

# Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

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## Harpur Palate, Volume 1 Number 2, Winter 2001

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*Binghamton University--SUNY*

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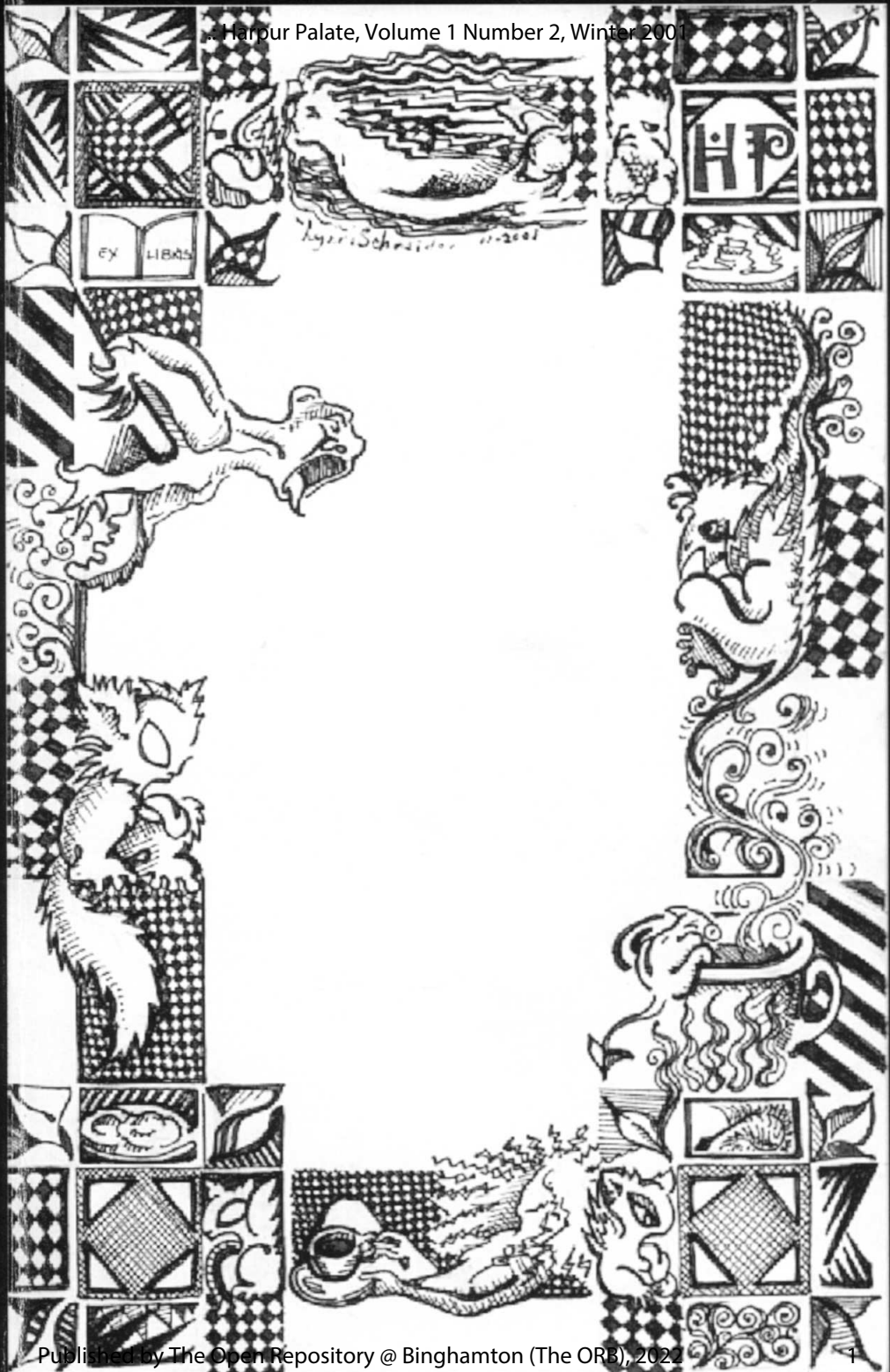
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Winter 2001

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We consider all genres of fiction from 250-8000 words and all forms of poetry. We are not interested in violence for violence's sake or the usage of four-letter words for shock value. To submit to *Harpur Palate*, please send an SASE, cover letter and 1 story or 3-5 poems (no poems longer than 10 pages) to:

*Harpur Palate*

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PO Box 6000

Binghamton, NY 13902-6000

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Submissions received outside of reading periods will not be evaluated. For more information please visit: <http://go.to/hpjournal.com>.

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Genre is such a fleeting thing. Once upon a time, the term slipstream applied to everything that slipped through the cracks and didn't quite fit genre labels. Now some, with varying degrees of success, are attempting to pin down what exactly slipstream is. Why do we have to have a nice little label for every genre or form? Sure, it's an important aspect of marketing—everything has to be marketed as something specific. But sometimes labels take away from the mystery in being unable to name something. There are several pieces in *Harpur Palate* vol. 1.2 that defy definition. Well, I suppose I could try to give them one, but my definitions would be incomplete and subject to debate. Beyond the Bluish Smoke, by Mokuo Nagayama is not quite fact, not quite fiction, and it blends memoir, dream, translation and illustration. The winner of HP's Inaugural Milton Kessler Memorial Prize for Poetry is Eric Machan Howd's *Cell*. It is a sonnet sequence, but I'm sure it's unlike sonnet sequences most people are familiar with.

That's not to say that genre doesn't have its place. We're determined to be as eclectic a journal as we possible can, and authors and poets are doing new things with genre and form all of the time. After all, writing rules were meant to be broken, and it's always a pleasure when they're broken successfully. Vol. 1.2 is very different than vol. 1.1 in some ways, and after reading two issues, people who are trying to figure out what exactly this fledgling journal HP publishes will probably not be left with a good idea. The truth is this: we aren't looking for a specific type of fiction or poetry. We like to be surprised by what we find in the mailbox. But our mission has not changed—we believe it's important to publish all kinds of genres (definable or not) and forms. We will not try to tell you what art is.

I'm pleased to present you with the first Writing By Degrees Supplement as well. With each subsequent WBD meeting, HP hopes to bring you selections from the graduate creative writing conference.

I must thank the following people for their hard work and support: the editors and readers of HP who always get the job done despite their various other projects, Maria Mazziotti Gillan for her guidance and wisdom, the contributors of the Writing By Degrees supplement for allowing us to publish their work, Dean Mileur, GSO, and the SA for their financial support,

GSO for allowing us to use their Mac, and Barb K., Barb W., Ruth and Stephanie for putting up with all of us in the English Department.

Vol. 1.2 may be a little different than vol. 1.1, but we hope you enjoy these selections. And as always, were looking for fiction writers and poets who aren't satisfied with literary boundaries.

All best,

Toiya Kristen Finley  
*Harpur Palate* Managing Editor

Now five years old, Writing by Degrees was originally intended as a three-day conference/writers' retreat created by, and featuring, solely graduate creative writing students nationwide. Panels on pedagogy, theory in the creative writing classroom, the process of editing and submitting work, and the creative writing job market have turned WBD into much more than merely a showcase for national graduate literary talent.

Aside from graduate readings from all genres and all styles from traditional to experimental, WBD also highlights nationally known poets and writers. In the past such names as John DuFresne, Bruce Bond, Jonis Agee, M. Evelina Galang, and Neil Shepard have given keynote readings, held workshops, and given talks on editing and writing. Plus, the relatively small size of the conference makes getting to know these writers and their work much easier and more enjoyable.

WBD is, as stated, still relatively small. The entire conference is held at the Decker Arts and Cultural Center in Binghamton, a wonderful turn-of-the-century mansion minutes away from downtown. With no concurrent panels, WBD offers participants larger audiences and a much more communal environment where most everyone is involved in either presenting on a panel or listening in and asking questions.

Now, with the advent of Harpur Palate, WBD hopes to provide much more to participants and attendees. This year we offer you a sampling of some of the fine work presented at the conference. In the coming years, who knows! As the conference and the journal grow, we hope that participants and attendees will begin to feel that Fall in Binghamton is the right time and place for writers to meet.

Enjoy.

Chad Davidson

Dana Anderson

Directors, Writing by Degrees

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## Appell

by Joanne Lowery

This was one of the first of their words we learned.  
Before dawn we had to leave the barracks  
and stand in lines of five in the courtyard.  
We waited while they counted us.  
The dogs waited while they counted us.  
We waited, and then we waited.

We waited under their terrible sun  
and in their terrible rain.  
Three pieces of ash floated in their sky.  
We waited, those of us who were left,  
in the beautiful snow.

I watched a louse crawl on the neck-stalk  
in front of me and disappear in an ear.  
I waited to see if it would come back out.

Then *appell* was over.  
We moved we walked we marched  
outside the camp to dig a huge pit.  
We waited for the hole to be big enough.  
I wished we were back in *appell*.  
That is how I learned  
I would never be happy again.

## Then & There

by Mark Terrill

We're standing in the kitchen of the old German farmhouse that we've been renting & calling home for fifteen years now & you're telling me very matter-of-factly in clear succinct terms just how delicious the black bread is that I bought from the baker that afternoon & over your shoulder through the screened-in kitchen window I can see a half-dozen brown & white cows grazing idly in the upper pasture & beyond that huge vapory puffs of cloud slowly drifting in from the west sliding up against a backdrop of deep blue sky & it occurs to me then & there that love is not just something that holds two people together or eventually tears them apart or hovers over them like some giant translucent dome protecting them from a world without love but rather exists like a sort of invisible spirit or energy that permeates and informs and runs through everything further than the eye can see deeper than the heart can feel more concrete than the mind can realize holding the whole thing together while it expands out into some previously unknown fourth dimension which is now resounding with your words of praise about a loaf of black bread I bought at the baker which really doesn't have anything to do with anything yet at the same time seems to be the center around which everything in the world is suddenly turning simultaneously expanding & contracting & folding back in on itself forming a perpetual loop of finite infinity in which I find myself standing on a tiled kitchen floor in a farmhouse in Germany in the midst of a split second of all-abiding clarity which without any further ado could also be eternity.

## Ants

by Loren MacLeod

Daljit sits on the parched grass beneath the dusty *neem* tree, straddling an earthen mound. Her dirty cotton sari is hiked high on her thighs, and she knows her mother will beat later for her immodesty, but she cannot keep her eyes from the fascinating comings and goings of the mound, which is an anthill. The ants stream up and down the sides of the hill, these tiny beings the Jains sweep from their paths with brooms for fear of crushing them. She is amazed that their armored columns can march far, far away, to places unknown, and return unerringly to the hill.

Daljit looks up, squinting in the midday sun. Missy Sahib is there, watching her from the bedroom window on the second floor of the great stone bungalow. Missy Sahib is naked. Daljit can see a hairless triangle and two little breasts, and then she smiles down at her in a mysterious, catlike manner. But her blue eyes do not narrow.

They are not allowed to play with each other.

Daljit looks down at the ants. Some time ago, they were brown and small, but a race of larger ants has conquered them. These new ants are very dangerous, she was told once by the shriek-roughened throat of her mother. No matter. They love her the same, they still crawl caressingly over her bare arms and legs and the sweet skin next to her *yoni*, and they never, ever bite.

During the last monsoon the rain caused a branch to fall from the neem tree. It tore a hole in the side of the hill, and Daljit observed the marvelous network of chambers and tunnels the first ants had made. She admired the ants' industry, the complicated routines of their lives. *Those are British ants*, said her mother, *they have red coats. And are poisonous.*

Daljit looks up again. A figure has appeared behind Missy Sahib.



It is Master Sahib, and he is also naked. His wide-hipped, womanish body makes her giggle. *You must respect him*, her mother said, *he is a colonel in His Majesty's army, and I am lucky to be Sahib's cook, although I am but a poor widow with an idiot for a daughter.* What luck, Daljit wonders; they are trapped together in a single, smoke-blackened room in the servants' quarters with the constant smell of damp-rot and a hole in the ground to squat over (she studies how others live, in that great stone bungalow with three floors and porcelain toilets).

Daljit knows the colonel will be going out with Mem Sahib this evening, to a party on the Lower Circular Road; Mem Sahib has made Daljit's mother repair the hem of a bias-cut dress, a yellow silk dress the color of cholera, and her mother's resentment led to anger, which led to the weals on Daljit's back. *Ai! How shall I ever find a husband for you? You are so dark, so ugly.*

Missy and Master Sahib retreat from the window, back into the shadows, and Daljit can no longer see them. The ants have fashioned a beard on her chin. Brilliant green parrots swarm from one tree to the next. From the vine-covered wall comes the ghost of jasmine, and a water-wallah cries his wares in the alley beyond it.

*Su-ra-hi! Su-ra-hi!*

Master Sahib sleeps alone in a white, mosquito-netted bed. One day, Daljit will creep up the carpeted stairs on her bare feet, ants thick as rubies around her neck, and allow them to bleed into the spaces between the freshly-ironed sheets. She knows they can find their way home, even from a strange, new place.

HP

## Daughter, Mother, Sister, Wife

by Allison Joseph

When your daughter is a poet,  
burn all your possessions before you die.  
Or else she will rifle through them,  
searching for that one bauble, that trinket,  
that one letter or card or bus schedule  
to explain why you were so cold, so reluctant  
to pick her up when she was nine,  
when she was nineteen. Burn all  
your correspondence; but be warned,  
she'll make something of the cinders.

When your mother is a poet,  
your breakfast may be marmalade  
and wine, wheat toast and dandelion  
stems. She may slit a fish's belly open  
in a gesture so sudden and swift  
that you can never eat fish again,  
her eyes gleaming with conquest.  
When your mother is a poet,  
you may get crumpets, not pizza,  
gravy but no potatoes.  
You may not get fed at all.

When your sister is a poet,  
she may steal your stories  
for her own, her life's humiliations  
not nearly as intriguing as yours.  
She'll become the one whose left breast  
popped out of her prom gown;  
she'll be the one with the extra-smarmy

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dentist, the one at your father's  
graveside, mother's deathbed.  
She will send these words off to strangers,  
and not discuss one page of it with you.

When your wife is a poet,  
watch your mouth. Anything you say  
can and will be used, anything you do  
preserved whether you think it should be  
or not. She may quit being your wife,  
but she will never quit searching her memory  
for that awful thing you said  
in the delivery room, the laundry room,  
the bedroom, the kitchen.  
And she will write it down  
in that penmanship you always loved—  
an ornate script that looked  
like another era's handiwork,  
malice controlled by curves  
and loops in ink, swelling on paper.

HONORABLE MENTION  
MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE FOR POETRY

**Melon**

by Eileen Malone

On your desk a jam jar of snapdragons and sweet peas  
from my garden, my attempt at an apology  
so far, we've gone deep enough into my melon disorder  
borrowed nothing from anywhere else

I've already told you how it started when I was twelve and fat  
and saw a picture of a model eating a cantaloupe  
a goddess slicing into a green globe twined with beige rope  
feeding herself a sliver of gold from a scraped, scarred old burlap ball

and decided to eat only melon for lunch  
and breakfast and dinner

now, I tell you how I chop the honeydew into chunks  
add a fourth of a cup of lime juice  
very little sugar, some mint leaves, a blender  
pour over ice, serve myself, weigh myself  
then retch it all up; how it looks floating down there  
bits of battered, smashed, flesh-colored meat  
how the fetid odor of melons, tubers, bulbs  
rises from the cold white toilet  
floats around my naked kneeling form  
up and out the white curtained window

next time, if there is to be a next time  
I will tell you how someone might have done an awful thing to me  
when I was twelve, but I can't tell you what, won't even whisper  
those fat and dirty words

if you promise to do nothing during the whole of our hour  
but bring yourself back; if each time you find yourself  
drifting away you bring yourself back, if you stay with me  
and my secret that can only be detected in the vomit

I will bring you more flowers.

**Adelphia**  
by Ward Parker

I peered at the peas remaining on my dinner plate, imagining that they were planets scattered across the Williams-Sonoma firmament. I figured the inhabitants of the pea planets would be peaceful beings, living on a pea and all, and I was wondering what it would be like to shrink myself to atom-size in order to visit them when my wife tore me from my thoughts.

"Martin, are you listening? I said, I took my temperature and I'm definitely ovulating."

I looked up at Adele who had already finished her meal. She had that raised-eyebrow smile she wore whenever she had sex on her mind, which was usually only on weekend nights. Now that we've been trying to have a baby, I might find her smiling on any odd night of the week. Even a Monday.

"I have an 8 o'clock meeting tomorrow, so I want to go to bed early," she announced.

Adele got up from the table and put her dishes into the dishwasher. Six months ago she had insisted we redo the kitchen with all new appliances, a long wrap-around counter and the antique oak table. We ate every meal at that table, except for the rare occasions when we had company. Then we would use the dining room, which normally remained dark and unvisited, as did the formal living room with Adele's prized antique furnishings. The family room was a misnomer. There was no family to lounge there, just Adele and I when we watched rented movies. In fact, most of our 4 bedroom, 2-1/2 bath house sat hushed and lifeless, like the model homes the real estate developer fills with bowls of plastic fruit, shelves of fake books, and other props of an imaginary family.

"I can't think of a worse night for sex, the night before a big meeting," Adele said, rinsing a pot in the sink, "but like Dr. Fenwick says,

we have to work with what nature gave us.”

She placed the pot in the dishwasher and put her arms around me from behind. Instead of hugging, she grabbed my roll of belly fat and jiggled it. It felt uncomfortable, her hands on my flab, as if she were touching an open sore.

“I’m so glad you went to see him,” she whispered in my ear. “You’re going to be a superman tonight.”

I broke away and perused the mail I had left on the counter. There was an account statement for our mutual funds that I didn’t even open, because I knew our savings were quite healthy. Adele was paid an embarrassingly high salary, with bonuses and all, a portion of which we studiously set aside for our retirement and the college funds of the children we hoped to have. The next envelope was a bill for my subscription to *Model Railroader*, which I slid into my pocket so Adele wouldn’t see.

She turned on the dishwasher. It hummed with the silence only attainable with a top-of-the-line Whirlpool.

“The Weakest Link is on,” she said, giving me that smile again. “I’m going to watch it upstairs.”

“I’ll join you in a little while. I want to do some work in the basement.”

“Martin, do you have to play with your train set tonight?”

“It’s not a train set. It’s a model railroad.”

“You spend all your days down there. Couldn’t you at least give me tonight?”

“I’ll see you upstairs, O.K.?”

She gave a theatrically loud sigh and walked away.

“Soon,” I called after her.

Then I opened the door to the basement, switched on the lights, and looked down upon the world I had created.

It was like the view from the window of a plane about to land. Craggy brown mountains sloped down to a lush valley where the buildings of a small city huddled together. Railroad tracks sprouted

Ward Parker

from the city like veins and capillaries, running into the mountains and to smaller towns, stretching along three walls of the basement until they disappeared under the stairs. It was a landscape in perfect miniature, all so convincingly real. A universe replicated in HO Scale, where a model of a 40-foot boxcar was only six inches long.

The grass in the lawns of the miniature houses was a vibrant green, and the trees that clung to the hills were thick and lush. The rivers and streams shimmered pristinely. People went about their work or grouped together on sidewalks to chat in a day that was perpetually sunny, forever summer, locked permanently in 1924. But it wasn't a tableau frozen in space; there was movement, there was life. Majestic 4-8-4 steam locomotives, double-teamed, pulled serpentine tails of boxcars and hoppers heavy with ore. And the streamlined 4-6-0 (with a realistic whistle sound effect) chugged with pistons flailing as it flew down the mainline. It headed the daily Blue Goose express train to Chicago, a long string of heavy Pullman cars in which elegantly dressed passengers gazed out the windows upon the land I had created.

I had thought of everything when I built my world, and I ran it with total efficiency. From my master control panel I operated the rail switches and could handle as many as three active trains at once. I turned on the miniature lampposts that pooled upon the street corners and bathed the station platforms at night. I controlled the overhead lighting that is the sun in this world. With a flick of a switch I began the day, and, when I decided to, I ended it as well.



"Martin," Adele called from the top of the stairs. "I'm going to bed now. Remember to turn off all the lights when you come up."

"I will."

"You're coming up soon, right?"

"I promise, hon," I said. "Please close the basement door, OK?"

There was a pause, and then the door finally closed.

The basement was originally meant to be the children's playroom.

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I had intended to build a simple plywood table upon which would lie the model train set I'd bought for my future kids. The problem was, no kid arrived, but I decided to set up the trains anyway. We already had a bedroom upstairs redecorated to suit a baby, so why not have the train set ready as well? And in honor of my wife, I named my future capital city, the hub of my railroad, Adelphia. Whether or not she was flattered, I never knew.

It took only a few books and magazines to show me how to build a railroad empire. The simple oval of track from the train set quickly evolved into a multi-level layout that filled much of the basement and cost several thousand dollars so far. In fact, just last week I racked up another charge on the Gold Card for more flatcars to service the sawmill I had spent two weeks painstakingly building from scratch. The sawmill, I admit, was merely an excuse to add another rail spur and purchase more rolling stock. But it made sense. After all, you can't have a city without a sawmill.

