1999 BACK TO SCHOOL ISSUE
The Literary Magazine for MSU Undergraduates
Oats

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Our Purpose
Oats is a registered student organization dedicated to providing an affordable, accessible printed outlet for the words and ideas of MSU undergraduates.

Submission Stuff
Oats accepts submissions of any genre, on any subject, and by any undergraduate author. We don't mind previously published work, or work that has been entered into competition. Furthermore, we don't place any restrictions on the further publication of submissions, so have a ball. However, it's only fair to tell you that no other literary magazine is as cool as Oats.

Getting Involved
Oats has a rotating editorial board, and positions will be available in the spring. We're always looking for people interested in that or other opportunities for involvement. Send an email expressing interest to:

msu.oats@hotmail.com

And thanks for reading all this tiny print. You are a true Oatsian!

In This Issue

Master of the Universe 3
John Eliot Sinclair

Hands 8
Abigail Cloud

Lovelife 8
Marie Dysangco

On Reading the Poetry of Karol Wojtyla 9
Laura Rose

Denied 10
M. G. Lee

Refrigerator Poetry 10
Doug Dinero

Mestre 11
Ian Hunter

O My Soul 12
Dan Bouk

Pygmalion's Problem 13
John Mandaumin
My friend Wesley and I were lounging around my dorm room on a cool Tuesday evening in August. The day had been dull, and now I felt a stirring for adventure. The night was young!

“The night is young!” I said.

Wes, spread out on the sofa, lifted a lazy eye in my direction.

“I’m tired.”


“No, really, I’ve got class in the morning,” he said, slithering slug-like from the couch.


“Seriously, I’m beat. I’ll see you tomorrow,” he said, trailing slime out the door.


The door did not respond, but its body language was clear: Hey, at least I’ve got something to do tonight. Damn! Sure, it was Tuesday night, but I still felt a stirring for adventure! For excitement! For… what? Actually, I had no idea, and that was the problem. With Wes out of the picture, my options were limited. Limited, I mean, in the way that travel options to the moons of Jupiter are limited.

If school had been in session, this wouldn’t have been such a problem. This is not because my circle of friends expands by any large number of people in the fall. In fact, it only grows by one—but that one is the inexplicably-named Hilary Greene, Master of the Universe.

Hilary is a spry, kinetic beanstalk of a college man, and loved by all who know him. In Hilary’s case, this is approximately the population of North America. I was in Toronto over spring break last year, and when I mentioned to a taxi driver that I was from Michigan State, he said:

“Oh! Do you know Hilary Greene, then?”

Repetition has robbed this question of any serendipity it may once have held.

“Tell him I said hello, eh?”

Certainly. Hilary, the taxi driver in Toronto says hello. Hilary’s ghostly presence
liners everywhere—he is a  
force of nature, a rival to  
gravity, electromagnetism and  
Starbuck’s Coffee. He is in  
Europe now, presumably very  
busy knowing lots of people.  
Although he won’t come out  
and say it, I’m convinced he’s  
intent on shattering the “six  
degrees of separation” hypo-
thesis, determined to knock  
it down to a more manage-
able two or three. Hilary  
wants to be the first degree.

He’s certainly succeeded  
with me; Hilary is the glowing  
center of my social galaxy. It  
is through him that I am  
invited to drunken house  
parties; through him that I am  
provided with beer to spill on  
myself; through him that I am  
introduced to girls with  
whom I may attempt to  
“score” but instead only  
manage to “spill beer on”. It  
is through Hilary that I escape  
being labeled “a total dumb-
ass”. During the summer, with  
the Master of the Universe out  
traveling the world, I am a  
spoke without its hub—really  
little more than a stick in the  
mud.

This was my frame of  
mind as I ventured out into an  
uncertain Tuesday night. It  
would have been invigorating  
if I had known where the hell  
I was going. Instead, it was  
like Columbus declaring that  
he would rally a fleet and set  
sail for… “Well, who knows,  
really?” Except, of course, that  
I had no automobile, so it  
was really more like Colum-
bus rallying a crew of excel-
 lent swimmers. “Come on,  
boys, we’ll freestyle it to the  
New World!”

