickly clown, as all eyes can see; would you do me the honor and dance now with me?"

Mr. Pritcher would have laughed were Magnifico's eyes not so deadly serious. The little clown held his hand outstretched as though he would never tire and inched forward. "Sorry, I'm not much of a dancer," Mr. Pritcher lied. He would be giving no lessons any day soon, even though for the purposes of the little clown, he could have managed. But he wouldn't have himself humiliated—especially for such a stupid little creature.

"Ah! Fear not, my dear friend! Magnifico cannot dance for the worth of a penny! Alone we are weak as work without worth; but together, I say, we can give grand gifts to all who watch. What say you? Come take my hand."

"Sorry," was all Mr. Pritcher said, and he turned and left, stealing one last glance at the clown's drooping face. His frail form slowly turned and gestured to another, a small child this time who laughed and skipped into the tiny clown's waiting arms.

But then a voice struck him. *We'll meet again, my dearest of friends. You'll know my name, this I do promise. And a promise kept, that it shall be.* The clown was already waltzing with the sweet little girl to the cheers and delight of all who watched. It was not possible that the voice should be his. So Mr. Pritcher shook his head and went on his way.

By the time Mr. Pritcher had come to his office towering high above the bustling city streets, his stomach had tightened into anxious knots, and his breath puffed in and out of his lungs

in sharp, uncertain heaves. He hadn't been ill for a very long time, nor did he feel this day would be an appropriate time to start. But ever since he left the street corner, his whole body had begun to...*weaken*.

"Cancel my appointments, Sheryll," he told the plump and kind-faced secretary in the room adjacent to his own office. She smiled and chirped that it would be done and did not ask for any reason. It was enough that Mr. Pritcher had said so.

The black leather chair provided some of the comfort it had for twenty years, but somehow today less than other days. The smooth, perfect arch that kept his back straight but relaxed felt rigid and tight. His legs ached when he tried to put his feet up on the mahogany desk. So, frustrated and unsure, Mr. Pritcher stormed over to the water cooler sitting on an ornate stand in the corner, filled a paper cup, and drank it down in two gulps. He filled it again and repeated the process. It didn't help.

Now beads of sweat were appearing on his forehead. His neck felt stiff and hot and itchy. He thought he remembered reading something dreadful in a magazine about these symptoms, and in a fleeting moment of panic, he considered having his secretary get him transportation to the hospital. However, before he had the chance, the speaker on his desk phone came to life.

"Mr. Pritcher," Sheryll's voice chirped, filling the office quite easily. "There's a gentlemen here to see you. He just rang the bell."

Being near the door, Mr. Pritcher swung it open and glared at his smiling secretary. "Did I confuse you when I said no appointments today? How much clearer can I be?"

Sheryll's smile wavered, and she nodded. "Oh yes, yes, Mr. Pritcher, I'm very sorry. It's just that he's on the monitor now, and he said you'd definitely want to see him."

Mr. Pritcher sighed, losing himself in his thoughts. The appointments he had cancelled were of no real consequence. "Well, what does he look like?" he snapped.

Sheryll straightened herself in her chair and peered into the little screen on the desk. "He's tall, well built. His voice is very business-like, well, you know. Would you care to look?"

"No, no. God no! Send him off, I don't feel well. Tell him to come back some other time—and make an *appointment*."

"Oh yes, certainly, Mr. Pritcher. Here, I'll just—well that's funny."

"What? What is it now, Sheryll?"

"Well, it's just that he's gone. Hmm, strange. He sounded so eager to meet with you that I—"

"Maybe he went to make an appointment like everyone else," Mr. Pritcher interrupted and stumbled back to his office, slamming the door behind him and leaning his head against it. The sweat was now sliding down his forehead and wrinkling cheeks. Every pore of his body seemed to leak an aching, biting fluid.

"Oh my dear friend, how ill you do appear. Perhaps I can help, powerless and helpless though I am."

That voice. That high, terrible sound. Mr. Pritcher whirled and found the little clown, Magnifico Maykar, squatting in his desk chair with a grin on his thin, bony face.

"How—how did you get here?" Mr. Pritcher demanded. He stalled a moment. The clown gave no answer. "More importantly, *why* are you here?"

Magnifico continued to grin. "Your words, good sir, they lack, yes they lack. Powerful you are; your office sits high above a sea of peasants. But your words, I say, they clutch in your throat, I feel. Yes, clutch and stick and force themselves weakly from your lungs. But your questions I shall answer, and I hope they shall satisfy. Here is where I appeared, as my master sent me so. Why is for you to know, as my name, all in the provided time, dearest of friends. There there, why do you lean so?"

"I'm not feeling well," Mr. Pritcher said carefully. "And I know your name. Now I want you to leave, do you understand me? We're not friends. We're not anything. I don't know how you got in here, if you climbed the windows or what, but you are trespassing."

Magnifico's shrill, high laugh filled the office, echoing and reverberating off the books and glass and walls. He bounced up and down in the chair and grinned wildly. "My dear Mr. Pritcher!

I come uninvited, as I always have done, but it surely will not matter by the time that I have gone.”

Mr. Pritcher stood straight and took three steps forward. His cold eyes bore down on the smiling little clown. “Now you listen here. I said I want you out. *Now.*”

“The same as your partner, whom you harmed so long ago? Poor Mr. Dedrich who did hang himself from a cellar beam?”

Mr. Pritcher’s eyes widened. His jaw fell open. “How did you—?”

“What was it you said, my dear, dear friend? ‘Begone from my presence, for the share is mine.’ You drove him away with your greed and your mind. Dead he is now, but smiling, I’m sure, for Magnifico’s grave was unearthed as it were.”