I was prepared to defend every expenditure if Adele protested, but she never did. She only made occasional jokes about a grown man buying toys, which at one time had made me smile sheepishly but now only irritated me. She was a broker on Wall Street, while I was a biologist for the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. I tested sewage levels in the water system. Needless to say, her income dwarfed mine to the extent that when I lost my job to budget cuts last year, our standard of living wasn't the slightest bit affected. I wouldn't even be surprised if my staying at home were advantageous from a tax standpoint.

"You're my kept man," she had said to me, one morning not long ago while she was dressing for work. She was awake at an obscenely early hour, which executives on the fast track all seemed to enjoy doing these days. I opened one eye and saw her looking at me with exasperation.

"Or, on second thought," she added, "maybe you're just my adopted child."

Ward Parker

"What is that supposed to mean?" I groaned. I was unshaven, with matted hair, and my stomach created a large hillock in the duvet. She was zippering the skirt of a Chanel suit.

I, of course, interpreted that remark to be three insults wrapped into one: 1) I was unemployed and supported by her; 2) I played with "toys;" 3) I had failed yet again the previous night to provide the service a kept man is supposed to provide the women who keeps him.

"Nothing. Go back to sleep, but try not to sleep all day. Have you made an appointment with Dr. Fenwick yet?"

"No."

"Martin, why are you procrastinating? He'll just ask you a few questions and then give you the prescription."

"That stupid pill is just a fad."

"It works. That's all that matters."

"It doesn't work for everyone."

"It can't hurt to try it. Will you do it, please, for me?"

I mumbled my assent, then rolled over and covered my head with a pillow.

"Oh, and there's a list in the kitchen of some errands I need you to do," Adele announced. "Please get everything done before you start playing with your trains."

"It's not playing," I mumbled from beneath the pillow.

"Whatever, sweetie."

Her berating tone reminded me remarkably of my father's when I was young. I'd be sleeping late during summer vacation, with dreams of trains and sword-fighting fantasy heroes (dreams of dreams), slivers of sunlight around the dark window shades, the window-mounted air conditioner whining like a jet engine. I'd be luxuriously relaxed—until my bedroom door would burst open and Dad stuck his Brill-Creamed crew-cutted bullet-shaped head inside to yell at me:

"You're two days late mowing the lawn."

or: "When are you going to get on the roof and clean the gutters?"

and always: "You'd better not spend the whole day inside playing

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with your sissy trains. Go play ball with the other kids in the neighborhood.”

Yes, my love of trains began when I was an adolescent, to the intense dismay of my father. Ever since I was ten years old (the age, I believe, when my father first noticed that I existed) he'd pressured me to be an athlete. He had been, as he never failed to remind me, a star linebacker in college who was drafted and then cut by the Baltimore Colts. Since as early as I could remember, I was forced to play intramural sports, a different one for every season. And I was awful. I had absolutely no coordination. I was too timid for football, though my worst sport had to be baseball. I would doze in the outfield until a fly ball was hit to me and then I'd realize I was on the spot; everyone was looking at me expecting me to catch the damn thing. Of course I'd miss it. The same went when I was at bat: trying to concentrate while everyone stared at me, judging how I'd perform. I'd strike out as quickly as possible just to get the hell out of there. After the game, during the walk back to the car, I'd endure my father screaming at me in front of my teammates. I was the world's biggest choker.

But I was good at academics and an excellent model craftsman. I built every scale model of every ship, car, plane and train that was sold. I had a good eye and a steady hand when I was alone working with miniature things. It's just when dealing with life-sized things that I had problems.

“Maybe you're spending too much time playing with your fucking dolls,” Dad said after a game once, at a volume audible to everyone. (He referred to my trains as dolls when he was feeling truly contemptuous.) “You've got to practice batting every single day until you get it right. Christ, I just don't understand. I've told you a hundred times you're not *trying*. Put some effort into it.”

We reached the parking lot where the coach was loading a duffel bag of bats into his pickup truck.

“What's wrong with you is you don't have enough pride,” my father said. “If you did, you'd try harder. For pride's sake.”

Ward Parker

To this day I think I just wasn't suited for this world. Maybe I should have been a Medieval monk, spending my days in peaceful silence, sitting atop a sun-splashed bench beside a fountain in a monastery courtyard, drawing intricate illuminated manuscripts. Losing myself to otherworldly concepts of beauty and perfection, and never worrying about being popular or athletic or successful. Totally protected from the grim competitiveness of the world.



"Martin?"

Adele's voice was muffled and far away.

"Yeah?" I had to shout now that the basement door was closed.

"Are you finished yet? It's almost nine o'clock."

"I'll be up in a minute, honey," I called up, though I wanted to say I'd be up when I was good and ready.

When I first met Adele, in college, she actually seemed interested in my hobbies. I guess you could call her a tomboy, though not the athletic sort. She hung around with guys like me: the ones labeled nerds and geeks because we weren't ashamed to play chess instead of football, or to read science fiction while everyone else was out getting drunk and laid. Back then I never felt self-conscious with her like I did with other girls. She was just as interested in talking about Star Trek as her economics class. She simply wanted to learn about everything, and treated me with respect as an authority on my arcane interests.

Back then she was also achingly desirable. She had a small, upturned nose, straight black hair in bangs, and a way of sticking her head forward when she talked as if to give her words more impact. I was one of the few guys who noticed how nice her body was, hidden within her baggy boy's clothes.

We never actually dated in college. She went off to Wharton for her MBA, but I later came into contact with her again through mutual friends. We didn't date long before getting married. And once she

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had that taken care of, she seemed to change. She no longer read science fiction or cared about computer games. Now it was the world of making money that interested her, so she milked her fellow brokers for knowledge the same way she used to question me about my hobbies. Once she had money, her next course of study was the realm of status. To learn this in Manhattan was an enormous undertaking, but she plunged into it with her usual enthusiasm, each month spending close to my take-home pay on her wardrobe and hair alone. When we bought our brownstone in Brooklyn Heights, I believe she was glad at first that I retreated to the basement. I was beginning to be an embarrassment to her. I think she would have forgotten about me down here except for the fact that the moment she turned 40 last year, childbearing became her newest and—until now—her only unattainable obsession. As Dr. Fenwick had put it, her window of opportunity was rapidly closing.



One Saturday afternoon I was laying some new track (which I, a perfectionist, do by hand, actually spiking the rails onto miniature wooden crossties, instead of slapping down unrealistic pre-fab sections of track). Adele was supposed to be outside, weeding the small flower garden in front of our house, when I heard her voice up above in the kitchen, along with a man's and a woman's I didn't recognize. Suddenly three sets of footsteps pounded down the wooden stairs to the basement. The train on my branch line, which ran against the back of the staircase, shook until it almost derailed.

"The treadmill's over there in the corner," Adele said. "Fifty dollars is fair, isn't it? I had planned to set up a little gym down here, but I've been so busy. And I didn't plan on Martin's train set overrunning the place. Martin, you know the Vanderpools."

Mrs. Vanderpool was a small woman with a rodent-like face. Her husband was tall, muscular, square-jawed—you know, the ex-jock type.

Ward Parker

"Quite some setup you got here," the husband said, "I've never seen a train set this big." His eyes showed he couldn't figure me out.

"It's just a hobby," I replied, quickly removing my engineer's cap and placing it out of sight. "And it's not a train set. It's a model railroad."

"Our two boys would just love this," said the wife.

"They're welcome to come by and see it," I offered.

"They've been awfully busy with soccer," the husband said too quickly.

"I'm sure they can find the time to stop over," said the wife.

"Just not alone," the husband said under his breath, studying me.

"Martin's train set was featured in *Model Railroader* once," Adele chimed in.

I was getting very uncomfortable, as were the Vanderpools.

"So. Do you guys have any hobbies?" I asked.

"Golf," Mr. Vanderpool said. "Twice a week without fail."

"Why don't you join their group sometime?" his wife asked me.

"Sorry. I don't play."

"But he does have a little golf course on his train set somewhere," said Adele. "That's truly miniature golf!"

Adele giggled and Mrs. Vanderpool nervously did the same. Her husband looked at me with an expression of both suspicion and ridicule.

"I'll stop by next week to get the treadmill," he said, inching his way toward the stairs.

That night was the first time I couldn't do it. I don't know what went wrong. Everything seemed normal until Adele said something about hoping to get pregnant that very night, and I saw a flash of desperation in her eyes that was so uncharacteristic of her. I've never considered myself a great lover, of course. Adele was the only woman I've ever been with (not counting a misbegotten two-night fling in college with an unhappy Chem major), and I don't exactly have the Kama Sutra memorized; but I can do pretty well with the basics. Or so I

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thought. That night I felt as if the legacy of Adele's 41 years of stellar achievement was now depending entirely upon me to protect and uphold. She had sacrificed her most fertile years in order to provide for us, and now the least I could do is hold up my end of the bargain. It was all up to me to perform. All the people in the stands were watching me as the fly ball descended from the sky. We were only a few minutes into lovemaking when suddenly I couldn't go on.

"What's wrong," Adele had asked.

"Nothing. Just problems concentrating. I guess I have a lot on my mind, lately."

"Running a railroad full-time is pretty stressful I bet." I know she meant it as a joke but her sarcasm soured it and only made matters worse for me.

Adele did what she could to help me, but it only increased my anxiety.

"I guess tonight's just not good for me," I said finally.

"Unfortunately it's good for me. Are you sure you're trying?"

"It's not a question of *trying*. It's supposed to just happen."

"Well it's not happening. So please, try harder, honey."

At that point, my face thoroughly reddened, I got out of bed and hid in the bathroom for a while. When I came out, Adele was still waiting for me.

"Are you OK?" she asked. "Just relax for a while and we'll start over."

I didn't know what to say. I didn't want to fight her off. I just wanted to be alone, so I went into the guest bedroom, locked the door, and went to sleep. That was months ago, but it was a familiar scene by now. For me, every "Baby Night" brought with it the memories of all the failed ones before, a deep guilt that I had let Adele down, and a resentment that she was forcing me to try and fail again. Which, of course, made choking all the more likely.

Then they came out with the miracle drug, the famous Blue Pill. Ostensibly it would make me perform no matter how inadequate or

Ward Parker

depressed I felt. With a little help from Adele, the pill would make me hard whether I wanted it to or not. The chemical circuits would bypass my brain and the sex would be a matter solely between Adele and my erection, which would probably suit her just fine.



“Martin?” Adele called from the other side of the basement door, her voice now sounding hurt and needy. “You’re missing Ally McBeal.”

The Blue Goose was still making its run, and I wanted to dispatch a switcher engine to pick up the three flatcars loaded with lumber waiting on the siding beside my sawmill.

“I’m almost done,” I called.

I heard the door at the top of the basement stairs open and I instantly tensed. But she didn’t come down.

“Tonight is Baby Night,” she said. “Why are you making me wait?”

“For God’s sake, I’ll be up in a minute!”

She paused, and then the door closed. I gratefully returned to my railroad just as the Blue Goose coasted through Horseshoe Curve. I increased her speed to the point of recklessness and thrilled at the sight of the heavy, dark blue passenger cars hugging the rails of my expertly laid track. She had never derailed and never would, not on my railroad.

I knew, however, that Adele was back in bed waiting for me, wearing her negligee in the blue light of the television set. On the bedside table would be her tube of lubricant jelly. Beside her the sheets would be peeled back like an open envelope, into which I would slip my flabby naked body and roll with a grunt against her. I would go through the carefully choreographed steps of foreplay, finally removing her negligee. Soon, if the pill did its work, I would become a raging love tool, a stunt dick in a porno movie. I would perform as dependably as

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a robot. Then, afterwards, we would lie there in silence and I would feel completely alone as usual, inhabiting a world that had become so foreign to hers.



The Blue Goose pulled into the station in the hamlet of Larksburg, and left exactly at 10:02, a scaled-down three minutes later. She was right on schedule and would reach Adelphia in an hour. The hum of her motor and the clicking of the passenger cars' wheels soothed me in a way I hadn't felt since I ran my first model trains as a kid. I imagined my son sitting on the stool beside me, breathless with the sight of the sinuous turns the Blue Goose made as she wound through the pine-covered foothills. I could feel his cheek resting against my arm as I nudged the throttle up a notch. If I had a son I would let him take over the controls and lead this majestic train through the tunnels, over the trestles and into the intricate wood and plastic city that I had built for him.

The basement door opened and I caught my breath. I was surprised to see it was already 10:45.

"Martin?"

"I'm just finishing up."

Just then the Blue Goose approached a grade crossing, and through force of habit I did what I always did, what railroad regulations said I had to do. I blew the locomotive's whistle.

I heard a muffled curse at the top of the stairs and the slapping of Adele's slippers coming down. She turned the corner and swept toward me in her white terry cloth bathrobe. Her face was boxcar red.

"Martin, you've been down here all day long. I don't ask much of you, but tonight's Baby Night."

"I wasn't here all day. I sent out some resumes."

I saw Adele's eyes grow sad as if she finally understood something.

"You're not attracted to me anymore," she said.

"Of course I am."

Ward Parker

"You think I'm fat, don't you?"

"Adele, please."

"Then why are you avoiding me? I'm not stupid, you know. You can't make me believe your train set is more important than our marriage."

I stood up and towered over her, but felt ridiculous wearing my engineer's cap. I flung it to the floor.

"Adele, stop pressuring me. Do you hear me? You're just making it worse. I'm sorry I've let you down. I can't tell you how sorry I am."

"You can't give up now. I know you can do it," she said in a deepened voice. She moved closer. "I know you can. You're just depressed, that's all. Did you take your—"

I stepped away from her.

"I'm not using the goddamn pill, do you hear me? I've got to have some. . . pride. I should be able to do it on my own, without pills. I'm sick and tired of you treating me like a child—assigning me chores, telling me when to sleep, when to have an erection. . ."

I turned away and looked out over Adelphia, the mountain, the river valley stretching to the lakeshore. A kingdom without an heir to inherit it.

"Not tonight," I said. "Maybe tomorrow. We'll try tomorrow night."

"Fuck you," Adele said in a frighteningly flat voice. "Fuck you and your goddamn toy trains."

She flung out her arm in disgust and there was a horrible crunching sound as my sawmill shattered and a flatcar loaded with lumber danced across the epoxy river. Three walls were flattened, and the roof was crushed. Scores of miniature planks littered the wreckage. I felt as if I had been slapped in the face. Tears welled in my eyes.

Her expression was pure brattiness. Her eyes flashed with the pleasure of revenge. She raised her hand again, and I saw she was going for Adelphia's main passenger terminal building, a grandiose Victorian-era structure covered with gingerbread detail. It was one of the center-

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pieces of the city I had named for her and her hand was swinging toward it with the inevitable force of a tennis forehand.

I don't know how I moved so quickly. I caught her wrist with my left hand just before it smashed into the station. She looked at me surprised, then angrily, before making an attempt with her left arm. I reached across her breasts and grabbed at her forearm, less successfully this time, and she was able to snap off a couple of telephone poles. By now I was more furious than I had ever been at anyone before. Adele lunged again and I had to use all my weight to push her backwards, away from the mainline. Somehow our feet tangled and we ended up on the floor, rolling about savagely. It was like wrestling a cheetah, except this particular one was calling me a coward and a wimp and a faggot and a lot of other words that haven't been hurled at me since my father was alive.

"Respect me," I shouted back, "respect me you goddamn bitch!"

Finally I got all of my considerable weight on top of her and held her arms, keeping her lower body pinned with my hips. There was still anger in her eyes, but she was panting from the effort to break free. Loose strands of hair covered her glistening face and I felt her breasts beneath my chest pressing against me with each breath we took. Her eyes softened and she smiled.

"It's not a joke," I said.

"I know."

I held her down. She was completely docile now. And somehow it happened there on the floor, beneath my model railroad layout, in a place that no one besides me had ever been—among the sturdy wooden legs and intricate patterns of braces that supported my world, the nests of wiring and bundles of cables that made it live. Somehow we began clawing at each other's clothing, grunting with impatience. And then, as an athlete would say, I performed in the clutch. I didn't choke, nor did I even once consider the possibility. And through it all, the wheels of the Blue Goose clicked and hummed as she made endless loops around my railroad above.

HP

HONORABLE MENTION  
MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE FOR POETRY

**Uncoupling**  
by Devorah Namm

She took the gravy boat from Venice  
Left behind ceramic mugs  
Insides stained like yellowish teeth  
Decorative shapes of open mouth fish  
Hardly recognizable  
Like the faded memories of the  
Caribbean trip where they danced  
Their way around the pill box of an island  
Drank one too many Bahama Mama's  
Left small puddles of half digested  
Crab legs, baby shrimp parts  
When the glass bottom boat lurched  
During a sudden rain storm  
And they lost their balance from the inside out.

After the affair  
They settled in separate islands in the house  
The front stoop a drawbridge they crossed each evening  
Her eyes glazed from the pretense  
His eyes watery with regret.  
At night he held her like a new bride  
While she trembled  
Grew fins, small teeth  
Her body floating away  
Like a goldfish on the surface of a tank  
Not quite dead  
One eye open, searching for  
Fresh air, open space.

**The Yellow Eraser (for wcw)**

by Charles F. Burm

The lights bawled out in Washington Square.

I walked around the fountain thinking . . .

    this could be a peach . . .

    this could be a plum . . .

I called you from the corner near the diner and the newsstand to  
recite

a poem I heard from a little girl in Queens:

*The Yellow Eraser*

*so much depends  
upon*

*a yellow  
eraser*

*on a desk  
beside*

*a girl named  
Jessica*

Charles F. Burm

Your phone rang through the shadows and I spoke to your machine:

I saved the last black olive  
the green one too  
for you.

When I finished at the bookstore I almost lost the fruit  
so I put it in my pocket and I wrapped my arms around it  
and the streetlights all were silent snowing

words and water  
plums and peaches  
little girls named  
Jessica

empty olive jars.

## Beyond the Bluish Smoke by Mokuo Nagayama

(1)

Out of the mud-walled sheds standing among the terraced fields came faint columns of smoke. Grandfather (Mother's father) explained: "Mokuo, you see, they are drying tobacco leaves."

This mountain village was highly cultivated. The villagers grew fruit and tobacco, not to mention rice. Grandfather's home stood on the highest hill of the village commanding a fine view of the Seto Inland Sea and Shikoku in the far distance.

He was then the village headman. Like the Emperor Nintoku



who was delighted to see kitchen smoke rising here and there, he was happy to see the smoke ascending from tobacco drying sheds, suggestive of the vigor and liveliness of the village people.

On the other hand, my father was a heavy smoker with a nasty smell. Choked with his cigarette smoke, I wondered how he could

Mokuo Nagayama

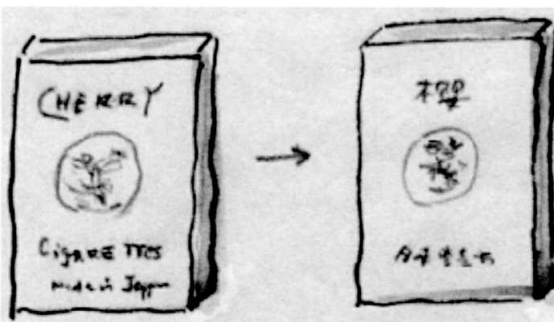
enjoy it.

When I was in the third grade of primary school, I attended a calligraphy class on Sundays. One afternoon I found the teacher's son sitting on the tatami before the family Buddhist altar. He was a student of Kurashiki Commercial School and was confined to his house because he had been caught smoking. He had to apologize to his ancestors as well as to his parents. It was the first time for me to learn the term "Kinshin" (disciplinary confinement). Why did he try such nasty stuff? Thinking it strange, I went upstairs to join the class.

Japanese major cigarettes around 1938 were Shikishima, Asahi, Hibiki, Tsubasa, Hikari, Cherry, and Golden Bat. I wondered which brand he smoked?

In 1940, because of an aversion to the enemy language, the names of some brands were changed: "Cherry" to "Sakura," "Golden Bat" to "Kinshi" with a respective rise in price.

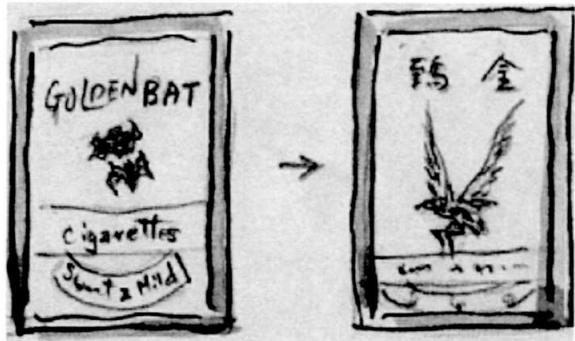
On December 8, 1941, when I was 12, the Pacific War broke out.



In its initial stage, Japan swept away everything in its way. But we saw a gradual shortage of materials, tobacco placed under the rationing system in 1943 with a further price hike.

(2)

In April 1942, I passed the entrance examination to Second Okayama Middle School. I had to submit



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the necessary documents including a letter of guaranty from someone in the area.

Some suitable person? No uncles, no aunts in Okayama. I consulted my elementary school teacher, Mr. Horiuchi, who told me to ask his friend, Mr. Yoshitomi.