I gravitated to Grand  
River, a moth transfixed by its  
electric glow. The hip, flicker-
ing concrete strip exaggerates  
the university’s arboreal  
atmosphere; emerging into  
the neon haze, you feel like  
some sort of grunting moun-
tain man staggering into  
civilization. Behold, I am  
Tarzan, Lord of the Under-
graduates!

Shuffling along on my  
metaphorical knuckles, I  
pondered a bar across the  
street. It looked busy, espe-
cially for a Tuesday night, but  
the prospect of spilling beer  
on myself alone didn’t seem  
very appealing. Besides, I  
doubted my ability to get beer  
in the first place—my fake ID  
is only a blurry version of my  
real one. It is blurry, of
course, because I move it very quickly. I flash it in and out of my wallet with what I presume is the kind of unthinking nonchalance one expects from a hard-drinking college man weary of the age-verification ritual. This has never actually worked.

As I wandered down the pavement, I passed a pair of cozy lovers sauntering hand-in-hand through the night. I was suddenly very conscious of the yawning emptiness in the sidewalk beside me. An old Barry Manilow song played in my head, and the street scene grew misty. The camera showed a close-up of my face: sad but hopeful, longing but uncertain. I was Ally McBeal with scruffy sideburns.

There is a girl I've seen a few times over the summer, a cute brunette whose ability to look good in a pair of jeans had initially raised suspicions in my mind over her claims to Honors College membership. I'd like to go out on a full-fledged date with her, but I can't tell whether or not I'm getting, as Wes puts it, “the vibe”. In Wes-speak, this is because I am not “plugged in”. To become suitably plugged, I must have access to the “grapevine of the fine” and, really, at that point, it just gets too silly for me.

Katie O'Donnell doesn’t go to bars, or drink at all. This is good—it means there is almost no way I will ever be able to spill beer on her. While fortuitous, it’s also a little frightening; I’ve never actually gotten past the beer-spilling stage with a woman before. More importantly, I’ve never even approached one without Hilary Greene as mediator, master of ceremonies, and espousal of my virtues.

At the same time, I think one of the things that attracted me to Katie O'Donnell was the fact that Hilary does not know her, nor she Hilary. The look of utter non-recognition on her face when I announced that, yes indeed, my roommate was the Master of the Universe himself, was even more alluring than the snug hammer-loop of her carpenter-style jeans. I meditated on that look and those jeans until the stream of traffic abruptly cut through my stream of consciousness.
I had walked the entire length of Grand River in my reverie, from Bogue Street to the People’s Church. Before me, glowing green-and-orange like some garish Chinese lantern, was a Seven-Eleven. It is brighter and more inviting than the Seven-Eleven on the other end of the strip; Wes attributes this to its “spunky west-side attitude”. I went in, pumped myself a Coke Slurpee, selected a tube of Pringles, and joined the checkout line. I glanced at the magazine rack. In a sea of periodicals with names like “Gun & Rifle Owner” and “HOT ROD”, the only section of mild interest was the cheaply tantalizing “gentlemen’s reading”, as my father calls it. My mother calls it soft-core porn. Before I could fully align myself with either viewpoint, it was my turn to pay.

“Two twenty-seven,” the ragged cashier mumbled. His head bobbed along to a Limp Bizkit anthem blaring from his six-dollar stereo as I tried to muster exact change.

“Have a good night,” I said as I dropped a precise assortment of coins into his palm, in a daring gesture of goodwill. I received an ever-so-slightly-pronounced head-bob in acknowledgement. Ah, the solidarity of youth.

On my way home, I cut across campus, reflecting on life, love, and the meaning of the word “nookie”. My thoughts drifted back to Katie O’Donnell, and I wondered if she had gone home for the summer yet. There were only a few weeks until the start of classes; already, the attrition rate among my friends was alarmingly high. Walking across the empty campus, it wasn’t too hard to believe that soon it would just be me, the squirrels, and—

I saw a flicker of movement in the shadow of the Computer Center. My head snapped over. A silhouette had come out of the door, and was striding past the bike racks now—it couldn’t be! That hair, those jeans, the green backpack—it was! My heart performed the kind of maneuver usually restricted to four-dimensional hypercubes. My brain clenched in disbelief.

