

## RON MILHOAN

*Winter Poplars*, 2013  
oil on wood panel, 18 x 24 in



credit: R.Blitzer Gallery

## ANDREA LEWIS

### Elytra

I was kissing Maureen Lautigan when I was paged to Central Office. She wasn't kissing me back, but she wasn't resisting either. It was a Friday in October after last bell. The students had streamed out of school like a bison stampede, leaving the twang of sudden quiet in the halls. I found Maureen alone in the teachers' lounge, amid the liver-brown sofas and limp *Newsweeks* and the stale reek of a million cigarettes. She was standing by the window, looking sad, her short coppery hair bathed in a cone of sepia light from the nicotine-sheened glass. The whole faculty knew that over the summer she had obtained a long-awaited divorce from her lady-killer husband, a guy who drove around Lancaster, California, in a cucumber-green panel truck emblazoned with the name of his landscaping business—*RAKES*.

Maureen was wearing a white blouse and a navy-blue skirt. Her silver stopwatch glinted from a cord around her neck. She taught typing and shorthand and the stopwatch was for the timed dictation she gave her classes. When I found her in the teachers' lounge, she was digging in her purse, probably for cigarettes. I set her purse aside, took her hands in mine and kissed her cheek. I had spent the last two years gazing at her, so she knew I liked her. I was too nervous to kiss her lips. I was shaking.

Then the PA speaker above our heads squawked to life: *Mr. Mallory, report at once to Central Office. Mr. Jack Mallory.*

I looked up at the speaker, mystified. "Why do they want me in Central Office?"

Maureen took out a Salem and lit it. "See what happens when you're bad?"

Barbara Leavitt, school secretary, all five feet and ninety pounds of her, ruled Central Office like the dictator of a strategic island nation. "Problem," she whispered, leaning over her typewriter. She took me into a little side room that I never knew existed, though I'd taught biology at Quartz Hill High for fourteen years. At a small oak table sat the school counselor, Hugh Crampton—the kids called him Cramps—and Mrs. Zachirias, the mother of one of my students. Mrs. Zachirias was crying. Her mouth was all distorted, as if she were trying to dislodge a poison banana she had eaten by accident, and her tears had siphoned into the runnels of her face. Her son, Peter Zachirias, was the top student of Quartz Hill High, destined to be the valedictorian of the class of '76 graduating next June.