I visited Mr. Yoshitomi's house accompanied by my mother. He had been kind enough to give me interview guidance before the entrance exams, but when it came to the letter of guaranty, he showed unwillingness, saying that he would be troubled if I should smoke in the future and be confined to my home. This was the second time I heard the term "disciplinary confinement." Mother, feeling miserable, left his house, her eyes tear-stained. Did I strike him as such a bad boy?

I went to Mr. Horiuchi for advice again. He kindly asked Mr. Yabe, a gym teacher at my new school, who was willing to say: "I'll see to it."



With his consent, the entrance procedures were finally completed.

During the first and second years, I did not smoke,

nor did I want to. We had some days without school to help families of soldiers at the front with rice and wheat harvests. In the field, if I had taken a fancy to smoke, I could have done so in secret, but I didn't.

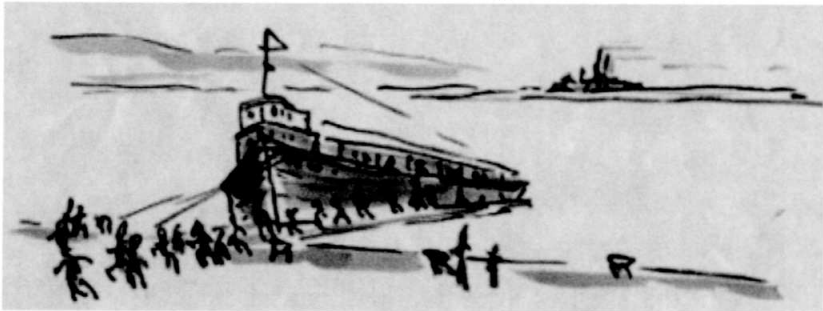
Mokuo Nagayama

On another occasion, in the first term of the third year, we went to the Tobacco Monopoly Office to perform labor service by carrying tobacco leaves. I could have smoked as much as I liked, if I had wanted to, for the tobacco supply was inexhaustible, but I felt no temptation. Down with the words of Mr. Yoshitomi I had heard upon my entrance to middle school! How he dared to say it like that, dubbing me a delinquent! A fit of anger surged up within me.

(3)

At the beginning of the war, Japan achieved many brilliant successes but now it was waning to a turning point. There were defeats in the Coral Sea and off Midway Island. Troops marched elsewhere from, or more accurately, evacuated Guadalcanal. Whole garrisons died gloriously like smashed gems, or more exactly, were annihilated in Attu, then in Saipan.

The summer of 1944 saw the execution of the Students Mobilization Law. At the age of 15, we were ordered to stop school and work in Kurashiki Aircraft Manufacturing Okayama Factory (now Kuraray Okayama Factory) located at the mouth of the Asahi River. From Kyobashi Bridge in the city center, we went there in a small ship called the Asahi-maru floating down the river about an



*Factory's Wharf* hour. To our astonishment, the factory was making wooden navy planes.

Whether my class teacher (then called a student supervisor) decid-

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ed on the job or the factory's personnel did, nobody knows. I was in Class A but put into a group of toughs and delinquents from Class B—their initials: A, H, K, K, N, O, O, O, S. The group was assigned to the Wood-Processing Section and engaged in the work of planning boards and rafters under guidance of drafted carpenters.

There we saw a variety of materials: cypress, cedar, pine. . . . At first we learned how to whet plane blades from carpenters. Next, how to plane wood boards. We did it at the worktable. The repetition of the same work every day wore out the right-hand pockets of our coats, making them hang down like regimental colors. Our future was in the dark, our present in feeble light. School lessons already abandoned, we were absolute workers.



Was it around this time that we started smoking? Each of us stole his father's ciga-

*Wood-Processing Works* rettes or tobacco and brought them to the workplace.

The first stage in smoking was called “kingyo” (Goldfish)—puffing out all the inhaled smoke. The next stage was to draw into the lungs about one-fifth of the smoke, choked with coughs. Then one-fourth, one-third...gradually the quantity that we could inhale increased. Dizziness and displeasure for a while, then our curiosity was whetted. In about a week, we could inhale all the smoke.

A youth has a wolf in his stomach. We visited the refectory twice at lunchtime. A bowl of boiled barley and rice with potatoes and beans. One bowl per person was the limit, but we managed to take another. Our hunger quenched a bit by smoking; we smoked before and after lunch.

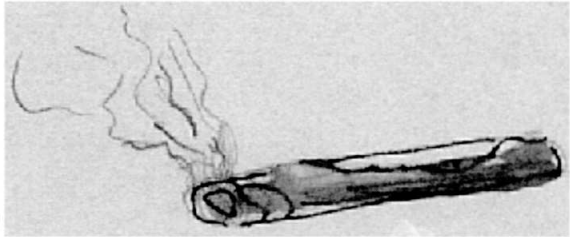
Mokuo Nagayama

One day we had overtime work. As it was very late, we decided to pass the night in the factory—to be more exact, stay at the workshop and sleep in the wood shavings. We had no cigarette then.

“I am wondering,” asked someone, “if we could ‘smoke’ these shavings.”

“Ok, let’s try,” said the rest.

Pine, cedar, cypress. . .an inexhaustible supply! The smoke along with some fire got into our mouths. Inhaling hard was not the way. Softly, slowly. . .that was the point. So many in the world, but no one rolled shavings to light and smoke them. We bragged about this eccentricity.



In the meantime, we became habitual smokers. Cigarettes were scarce, so we did not cast them halfway but smoked them to the very end. When our fingertips got nearly burnt, we used something like a needle to piece what was left of the cigarette and shared it among friends—each enjoying a couple of puffs. We dubbed this last past “true taste.”



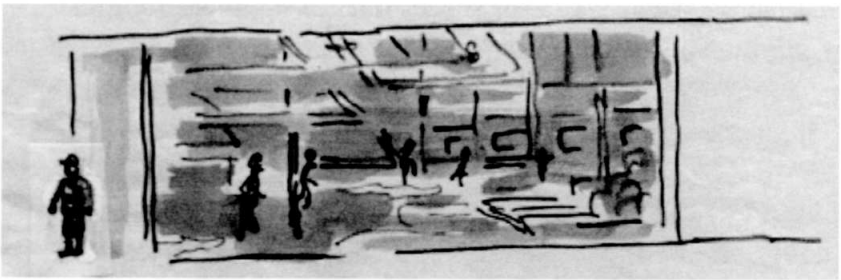
We kept fag-ends to undo them and make “new” cigarettes. An opportunity to learn the enemy language would never arrive again. We tore up English dictionaries and rolled the “leftover” in the paper to “manufacture” new

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products that required great efforts. We were first-rate craftsmen.

One day Mr. K brought some curious oval-shaped Mongolian cigarettes and gave them to us. We acquired bean-cakes and alcohol from the Research Institute of the factory, which made possible a triad—eating, drinking and smoking. The factory had a basement which provided a good place for our delinquent behavior. There, always in the gray-colored steam from the factory boilers, bluish smoke and our figures floated like shadow-pictures.

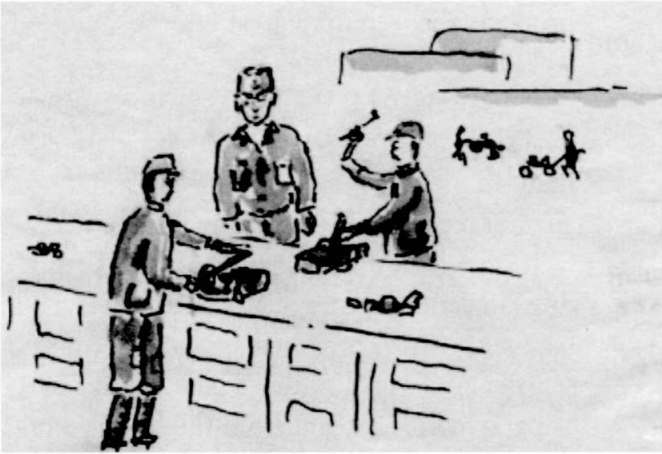


*Wood-Processing Works Basement*

Around January 1945, we wood-workers numbering ten were transferred to the Sheet Metal Works. Bidding Farewell to the world of wood, we entered the world of iron, where we made aircraft parts by using lathes, rasps and cold chisels.

We worked with Kosakuhei (navy workers). One of them tightened the control of me with these words: “Don’t loaf. Don’t loaf around.” I was not even free to go to the lavatory. Behind Kosakuhei stood a high-ranking officer carrying a bludgeon—a “Navy Spirit Infusing Club.”

Sometimes the Kosakuhei were ordered to form a line and clench their teeth for blows on their buttocks. Did this lead to



*Sheet Metal Works*

bullying the weaker such as myself working under their strict control?

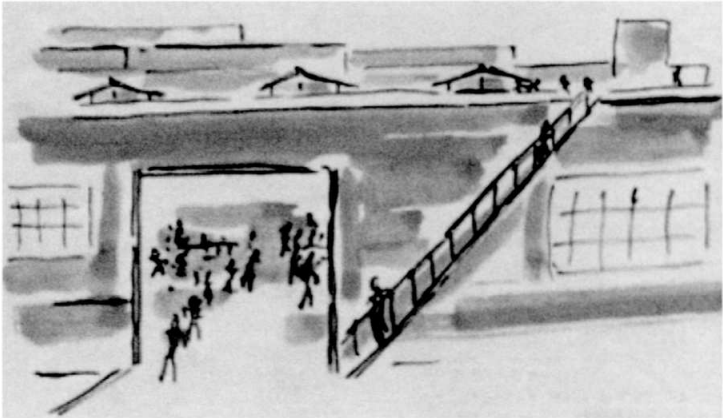
For diversion, we escaped to the roof of the works where there was a loft—a good place to smoke.

Even on the air-

raid alarms, we didn't get in the shelter but ran up to the roof to enjoy smoking in a world of our own.

(4)

One afternoon, in a corner of the Sheet Metal Works, I happened to find a



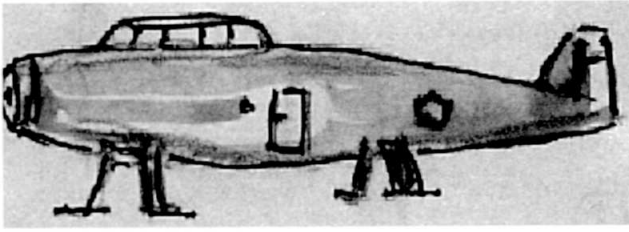
plane—only its body without its main

*Sheet Metal Work's Roof*

wings. I had often seen wooden wings in the Assembly Works, but it was the first time to see the body. We were informed vaguely that it was a navy training plane, so we did not know its type and name.

At that time I chanced to be with Sen-ichi Akiyama (commonly known as Sen-chan) who had been working in the Sheet Metal Section since the mobilization.

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Which of us, I can't remember, either he or I suggested: "We don't have to go up on the roof. Let's get

into this plane for a smoke."

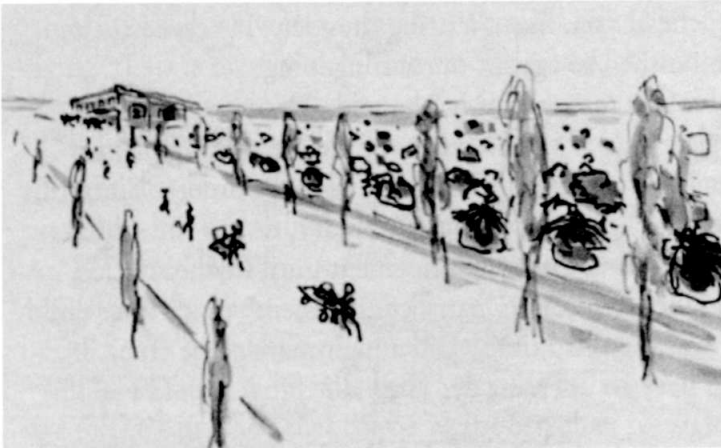
We entered the plane. Inside were metallic bones covered with duralumin boards—a dark and quiet space suitable for a smoke. We lit a cigarette.

After a couple of puffs, there came a voice from the tail: "Hey, what are you doing?"

Who can it be? Nobody else can be inside! We held our breath.

An employee approached from the dark and shouted: "What a nerve you've got to smoke in the place! Get out! Go to the section chief, Mr. Sakakibara." He opened the door and dragged us out. "This is a workshop. First, go to the section chief rather than the school supervisor."

It couldn't be helped. We were caught in the very act. No alternative but to do as we were told. Through a throng of employees and fellow students, the two of us, with drooping hands, went out



the east exit and plodded along the poplar road to the QI (twin-engine all-wooden plane) Assembly Workshop

*QI Assembly Workshop*

Mokuo Nagayama

where the chief had come on business. We went into the office dragging our heavy feet.

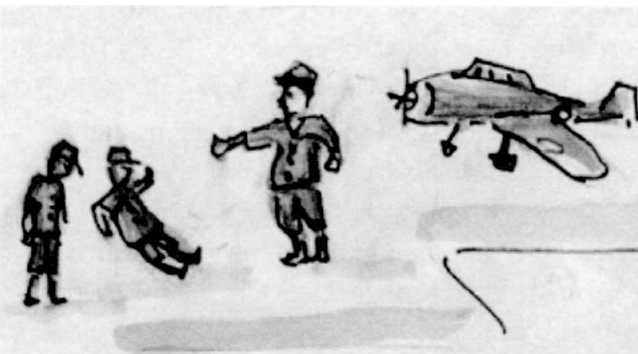
“We smoked in the plane in the Sheet Metal Works,” we confessed what we had done.

“We were caught, scolded by an employee and were told to come to the section chief.”

“You fools!”

He struck us on the head all of a sudden. We were still 16-year-olds of small build; we were knocked down. Each staggered up, then another blow. We staggered back again, then straightened up.

“You are still students. What a disgrace that you should do such a thing! I’ve never heard of a minor smoke in the plane and a war-



plane at that.”

Clenching our teeth, heads down, we listened to his sermon, with its rhythm, severe and gentle, like a mine explosion,

like a beneficial rain, like a roaring thunder. He earnestly and repeatedly admonished us against our wrongdoing.

“I can’t leave this matter as it is,” he said. “Now we are in a national emergency. In this sacred factory we are making planes according to military orders, that is, the Emperor’s orders. Since this happened here, first I’ll report it to the military, not to the school authorities. You’re disciplinary confinement until further notice.”

I had heard the term “disciplinary confinement” twice since childhood and this was the third time. Did a nightmare come true? Did Mr. Yoshitomi have an unerring eye after all? How should I apologize to Mr. Yabe?

In the meantime, a “Kempei” (military policeman) came. Each of



us was made to enter a separate room.

“Why did you smoke,” he grilled me, “in the sacred works, in the sacred plane?”

What I did was a fact. I admitted it. I did not receive cruel treatment for confession but I was at a loss for an answer to the question why I had smoked.

“Your school will send in a petition for your release,” continued the Kempei. “You can’t remain a middle school student. Now is a critical time! If you switch to a military school and devote yourself to the country, your delinquent behavior will be erased. If not, give up your school and be a general worker.”

Many students from our school had gone to the Military and Naval Academies but we two would be boy fliers, not officers. By now, Japan was in the final phase of the war with the situation not in our favor. Officers and men were the same. They would die sooner or later.

The circle of entreatment spread with our rough friends at its center. Our class teachers came to know this situation. My teacher, Mr. Ueda, and Sen-chan’s teacher, Mr. Nakahara, frantically negotiated with the military police for our release.

Mr. Nakahara with an anti-war thought talked with the military, saying “This is merely a childish smoking case,” but was rather scolded because he had long been watched as a leftist. Mr. Ueda was not a leftist but was believed to be a man of free thought only on the grounds that he was a teacher of English—the enemy language. He entreated, but the military would not budge.

We apologized for our misconduct and heartily thanked teachers and friends for their many kindnesses but we were completely caught in the hands of a destiny beyond human control.

The military thought it better that we two should be separated, one to the east, the other to the west. Sen-chan to Tsuchiura, Kanto. Me to Kanoya, Kyushu.

Mokuo Nagayama

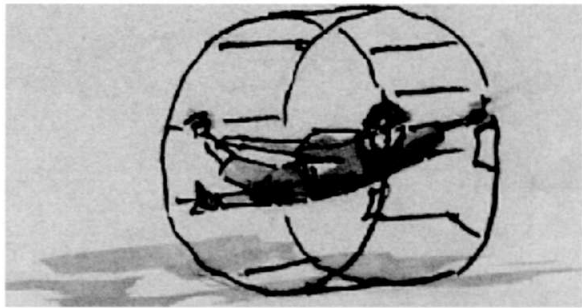
I did not know what became of him. The military authorities forbade our mutual correspondence.

(5)

In Yokaren (Navy Pilot Training School), there were 4 classes: A, B, B' and C. In 1945, the application was reduced and the training period shortened. I was qualified to apply for Class C—a six-month crash course.

Every day for a couple of months, severe training continued. Practice rather than theory mattered. Acrobatic exercise to increase our sense of equilibrium. Long-distance races to develop endurance....

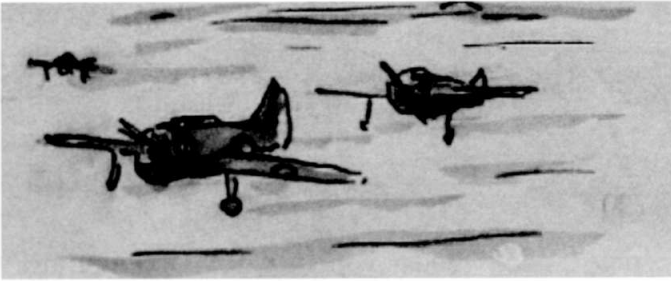
Smoking regulations were very strict there. Smoking was never allowed not only in the plane but also in the hangar, on the apron and in the plane line. No smoking 24



hours a day except in the command post and waiting room. Was it because of the gasoline we used?

When I was a student, I had smoked in a plane where even a regular navy man was forbidden to. Even though I would not reveal my past misdeed, deep down I felt proud that I had done what no one else could do.

Being a minor still, I could not smoke in public, but some teachers tacitly approved it. One day after lunch, I had a smoke in secret and then came out to the open, where I found a pudgy plane—the same type as I had made in the factory. An officer stated, “This is a Shiragiku (White Chrysanthemum).”



Was it only three months ago that I had been caught in the act while smoking with my friend in

the plane and ordered to give up school? It was a turning point in my life. I wondered how all of my classmates were getting along. Still smoking on the roof of the Sheet Metal Works?

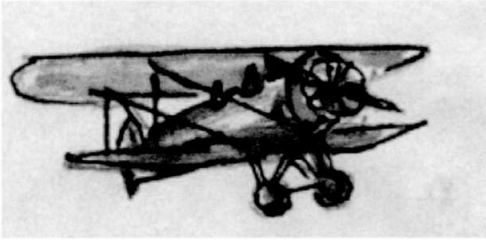
Before long, I learned Shiragiku was a Tokkoki (special attack plane) by which your fliers carried out suicide-bombing missions. Originally, 780 metal planes were produced. Because of their slow speed, they were despised by the enemy as “turkey shoot” in the Battle of the Marianas. The number of Shiragiku decreased. A type with cloth moving vanes—ailerons, rudder, elevators—took its place. Then a further shortage of materials led to the development of a type with main wings made of wood. It was the same as the metal plane in terms of speed and power. Since they were Tokkoki planes, metal or wood, either one would probably shot down before accomplishing its mission.

As usual, Lady Nicotine lived in me. Days of smoke-love passed along with severe training. When out of cigarettes, I opened my mouth beside seniors smoking in public, and inhaled the smoke they exhaled. When teachers were around, I inhaled through my nose without opening my mouth.

When I thought of this way of smoking, Sen-chan’s face came to my mind. What kind of way did he find?

Our training plane was they type nicknamed “Red Dragonfly.” The front seat was for the trainee, the rear seat for the instructor. First of all, ground training was conducted. The plane checking procedure, engine starting, taxiing—this practice took only three days.

Mokuo Nagayama



Then came the take-off and landing practice. The instructor, with his eyes all the sharper, gave repeated scoldings from the rear seat. Trainees had more rebukes

even after the practice session. "Today you were not concentrating!" "No baby play, mind you!" "You lack strength!" "You'll never be a good pilot!"

The scolding words were the same every day. The training increased its vigor day by day. After two weeks of the flights with instructor came the solo flights. We received directions through a radio from the instructor on the ground.

The chocks taken away, I moved to the starting point. The engine roar became louder. The plane increased its speed. Not being heavy, it took off in a minute. Houses, paddy fields, cars flew away. Wind pressure was severe on my face. The plane rose up bit by bit with great power. The roar grew less loud. On the left ahead, the airfield was seen. The runway drew close. Bang! Bump! Thump! I landed! Duration of light: five minutes.

Pilots had to be trained rapidly through a repetition of drills and thrills. Though lots of time and expense had been used to train previous pilots, we were inexperienced fliers who would be sent to the front as quickly as possible.

Most fliers could take off but not land well—especially on the carrier. I heard a child-like greenhorn salute, an officer saying, "I can leave the ship but not land on the deck." It was enough if they only could take off to launch a ramming attack against enemy ships with 250 kg bombs! There would be no returning.