OH MY GOD IT’S KATIE O’DONNELL.
I tried to move, to think, but all I could do was stare. I must have looked exactly like a deer caught in someone’s headlights—too many thoughts at once! I was scared and excited and unsure and disoriented and on top of all that, I had to worry about things like standing up, and breathing…

**OH MY GOD IT’S KATIE O’DONNELL AND SHE’S WALKING TOWARD ME.**

I realized that I had stopped chewing at the first Katie-induced brain spasm, and gathered the presence of mind to finally swallow the Pringle that was dissolving in my mouth. I tried to collect myself. I was in control of the situation! I knew exactly what to—

**OH MY GOD SHE’S WALKING TOWARD ME AND I’M STARING AT HER.**

I had no idea what to do. I wanted desperately to run away, or stop time, or have an aneurysm, or … she stepped out into the light, and it wasn’t her.

**OH.**

Instead, it was a pretty olive-skinned girl who, of course, looked nothing at all like Katie O’Donnell. Her backpack was blue, not green. She gave me a polite smile and kept walking. Then, it came. Bubbling up from the depths of my freaked-out brain, it came:

“Umm, would you like a Pringle?” I asked, and lamely proffered the tube.

**OH MY GOD YOU JUST OFFERED HER A PRINGLE.**

It hit me that I was the kind of freak that people tell their friends about, in the kind of “Can you believe it?” story that always elicits a round of chuckles and rolled eyeballs when the traveler returns home. I had heard them myself! I had chuckled, and rolled my eyes! Oh, little did I suspect that one day I myself would—

“Sure,” she said, and plucked a single chip from the tube. “Thanks.”

She smiled again, and continued on her way. I was numb.

Later, as I followed the Red Cedar home, I realized I had a dopey grin on my face. A totally irrational happiness swept over me. Wes calls the experience “gettin’ genki” and this, at least, is not an entirely
made-up phrase. He explains that *genki* is a Japanese word that means healthy, energetic, optimistic, high-spirited, and filled with life—all at once. It’s like a positive adjective multi-vitamin. Though Wes usually laces the term with illegal drug-use connotations, I felt it now in its purest form. Genki yo!

I was tired now, as I hadn’t been before. I no longer felt a stirring for adventure, but simply for sleep. The sidewalk sloped up to the Bogue Street bridge, and as I crossed, I thought—as I always do—of throwing myself into the water below. There is absolutely no danger of me ever actually doing this, but I always have the notion. I can’t help it, and I don’t mind—it reminds me that there’s a little madman lurking inside of me, maybe like the spark at the center of a furnace.

I hiked along, and wondered if Katie O’Donnell perhaps looks for just a little bit of a madman in potential boyfriends.

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**Lovelif**
**Marie Dysangco**

Epicures of life
Savor symphonies of memory,
Breathe friends,
Admire diverse faces,
Compromise melody,
Relish the aroma of love,
Hear melodies that inspire
And compose harmony.

**Hands**
**Abigail Cloud**

Your hands,
soft like feathers
flying on my spine...
Silent, resting
on my hips
like sleepy children...
Cool like silk,
like sand sliding
between my shoulder blades...
Gentle baker
kneads knots
and molds muscles...
Spider fingers
draw their web
strung up on my lifeline...
Generous jailers
take their prisoners
My hands...
Yours.
On Reading the Poetry of Karol Wojtyla
Laura Rose

The poet produces the beautiful by fixing his attention on something real.
Simone Weil

Some poems are so real it hurts
because the sick soul pulls back, doesn’t want the light
exposing its shameful closets

Some poems are so beautiful
they don’t make sense, the mind
refuses to wrap around them

You ask “What does this mean?”
And I cannot answer, only shake my head
and say, “I don’t know... but it’s real.”

You say that every spring dries in time
That repetition equals routine, meaning lost
into the obscuring veil of words

But I say that reality never loses its spark,
its pull on the heart, its twinge like a brush of skin
with the one you love.

True beauty—a cliche; true poetry—another;
Reality, and inner self, and God—cliches, every one.
But I must fight free of this sludge, and find the pearl.

