



THE ARCHIVE

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CONTENTS

Prose

yellow - Sarah Van name - pages 15-16
nine ounces natural - Alyssa Wong - pages 19-22
Getting down to what matters most - KB Gould - pages 25-30
The Fisherman - Bennett Varney - pages 23-24

Poetry

Arachnophobia - Haoxiaohan Cai - page 3
Dreams - Katherine Zhang - page 6
The Egg - Christine Chen - page 4
What it means - Christine Chen - page 18
The scientist - Elizabeth Beam - page 8
Spinning man - Elizabeth Beam - page 9
The Gospel - Andy Chu
Rhapsody - Andy Chu - pages 11-13
On the Energy of Lake Louise - Mary Nielsen - page 7

ABOUT THE ARCHIVE

Established in 1887, The Archive is one of the oldest continuously published literary magazines in the United States and the oldest student publication at Duke University. The Archive is published twice a year through the Undergraduate Publications Board of Duke University, Durham, NC. The Archive welcomes submissions from all undergraduates. Submissions are read by the editorial staff, and authors' names do not appear on the manuscripts during the evaluation and selection process. All material © 2012 by The Archive. Rights revert to the author upon publication.

The Scientist

Never had there been dancing in the scientist's carbon paper pad until this morning, a girl appeared pirouetting down the aisle of the bus. For seven years, I have looked on while he scribbles his digits of such magnificent importance that he does not glance up once until his stop, and for seven years, I have wondered not just about the astronomy, but the sort of sleep he gets so that his eyelids are purpling, whether he dreams up his theories, whether his salt-spotted leather jacket was his father's, what his voice sounds like, what he tells a woman when he wants her to fall in love. Meticulous as his science is, he is not a careful man by any measure. Perhaps that is what he understands about the young girl who dances, who does not know she is improper but knows the footing for each position one through five. Her feet, he sketches in parallel and dovetailed articulations

precisely but so desperately fast as if tracking the collisions of comets. It is not merely how she dances that entrances him—Why does she dance? Why, after all these years, does he see another human being for the first time in her gray pea coat, with the sleeves too long, her galoshes slogging along after her resolute steps, her small nose wrinkled at the bridge, her eyes closed. I wish I could tell him that the girl is the wrong question for a scientist, who must ask only what he can answer. But all I can do is watch and wonder as she turns like a star in his hands.

The Spinning Man by Mark Bradford, 2007

The city leaves us spinning. Lines and lights slip fluid out of the mind. All you can do to guess which roads you crossed is to hoist your left shoe and in the ruts of the sole will be an old wad of gum and in it, nearly readable scraps of receipt, confetti, maybe a used ticket stub.

The Spinning Man is something of the city. Poised for the museum, yet it sticks like artifacts to places, points in time. A bus chugs up, a man trips, the moon huddles under a gauzy shroud. Impressions are whims to feel the steel grating, to deliberate the graffiti, to call up a friend to go

along to a flyer's show. Surely, you've seen the river—every good city has a river—but who can say why or when. The city thrives, and yet it is a graveyard of ruins that haunt you vaguely. Soon you leave, and it leaves you back where you started, unsensing.

When I recollect the city it is just like this map splattered with last week's castoff souvenirs. It lets chaos be chaos. Impressions falter, fade into whitespace. I look to this painting, and I don't know what I'll take away from it, but can use it now to go momentarily home.

Elizabeth Beam