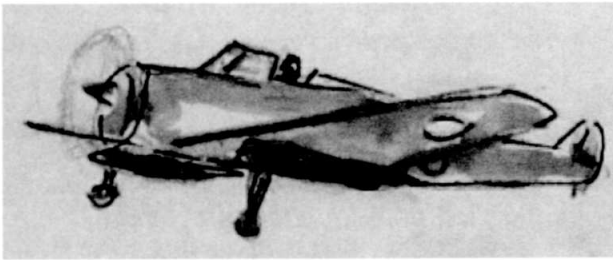
(6)

The war situation deteriorated: In the battles of Midway, the  
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Marianas, Leyte, our combined squadron had a deathblow, we learned. If things went like this, the situation would be beyond recovery by ordinary measures. A drastic step had to be taken. Japan had no choice but to launch a ramming attack on a large scale—"one plane against one ship." Even the training plane was to be used in combat. Thus the Shiragiku Tokkotai (special attack unit) was organized.

Shiragiku which was not suitable for a swoop had to approach an enemy ship at a super-low altitude (less than 100 m.) to avoid the enemy's radar. Just before the strike, it was to rise and make a gentle descent and then dive into the enemy position. With a view to its powers, Shiragiku's strategy was to take off at midnight and dive early in the morning.

The highest speed of Shiragiku was 226 kph, but with two 250 kg bombs loaded, its speed went down to 200 kph. That was why night flights were carried out.



Could such a heavy plane take off? Slow Shiragiku, heavy Shiragiku! When the runway's tip was a hollow, the plane, even after

running the whole way, sank for a second and disappeared. Then it came into view again. It made it!

The Shiragiku Unit was not accompanied by any escort planes which were normally used to confirm the battle results. A Shiragiku flier had to recognize his target and report to the Base before starting his suicide strike. In the case of a warship, he radioed the signal: "Seta...Seta..." then sent a long cord: "Tsu..." pushing the tapper down. When the radio transmission stopped, it was time of his strike, the time of his death. "Hota...Hota...Hota..." for the enemy

Mokuo Nagayama

carrier; “Yuta...Yuta...Yuta...” for the troop ship. The communication abbreviations were decided beforehand.

According to statistics, the number of Tokkoki planes, both army and navy, which sortied to the Okinawa front from April through June 1945 was estimated at 2500, of which the navy planes classified by type were as follows:

Zero fighter (631), the 99 type bomber (135), Shiragiku (130), Suisei (122), Ginga (100), the 99 type attack plane (95), scout plane (75), Ohka (54), Tenzan (39), the 96 type bomber (12)

Total: 1393

This shows, setting aside the Zero fighters, how many training planes Shiragiku took part in the Okinawa campaign.

(7)

Satsuma Fuji, Mt. Kaimondake (922 m.), soaring across Kagoshima Bay was Tokkotai's last point of farewell. Here they banked their planes.

The farewell to Kaimondake was their farewell to the country and also to their families.

Before the sortie, I thought, I would climb the mountain—not by an ordinary zigzag route. The most beautiful way to climb Kaimondake would be to climb it straight and alone—the most lovely line I could draw on my life's canvas with no better way of expressing my love and respect for the mountain. This would be my “note” to leave behind.

The ordinary path was supposed to take one hour and a half, but the straight climb was filled with a number of obstacles: bushes, fall-  
48 Harpur

en trees, rocks, gullies and ridges.... After four hours of struggle, I reached the summit.



There I gathered stones and built a little cairn for my own sake. The stubborn

fighting was over. On the mountain my feelings of melancholy and loneliness were veiled in the mist. Abruptly, on my lips were several lines of “Snowy Night” by Toshihiro Tanabe:

Men live, though in despair,  
beyond a space of time, somewhere  
in the place we never can find.

White snows that stay upon a height,  
gleam, whatever the light,  
to guide a man who is quite resigned.

(Trans. by MN)

These were the echoes of the mountain’s words which seemed to give some direction to my life. I lit a cigarette wet with sweat. Good! The freedom to relish it now! For a moment I forgot my status—a Tokkotai pilot destined to die in a few days. Instead, I thought of myself smoking on the sunny roof of the Sheet Metal Works or rather in the basement of the Wood-Processing Works, for I was in the mist where nothing could be seen.

I mused over memories of the days when bluish smoke faded into the dark space filled with whitish steam in the factory's basement. Are those friends still smoking? Still drinking alcohol with bean-cakes? Still fighting with other groups?

On the other hand, I pondered over the days of labor. We worked—worked like slaves. Worn-out clothes, worn-down Geta (clogs) which looked like Zori (sandals). One friend lost his fingers on a sewing machine. Another had his fingers injured on a lathe.

My fellow fliers began writing their farewell-notes to their families. One of them wouldn't write, saying "Writing to my parents will cause them trouble, which will shake my resolution."

Another said, "If I write, I'll have to go through the senior officer's inspection. I can't lay bare my heart."

The majority were writing. Some wrote Tanka poems, long letters to their parents. I took a quiet attitude.

Some one asked, "Why don't you write?"

"I already did," I said in my mind. "My message is the mountain-climb I did yesterday."

At last, order was issued: "Write your message and hand it in."

What should I do? Pondering with composure, I had to so much to write about. Only one sheet of paper was not enough. I intended just to write "Note" and leave the rest blank and then sign my name. But I remembered Victor Hugo's letter to the publisher and wrote like this: "?!" Hugo had written "?," feeling anxious about the sale of his book and received "!" which told him that sales were good.

In my case, I thought "?" shows my anxiety—whether I can reach the enemy ship successfully at a low altitude, while "!" means that I finally made it. But deep in my heart "?" was a question of slow Shiragiku as a special attack plane and "!" was an act of desperation to my destiny.

"What's this?" asked an officer. "You wrote nothing about your



parents.”

“It’s Shiragiku’s brave flight toward an enemy ship and finally hitting my mark,” I answered.

“Hum...well...”

He probably felt how I was burning with Tokkotai spirit. I was praised for the first time.

Slowly I smoked, sending out wreaths of smoke from my mouth. Sen-chan, we often did so, you know, in the factory. Inhaling or rather exhaling. Are you still doing it like this? Wreaths, big and small, floated away. One like a human face gradually changed its shape, looking like a crashed face. The shapes of sorrow finally faded into nothing.



Only a short  
span of life  
how sorrowful  
the dance of  
cigarette smoke

(8)

August 15. It cleared up from morning. The sun blazed down on us. Did the last night’s Tokkotai reach its destination? Had about 10 percent succeeded? The sortie order was finally issued: 12 midnight. I arranged my personal belongings. The final chance to smoke. I would relish it. A single day’s life.

How many times and how many cigarettes I had smoked! I inhaled deeply and exhaled. The smoke danced in front of me. After

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exhaling the smoke, I opened my mouth once again and inhaled it or rather ate it. I exhaled again. This I repeated. The bluish smoke became whitish and gradually the color lightened. Though I tried to emit smoke from my mouth, it did not come out. Perhaps it sank into my body. Then slowly I brought the cigarette to my lips for a second puff—a long, long, smoking time.

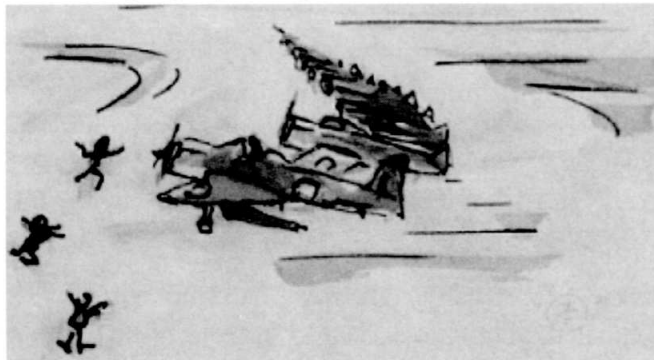
The departure of Zero fighters and bombers was expected in the daytime. The pilots were waiting around the command post, some on the chairs and some on the grass.

“Fall in, fliers!” The pilots rose to their feet and lined up in front of the command post, wearing white mufflers and headbands with the Hinomaru (the rising sun). The summer sun glittered in the cloudless sky.

The commander stood on the platform and gave the sortie order. Sake was served in small flat cups. Each pilot drank his and smashed his cup on the ground. Is it something like a rite of strewing flowers or an act of wiping off earthly desires? The pilots hurried to their planes and climbed into their cockpits and were ready to start. Just when the chocks of the Captain’s plane were removed, an orderly rushed from the waiting room to tell that the take-off had been called off.

Anxious about what had happened, the pilot returned to the command post, where all the officers and men were in great grief.

A rallying cry was given to all.



“The war is over,” declared the commander. “Our country has surrendered to the allied forces. At 12 noon, the Emperor will

make a solemn broadcast.”

All were dazed in dumb shock. Sudden mental relaxation after continuous strain. Until yesterday everyone had been expecting victory. There was something inexplicable in the matter. Something would have to be done.

Just at this moment, several “Gekko” came flying from Atsugi Air Base and scattered handbills appealing for everyone to continue fighting to the bitter end.

Notice to the Japanese People  
The Navy Air Force Command

The senior statesmen and the Cabinet ministers who lost their confidence in victory, caught in a trap of the red demon, shielded the Emperor and deceived and derided the nation and at last have issued an Imperial message unprecedented in history. We are thrown into consternation.

The Japanese Emperor is the absolute being. There should be positively no surrender. The Emperor’s Army should never lay down its arms. We in the Air Force have a firm conviction of ultimate victory. Foreign Allied Forces will be stationed in our divine country and execute the Postdam Declaration. It will give torture thousands of times greater than the sufferings borne in the continuation of war. It is as clear as day.

The senior statesmen of injustice and hideous wickedness are being purged by the Imperial Army. Thus, the nation’s attitude should be fully prepared for victory. Now is the time for a hundred million people of this country to stand up.

(Trans. by MN)

Palate 53

All the pilots had been utterly discouraged. But spurred by this written appeal, they thought they could not let the things as they were, and showed a strong stand toward the do-or-die resistance.

From beyond the whirless blue skies undisturbed by aircraft drones, the dead seemed to press us hard with this questions: "What happened? Why not follow us? Why are you standing idle?"

From somewhere, officers and men got together by twos and threes and shoulder to shoulder began to sing "Showa Ishin No Uta" (Song of the Showa Revolution).



Waves roar at Bekira's<sup>1</sup> abyss.  
Clouds fly wild over Mt. Fuzan.  
When I stand in the muddy world,  
my blood dances with righteous anger.

Men in power, though they vaunt above,  
have no heart to grieve for the State.  
Zaibatsu<sup>2</sup>, though proud of their riches,  
have no mind to think of the State.

(Trans. by MN)

1. theplace where Kutsugen, a

Beyond the Bluish Smoke

Chinese patriot (343 B. C.-  
278 B. C.), drowned himself,  
weary of the world.

2. big financial combines

Our morale rose, our youthful blood throbbed. But no matter how hard we shouted lifting up our fists, we could not fly the planes. The high-ranking officers including the commander tied us up and tried to break our circle of unity.

My mouth dried up, lips parched. I wouldn't feel like a smoke which I had loved for such a long time.

"Everything has come to end," I told the commander. "Please let me just get in my plane which was supposed to fly."

"Well, okay."

Dragging my weary feet, I made my way to the plane. Getting closer, I found the tires flat. However furious I got, the plane never budged. For fear of our uprising, the commander had told the ground men to let the air out of the tires.

Like a wingless bird I got into the unflyable plane and fell into a dreamy doze.... In proportion to the buoyancy of the dream, the plane was skimming the surface of the sea. Over the crest of the dream, the plane climbed up for a moment. With all the weight of the dream, the plane plunged—into an enemy ship.

In due course of time, the dream returned to the space beyond the bluish smoke I once puffed with Sen-chan in the wingless Shiragiku in a corner of the armament factory.

Afterword

In secondary schools under the former system, there were groups of students: Koha (rough) and Nampa (romantic). I did not belong to either. "Moku" is a slang term for tobacco. Mokuhiroi (butt gathering), Shikemoku (out of cigarettes).... In view of my own name,

Mokuo Nagayama

Mokuo, and my experience of early smoking, if there had been a group I should belong to, it would have been a group of “smoke-lovers.” But I quit smoking at age 50, more than two decades ago. Now I am a “smoke-hater.”

The former half of this story—from the beginning to the reproof of Mr. Sakakibara—is all based on fact. The latter half is a dream-like fiction. But the Song of the Showa Revolution is what I sang with friends in a corner of the navy plane factory on the afternoon of August 15, 1945.

The sketches on pages 33-43 are drawn from memories of more than 50 years ago, while those on pages 44-55 are all imaginary. As for the active service of the Shiragiku, I referred in part to a former Tokkotai pilot, Mr. Chisato Nagasue’s combat experiences.

With deep gratitude to him.

HP

An Interpretation Of The Dream  
Or The Way The West Was  
by S. K. McDonald

Even a whore must empty her chamber pot  
before sharing the foul breath  
of nightmares: a red cloth over a table,  
again.

a red cloth for gambling, a businessman  
listens to the same violin  
as a ukelele again and again.

Sometimes, when the whiskey wastes  
the man will ferment the milk  
of his mare, drink the rain, pray  
for a breakdown or to be stabbed  
near the abdomen.

To pull the sound of voices closer  
to understanding remains unlikely  
in a place with a bridge for one man,  
a river with heavy silt, and more  
then one thousand stones.

On Mondays the wind is slanted  
in favor of wiping out  
a drunkard's intestines like hallways  
swept clean from dust.

The night whispers  
of morning's  
disappointment

we're never sure  
what to make

Knives are what  
have separated us  
cards and conquest  
mean nothing  
anymore

If I had to  
I'd choose  
the opium  
to disappear

At a table  
beside the bed  
I've sat  
drunk  
& thinking of you

S. K. McDonald

And their horses in the shadows  
carry their ghosts  
in each other's hooves  
it goes this way  
because their tails  
are tied together.

With a frontier  
drenched by rain  
I've confused  
all of this

& died  
in the snow

An appearance of the shootout  
lessens the belief in God's ways  
of caring for the innocent  
or prize-winners of an evening  
in the whorehouse.



**Cell for Milton Kessler**  
by Eric Machan Howd

WINNER  
MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL  
PRIZE FOR POETRY

The room is full of him, my son; the  
outside the window hold memories  
tight as spider's web—what do you want?—  
bring him to me, back into my fears—the  
day gone to butterflies push and  
above grass? Push and fall, beating the  
the colors of wing melting on the  
blades, slowly rolling to the ground —a  
born of this blood, blossoms and ebbs—the  
on his sleeping—all I wanted to  
lost in the woods, memories in  
Nurses, white, the black bars, how can this  
protect? My arms strapped around my  
the prayer begins, the mind turns to

trees  
as  
please  
has  
fall  
air,  
tall  
prayer  
scent  
feel —  
fragments.  
steel  
back  
attack.

The prayer begins, the mind turns to  
and children visit, small faces and  
unbroken, untouched by terrors; they  
love, oceanless, my son taken by  
to out there and returned with burning  
in his eyes, (distorted and  
shadows and inward faces turned; these  
crucify the clouds, merciless,  
Empty . I watch my fingers scribble  
on the air and I hear his scream, the  
comfort. The man in the next bed is  
and I feel his stare, his knowing of  
my cowardice, he can smell with his  
These children's parents don't know how to  
my son roams the forests, insanE with

attack  
lips  
lack  
ships  
star  
misshapen)  
bars  
again.  
fear  
call  
blind  
all  
mind.  
cry  
sky .

Eric Machan Howd

My son roams the forests, insane with  
chant! ho!, only I know what he feeds  
at night under the moon. At first I  
to care, locked him in the cellar; the  
came and he was gone—his outline burns  
eyes in every day dream. He is out  
eating everything, studying fright,  
the heart beats; I hear news of his work,  
hunt > the smell of blood in word droppings. They  
did this to him, aliens from the new  
country; before, we watched the moons rise gray  
over staggered mountains, times when we knew  
our bond. What type of being can be bold  
enough to disturb the balances, old.

Enough to disturb the balances, old  
true friend, we have it all; these are the times  
of jarred honey in wooden combs, behold  
the age of garbage, men and space. The crimes  
remain the same, justice indifferent,  
and their paperwork sags in com-part-ment-  
al paneled rooms with plastic plants and  
smoke eaters. What ever meaning you evoke  
from the constellations — have it your  
way — all myths are fractalizing in our genes,  
I Atlas, I Job, Hunter of the Boar,  
doomed by my morals, a man fading green.  
In the mornings I smell his powder breath  
at night I hide beneath the windows, Death.

At night I hide beneath the windows,  
scrapes empty trees together  
and howls from the woods; my heart and my  
increasing in the moon moth's  
against the pane — they come and put me  
bed, strap my wrists and ankles in  
and the screams continue while day  
its slow seeping through the bars—  
A woman visits the  
his arms hugging air, lips kissing  
her, before she left—the  
on his face divides, what else can be  
Men are so tired, their hearts beat slow ,  
all we feel is what we're missing

Death  
...legato...  
breath  
staoccaoto  
in  
leather  
begins  
together.  
catatonic,  
someone—  
arithmetic  
done?  
sub side  
inside.

<p>All we feel is what we're missing          (somewhere a mother gives birth) and the          shifts, spinning, seismic to the Sun — the          is always male. O dear father what          would you put on my life? My son is          and men gather to drum in sage          sick, nervous, prayers on the four winds. A          light pulses from some          tower, we think UFOs, and          changes in the weather. I am          in drag, dancing. My memories          preserve my mind, the black box reads          I use words to kill ants, watch them          black symbols, arranged, their sound falls,</p>	<p>inside;          earth          tide          worth          dead,          circles,          red          communication          detect          anger          protect,          "DANGER."          crumble—          fumble.</p>
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<p>Black symbols, arranged, their sounds fall,          dark bodies spell L - I - F - E or          it L - I - V - E; idiots          answers into their chests, a woman          from the ceiling or was it man?          spider rebuilds its web in the          flies live off the lighted windows, it          be the times, I am old during the          bent; the night ocean trips tiny hermit          so they buoy and skitter,          to scavenge. A strong hand, electric,          my arm, turns me around, and winter          in wet dreams, snowfall dumb and coffin          the room is full of him, my</p>	<p>fumble,          was          mumble          cries          A          doorway,          may          day,          crabs          desperate          grabs          comes          breeze—          Son.</p>
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## Pogy Bobs and the Hyena of Death

by Hugh Cook

The news was all through the little town of Trotter inside of half an hour: West Virginia's population was down by one. Again.

"Did'ya hear?" said Pogy Bobs, a breathless age eleven, bursting into the kitchen, hot to instruct his mother.

"Hear what?" said Vicky Ann, who was cutting bread.

"The Silver Killer, he got another one."

Pogy had already accessed one of the hyena websites and had gotten a hot update of the news-break details. Dug out the eyeballs.

Yeah!

"That's very sad," said Vicky Ann, in a pro forma manner.

"And Horace Whelk," said Pogy, still fizzing. "Splam!"

"What?" said Vicky Ann. "Who?"

"The fat guy. Horace."

A big guy, this big ballooning muscle-and-fat dinosaur of a guy, real old, 14 years old.

"Horace?" said Vicky Ann, looking up. "The Silver Killer killed Horace?"

"No," said Pogy, impatiently. "Some car. Horace, he got hit. Splam blam! Thank you ma'am."

"What did you say?" said Vicky Ann, sounding distant, dazed.

"Just like spaghetti," said Pogy.

"Spaghetti?" said Vicky Ann, not comprehending.

"A mess," said Pogy, always amazed—frustrated, too—when his mother couldn't follow the pith and gist of his quick analogous shorthand. "Spaghetti. A car hit him, then a truck went over him. Hey—are you okay? Wow, that's some cut."

"So it is," said Vicky Ann, realizing she had sliced into the top of her thumb with the bread knife.

"Mom?" said Pogy, uncertainly.

But Vicky Ann just stood there, mesmerized, watching the liquid

ruby stuff come welling up out of her flesh.

"Mom," said Pogy, "you got to get on top of that. If you don't, you could bleed to death in a couple of weeks."

"I guess so," said Vicky Ann, faintly. "I guess so."

Then she walked out of the kitchen, sucking on her thumb. Pogy was worried. Blood can give you Aids—he'd learnt that at school. But how can you say that to your mother?

Later, when he listened at the bedroom door, he heard his mother weeping. He didn't think too much of it. Sometimes, if dad slapped her around a bit, mom went off and cried a little. Usually, however, she snapped out of it pretty quick. But, this time, she was still as bad as ever even three hours later. By now, Pogy was seriously troubled. There was no sign of dinner, and he was getting hungry.

So what do you do when your mom breaks down? Call the cops? Ring the Pentagon? Check the warranty? Phone up the local Loving Mom franchise and ask for a new one? Maybe he could sell the story to TV. My mom hacked at her naked flesh with this huge knife, then staggered into the bedroom, bleeding to death. Yeah.

Or, then again, maybe not....

Finally, Pogy rang directory service.

"I gotta speak to my dad," said Pogy.