You say there is no pearl, that the Word is a corpse,
strip it down to its bare sinews, and it disappears
an emptiness among vapors, suspended in utter void

But I say you are blind.
I say that the sludge is not all, that beneath it
the Word is alive, alive—and dancing.
Denied
M. G. Lee

They want no part of you, angry children,
No part of your broken-off, locked-away souls.
No tolerance for your anger, your isolation,
Your desperation to find real understanding.

They’ll have nothing to do with you while you persist
At insisting you’re different and pained.
It’s time to grow up and face the fact
And act like adults who’ve cut off their faces.

Come on, angry children, just be like a man!
We’ll hold you and charge you as one, anyway.
You’re too young to be trusted, you’re deviant and mad,
And it’s sad that we’ve enclosed you, yet you grow up too soon.

They’ve washed their hands of you, angry children.
Your nature couldn’t meet their ideals.
You didn’t arrive like the picture in the book,
And they don’t want to look at what you’ve got to reveal.

Refrigerator Poetry
Doug Dinero

1.
a girl with repulsive feet is a friend
to those who dress in blue

2.
heave a rock at the man
smear his blood in the
garden of drool with
waxy peaches
in my hair
The storm turns the Venetian streets to rivers, churns the gently lapping canals, and further drowns the already sinking island-city. The heavy iron sky brings thunder and torrents with it as it rolls slowly from the mainland, a tired locomotive across the straits, ferrying back to mother Venice news of her son, Mestre. The news is in the roar of the clouds, as of steel on strained steel, and in the dull hard grey of the sky. The news is of all of Venice’s children fled her embrace—made feeble now by the passing centuries—to crouch and grub with fierce, dirty industry on the edge of the mainland, almost within sight of her glance, still regal somehow in her ruin.

The rain sheets off tiled roofs and down centuries old walls, pillars, and steps of marble, yet can do nothing to cleanse the once gleaming city of the black dirt and iron stains that her errant children have sent her in heavy black smoke, stinking and choking, floating from their factories to wreath her bell towers and cling to her shining facades. And pounding into the canals, the rain does not freshen the rank water or wash away the refuse that floats in it.

The storm continues, seeming to both rage and weep at once, and pours over the city. The streets it hammers are empty and the windows it streaks are filled with light and with gawking faces. The Carnevale revelers have taken their celebration inside at the first heavy drops and now watch the deluge with mixed wonder and dismay.

One storm-drenched garden is not empty. Among the elaborate vines and bushes, the vibrant greens and brilliant floral hues, a young woman lies on the grass. The rain strikes sharply on her bared skin. She does not stir as the chill drops splash on her naked chest and limbs, and weigh down the shining dark hair thrown behind and around her on the soft grass. Her dress, all...
O My Soul
Dan Bouk

My holey shoes
I've worn to church,
And on a path to sing along with 'coo's
Voiced from a lovely dove, set atop a birch,

And to stroll down deserted
Avenues on speckled nights
With a few disconcerted
Souls weary from other fights

Than those which have tread
Thin my simple soles;
And oh, to think they heard all that was said
Between the two of us. These holes

Were nursed by ambles
On school nights, and in the rain and
Thunder! For times that sandals
Simply wouldn't do, or we hadn't planned

To go through the sand to that pier
That I know you love so much. And
Now, when I look down or see in a mirror
The tears that have befallen these companions of the land,

I feel pity for times now worn
Away; and think of runs these shoes were not
Made to race, when from cow’s skin and thread were born
A couple of sneaks that forty bucks had bought.
Pygmalion: a Greek mythological figure who sculpted, and then fell in love with, a statue of the perfect woman.

Paul Finch scanned the column of figures one last time and groaned, shaking his head. There was no getting around it—Metagene was in deep trouble. The reserve was gone, the bills kept coming in, and his own rather deep pockets were emptying fast. It didn’t look like any of the stockholders were prepared to bail them out either; in fact, they were fleeing like rats. Bankruptcy—and failure—loomed on the horizon.

He had failed Andrew again. His father was five years in the grave, but Paul knew he had to be turning over down there. Dad had started the company back when genetic engineering was really taking off, when the secrets of the genome had just been unlocked and the first genetically engineered human, GE for short, had still been an infant. And now Paul was responsible for the company’s bitter end.