“What is this?” Mr. Pritcher demanded. “Did someone send you? Did the board put you up to this?”

Magnifico smiled coquettishly and hopped up on the desk. Papers scattered and fell to the floor, and Mr. Pritcher wanted to collect them, but the clown held out his hand and extended one crooked finger. “I am sent, but not by them,” he said. His voice had changed. It was low, grating. He held out his bony finger, and a smirk, not a smile, adorned his pale face.

“You stopped your friend. You’ve stopped many in such fashion. But you cannot stop this. Dance with me now, yes!”

Blinding pain flared in Mr. Pritcher’s head where the clown was pointing. He fell to his knees and pushed on his temples and opened his mouth to scream. No sound came but a gasp and a small whine. The pain was in his eyes, crawling, scraping backward into his brain where it grew and spread through every pulsing vessel and cell.

Magnifico sat passively, cross-legged on the desk, pointing. There was sadness in his droopy eyes.

“I am the thing you cannot buy, you cannot sell, you cannot find.”

The clown moved his finger down, and the pain fled from Mr. Pritcher’s head to his neck, which seemed to balloon and swell, then down to his chest, where his heart contracted and agony clawed with every slowing beat like jagged stones were passing through the pumping organ instead of blood.

“Desire me more than silver or gold when I slip away and grow you old.”

Mr. Pritcher clutched his chest and dropped to the floor. He arched his back and curled his legs. Nothing would make the pain subside, and it throbbed and tore and ate at his heart and lungs. Acid dripped into his stomach. His muscles caught fire. Life was fleeing from his body.

“What am I?” the clown whispered.

The words echoed in Mr. Pritcher’s head as he kicked and writhed on the floor. He wasn’t just hearing them; he was seeing them sparkle and dance in the darkness. His mind produced and reproduced the riddle, and the thought occurred again and again that if he could just solve it the pain would stop.

“What am I?” the clown repeated, as if confirming his sentiment.

“T—time,” Mr. Pritcher gasped, and immediately the pain ceased. It didn’t flutter away like so many birds from a field after a gunshot. It simply vanished, all of it, like it had never been there in the first place, and Mr. Pritcher opened his eyes. He slowly stumbled to his feet and faced the little clown, who was now smiling somberly as he sat atop the desk.

“Correct,” he said simply and slid to his feet. “It was a very easy riddle. But you did well.”

Magnifico strolled about the office, marveling at the collection of books on the shelves as Mr. Pritcher regained his senses. His skin was no longer dripping with aching sweat, and oxygen saturated his lungs in slow, easy breaths. He felt better than ever, truth be told, and he watched the funny little clown as he moved about.

The long silence was broken when Magnifico, now satisfied at having looked at everything, turned towards Mr. Pritcher and said, “It is time, yes. Time I must depart. The work of worth is done, I do think!” His voice was back to its usual dramatic height. “You have done well, my dearest of friends! There is no need to fear; I shall not return, so long as the lesson remains as you learned. One day, yes, we shall meet again, long into your years. But yes, I surely must be off at once!”

The clown hopped forward, grinning with his eyes alight, but Mr. Pritchler stopped him. “What about your promise?”

Magnifico’s eyes were like starlight. “Ah yes, the promise yet to be kept. How astute, Mr. Pritchler, my friend! How astute, yes!”

Mr. Pritchler inched forward. His head tilted to one side. Questions upon questions swarmed through his tired, foggy mind. They formed so fast he couldn’t decide where to begin. “You’re not a clown, are you?”

There was that shrieking giggle that no one but Mr. Pritchler seemed able to hear. Keyboards clacked and coolers bubbled outside his door. No one had heard anything. Magnifico placed his hands on his heart and said, “A clown? Oh surely one such as I must be. Do you believe, do you see? But a clown is not a clown, nor what’s beneath the flesh. Whose face smears and slides and grows, or the wind, perhaps, the air that blows?”

“But your name. It isn’t Magnifico?”

The clown’s large, droopy eyes fell to the ground, and his whole form sagged. But a queer little smile still adorned his creamy face. “Magnifico, yes. It means powerful one. His bony legs crossed, one arm stretched out to the side, and the other fell across his chest. And I, Magnifico, am the least of these.”

The clown bowed low, his eyes to the ground.

Then he was gone, and Mr. Pritchler could not find him any more.

In this Issue

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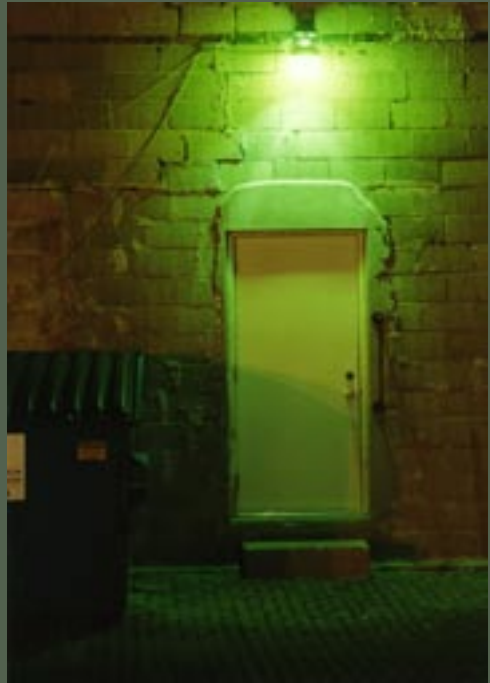
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