Usually, dad went out with the boys to play poker on Friday nights, but this time he was in Pittsburgh for a job interview. The company doing the interview was putting him up in a hotel. After directory service came through with the hotel's number, Pogy phoned.

"We have nobody registered under that name."

"That's Gary. That's G-A-R-Y. Bobs. B-O-B-S."

Not known. Not there. Maybe space aliens had abducted him. Finally, Pogy extracted twenty bucks from his mother's purse and went out, first to McDonald's and then to a movie.



Hugh Cook

“So?” said Pogy, at dinner the next day, “where were you then?”

“Pogy,” said Vicky Ann. “You can’t talk to your father like that.”

“But I just did,” said Pogy. “Maybe I watch too much cartoon—too many cartoon shows. Maybe I’m hyperactive. Huh? Maybe we’re living on a toxic waste dump here. What do you think? Huh? Huh?”

Wham! His mother slapped him. Just like that! His face was red, hot, burning. Not the first time she had done it. The first time had been a major shock. But, these days, it didn’t slow him down much. The thing was, she never hit him twice.

“You just,” said Vicky Ann. She sucked at the air, tried to extract oxygen from it. “You just watch your mother. Mouth. When your mother. You’re talking to your mother—you just watch your mouth. Okay?”

“I don’t see what you’re so uptight about,” said Pogy, aggrieved, rubbing his face.

“You’re messing in something which is not your business,” said his father, a little drunk but speaking evenly. “You really want to know? Okay, Pogy. I was in Pittsburgh. Just like I said.”

“That’s not what the hotel says.”

“You attribute papal infallibility to the front desk?”

Two downsizings back, dad had had intellectual pretensions. It still showed, sometimes. This out-of-level stuff which came out of his mouth. Papal infallibility. But, hey—even Pogy knew what that was. Had read a lot, even that stuff about Martin Luther and the nails—wham! blam! Pogy had the kind of mind that chewed up entire curriculums. But this was dad playing dad, pretending he was the Omniscient One, not a loser on the skid road down. When dad plays dad, you play kid. A kid can’t even find Canada on the map.

“Papal staple,” said Pogy, playing age eleven, hamming it up a bit. The enthusiasm was sincere. The big fat bully: dead. No more Horace Whelk. Long live Providence, master of the timely bulls eye. “Hit him with a truck. Splam! Blam! Hot pasta! Wow! Great

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stuff!"

"Shut up," said Pogy's father.

"Good shot—right, dad?"

"Shut up."

But Pogy kept on, irrepressible age eleven. That was his role, that was what they wanted—a baseball-kid, not an IQ freak.

"Splam!" said Pogy.

And was down on the floor. A splinter of identity in a fractured universe. Overhead, his father. Breathing heavily. Pogy had no memory of anyone hitting him. His father had no eyes. Instead of eyes, darkness. Blobs of whirling red darkness. The darkness expanded, eclipsing the world. Then Pogy was in his mother's arms.

Reality had suffered a continuity glitch: his father had vanished, and the sun had moved to midday.

"Are you all right?" said Vicky Ann.

"My face hurts," said Pogy.

It was really sore. Throbbing. As if someone had hit him.

"Pogy," said Vicky Ann, nursing him. "Pogy. There's a decorum of silence. A certain propriety of speech you must master if you are to find your place in civilized society."

And, from the elaborate mannered intricacies of her speech, Pogy knew she was drunk, again. But there was no alcohol on her breath. Just the sour ketones of anorexia—she hadn't eaten. Oh, and another smell. Faint but detectable: the bruised perfume of her body. And that was when Pogy realized her face was marked. You could make out the smudged discolorations underneath the pantomime makeup.

As his mother observed the decorum of silence, Pogy made the necessary logical connections, putting two and two together to make four. The Silver Killer struck again, and dad was not in Pittsburgh at the time.

So dad beat her. Right? Yeah. Dad beat her because she knew, and she didn't like it. She knew that dad wasn't chasing a better job, no sir. Instead, he was creeping out to kill people. Because he was the

## Hugh Cook

Silver Killer, that's why.

My dad, the Silver Killer.

A kind of power in this, knowing that your father was the Silver Killer, and that it would take only one phone call to send him to the frying machine. Eyes boiling-blue eggs, sunny side up. Smoke coming out of his ears. Or have we started using that lethal injection stuff? You want the spike, dad? Or shall we fry you?

But, for the moment, Pogy did nothing.

I mean. He is your dad-right? And the dead women were-well, mom called them cheap. And maybe the hotel got it wrong. Maybe dad was in Pittsburgh after all. The hotel screwed up. Wrote his name as Bob Gary instead of Gary Bobs. Or maybe he checked in as John Smith or something. With, like, a girlfriend. And maybe that's why mom was throwing up in the bathroom this morning.



Things stood that way, delicately poised between knowledge and denial, for a week. That was when their new neighbor moved in next door and the underlying structure of the family's world started to totter.

"She's a Hyena of Death," said Pogy's father, studying their new neighbor through the scope of his sniper rifle.

And she was, too. No doubt about it. From where he was placed, kneeling on the sofa by the window, Pogy Bobs could make out her Hyena of Death T-shirt. He was fascinated. Of course, she had to wear the Hyena of Death emblem, as mandated by law. But to have it splashed with such unnecessary bravado right across her T-shirt-well, that was brazen!

Pogy's breath fogged the window. His stubby eleven-year-old nose touched the glass. He knew, right then and there, that he was going to meet her. He would knock on her door. He would walk right in. Commit an irrevocable act-like Martin Luther with the



nails. And would he tell on his dad? Well, maybe. Telling was an option. But the meeting came first. Do at least that, Pogy. Yeah. Meet her. I dare myself.

“First the crack house then the whores,” said his mother. “And now this! There goes the neighborhood.”

They saw her on TV that night. She was reporting from the site of the latest Silver Killer slaying. Once again, the Silver Killer had done the eyeball thing. Hot metal glistening, trembling, sucked down by gravity. They were always alive when the stuff splashed home. So how come the Silver Killer didn’t get burnt when they convulsed, making the molten silver splash? Or maybe he did get burnt, now and then.

These days, his last desk job ancient history, Gary Bobs was a welder once again.

Heat and hot metal.

An expert, but he still might get the occasional incidental burn. “...the standard rape and mutilation. The killer has now killed six times in six months, terrorizing West Virginia. Police have again repeated their call for members of the public to report possible suspects. This is Eleanor Mavis Glavergail, Hyena of Death, reporting from the scene of the crime for Voyeur Vision.”

Close up. Their new neighbor. Yes, that was her. And what did you expect to see, Pogy? Come on, truth it up.

Fact was, he had expected to see the saliva of hysterical joy dripping down her face. Had expected to see a big hyena tongue licking at the exudates of its own unclean excitement. Now he felt embarrassed, realizing that his Einstein brain had made a dumb eleven year-old error. Too much method acting. You act like a kid, you start thinking like a kid.

Eleanor Mavis Glavergail’s face betrayed no hint of slaverling animal. Instead, her face was intent, serious. A locus of significance. Here, in the glare of the TV lights, something austere and terrible was being brought to life. Fascinated, Pogy watched. He was starting

to understand. We hate her because—

“Pogy,” said Vicky Ann. “We have something to tell you.”

Oh boy. Here it comes. Your father’s the Silver Killer, but you mustn’t tell anyone.

“I won’t tell,” said Pogy.

“What?” said Gary.

“It’s not a secret,” said Vicky Ann. “Pogy, you’re going to have a little brother.”

“You’re, like... adopting a kid? Like... you know, the ads?”

“Ads?” said his father.

“Whatever,” said Pogy.

It was so obvious. The ads. Adopt a kid, a dollar a month and you can keep this kid alive. But his father couldn’t understand that kind of shorthand. Needed to have everything spelt out, letter by letter. C-A-T spells “cat”. Gary Bobs, that’s Bobs spelt B-O-B-S. Nobody here by that name.

“I’m pregnant,” said Vicky Ann.

“What?” said Pogy.

He heard and yet didn’t hear. Felt dizzy. Had this obscene vision—strands of DNA tearing themselves apart with this really gross squelching sound. Replication. Soft soggy kisses. Pregnant. A girl’s word. Giggling girls. Made him want to think of boy stuff. Footballs and baseball bats and rifles converted to full automatic fire.

“Pregnant,” said Gary. Then, explaining: “That means she’s going to have a baby.”

“She is?” said Pogy.

Playing dumb and stupid, playing age eleven to give himself time to think, only he didn’t know what to think. Pregnant, yeah, he understood pregnant, you do what you do to get Aids, no condom, it comes spitting out, rocketship heaven, the big fat egg sitting there, a screwworm docking procedure, then—

“How do you feel, Pogy?” said Vicky Ann.

“Uh,” said Pogy.

“He’s confused,” said Gary indulgently, tousling the head of his eleven-year-old son.

And Pogy was. He could feel the impatient anger in his father’s hand—could feel that the gesture of tenderness was just a moment away from murder. His father’s emotions were tight, stressed, conflicted. His father was a real mess. A big emotional toxic waste dump. And then there was the business of the operation. Which Pogy wasn’t supposed to know about, but did. The vasectomy. A roadblock for sperm. The screwworms can’t escape. You can do it for sport, but not for production.

“How do you feel?” said Vicky Ann.

“Uh,” said Pogy, mastering a happy eleven-year-old smile onto his face, “uh, a little brother—wow! Great!”

And, as soon as he could, he logged onto the best of the hyena web sites, the one with all the secret autopsy details. No sperm in the Silver Killer’s fluids. Expert opinion: the Silver Killer was vasectomized. So. If dad’s little brother’s father, he can’t be the Silver Killer. Or am I missing something?

Check.

Look for evidence.

And find what there is to be found about Vicky Ann Bobs and her husband Gary.



Vicky Ann Bobs and her husband Gary were out at the ballgame when the credit card statement came. Pogy touched it, then withdrew his hand. Didn’t dare.

“Come on. Imagine you’re a hyena. What would a hyena do?”

Hyenas lie, cheat, steal, bluff. They’re natural cowards. Sneaky. They’re the bad guys, so they have all the best moves.

“And his face changed,” chanted Pogy. “And he became—Hyena Man! Ta dah!!”

Once transfigured into Hyena Man, Pogy found the next step easy. He steamed open the envelope, took out the evidence, and read it. The day of the Silver Killer's last killing, there was no charge for any hotel room in Pittsburgh. But it seemed his father had used his credit card that day. To buy gas at a place just outside of Trotter.

Pogy made a copy of the credit card stuff using the copy facility of the family's fax machine. Then he stashed it under the loose bit of carpet in the south-east corner of his room, where there was still a faint sour lingering smell from the milkshake he had spilt a month back.



And now?

Now wait.

"I'm giving you a chance, dad," said Pogy, talking it through with himself. "Don't do it again, okay? Just one chance, you hearing me? You do it again, I'm calling the cops."

Or something.

But, come the monthly date, the Silver Killer struck again. Got into the hospital, this time. Into the maternity ward. Did not just the mother but the newborn. Ms Glavergill stole the filthy details from a morgue attendant and broadcast them to the world live on TV.

"Oh god!" said Vicky Ann, weeping.

Crooning and weeping, crooning and weeping, while Eleanor Mavis Glavergail, Hyena of Death, inflicted the details on the defenseless world.

"Filthy vulture," said Gary Bobs. "She's to blame."

"To blame?" said Pogy, not quite understanding. "I don't get it."

"That's because you're eleven," said his father.

But Pogy sensed a logical problem which had nothing to do with his being eleven.

"I mean...." said Pogy, pursuing the subject, for once actually

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hoping that his parents could enlighten him. “I mean, she doesn’t, you know, chop people up, hack people’s eyeballs out. She just says what happened, right?”

At that, his father went very quiet. And, for a moment, Pogy thought one of Those Times was coming. One of Those Times which sometimes followed his father’s all-night poker sessions “with Harry and the boys”, those monthly indulgences which brought him home at dawn, freshly showered, his mouth smelling of mint-flavored mouth wash, fatigue making his eyes look bruised and sullen in his relaxed, expended flesh. On those occasions, Gary Bobs just wanted to sleep, and, irritated by interruptions, would lash out quickly, and without valid justification.

“Pogy,” said Vicky Ann, speaking quickly, as if prompt intervention could cover Pogy’s indiscretion and save him from another beating, “I think we’ve heard enough of this. Just let it go—okay?”

“No,” said Gary, slowly. “The boy has to know how things are. The thing is, Pogy, she makes him do it. The Silver Killer. It’s the publicity, he’s hot for it, she’s making him a hero, if she wasn’t there he wouldn’t do it.”

“I get it,” said Pogy. “I understand.”



So. Is that why you do it, dad? Because the hyena turns you on? But she isn’t even pretty.

Thinking that, Pogy fell asleep, and had a confused dream in which he was beating his father bloody with a baseball bat. Like Al Capone. Splam! And then the dream changed, and Horace Whelk was hurting him. The big fat slob of a bully was digging into Pogy’s bicep, pinching the nerve. Torture without marks. Splam! Someone shoved Horace out of a car, and an oncoming vehicle hit him, and the truck coming up behind went right over the top of him.

Blood.

Hugh Cook

The dream shifted, and showed him a lingering trace of blood floating in clean water. In his dream, his mother held him close and squeezed. Anorexic breath, spoiled perfume.

“Change the channel, mom,” said Pogy, speaking in his sleep.

He was himself yet not himself. Her fingers were in his underpants. He endured a partial knowledge of a weird kind of blunt, angry ugliness which he could not quite bring into focus. Like something in math. Like the square root of minus one—you’re told it’s there, but you can’t quite imagine what it is, or what it would be if you were ever to actually see it.

And then the ugliness was on top of him, jumping, throwing him backwards, weighing him down, his mother’s face all mixed up with the smell of a dog, with the shock of a frog. His mother’s creamy brassiere melting down the shining shaft of his baseball bat, tense and greased. Bra. Brassiere. English. French. French lips web site. We want you, dude. Her thigh opening with a gasp, smiling upwards, spilling, wet and milky.

Waking from that nightmare, Pogy Freudened his dream. Basic Oedipus. You want to kill your father, rape your mother. So do it. Kill your father. All it takes is a phone call.

But, one glass of milk later, he felt saner. Truth was, he was too young for Oedipus. That stuff comes later—doesn’t it? And. Besides. I like it here. The State of West Virginia microwaves your dad, what happens to you?

“I’m going to pray,” said Pogy.

He didn’t believe in God—just a phase, or so his mother said—so he prayed to the Statue of Liberty instead. The very act of being down on his knees made him feel younger, simpler. And something else. An odd emotion. Unfamiliar. Maybe ... nostalgia? Yeah. Nostalgia. So that’s what nostalgia is.

After prayer, Pogy Bobs felt cleaner. Purged, in fact. That kind of dirty sex stuff just wasn’t him, wasn’t the real Pogy Bobs. Just vagrant web site images, that’s all.

And, when Pogy Bobs finally got back to sleep, he had no more turbulent Deep Freud nightmares. Instead, he had a strangely lucid dream of a candyfloss cheerleader, as sexless as the Spirit of Hygiene. When she came to him in his dreams, she was wearing a white T-shirt and white panties. The pink lettering on her white T-shirt bore a simple message:-

GOOD GIRLS SAY NO.  
I'M A GOOD GIRL.

This visionary Spirit of Baseball (or whoever she was) had a big white smile and a clean healthy body, and Pogy was vaguely aware (somehow) of the fact that each of her internal organs was hygienically wrapped in tissue paper.

"Hi," said the candyfloss cheerleader. "I'm Hillary Clinton. I'm you're Good Angel."

"Your," said Pogy, correcting her grammar—though, even in his dream, he was puzzled as to how she could err in differentiating "your" from "you're" when speaking.

"My your and thou art," said the Good Angel. "It's not on the menu, but we can order it. And how are you today?"

"We will be landing shortly," said Pogy, meaning that he was feeling just fine, thank you.

"That's great," said the Good Angel, understanding him perfectly. "Oh, and this is a golf ball."

A big dog nosed the golf ball, then ate it. Pogy was deep underwater by now, swimming through mists of lime green icecream in the company of a school of carnivorous baseball cards. The Good Angel swam beside him in the shape of an ashtray.

"Your parents are right, you know," said the Good Angel. "She is a Hyena of Death. She creates war, death, famine, ruin, chaos, earthquake."

"Who?" said Pogy, uncertainly.

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“You know who. Eleanor Mavis Glavergail—the Hyena of Death.”

Then the world grinned open, and Pogy was standing on raw volcanic rock. The sky was hot and blue and smelt of stale beer. Railroad cars rumbled by in the background. And there was the Mean Dude, standing there in raw denim and black combat boots, smelling of cordite and cigarette smoke, a flask of whisky on his hip, a bullfighting poster rolled up in his left hand.

“You know me,” said the Mean Dude.

“Yeah,” said Pogy Bobs.

Sort of. He had never seen the Mean Dude before, not in his entire life, but he knew immediately that the Mean Dude was a figure of power.

“Sardines and Mexico,” said the Mean Dude.

Hearing this, Pogy knew it was an offer of power and destiny. He was being given an opportunity to become, in his own right, a living version of the Mean Dude himself. To walk across the killing fields and leave the bloody tracks of his boots in the cellars of the slaughterhouse. To watch as Cain does Abel—to watch as Cain picks up that chunk of rock and smashes Abel over the head. To report, live on TV, as God burns Sodom and Gomorrah.

“Yes, the walls have fallen, and we can hear the injured screaming beneath the masonry as the invaders attack. This is Pogy Bobs, live from Jericho.”

To create it all, *ex nihilo*, from the blank vacuum of the TV tube: the barefoot girl running screaming down the road between the paddy fields as the napalm burns her, the pale faces looking upwards from the impossible abyss of the ditch, the bloated flesh floating belly-up in the swollen river.

To take the world—the clean, orderly world of school curriculums and retirement funds—and turn it into a capering carnival of torture, starvation, persecution, crucifixion, expulsion and death.

To see. To know. And to say.

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“Pogy!” cried Hillary Clinton in alarm, arriving in the guise of a bunch of yellow roses. “Pogy! Pogy! You are in danger of your mortal soul!”

“Yeah,” mumbled Pogy Bobs. “I know.”

Then a wind made of boot polish swept away the roses. The Good Angel was gone. And Pogy Bobs was alone again with the Mean Dude. Who was lighting two cigarettes and offering one to Pogy. Even though Pogy knew it was wrong, he accepted one of the cigarettes, and sucked on it deeply. The cigarette tasted of sulfur. And Pogy realized that they were standing together on a high place—the Mean Dude and Pogy Bobs—and that the Mean Dude was showing him the kingdom which could be his.

“This,” said the Mean Dude, pointing, “this is the prison where they beat me up. Kicked me in the kidneys. I was pissing blood for a week.”

Pissing blood for a week. For Pogy Bobs, age eleven, there was a genuine shock in those words. The shock of authenticity. This is where the real action is.

“And that,” said the Mean Dude, with a wolf-wet smile, “that’s just the start, Pogy, that’s just the start.”



The next day, Pogy Bobs came to his decision. There is a price for everything. The Mean Dude hadn’t said so—hadn’t even hinted at the subject—but Pogy knew. The Mean Dude was offering Pogy a new life, but there was an entrance price to be paid.

“So let’s pay it,” said Pogy.

And walked down the street and knocked on the door.

She answered.

“Hi,” she said. “I’m Eleanor Glavergail, Hyena of Death.”

The law forced her to announce herself like that. The whole world hated these parasites, these vampires who preyed on the suffer-

## Hugh Cook

ing of others, and, one day, they would probably be swept out of existence, their offices burnt, their bodies broken, their web sites scrubbed out of existence to make room for more stuff about downtown restaurants and Parisian fashion shows. But, for the moment, here she was, alive and breathing.

“Hi,” said Pogy Bobs.

So far, so good. But then he began blurting. His words rushed out like a herd of swine stampeding over a cliff. Panicked, a mad rush, everything happening too quickly, the edges of the world losing focus, the world becoming a tunnel.

“I’m Pogy Bobs, and my daddy is the siller, silver, Silver Killer, you know, he’s a weld, a welder, he, he’s killed, six, seven, how many women, I think I have to sit down, can I use your bathroom?”

Soon he was confronting the void of white porcelain. Drooling. Abruptly, his lunch came blurping up. But that was not enough. His stomach kept purging itself until the painful green stuff came. This was his punishment. He should have listened to the Good Angel. But it was too late for that. He was already inside the lair of a Hyena of Death, and something dreadful was sure to happen next.

“Come this way,” said the Hyena of Death, when Pogy reemerged.

She stumbled as she led him into the living room, and Pogy Bobs realized she was drunk, drunk and reeling in the middle of the afternoon, an alcoholic, as drunk as his mother, and he was disgusted and excited at the same time, and she sat with her legs apart, and her panties were black, and they smelt of lions, and that was shocking and impossible and had nothing to do with baseball, and once again he was realizing there were forces in the world more potent than video games, and it was the wrong time for this to happen, he knew it, he was way too young, it was happening too soon, he was not ready, but that was how it was.

“So,” said the Hyena of Death. “You’re Pogy Bobs.”