He sighed again, leaning back in the plush chair and blinking his weary eyes. Staring at the records late into the night wouldn’t change the facts. They would have to file for bankruptcy unless a very large contract came in very soon. And for someone to bring a large contract to a second-rate firm... never. It was over.

Rubbing his temples, he looked out the window above the desk. The San Francisco cityscape stretched out in front of him, a mirror image of the starry night sky. The dark expanse of the bay and the ocean beyond was a constant reminder of the city’s eventual fate: one day, the Big One would rock the earth and turn the area into an island, or worse, sink it into the ocean like Atlantis. Just like Metagene, he decided. Doomed, but still hanging on until the end.

Rising from his chair, he leaned forward to look down at the miniature drama played out every night at the foot of
his gigantic office building. A gang of “street rats” hung out at the concrete plaza in the corporate sector. The police chased them off several times over the course of the night, but they always returned. Sneaking one by one through the shadows, emerging cautiously like frightened deer, and finally throwing caution to the winds, they alternately partied and fled from dusk to dawn.

Right now, the plaza was deserted. He watched for a few minutes, but the gang showed no signs of reappearing. Maybe they had given up for good. That was a shame; he had admired their tenacity—it reminded him of his own.

He wondered if there was any way to escape the growing desperation. It seemed like everything he did, saw, or heard reminded him of Metagene’s critical financial situation, and his own impending failure. If there were only some way out...

As if on cue, the phone rang.

He jumped back from the window, startled. Who could be calling... at three in the morning? Curious, he reached over the desk, flicked off the voice-mail system, and picked up the receiver.

“Um... Hello?”

The voice on the other end was male, middle-aged, and oddly confident. “Finch? Finch, is that you?”

“Yes, uh, who... what can I do for you?”

“Just calling to chat, Andy. I hear the genetics business is pretty hot these days, hmm?”

A pause. “I’m sorry; this is Paul Finch. My father passed on five years ago.”

The voice on the other end hesitated, then the confidence returned. “Oh! Dreadfully sorry, we’ve been out of touch, you see, and... well, I’ve been in Europe. And so, let me get to the point. I need some genetics work done, highest quality, and with the utmost... discretion. I’d make it worth your effort. Perhaps we could meet and work out details?”

Paul’s interest was suddenly aroused. “Indeed, uh...”

“Cartier. Thomas Cartier. I’m with Consolidated Neoplastics.”

“We can make an appointment anytime, Mr.
Cartier. Our offices are in Suite 72 of the TransAmerica Building, downtown San Francisco. When would it be convenient?"

“Well, I'm actually calling from Italy, so it'll be a few days before my wife and I return to the States. Maybe next Thursday, around 2:30? Say, what time is it in California?”

Paul glanced at his watch. “A few minutes after three. A.M.”

“Oh! Terribly sorry. So, next Thursday then.”

“Next Thursday.” Paul replaced the receiver, allowing a foolish grin to spread from ear to ear. The impossible had occurred. If this went down, they would be back in the black for years—barring any disasters.

The next Thursday, at precisely two-thirty, Paul’s secretary came over the intercom. “Mr. Cartier and his wife are here to see you. Shall I send them in?”

“Of course,” Paul replied, and turned toward the door. He had carefully arranged the office for the convenience of his visitors. Two padded chairs faced his own, and the computer terminal at his desk was accessible without obstructing the line of sight. The door swung open and a woman in her early 30’s swooped in. Waves of blond hair spread over her shoulders. She was dressed in a peach tunic over a white ribbed shirt, with pearly silk leggings. Mr. Cartier followed close behind, a slightly balding middle-aged man with grey eyes, a conservative suit, and a confident stride. He approached Paul and shook hands firmly.

“A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Finch. This is my wife, Vicky.”

Paul offered his hand and bowed slightly. “How do you do, Mrs. Cartier. If you’ll be seated... now, you mentioned some genetics work?”

Mr. Cartier leaned forward. “Yes... to put it simply, we want a daughter. A perfect daughter. And we’re willing to pay whatever it costs.”