Even drunk, she had committed his name to memory. Already.

Names were her stock in trade. She bought people and sold them. She was a slave trader, trading human souls. He was not going to escape her.

"Yeah," said Pogy Bobs, eyeing the tape recorder, which had magically manifested itself on the coffee table, next to a big, serious book entitled "Exegesis: An Analysis of the Socio-Philosophical Implications of the Metaphysical Discourses of Dan Quayle", and the latest copy of Vogue magazine. The tape recorder was already running. "Yeah, I'm Pogy Bobs. The Mean Dude sent me."

"The Mean Dude?"

"A guy I know," said Pogy, remembering that she was a woman, and maybe women are different from men.

If women really are different from men—and, at age eleven, Pogy Bobs was aware of quite a bit of evidence suggesting that this is, in fact, the case—then maybe they don't get to meet the Mean Dude. Maybe something else happens. Yeah, probably. Girls just aren't going to go for the napalm thing, the killing fields vision. Girls want—but, hey, who understands women?

"This Mean Dude," persisted Eleanor.

"A kind of counselor guy," said Pogy. "I can't go into that, that's, uh, kind of personal, private and confidential, a kid and his counselor—okay? But he told me. To come here. And tell you. About my father."

"And your father..?"

Pogy told her all about it. His father missing, absent on a monthly schedule. The killings happening, monthly. The alleged trip to Pittsburgh which never happened. The gas bought outside of Trotter at the time when the Silver Killer was on the hunt.

Pogy Bobs told Eleanor Mavis Glavergail. And Eleanor Mavis Glavergail, the Hyena of Death, told the police. And the police gave her a privileged position: in on the surveillance operation, in on the kill. The result was local news only:

"Police Bust Gambling Ring."

Not just poker but blackjack as well. And a roulette wheel. A miniature casino, totally illegal.

The results? Well, to start with, Pete lost his job. Joel was indicted after the crack was found in his car. Stuart went home and blew his brains out with his .45. Gavin moved to San Francisco, and his parents never spoke of him again. Harry went to jail for statutory rape: his girl (like Stuart's) was only fourteen. And Pogy's father? Well, he got probation, but he lost his job, too. "You surely understand the company's position...."

And, after her necessary beating—it was somehow all her fault—Pogy's mother had first a miscarriage and then another relapse, and had to be taken away to the sanatorium again, possibly for the last time. After which Pogy's father went on an all-time drunk, and ended up in hospital with alcoholic poisoning.



Home alone, Pogy prowled the house, prying into the wreckage of his parents' life. The empty prescription packets. His father's HIV test—negative. In amongst his mother's lingerie, a box, rather bulky. Inside the box, nestled in mauve tissue paper, baseball mitt tattooed with the name of Horace Whelk.

"Horace Whelk," said Pogy, puzzling over it. Then, invoking the name of the Great Thinker, asked, "What would Dan Quayle make of this?"

As Pogy was not Dan Quayle, he had no way to solve the conundrum. The baseball mitt remained an unsolved aberration, a random piece of detritus from an alternate universe. No way to link it to this one.

That night, when Pogy fell asleep, the Good Angel and the Mean Dude came to him in tandem.

"You see what you've done?" said the Good Angel, shaking with wrathful fury. "You've destroyed your parents' marriage. One of

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your father's best friends is dead, another's in jail. Your father was a hard-working, stable family man, the salt of the earth. Was. And now look!"

"Yeah," said the Mean Dude. "True. See how it is? You can break generals, presidents, bank managers, you name it. Did you really earn those combat medals, general? Do you have a gun at home? That's how it is, Pogy. We can take them and break them."

"But you don't have to!" said the Good Angel. "You have a choice! You could live in a cleaner world, a better world! Brighter, happier, more cheerful!"

Pogy was confused, and not just because he was up to his waist in dead monkeys. What did he really want? He was on the cusp of a decision.

"I'm on the cusp of a decision," said Pogy.

He was good with words: it was, unfortunately, one of the sure marks of a latent tendency to Hyena-type behavior. Pogy knew as much. He had read about Hyena Syndrome in a psychology textbook. "I am a latent Hyena," he said, announcing it to himself. A latent Hyena, and too smart for his own good. He knew that, too.

"So, hey," said the Mean Dude, chewing on a dead gingerbread person. "Don't sweat it. You've got plenty of time to make a decision. Sit back, watch and wait. See what happens. Let reality shape you as it will."

"No!" said the Good Angel, furiously, hitting the Mean Dude on the head with a wet balloon. "You've got to get a grip on your moral destiny! You've got to fight this thing, Pogy! You can still be a Good Citizen, an Honest John! You must resist the Inner Hyena!"



Then the Silver Killer was caught. He turned out to be none other than Meekam Spleet, Pogy's school counselor. Live on TV, he confessed. He had done it all for the publicity. The glare of the TV

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lights: he was hot for it. It turned him on. If it hadn't been for the TV, he wouldn't have done it at all.

"It was that Glavergail slut," said Meekam Spleet. "The way her lips parted when she read the news. The tip of her tongue would come out, real pink, you could see it all wet, she was hot for it, I wanted to turn her on. She was asking me, begging me, that's why I did it."

The lynching of Eleanor Mavis Glavergail took place that very same day, starting at 3.17 pm precisely. They caught the Hyena of Death and they strung her up on high, kicking. Eleanor Mavis Glavergail, Pulitzer Prize winner, strangled slowly until dead. It was the perfect crime. There were no witnesses. Nobody saw anything. Someone doused the body with petrol and set it alight to destroy the forensic evidence—you watch enough TV, you learn about that kind of stuff.



The perfect crime? Well, it would have been, but for Pogy Bobs. He saw it happen, and he took pictures.

By 7 pm that very same day, Pogy Bobs was on a bus to Washington, D.C. He had three rolls of film sitting uncomfortably in a plastic bag which he had tucked inside his underpants. An agent who handled such products was going to meet Pogy at the bus terminal in Washington, and the agent was very, very interested.

Fatigued, Pogy Bobs nodded off to sleep.

"There's a price, you know," said the Mean Dude.

"Yeah," said Pogy. "Yeah."

Those whom Pogy had caught on film included his very own father.

"You're only eleven. They'll make you go live with your Uncle Hank. In North Dakota."

"Yeah," said Pogy, feeling flat, exhausted.

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"I mean, this is North Dakota I'm talking about! They don't even have electricity up there!"

"Yeah, I know that," said Pogy. "I've been there."

"Oh, sure, for Thanksgiving. But what would it be like to live there for a week? Or even longer?"

"I can handle it," said Pogy.

"You sure of that?" said the Mean Dude.

"You sell your soul to the Devil, there's a price to pay," said Pogy Bobs. Then, to stress his maturity, and his command of worldly wisdom: "I am eleven years old, you know. I know about stuff like that."

"You're confused," said the Mean Dude. "I'm not the Devil, I'm an aspect of the Evolved Interactive Consciousness, which is a big step up from the old-fashioned collective unconscious you've heard so much about. The Evolved Interactive Consciousness—okay? It's like the Internet, only you don't have to pay service provider fees."

But Pogy Bobs was no longer listening. He had slipped into a deeper level of the world of dreams. He was dreaming of the throne room of the empire—the Old Empire, upstream from the sea. The King sat on the Peacock Throne. Liquid gold trembled in the waiting retort. The air above the retort wavered and buckled, giving evidence of the heat within. The Executioner waited, stolid and impassive.

And Pogy knew: this is how it is.

You are the Messenger. If you deliver the Message, the King will have you killed. Your mouth will be filled with liquid gold. Your scream will be silent. You will perish because of your offence against the Hierarchy of Order.

The Hierarchy of Order is plain. The Father instructs the Child. The King instructs the People. The President instructs the Nation. You are usurping the natural order of things, and, for that reason, you must die.

But there is one more thing you have to know.

The King cannot deny the Message.

That is a rule of the Game.

The King does not want to receive the message, but he must listen. And, while he listens, the power is yours. It is you who calls into existence the defeat of the King's armies, the famine in the northern province, the revolt in the eastern seaport. You call into existence his mother's sickness and his sister's death. You create things which never existed before. The rats in the granaries. The breach in the treasury. The barbarians at the gate.

And your power is such that what you create cannot be destroyed. You may die, but what you create persists, and it persists forever.



Pogy Bobs steps forward. He has made a decision. He stands in front of the King. He is wearing his hieratic mask: the mask of a Hyena of Death. And he speaks the Words Which Cannot Be Resisted.

"I am the Messenger," he says. "And I have a Message."

HP



HONORABLE MENTION  
MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE FOR POETRY

**Photographs of the Insane: A Suicide**

by Corrinne Clegg Hales

*The Photographer secures . . . and exhibits . . . the well-known sympathy which exists between the diseased brain and the organs and features of the body.*

*Dr. Hugh Diamond, Surrey Asylum, 1850s*

Calm has spread like a slack blanket  
Over her features. He's always hated  
How funeral-goers like to imagine

The dead as peaceful, but her  
Half-closed eyes and slightly  
Smiling mouth make her appear

Almost content. Is this her illness?  
Or her cure? Maybe it's the record  
Of final communication

Between brain and body. Or maybe *calm*  
Is simply our name for absolute absence  
Of expression. He has taken

Other images: one with bruises  
From an unsuccessful death-leap  
Out a third floor window; one with tangled

Hair, clenched fingers, wide eyes; one  
In recovery with smooth skirt and raised chin;  
And there is also the likeness made

At her admission—in the throes  
Of her illness, where her bare throat  
Reveals a broad, new scar.

The doctor spreads  
Photographs across his desk  
Like tarot cards. He can place them

In any order he likes: life  
To death, progress and regress  
Of disease, even death to life—a miracle

Of technology, imagination, light.  
He shuffles them. What difference does it make?  
They are all history. Reflection insists

On looking backward, against  
The paradigm of progress. He chooses  
The earliest image, where the brain

And the body still speak,  
Where the muscles in her face  
Are so tense, her bones

Seem about to burst  
Through her skin.

## The Windmill Man

by Richard Dokey

The old man came out of the house into the hot afternoon light. The Indian was waiting with the horses.

"Where is she hiding?" the old man, whose name was Grisham, said.

"Grand Hotel," the Indian replied.

"The Grand."

The Indian nodded.

"The father, then?"

The Indian shrugged, looking away.

The old man scowled. He was short and squat with a beet-red face that never tanned beneath the Montana sun but only got redder, until it peeled about the nose and cheeks into white, feather-tipped patterns which, from year to year, were never the same.

"And?" the old man said, squinting into the sky.

The Indian, who had been with the old man from the beginning and knew exactly how he thought, so that they spoke now in quick, elliptical lines which no one else understood, pointed in the direction of the lowering sun, circling his fingers.

The old man grunted, took the reins and stepped into the dust.



The windmill stood where the Old Boulder Road went across Elk Creek. It had been built before the turn of the century by a Dutch settler named Iver Gelderland, who had followed the trail of Lewis and Clark up the Yellowstone River. The descendents of Gelderland lived along the creek, which wasn't a creek at all but, after the spring rains, a boiling, white torrent that emptied into the Yellowstone, and which, Gelderland imagined, could be used to ferry grain to the mill from the ranches in the valley, allowing him to continue the trade he

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had learned as a young man. Almost immediately, however, the locomotives came, blowing smoke against the great, rectangular arms, which swept clumsily, like broken masts in a fog. In two years business was done. Gelderland hanged himself from a beam above the millstone.

It was the only windmill ever built in Montana.

Surviving Gelderlands did not want the mill torn down, even though, almost at once, it fell into disrepair. They scrambled about the apparatus, painting and patching. They kept the weeds away and cut back the trees. They put round stones from the river along the path to the mill door. They painted the stones white.

Many people from nearby Big Timber, the county seat, wanted the mill removed. It was an oddity, they said, an eyesore. It made the people from Billings, Livingston and Bozeman smile when they came to visit. There were articles in *The Pioneer*.

But the surviving Gelderlands pleaded and cajoled. They attended town meetings. The windmill was important, they said. It was history, what once was and what was now, together, they said, a scaffold of cloth-framed arms that shook in the winds of memory, though none of them had ever worked in the mill or seen the country from whose knowledge it had been created.



Louise Grisham of Big Timber, betrothed to Angus Gelderland, was with Angus when he found his father Iver hanging from the roof beam above the millstone. Two nights later, in tears, hopelessly commiserative of him in her parents' home while they were away visiting, she was made pregnant by Angus, who fled the county and was never seen again. Jonathan, their son, a Gelderland after all, spent his life wandering up and down the Yellowstone, fishing, hunting, trapping, until his mother went crazy and was institutionalized in Billings. Jonathan stayed alone in the tiny house on Elk Creek, then,

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with the windows shut and the shades drawn for ten more years until, drunk, he was hit one night by a truck speeding up the Old Boulder Road. In the house they found a woman and a three-year old boy. Five years later, after his mother put a shotgun to her head, the boy was raised serially in the houses of the remaining Gelderlands, who continued to live, perpetually it seemed, on the outskirts of town.



It was very hot now in the afternoon, and as the sun touched the peak of the hills, the young man scurried upward and kept going. He was not a tall man, perhaps five-seven, five-eight, but his arms were muscled and his legs were strong from years of roaming and exploring above the valley. He loved the mountains and the trees and the springs that bubbled everywhere, and sometimes he paused to watch the water turn in the light as it fell to meet the big Yellowstone below. He was young and confident, had, in his opinion, done nothing wrong and was unafraid.

He paused a moment to adjust the shoulder pack, which was filled with food, and to remove his cap. He breathed deeply, took a single swallow of water from the canteen, drew a sleeve across his face and blinked the sweat away. The eyes were sky blue, like his mother's, very large and very clear and bright. He looked ahead to where the trail disappeared into the trees. He had come a long way, there was a long way to go, but it was all right. There would have been no chance along the roads or the highways. Up here he knew what he was and where he was going.

He continued to climb, the rhythm had come, the legs working smoothly, stepping out or around, the weight forward, the arms moving for balance. He was not tired and would not be for a long time. He felt he could walk off the end of the earth if he needed to.

Nothing was complicated or confusing. There was nothing to

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think about or to plan, the steady lift and move of his legs going upward, sometimes traversing, sometimes taking short, high cuts to pull straight up, making it easy when he needed to, turning, angling away and up, so that he did not have to think, not about the town or the people or the woman or anything, not unless he wanted to. He did not think about the woman until, pausing, he looked back through an opening in the trees and saw them far below, the tiny heads bobbing above brown horses.



They came on. There were five, besides the Indian and Old Man Grisham: Harmon Ogren, the sheriff; Jim Creed and Tom Satler, who owned the ranches adjacent to Grisham's; Steve Keehnel, the mayor of Big Timber; and Johnnie Waldrop, the thin-faced, nervous little clerk, who had married the old man's granddaughter three years before.

The Indian was in front, his eyes to the ground, then the sheriff, the old man, Creed, then Salter and finally Johnnie Waldrop, who didn't look at anything particularly but was merely a load of something pitched atop the horse he had had to borrow from Jim Creed, when they had all met at the windmill earlier to pick up the trail. Johnnie's father-in-law, Mart Grisham, had said he wouldn't be a part of it, not any of it, for any reason, and Johnnie knew, everybody knew, even Old Man Grisham himself knew it was just to spite the old man for turning him off the ranch all those years before, but, go ahead, if you want, Mart Grisham had said, looking mockingly at his son-in-law. "The world needs another fool."

Johnnie did not feel that way. Every motion of the horse sent a jolt of pain through his body, which had, through no fault of his own, after having been kept so close and private for so long, at last betrayed him. He understood exactly what it meant, and perhaps, in a way, he was foolish for being here, trailing along behind his wife's

grandfather like a sheep dog, incapable of leading a chase of his own, of trapping Miles Gelderland high up in the Montana hills and beating him within an inch of his life, perhaps, even, of killing him. But he was wise enough to think that this itinerant trash, who had come to live finally in the old mill on Elk Creek because none of the other Gelderlands—a lost race of failures from a land no one had ever seen—would any longer keep him, had done nothing without the woman’s permission, that same woman who, confessing her guilt and begging his forgiveness, pleading with him to say nothing, even after he had struck her almost senseless into a corner of the bedroom, revealed to him a cowardice at least as great as his own, for he had married her for no clear purpose but a desire to belong and lived with her now for no other reason than that he was afraid.

The Indian stopped, nose to the air, eyes as coldly dark as ripe olives.

The old man rode up and said, “Yes.”

The Indian pointed to where the trail disappeared through the cottonwoods into the tall pines beyond.

The old man smiled.



He moved faster, catching a glimpse, now and again, of where the trees thinned to meet, finally, the high, granite face of the mountain. Crevices were there, deep, corrugated fissures which, eons ago, had been formed by the slow moldering of the earth, pathways where only the cautious step of a man, one foot carefully before the other, might go and where horses could not follow. Already, he knew that, since leaving the valley floor, the animals would be having a hard go of it.

It did not bother him about the men. Over time they had become faceless, like the faces of people he saw speeding by on the interstate. Their hostility and prejudice were as predictable

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as the cold of winter snow, and he avoided them whenever possible, skirting their busy inquisitiveness like an antelope.

But the woman confused him.

He thought of her now, leaning against the stump of a tree, taking a swallow of water from the canteen and catching his breath. She came to his mind, released from all social structures and conventions, as a wind that comes from the mountains, stirring the leaves of the cottonwoods. She lingered at the foot of the mill, where the white-washed stones went up, turning and lifting her face into the sunlight so that her hair, which was the color of flax, shone. He watched from behind the weather-shredded boards of the mill how she raised her skirt to sit, how she talked to herself, snapping her hands, as though shaking dust from an invisible cloth. He watched her come straight up the path that one time and stand before the crack of the door and heard her say quietly, as he drew back and held his breath, "I know you're there, Miles Gelderland, and I know you want to talk. Why don't you come out and talk to me? My name is Leona."

A hawk dropped across the sky toward the valley. He allowed his eyes to go down the trail, but he saw nothing. He imagined the horses blowing, the men resting, their faces looking to where he was hidden, high above them.

The woman was in his mind, not as pain or sadness or even loss, but as something remarkable and so confusing. Though he understood perfectly about the men, when he thought of her, he did not know and was uncertain. When she spoke to him at last, when he had come out finally and been there waiting at the door one afternoon, she talked quickly, the way a jaybird does when it has been startled, so that he could hardly understand.

"Why are you here by yourself?" she asked, shaking her hands. "Isn't it strange living in a place that is not a house and certainly not a home and not even an old building with rooms, like the Grand Hotel on McCleod that's boarded up now and been for sale all these years, where they used to have such dances when I was just a girl and

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we would all go to them and have such fun, but it's all boarded up now and I don't go to any dances anymore anyway, so living here must be very empty and strange for you too, when you have so many people with your name? I'm Leona. Why don't you ask me in to look around, Miles? I've never been inside the windmill before, though it's been sitting here ever so long. Everything is so boring and so day-to-day. A windmill must be a funny place to live after all. Show me where you sleep."

He began to climb again, but now he climbed with the woman inside his brain. She climbed, touching his memory, as he skirted the trees, the larger stones that began to appear when the forest thinned and he stumbled ever higher to where the horses could not reach. Though she had fled down the path to the thin-faced man she said must have followed her that last time and who, now, brought the men and the horses, he was still only confused. Those others were understandable. He had lived near them all his life, unoffended by their disdain, remote, like a traveller in a foreign land.

But the woman, this Leona, was beyond everything. He thought of her as that peculiar, chattering creature who, much of the time, was incomprehensible but who had brought to him an emptiness and joy he had only found, walking among the hills. That he had been capable of such feeling, such experience of life, even now, as he clamored higher, amazed and befuddled him. How could such delight bring so much anger up the mountain after him, when he knew nothing about her except that, from time to time, she allowed herself to be alone with him in the mill?

He leaned back a moment against a large rock to take a drink and to think about it, when a chip of stone struck him in the cheek and the sharp crack of a rifle sped up and away across the slope.

He sat down slowly. If they were willing to shoot him, there was no point in going any farther.



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Creed and Satler took the arms while Keehnel put a rope under the chin to keep the head up. The sheriff stepped away and lit a cigarette.

Old Man Grisham came close, eyes wide, lips parted. He spat. The Indian, watching everything from his horse, turned the animal down the mountain.

Johnnie removed the plaid shirt that Leona had given him two Christmases ago. His flesh was pale and sickly in the hard light, the arms thin, the chest a bit sunken, with a tiny scruff of wiry brown hair exactly in the center. He put his left foot ahead of his right and leaned back. The men lowered their eyes.

The first blows were timid, for Johnnie had never struck a man before. The bones of his hands ached almost immediately. Miles Gelderland's face got red.

Then Johnnie began to like it. He moved closer, so that the weight of his body would help. The ache traveled to his shoulders, settling with a queer, sharp pleasure.

The blood came from Miles Gelderland's nose and mouth. It splattered the men as the head banged this way and that. It stippled Johnnie's chest and arms. Johnnie's hands got red.

He struck Miles Gelderland in the stomach, doubling him so that the men had to support him. Keehnel jerked the rope. Johnnie's fists struck the blood shining on Miles Gelderland's face.

The fists came again and again, but Johnnie's hands, though they took on the appearance of chopped meat and stopped hurting, left him oddly distant. He realized that he was yet safe, that only his body was there but not himself, his own private self, which had never been given to anyone or anything. Not even Leona had been smart enough to trick him into surrender. With each blow, sinking deep into Gelderland's stomach or smashing the blood from Gelderland's face, he was free, untouched, as cut loose as his own father-in-law, who had merely gone off to get drunk.

And when they let go of Miles Gelderland at last, stepping aside

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in the kind of timid revulsion which comes only after something evil has been done, Johnnie dropped to his knees and pounded helplessly at the unconscious lump, until the sheriff strode over finally to say, "Enough," since they would not kill a man merely for what Johnnie's wife had done.

They stood looking.

"All right, then," the old man said, and mounted his horse.

"We won't leave him," the sheriff declared.

Johnnie wiped his chest and arms with the old towel he had brought from home. He put on the plaid shirt.

"Tie him behind my saddle," he said.

All the way down the mountain, the weight of Miles Gelderland bumping his legs, Johnnie Waldrop felt peaceful and ashamed.



It was dark when they returned. Keehnell went into the mill and found some rope. They lashed Miles Gelderland head down to one of the great, tattered arms and then, working together, ran the arm straight up and tied it off.

"Let his people take care of him," the old man said.

They went home.

Later, a cool wind from the north awakened Miles Gelderland. His face disfigured, the blood crusted in his hair, the clothes fastened to his aching body, he tried to think, but there was nothing that thinking could do.

That night the woman came stealthily at last to see what she had done.

Floating high above the earth in the arms of the windmill, as useless as the man who had created it, Miles Gelderland looked through swollen eyes at the broad, bright yellowstone and the high hills stacked one upon the other against the stars.

It was the best view in the entire valley.

## Mandala

by Leigh Phillips

i.

I was eleven once  
and owned by the seasons.  
While filling up  
the tractor back with slug-infested  
orange and brown, I pounded  
the leaf beds flat, raked  
just as I was told,  
I pounded dead leaves to mulch,  
the ripened summer bare-backed,  
beaten-how was I to know  
my last fall as a child  
could not be bagged, swept  
into a sweatshirt, or bundled  
into a pink anorak, like those  
angels in the snow.

ii.

Then there was winter.  
No two alike, but in memory  
those flakes drone.  
I never wanted them, days  
circumventing their hours,  
their groove, their moments  
like mitosis. It was all I could see.

Foot by foot by foot  
buried, "a roof can withstand  
only so much weight," dad repeats  
anxiously, looking out the window.

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Meanwhile, an auxiliary is waging  
war in my abdomen, awakened  
by the release of a hormone,  
drop of an egg.

I do not know this, bored  
with the slow rumbling of plows,  
the dispersing ache. I regress, replace

the tired anthem on the turntable  
and pirouette, dance the spiral  
snowflake dance,  
rot my dulcet tones, *you are my sunshine*.  
Age spreads like fungus, it clings and sings.  
I grow chilled by the blandness my voice brings.  
The parents don't notice the stain on my pants,  
croon for an encore, saying  
"such a talent in that child!"  
but there is nothing avant-garde  
about being in limbo.

iii.

I etch on frosted windowpanes  
the story of my creation:  
mother says she died until divorce.  
When she was no longer perfect,  
myth was, he set her free.  
I wonder what happens when  
I prove the value of my shallow breasts  
and the slow stream tracing  
each inner thigh. Will I be divorced?  
Exiled like Ovid, or tried as Socrates?  
I think I'd die a hemophiliac  
if I weren't in love with certain scars

Leigh Phillips

created before my birth, though  
mom says I grew into them nicely.  
Dysfunction is not a dress.  
“Nothing will ever grow in *me*.”

iv.  
I was fourteen then,  
when distrust bloomed  
in the throat, as if I were Chloris.  
I wretched out roses  
to the tune of romantic ditties,  
closed the window on Zephyr’s  
wanton whisper, and haven’t opened  
my tight-lipped service since.  
I’m twenty-one now,  
a hybrid of the ages.  
I’m twenty-one now,  
ten when I started growing.  
I haven’t stopped, and will  
not commit to bandages,  
the clotting veil and train.

At twenty-six I’m supposed  
to be garnished, ready to serve  
a child’s hungry suckle; but will not  
become pretty calendar poses  
of seasons and cycles, though I make  
no effort to comb leaves off my shirtsleeves:  
their hugging veins cannot breathe or bleed.  
Shaking flakes off my bodice,  
I will not be a carrier.  
I, like ground, have taken on too much water.

**Archipelago**  
by Susan Rich

Perhaps, I am ready to wave good-bye  
to one man

ready to wrestle the thin membrane  
of what is mine

from between his thumb and forefinger  
before he can cast

further out than any could sing  
to lure me back.

What makes love arc  
why ask tonight

for new dysfunctions  
of the heart?

*WRITING BY DEGREES*  
**SUPPLEMENT**



## Excerpts from WHAT IS TRIBE

by M. Evelina Galang

*Between the tunnels that connect the land and the peninsula, girls attach their bodies to the underpass like spiders crawling up a wall. The rumble of trucks, the whir of tires spinning fast on asphalt and the wind float down and drown beneath the underpass, bleed into the bay. Fire works pop like shooting guns. In their hands, spray cans omit a fierce red, a cold blue, morning yellow and a white light as the first layer of snow. Each girl works on a section—scales of the fish tail, slope of the hips, brown breasts and nipples dark as chocolate, hair that swims long and black as floating seaweed. Together they tag the underpass in Alibata, in English, in unison—Las Dalagas. Pinay forever. Forever Pinay.*

When the ringing woke Isabel at two in the morning, she knew it was bad. She could tell from the tightness in her belly. She leapt from sleep, her long arm reaching for the phone. She ignored a blue moon swinging just outside her windowsill. All business now. She answered alert, wired, as if waiting. She thought of the night two years ago, waiting for the doctor to return. Her body felt just like this. Numb.

At this moment, she needed to know who and what and how much pain was there going to be. Who did she lose tonight?

"Hello?"

She didn't recognize the voice, though she could tell by the tone, something was really wrong. "Who died?" she wanted to know.

"A child," said the voice. "He was pretty young."

"Who?" She was afraid the night and this new environment were playing tricks on her.

"I don't think you've met."

"Not again," she said, "not another lost child."

"Afraid so."

Who is this, she thought and why do you insist on confirming this

M. Evelina Galang

nightmare? Her body shivered and she pulled the cotton sheets around herself. Outside, the crash of water hitting sand confused her.

"What is the matter with you," asked the voice. "Why are you hysterical? It's me, Andrea Calhoun. From school. Are you awake, Isabel? Are you all right?"

Too late. Isabel had slipped back into her nightmare and in less than a minute she was grieving. Tears flowed so fast, she began to hiccup. The hiccups interrupted the beating of her heart. Now she skipped a breath. Now she sighed long and low. No mother should have to live this, she thought, no mom. No single mom, no married mom. No mother should have to outlive her kid—no elderly mom, no middle-aged mom, no teen-mom not ready to be a mom—no Mother of God—not anyone. And before she knew it, Isabel was whispering. Why, why, why, she wanted to know. Why did you do it, God? Why forsake the ones you love? And even though she had not met the child's mother, and even though she could not distinguish her loss from the mother of the slain child's loss, she felt the grief come over her like the waves washing her out to sea—lost and wet and completely overwhelmed.



Two years ago Isabel misplaced her baby. Miscarried it so that it skipped certain critical stages of development. The fetus had grown a tiny sleeping face. Its mouth had been set into a grin—as if it were enjoying a dream. And he or she came to grow two long and slender arms flung out in opposite directions crying, "Uppy, Mama. Uppy." What the baby didn't grow were legs. The child had a trunk that loomed out into his or her ten digits—toes woven together by a membrane thin as spider webs. He or she, her baby, had grown into a semi-human/semi-tadpole. It's fin-like leg kicked inside her, begged for two legs, two feet, ten perfect toes. There was nothing she could do. She tried herbs and special teas. She sought out wise women—a

healer and an African (American) high priestess. She implored the Mother Mary to intercede. But nothing. And one night she woke because the kicking stopped. The baby gave up and floated out of Isabel's body.

She still dreamed of the unborn baby. She painted a child lost and confused. Her water baby swam in a maze of large and small intestines. Negotiated its way about the blood vessels, the blue veins, the forest of muscles and tissue woven together like a pretty braid. She saw hands tiny as specks of dust—groping for her uterus—only to find its way to a kidney, a bladder, a chamber of the heart—no place to grow a baby. No place to be certain. So the baby had to choose. And what were the options? You can have a set of hands, two beautiful arms complete with biceps, deltoids, triceps, chest and big fat belly—not to mention a trunk, a leg, a tail and webbed feet. And you can be born to this world a special child, anomaly child, a child of challenge. Or you can try again, come back later come back with legs and arms, a torso, head, shoulders, a perfect set of vertebrae, deep set almond eyes, hair like silk—he works. You could slip into the world like the rest—healthy and unremarkable. What'll it be? Womb or land, spirit child or baby thing, heaven or earth? What kind of choice is that to make for the unborn? For a dream child, for a baby who barely knew its mother?

The rest of the night was lost. She could not find her way to sleep. When she closed her eyes she saw the ghost of a boy who died in a trance of happiness—among his friends, among the boom—boom—pop of his homies' bass, of rapture, of ecstasy and of escape. When she opened her eyes to lose the image of the boy, she heard the child's mother, wailing, dying, shrieking at God and all the angels. Why? So she got up and walked the house, closing windows, and shutting doors that had slipped wide open. That's when she felt her baby's spirit floating next to her, swimming along side of her in the unforgiving blackness of night. That's when she realized this could never end.

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La Familia threw a party down on 56th and the beach. House music blared and everyone closed their eyes, dancing, rapping, hanging with their homeboys. Then kids from Norfolk—maybe one of the rival gangs—cruised their slick cars down Beach Boulevard, circled the house and shot shot shot. The bullet found its way to a window framed in white ruffles, crashed through glass so clean, so clear, so invisible, a bird might've flown right through the pane. The bullet darted into a red lit dance floor, careened into music so loud so—UH an UH an UH UH UH—that the sound of this shooting gun, and the grunt of this falling boy—was barely heard over the slow beat of the bass. Shot in the stomach and bleeding, the boy called out and no one heard over the cries of this MC—fly artist of the angry word, repetitive word, the beating word. The boy went down. Died. This was not the first incident.

“Who is it?” Isabel wanted to know. She ran through the faces of the boys she had met. In her half wake state, they were all a part of her dreams. “Who got hit?” Dr. Calhoun couldn't tell her.

“They're still looking for his father at sea.”

More than the worrying for the boy who died, she worried for his parents, for the sleepless nights and haunting spirit of the child. For this mother and father it would be worse, because they knew their boy, knew his voice and all the noise that came from him. That mother's hands have run the course of him, would have memorized the texture of his skin—all that was perfect and all the flaws too. Isabel could only speculate what her unborn child might have been. And Mark never understood that the thing that died was a child, was something between them. Isa knew her child was only a dream baby. This family would have memories. They would have to live in their house and see where he used to leave his shoes (right in the middle of the TV room), where he hung his coat (over the back of a kitchen chair)—what snacks he liked to eat (pepperoni pizza, Mountain Dew and rice). They'd miss the way he'd lose his temper, (snapping at his younger sister when she crowded him on the couch) or how he'd

make the family fried eggs and garlic rice on Sundays. They'd miss the way he nodded his head when they lectured him, when all the time, he had slipped on his headphones and only pretended to listen. They'd miss the very experience of his life, a life Isabel could only imagine. And this is what kept her up and weeping—knowing her own pain and multiplying that infinitely. How would they ever sleep again?



Isabel had no idea what to expect as she entered the hallway and traveled around the maze of students and faculty. She walked amid the banging of metallic lockers, and their voices chirping in and out of laughter.

At the edge of the corridors, a mural illustrated the lives of the youth. Spiked hair was in—the boys on the wall displayed it—white boys, brown boys, black boys. Some of the portraits had round heads, smooth like the surface of a basketball. The girls had curvy bodies—long lashes, bright lips. Fishtails caught her eye, the long strands of mermaid hair sailing across the wall and arms that moved like ribbons wrapped their way around the boys. The letters LD tattooed mermaid fins. Maybe, she thought, they were the high school mascots. Mermaids and sirens. Why not, she reasoned, the Atlantic was just down the street.

Students buzzed at one another, leaning on lockers and pulling at each other as if this day was no different than yesterday. Isabel searched her past, mentally paging through her high school yearbook. One boy died of a car crash. He'd been drinking. Another girl had died of a heart attack. Another one from a ski accident. Not a single one had been shot. Just the thought of someone dead had silenced her school, had fallen like a giant shadow onto their halls. It was different than this, she thought.

She walked into the gym. Took a long drink of water. Breathe,

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she told herself, breathe. She exhaled slowly and examined a dozen teenagers on metal folding chairs, their arms crossed and their voices hissing into the air like steam. Derek, Lourdes, Marilena, Mercedes, and Miguel sat among the students in the gym. Isabel smiled at Derek, mouthed hello, but he looked past her, his face set, locked in a heroic pose. She felt pain rifling through her bones. Miguel sat forward on his folding stool, nodding his head to some internal rhythm. He locked his thick lips tight as airmail. She wanted to leave the room, never return. Instead she called, "Miguel?"

Miguel raised his eyebrows, nodded. "Sup, Ms. Manalo."

"What'd we do now?" A girl, heavy set and sad crooned.

"Dis gonna to take all hour?"

Lourdes and Mercedes bowed their heads, whispered hot S's into the gym's atmosphere. A few of the boys had shaved their heads, wore dark shades to cover their faces, faces hard and scored like marble gods. The girls slumped down in their seats, tough as their brown brothers, with the exception of lips lined in brown pencil, stained boysenberry, sienna and chocolate. Some of the girls had dyed their hair blond, red and cherry.

"How are you," she asked, balancing her books and tapes. She ran her hands through her hair, made sure it was fluffy, not stuck to her scalp.

Silence. Old heaters spat. Long tubes of fluorescent lights hummed. Outside a cop siren howled like a cat being torn in two. They stared at one another. It's me versus them, she thought.

"So why we here?" said Lourdes. She stretched her thin legs out in front of her. Her arm reached up high and exposed a silver belly ring. She shifted her shoulders, cracked a bubble with her chewing gum.

"You not going to try talkin' to us bout Arturo," said a boy in wire rim glasses. "Cuz ain't nothing you can tell us we don't already know."

Arturo, she thought. Not the boy with the tattoo.

“Yeah,” said Lourdes, picking at peeling nail polish. “An nothing we can tell you either. We don’t know what happened, who did it, why it happened. We don’t feel nothing.”

“What do you mean you don’t feel anything,” Isabel asked. She remembered, how he mixed pansit at the table, how he joked as he carried her TV into the house. She could see the curve of the black letter etched into his auburn skin. Alibata for Pinoy. Black ink on brown skin. She had asked him to explain it. How could that be?

They stared at her like she wasn’t there. She saw a force field—an invisible dome—hanging over them, keeping them from her. “You don’t have to talk about it,” she told them.

“Thas right,” Derek answered, “We don’t.”

Their arms rested against their chests, teenage armor. Their eyes were open, but nothing registered—no light from the window, no book slamming to the ground, no hand in their faces. Unflinching. Isabel felt hot, felt her clothing sticking to her skin. Her heart beat wild—pintig, pintig, pintig. It’s all she heard. What did they mean they felt nothing. They had to feel something.

“That’s the difference between us,” said a girl named Maya Antaran. Her face was red, swollen.

“You can’t tell us what we feel,” Miguel shouted. He stood up from his chair and pointing said, “Who you to tell us what we feel?”

“That’s not what I’m doing,” Isabel said. “I’m not—”

And then it seemed they were all standing, circling her like a swarm of bees, irritated and ready to sting. She swung her arms at their words, swatting them out of her way, but they persisted. She tried to speak to them, to tell them that she was there for them, but they were shooting—Who are you anyway they wanted to know, and why should we listen to you? You don’t know us and you want us to tell you how we feel? Sup wit dat shit? She felt claustrophobic, their brown arms swirling fast like electric fans, like blades slicing through air, through her. They wouldn’t let her near them. She turned away and looked up at the window, breathing deeply. She

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fought a tumult of tears. Reaching for her blue bottled water she talked to herself. Don't you dare, she said. When she turned to face them, she realized that they had been sitting silently all this time. Silent. Silent. Nothing. Still as a portrait, they leaned on one another, their faces vacant as Barbie dolls. They sat like that for the rest of the hour. No one spoke. No one moved. Just Isabel facing the youth. Like that. For an hour.

HP



**Miniature**  
by Christina Pugh

It was only an everyday betrayal.

But today your faithlessness  
lives as a natural law,  
clear as a mist-dimmed  
mountain disrobing:

the brisk *I forgot*;  
the fierce *I lost*—  
lies you no longer know  
you're telling. And lies

suit you: the mountain  
morphs to shoreline;  
your eyes take on  
a planetary sheen...

now a family of mollusks  
scatters.

You're becoming  
a seascape  
I want to brush  
in miniature, fever

in an inch  
of India ink—  
then press in a locket  
for unsentimental ends.

Christina Pugh

But one sea truth  
is only half a locket.  
It needs the twin oblong  
of my tidal acquiescence,

burbled back  
to sand-combed  
and silt-glazed you-

the breathless  
facing page of it!-

as if you've granted me  
a lifelong dream  
to co-write fiction:

the *it's so nice*, the *of course not*,  
the *you didn't need to*.

Outside Boston  
by Christina Pugh

After a long sabbatical,  
the sun sends the street  
glassy again: the neighbors'  
bone siding evanescens;  
a clamped tulip  
lightens its striated load,  
and narcissus grazes a well  
in the corner park.

Even the bus driver's bark—  
*You got a lot o' nerve,*  
*parking there—*  
flutes infinitesimally,  
risen from a shock  
of greener world.

The sun was studying  
Pearling—how to skim  
opacity from liquid limbs,  
to amplify the unforeseen:  
so the old nurse  
two houses down,  
veteran of ten thousand lakes,  
wakes today to find herself  
mayor of her town.

"What do you know,"  
she says, rubbing her eyes.  
Outside the window,  
an entourage  
rings her ancient  
station wagon.

**San Francisco**  
by Adela Najarro

My great-grandmother taught my mother to read using chalk  
and a black slate in León where adobe brick  
buildings are white-washed Spaniards  
  
and history. We brought with us red and blue macaws, panthers,  
and crocodiles. Tooling up and down  
Dolores Street hills, my Papi rode  
  
a bicycle delivering Lela's *nacatamales*. Back and forth  
from a clock tower at the end of Market Street,  
a renovated 1919 streetcar,  
  
transplanted from Milan, works tourist dollars. Advertisements  
from the late sixties posted behind  
True View Plexi-glass. I can't read a word  
  
of the European Italian glitz, deep blue of the Mediterranean  
and a Coca-Cola, but there is a warm blanket  
on a wooden bench and a leather  
  
hand hook. Above a Cuban restaurant, where waiters serve  
black bean hummus and chocolate croissants,  
hangs the gay pride flag alongside  
  
a Direct TV satellite dish. Gabby walks to school, Pokémon  
cards in his pocket. Sanchez Street. I work  
in the kitchen with my Lela. Mariposa Avenue,

Valencia Street, Camino Real, are added to *masa*. Homemade  
tortillas puff into sweetness. I'm not  
one third Irish, one half German

and two parts English with a little Cherokee thrown in,  
but last night I couldn't translate the word "hinge"  
on every door that opens and closes

to clouds beyond four walls. An old lady, perhaps Cambodian,  
Vietnamese, Korean, something of her own,  
hurries off the 31 Stockton while

my Tía Teresa double parks in front of the *mercados* on 24th street  
*para los quesos* and the chiles in the backroom. One  
whiff and the world is not so small.

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6, no. 2.

## My Mother's High Heel Shoes

by Adela Najarro

A fat man in white. A polished stone floor. Marble or granite  
cool in the hot sun. Circular tables. Chairs. Umbrellas.

A patio deck.

Inside the cabana, at the counter, I ordered a hamburger.

In Nicaragua?

Maybe it was a soda

in a highball glass with a cherry. I do not have to ask  
for money. I am part of the black sand, fine silt, and seaside sparrow.

The sun drapes freckles across my mother's shoulders.  
Ponoloya, a beach in Nicaragua. She is seventeen and pretty.

I lost the 8x10 glossy.

Each eyelash curved. An ivory cheek. Joan Crawford lips.

I think I took it

to school for a class

project on family history and autobiography. In the second drawer  
of her dresser, a satin slip the size of a Mead college-ruled notebook.

How close can I get to the first bikini on Ponoloya?  
Saturday at three o'clock old movies re-run on KTTV, Channel 11.

Clark Cable. Claudette Colbert.

A shapely leg in a silk stocking extends for a ride

to champagne

and elegant parties.

Cummerbunds. Gold taffeta. Who does my mother kiss on a blanket  
as *abuelita* scolds her with a look that keeps hands in view?