Vicky tossed back her hair. “You know; random heredity is just so random. We want our daughter to be different. To be everything a woman should be.”
Paul looked from one to the other. They were serious. “You realize this is completely illegal. We could all go to prison for a long time just for trying to make an unlicensed GE. And if we succeed... well, it’s a total breach of the Rio Accords.”

“We’re not asking you to do anything illegal. We’re just laying out the problem, laying out our resources, and inviting you to come up with a solution.” Cartier pulled out a debit card and keyed in the display code. He handed it to Paul; the readout showed ten billion dollars in electronic cash, with a small icon indicating it would be totally untraceable. “Hang on to that. When you deliver the final product, we’ll give you the access code. I believe we understand each other, yes?”

Paul blinked. He remembered now where he had seen the name Thomas Cartier—he was one of the co-founders of Consolidated Neoplastics, an entrepreneur with money oozing out every pore. This guy not only had the cash to buy a GE, he had the connections to keep from getting caught. This was it—the big break, the lucky strike. The fatal decision was too easy.

“Yes. Let’s do this. So, you said ‘perfect’. What exactly do you want?”

Vicky pulled out a slip of paper and read, “Rounded face; small jaw; high, elfin cheekbones; very large, liquid, blue eyes; small, pert nose; full, but not protruding, lips; arched eyebrows; thick blond hair; beautiful soprano voice; thin neck; slim build; full figure.”

“Slim build... full figure,” Paul repeated under his breath as he typed the parameters into his terminal. “Anything else? Disease resistance? Faster maturity? Any mental or hormonal alterations?”

They looked at each other a moment. Cartier replied slowly, “Well, we hadn’t really considered those. How about... all of them? Make her as perfect as you can, without compromising looks. Budget is not an issue.”

Paul considered this. “Good. All of them... here, this is what your baby will look like when she’s reached maturity.” He activated a projection routine, and then
Vicky sighed, “It’s wonderful.”

Cartier continued to stare at the image. “She’ll really look like that?”

Paul nodded. “In only ten years, too, with the rapid maturity option. You’ll need to take some precautions, of course.”

“That will be taken care of. The baby will grow up at our private mansion, hidden from the world until she’s old enough to start her career as an actress, model, singer... whatever.”

“How long before she’s born?” Vicky asked.

“It’ll be about six months to prepare the embryo, though that’s a very rough estimate. I’ll let you know when we do the implantation. After that, nine months and the baby will be ready.”

Mr. Cartier stood up and shook hands again. “It’s been a pleasure. Oh... before I forget, bill me for the project expenses. I’ll leave my financial info with your secretary on the way out. The ten is a bonus. Keep us updated on progress.”

Without waiting for a reply, he turned and left. Vicky followed, leaving Paul wondering where to start. This was undoubtedly the largest project Metagene had ever taken on. They had done some livestock enhancement, a fair amount of subcontracting for the military GE labs, and customized pets for the well-off, but never before a full GE. The permit application alone was beyond their financial reach, but permits were no longer a problem.

He sat back down, turned the monitor back to face him, and flinched in revulsion. He hadn’t gotten the chance to see the image earlier, and now it shocked him. The face was beautiful, but it was a plastic, false beauty, unnatural and yet seductive. Was this a goddess, or a monster?

The styrofoam cup bounced off the rim of the trash can and onto the floor. With a groan of effort, Paul hoisted himself out of his swivel chair to pick it up. The gene sequencer continued to blink patiently, awaiting his return. Empty food trays littered the desk, while cans
of cola stacked in one corner testified to the caffeine surging through his system.

The coffee cup disposed of, Paul plopped again into the Snooze Seat (as he called it) to continue. He did his most efficient work late at night, half asleep. He hit his prime around midnight and stayed on fire for several hours. All the rest of his staff had long since gone home, but Paul continued to tweak this, readjust that, add, enhance, delete. Now, if he could just keep his eyes open...

Five months and many long nights later, they were ready to implant the finished embryo. Most GE’s were prepared in a few weeks, but he considered this a fast job after considering the intensive training the entire staff had gone through, the complicated sequencing needed for the facial features, and the bone remolding needed for the paradoxical “slim build, full figure”. They ended up giving this creation the full treatment: rapid maturity, yet slow aging; tough, natural armor undernearth the skin; a high degree of memory, intuition, and empathy; larger pupils, both for beauty and night vision; boosted healing rates, along with an anti-scarring treatment; and finally the sterility that was mandatory for all GE’s. All in all, it was a pretty potent mixture, and while he decided to avoid the sensitive hearing, powerful muscles, and enhanced reflexes used for military specimens, she would still be a lot more dangerous than the average pretty girl.

One of the lab assistants, Nicole, volunteered to be the surrogate. The pregnancy went smoothly, and nine months later, when contractions began, Finch was ready. Part of the lab was curtained off, and a bed on casters rolled in. He had hired a midwife to assist in the delivery and keep things quiet. As the birthing process continued, he allowed a slight smile to creep onto his face. All was well, and in a matter of hours, he would be rich.

Still, he couldn’t ignore the muffled groans and gasps coming from inside the enclosure. It was taking an awfully long time, and the soon-to-be
mother was clearly and loudly in pain. The curtains swung open as the midwife came out. “It doesn’t look good,” she said in a low tone. “She needs a C-section.”

Which, of course, meant the hospital, and the possibility of being caught with an unregistered GE baby. On the other hand, not going to the hospital would mean the possible death of both the baby and his employee. Paul fingered Cartier’s debit card in his pocket and decided.

The phone call, the ambulance, the emergency room, and the obstetrics ward passed in a rapid blur, and soon Paul found himself abandoned on a bench outside the operating room. After a few minutes of tense waiting, he heard a baby crying inside. Looking through the window in the door, he could see Nicole being stitched up, the baby (what should they name it?) being dried off, and a doctor taking a small blood sample for congenital defect testing. No defects to be found in that baby, thought Paul. Just enhancements.

Paul’s high spirits fell through the floor as he realized the implications.

Thrusting the door open, Paul charged into the operating room. “Wait!” he shouted as the doctor started to leave with the traitor blood sample. The nurses and orderlies clustered around the mother looked up in surprise at this intruder. “I... I don’t want my baby tested,” he continued weakly. “It’s... it’s against my religion.”

The doctor looked mildly surprised. “I’m sorry, sir, but we have to make a few checks on your baby’s health. Required by law.”

Paul was trying to think of a suitable response when the monitors linked to Nicole started beeping and wailing aggressively. “She’s slipping!” yelled out an orderly. The doctor rushed to her side, dropping the blood sample on a table. Seeing his chance, Paul stepped as quickly and casually as possible over to the syringe and slipped it into his pocket as the medical staff struggled to revive the traumatized mother.

“She’s conscious! I think she’s trying to say something!”

As he quietly left the
room, Paul didn’t hear Nicole confess to the doctor, curse his greed, and fall into shock again. He didn’t see the doctor look for the blood sample and then call security. His mind was so wrapped up in the ten billion that he didn’t see the guards moving to intercept him as he walked through the lobby until it was too late.

MESTRE, CONTINUED
elegance and lace, lies torn and sodden beside her. Only her face is dry behind her black and white mask. The frozen coy smile betrays nothing of the thoughts that seethe beneath it.

    Her mind struggles to forget the feel of him, his weight, his terrifying strength, and remember only the look of him. His clothes were the cheap masquerade costume that poor Venetian artisans sell to mainlanders trying to reclaim their lost past, a costume identical to thousands of others. She concentrates on his peasant commonness as the rain washes the stains of assault from her loins and slowly drowns decadent Venice, Atlantis-like, beneath the sea.

OATS WANTS YOU!
YES, YOU!

Oats is seeking submissions for its next issue. We’re committed to printing undergraduate work, but we can’t publish your masterpiece if you don’t take a chance and send it to us first! Send your work to:

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or

Oats Home Office
307 Holmes West
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48825-1115

Electronic submissions are preferred, in either Microsoft Word, RTF or plain text format. Before you submit, check out the fine print on the inside cover.

HEADS UP! Halloween’s coming up, so we’re giving bonus points to spooky, creepy, scary stuff that’s well-suited to the witching hour!

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