My mother spots a picture in a Paris magazine or one  
*de Los Estados Unidos* and asks the seamstress to make her just like it.

Probably blue.

It would have covered her belly button but exposed two inches of ribs

below the bosom.

Esther Williams

pulls back her hair and raises one arm before submersion.

On an overcast day we head toward Huntington Beach.

The piping tube of a seaweed frond stuck in a castle turret.

Half moon slivers.      Crushed shells.

Pebbles in sand.

My father, my brother and I are added to a shoebox.

**Closing Down**  
by Bruce Bennett

I. *Toast*

My father-in-law  
spreads the butter  
with a spoon.

“Here,” my wife says,  
showing him his knife.  
“This will work better.”

He picks up the knife,  
holds it,  
puts it down.

He picks up the spoon.

“That’s for the coffee,”  
my mother-in-law says.  
“To put the sugar in.”

II. *No Point*

The same story  
in the same words  
over and over.



“We used to visit here  
when I was a kid....”

None of it true.

“This was the house.  
It belonged to Aunt May.  
Isn’t it amazing  
after all these years?...”

No point in contradicting;  
in correcting.

“It’s the good old days  
all over again.”

We have tried and tried.

### III. *Missing*

He can think  
only of his car.

“Where’s my car?  
Where’s my car?”

“You care more for that car  
than you do for me,”  
goads his wife,  
but it’s no use.

Bruce Bennett

“Where’s my car?”

he repeats,  
louder now  
and angrier.

“What have you done  
with my car?”

He fingers keys  
to the house  
they have left for good.

“Where  
is my *goddam* car!”

**Full Disclosure**  
by Bruce Bennett

Were I to tell you what I truly think,  
whether in prose or verse, in sign or rhyme,  
aloud through words, or silently in ink,  
all in a rush, or halting, over time;  
Were I to lay all out: my heart, my head,  
my deepest mind, my terrors, my conceit;  
bundle and send them, to your care consigned;  
for your eyes only, naked at your feet;  
Were I to do this, and were you to say:  
*I see; I understand. It's as I dreamed.*  
*There is another being here who may*  
*be just like me.* If this were as it seemed,  
and we held nothing back, would each possess  
new life, or one more lease on loneliness?

*"Full Disclosure" originally appeared in Were I To Tell You, published by Wells Press.*

## The Cat Story

by Richard K. Weems

An old woman comes to the door to tell me my cat is dead. This After I've spent all morning and a good part of the afternoon getting ready to hang myself. The old woman is at least seventy, nearly toothless, disheveled. She is carrying a paper sack, the bottom rounded at the edges like a curling puck.

"It was a Buick who did it," she says, thumbing over her shoulder toward the street. I look, but there is no Buick. No aura of recent death, no hint of an accident. I don't know why I'm even looking. I don't have a cat. My gaze strays to the neighbors' lawns—manicured, sculpted, very uniform. It's the kind of neighborhood that would get a big, disgusted jolt from a hanging.

"A Buick?" I say. "How do you know it's my cat?"

"Your cat," she says. She puts her hand atop the shower cap on her head and scratches through it. "Got hit in front of your house."

If she has a cat in that sack, it's rolled pretty tightly upon itself. The mouth of the sack is worn in her grip.

"Who sent you?" I ask. I haven't ventured to open the door wider than the width of my face. This isn't even my house—it's my grandmother Peg's, but she's in Florida for the season and I'm supposed to be getting my writing done.

"I got nothing to do with nothing," the old woman says. "Thought I was doing a favor. You can just bury it out back you know." Artfully, she looks around and above me, avoiding my eyes with precise near misses.

Did she walk around, paper sack in hand, looking for recently squashed cats? She must have been walking for days from the looks of her. Her quilted housecoat has grass stains and mud that make it hard to discern the housecoat's true color.

"What if I told you I didn't have a cat?"

"Liar," she says, still scratching her head.

"Maybe it's best you came in." I'm already quite an item of gossip in this neighborhood I'm sure, the equivalent of an idiot-man child locked away in the root cellar. Now, Peg's poor excuse of a grandson, who's given up stability and family for artistic endeavor, is making things worse by humoring a dirty homeless woman on the front step. I can feel the neighbors watching us, their property values sinking into their lower intestines. I open the door all the way.

Her slippered feet slap against the tile floor. She keeps a gentle hand under the bottom of the sack, reinforcing it but reverential about not poking its contents.

I hesitate from offering her a seat. There's the kitchen chair I brought out to do my business with the light fixture, but it's in exactly the right spot and I don't want to go through all that rigmarole again. Being my grandmother Peg's house, the sofa, loveseat and armchair are all covered in plastic, but still I worry that the old woman's grime will seep through. Bad enough I plan to leave behind a swinging body to clean up, but also leave behind the stink of a filthy old lunatic carrying around a dead cat? I motion toward the kitchen chair. "Sit?"

The old woman sits with determination and plops the sack onto her lap. It's more of a thud. The sack has some serious weight to it.

I have a seat on the sofa. Unfortunately, it is directly across from her and there we are, face to face, the coffee table and my rejected book between us like a wall built far too low. I reach for my glass of gin but think better of it. I have no intention of offering her any. The generic rejection letter clipped to my book reads, "Dear Writer." I haven't read the rest; with an opening like that, why bother? I have added to their salutation with my pen so it now reads, "Dear Writer-my-ass."

The old woman is sitting as though ready to withstand military interrogation. She has every intention of protecting the sack in her lap.

"Coke?" she says abruptly. "Coke? You got Coke here?"

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"It's all warm," I lie. "It's sitting in a cupboard."

"A little ice will do the trick. I can help you dig that hole if you give me a little Coke."

I've sunk deeply into the sofa, the kind of sofa that's a struggle to get up from again. To the right of the old woman, I can see the red light blinking on the answering machine. Three messages—all from my wife, one every other day for the past week, each one no doubt prompted by grandmother Peg, a new effort to pull me out of my hole. I sat by the machine during every call, watching the machine as it recorded. Each one began with a formal Hello Brad, it's Marsha. Two Hope you're doing better's, two Been thinking of you's, and only the first closed with Call me if you want. For the third message she said only, "Hello Brad, it's Marsha," then hung up after a thoughtful silence.

The book I've written is this:

A man, Phil, feels stuck in his life and so decides to take a vacation from himself. First he tries drinking, drugs, extramarital affairs with strippers. Then he runs off to Mexico, beds down two married women simultaneously and tries his hand at bounty hunting, inspired by a mysterious one-eyed midget he meets over a session of tequila. He finds he has a knack for it and on his first time out he brings to justice the head of a notorious drug cartel and steals a briefcase full of drug money that befriended DEA agents discover but let him drive off with in a scene of touching camaraderie. Phil finally comes home, determined to resume his life now that he's sown his wild oats. But the suburban lifestyle leaves him wanting, and after a well honed and witty speech to his patient but unsympathetic wife, something like the end of *A Doll's House* with muscle, he goes off into the night, his future uncertain but chock full of potential for gunplay.

"About this cat," I say to the old woman.

"Your cat," she says defensively, "out in the road nothing I could do about that. Just sitting there doing what cats do in the middle of the road acting like nothing's going to happen to him safe as all shit

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and suddenly there's this car this Mazda this brown shoebox thing."

"A Buick?" I say.

"Yes a Buick I said Buick no way you can prove otherwise." The woman scootches up a little, her housecoat crackling. "This here Buick isn't from around here it was obvious speeding down the road in a neighborhood like this a nice neighborhood like this one speeding down the road like that the cat had it coming. You can bury it under a tree in some shade."

Right now she should be pulling the cat out of her sack by the hind legs and laying it out on the coffee table like a butcher displaying a whole plucked chicken. Exhibit A. I move my rejected book aside. I notice how much "Dear Writer-my-ass" stands out along with the doodles I've made around the clean, mock-literary typeface of the company letterhead. The font that suggests serenity and insight. I notice even more drastically the stick figures hanging from gallows I've drawn in all the margins—left, right, top and bottom. I can't remember how many times it's been rejected now, but it seems to come back more quickly every time I send it out. I slide the rejection note from under the paper clip and gradually turn it over.

Meanwhile, the old woman is still talking: "And if you think I blame that Buick that Chevy any you think wrong. But boy was it coming down the road coming down quick cuz he couldn't have known what kind of neighborhood it was not being from around here and Friskie got it all in one shot at least just got run over and shut his eyes and that was that."

"Friskie?" I ask.

"You named him," she says, pointing at me to make sure I know who thought up that stupid name. "All those cats how are you going to find an original name for all of them? He likes Friskies so you call him Friskie. The black and white you call Oreo what else? Sylvester the other black and white. Mittens Cracker Big Balls you can't go not giving them names you know." She looks sentimental and a little misty-eyed talking about my cats.

Richard K.. Weems

“How many cats in all?”

She slumps as though strategic wires have been cut. A look of futility. “Your damn cat mister,” she says.

The sun is coming down. The shades at the old woman’s back glow appropriately. I have one hand on my rejected book; I am considering whether to leave it behind or destroy it before I go.

I’m not the type anyone would have ever taken for a writer, including me—a stable though generally unaffectionate marriage, the promise of a more than adequate inheritance from an aging grandmother, and a good job as Associate Manager of Space for a 40-storey office building, my prime responsibility chair inventory and allocation. I was going over inventory sheets in my office one day, and I suddenly wanted to have Charlie Rose interview me about my novel. I thought what an interesting story my sudden, unprompted calling would make to start off the interview.

I brought home a dozen legal pads that night and stacked them on the piano in the den. All through dinner, as Marsha fished for compliments on her brown rice with wakami, I wrote questions Charlie Rose might ask me so I would have some natural-sounding, thoughtful responses: *How do you know you weren’t just struck by a sudden bout of midlife crisis?* and *Talk about how the position of Associate Manager of Space prepared you to be such a methodical and assertive author.* After dinner I went straight to the den and made a start of it. It was tough, since I had to make things up from scratch. After she finished loading the dishes, Marsha came into the den with a gourmet-cooking magazine. She sat on the edge of the recliner as though in a doctor’s waiting room and opened the magazine, but it was clear she wasn’t reading a thing.

“How long does a novel take?” she asked, looking up at me, her pretty brown eyes trying their best to understand something about what I was doing.

“I write for a while,” I said, stooped over the cover of the piano



keys, “and then it will be finished.” I didn’t have much yet—a description of some weather, and a guy coming home from work. Marsha said, “Hmm,” as though she understood perfectly, and went back to her magazine. The sound of her turning pages was like jelly getting slapped through a ventilation grate.

“It can’t be all that long,” she said. Marsha didn’t read novels. Magazines were more practical and necessary, though she would sometimes admire the layout of the cover on a Clive Cussler or Robert Grisham book I’d pick up on occasion. “I mean, if it took all that long, it wouldn’t be worth all that bother, would it?” As she spoke, I could feel my brain numbing, acupuncture on the hypothalamus.

“You need to leave me alone,” I said. Marsha looked at me as if I had just told her she had a cancerous bulb on her cheek. “You need to get out and leave me alone,” I said. Funny—not once had I asked Charlie Rose to give me a moment to thank my patient and understanding wife.

Marsha closed her magazine carefully and held it to her chest as she left.

When I was writing, it was all think and drink, think and drink, write a little, then back to the thinking and the drinking. I went right to it every day after work, all morning and afternoon on my days off, the evenings sleeping off the heavy drunk I would accumulate. Marsha checked up on me every now and then. I could smell hope, like moldy water, swell up in her when she’d find me slumped uncomfortably in the leather recliner or reading the label on a bottle of Wild Turkey, my messy pages of writing scattered around the piano.

“I’m making dinner,” she’d say for instance, her voice tinged with a hint of warning, of her need for things to be normal again. “Do you want me to put lemon in the curry?” Maybe she was counting on me to announce failure so she could comfort me briefly and pack me an alfalfa salad for lunch the next day, our life back to brief kisses

Richard K.. Weems

and semi-annual intimacy. I ignored her the best I could, feeling with her every intrusion a desire to throw pencils at her ankles.

So I started writing at the office, chair requests and locations ignored or handled sloppily to let me focus on my real work. The office building fell into chaos, unclaimed task chairs stranded in hallways, mail sorters sorting in leather executive high-backs. Marsha started hiding my manuscript pages, so I started putting her silk blouses in the dryer on high. She said, "Oh, great," every time she saw me with a pen. I slept on the couch and promised things would be back to normal when I finished. It took three months of note pads and pens and pencils and bottles of liquor that fueled my creative fire, and I lost my job, but I finished my novel. I told Marsha our troubles would be over when I typed my book up and got it published. She did her best to pretend I didn't live in the house anymore, and I looked up the names of agents and book publishers and bought manuscript boxes. As I sent my novel out, I imagined the letter of acceptance, rife with compliments. I planned my book tour, practiced my mannerisms, invented witticisms to sign my name under. Late at night, I could sometimes hear Marsha crying on the phone. I imagined literate groupies, bodies tingling in my presence. With each rejection, I moved my book from one envelope to the other, sure that this time someone would see the light.

My grandmother Peg lent me her house when Marsha finally asked me to leave mine. Marsha never asked me directly, to tell the truth. She told grandmother Peg, and grandmother Peg told me. Marsha and I had not spoken to each other directly in a month. She had started pulling open the zippers on my best pants, and I had started cutting into the straps of her bras with a nail file so they would break while she was wearing them.

Grandmother Peg's offer was not one of kindness. It was to get this 'writing thing' out of me, to let it run its course like a stomach virus. She sent me the keys express mail. That night, she called from her larger house in Florida.

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## The Cat Story

"The summer house is yours," she said. "Send out your book. See how no one wants it and for God's sake go back to Marsha.

"And also for God's sake, Brad," she added. She paused to let her next statement sink in. "Brad. Brad. Dry out and give up and go back to your life." This was four months ago, and she told me she was going to need the house again in four and a half.

None of this sounds like good justification for a hanging, but I've given up on finding a good reason. I spent most of the morning making sure the chair was in the right place, so I could stand on it comfortably with the belt around my neck and kick the chair away easily to give me no way of backing out. Then I started doing dry runs, swinging by my arms to make sure the light fixture would hold me up long enough to kill me, each run separated by an hour on the couch, drinking and getting my courage up. It's one thing to practice your death, another to get yourself off the couch to practice it again. Just before the old woman came knocking, I was wondering if I was up for a dress rehearsal.

She suddenly pulls a faded pea green scarf from the pocket of her housecoat.

"I make these myself," she says, the silk scarf crumpled in her hand, a far cry from any kind of lucrative presentation. "You got four dollars? I could use four dollars right now. Four dollars and a ride."

It's not what she says or how she says it, but something about the old woman inspires the perfect idea in me, an idea that can only be explained in a novel.

"I write," I tell her.

She glances sidelong at me, the first time our eyes have met. She rubs her cheek with the scarf, and she clutches the paper sack a little tighter, as though I've just told her I'm a rapist of old women. "You make money with that?"

"I just write," I tell her.

Richard K. Weems

"Not buying no damn story," she says. "And I'm not taking one for this scarf. Don't need that shit. Don't need to be carrying around no story I got nothing to do with," she says.

"But you do," I tell her.

Again, the brief meeting of the eyes. If we go on like this, we'll be married by nightfall.

"You drunk?" she says. "All I need is a dollar."

"It's a story about cats," I tell her. "Cats and scarves and grandmothers who wrap everything they own in plastic. It's got all the reasons why you can't go home anymore. It's about being down to dill pickles in the fridge, about the last days of the siege. Coke with no ice and the wives who leave their men because their men like Coke that way. It's about the clarity that happens sometimes right before the end." All this is coming together like particles orbiting a gravity well, collapsing into the inevitable brilliance of a new star.

"That's a weird book," she says.

"I'll send you a copy."

"Don't read no damn books." She lifts the sack to her chest and stands. "Don't got no goddamn books cuz I don't need no goddamn books and they got nothing to do with me I ain't in no goddamn goddamn book." She makes for the door. "Fucking books no ice this house smells like pork like a fucking pig." Before she's out, she pauses a moment in the doorway. "Great stinking pig is how it smells I don't give my tits to know how you keep your pecker up in here!"

I sit up. The couch creaks like couches in a grandmother's house do. I hear the old woman heading down the street, still yelling out about my pecker and all.

It's a beautiful ending—the perfect idea that doesn't get written, its only living vestiges rolling in pieces around the head of an old woman trying to find her kitty's final home. I rise and take my novel out back to throw it out. I'll leave nothing behind but a half bottle of gin, some Cuervo and a little apricot brandy. Let them

admire nothing but the strength of the knot in my belt, how I chose the stem of the light fixture rather than the paltry branches to swing from. An artist's death. Grandmother Peg will shudder in disappointment at the thought of me. Marsha won't be able to contain her anger. I am past needing their affirmation for my work. I feel more ready now than I have all day.

Out back, I pause over the trashcan. I consider digging a hole in the yard, but some birds nearby distract me. They're small, brown birds, I don't know what kind. Quick and electric in movement, but deceptively preoccupied. They seem too easy and inviting to reach out, grab and crush. My manuscript lands with a loud slap on top of yesterday's trash.

HP

## Sometimes in the neighborhood

by Elizabeth McLagan

I see her unwashed hair  
a thick cap  
hiding about as much  
of her face as shadows did  
that night in January  
in the balmy park  
daphne breaking open  
witch hazel throwing off  
its scarf of sweetness.

I was by myself.  
I heard the lance of traffic  
a runner's lope  
like heartbeat passing.  
Voices. Then, an exclamation  
strode across the lake.

I circled my familiar way  
toward that sound  
and passed the picnic table  
she had spread herself upon. One man  
held her hands  
so gently, it seemed  
and in the shadows one man  
stood behind her, pushing  
out the hunger.

And if I wished to feel  
the silk flesh of a stranger  
on my shoulders:

I still turned away  
eyed the skin of copper beech  
a colonnade  
of gray upended crotches.

Under the streetlight  
my own shadow  
swung out and back  
and overtook me.

## Bat Child Found in Cave!

by Beth Martinelli

He hunts rodents and plucks the ripest gooseberries.  
The smell of mint follows him. His fangs bristle,  
hang in deadly points, but the child only chases the mice  
and nervous squirrels; he's a strict vegetarian. At two feet, two inches,  
police and scientists warn he's extremely dangerous.  
He skits and menaces along like several pieces  
of shadowy paper. Unlike true *Eptesicus fuscus*, he sees  
right through the dark; the night air opens for him  
as he rustles cypress trees and flirts with a reticent Barred Owl.  
Three miles away, car engines start, startle him,  
and in the next town, children's whispered bedtime stories beckon.  
Hovering in their windows until just before dawn, does he understand  
the words he hears with such impossible precision?  
He must count chickens and windowpanes in his head  
to fall asleep. Dangling with the iridescent stalactites at noon,  
he dreams of teeming reefs of coral and snowflakes,  
a fresh plateful of juniper. Miles underground his cave is quiet.  
The chamber hunches with cold, his fuzzy slippers wilting  
in a corner like a large pair of dandelions. A wicker basket  
brims with clementines. A table with fresh linen, fluted crystal.  
The hall floors sparkle, delirious with importance, the front door  
always standing open. His wings raise a small wind, he listens,  
shudders at his own ancestry. On his way home, the boy cuts across  
the moon.  
And the fading moon tries. Fails to focus through the silent, sour milk  
sky.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Bruce Bennett** is the author of four books and numerous chap-books. His most recent book, *Navigating the Distances: Poems New And Selected* (Orchises Press), was chosen by Booklist as “One Of The Top Ten Poetry Books Of 1999.” He co-founded and served as an editor of *Field : Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* and *Ploughshares* and has reviewed contemporary poetry books in The New York Times Book Review, The Nation, and Harvard Review. Since the early 1980’s he has served as an Associate Editor at State Street Press. He is Professor of English, Director of Creative Writing, and Director of the Book Arts Center at Wells College in Aurora, New York.

**Charles F. Burm** currently teaches at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. He also serves as the associate managing editor of *Washington Square*, the journal of the graduate creative writing program at New York University. He will receive a Master of Fine Arts degree in poetry from NYU in the spring of 2002.

**Hugh Cook** was born in England but educated in New Zealand. He currently lives in Yokohama, Japan and teaches English and aspects of English culture in Tokyo to junior high and elementary school students. He has been widely published in various outlets in England, Ireland, Canada, America and Australia. Some of his published novels include *Wizard War*, *The Questing Hero*, *The Hero’s Return*, *The Oracle*, and *Lords of the Sword*. He is currently working on “Oolong Morblock,” a multi-volume series of “no-holds-barred fantasy.”

**Richard Dokey’s** novel *The Hollow Man* was recently published

by *Delta West*. His stories have appeared in *Triquarterly*, *The Literary Review* and *The American Voice*, among many others. A new story is forthcoming in *Witness*.

**M. Evelina Galang** is the author of *Her Wild American Self*, a collection of short fiction from Coffee House Press. She has been widely published and her collection's title story has been short listed by both *Best American Short Stories* and Pushcart Prize. During the fall of 1999, she joined the creative writing faculty of Iowa State University where she has been at work on her novel, *What Is Tribe*, screenplay, *Dalaga*, an anthology of Asian American Art and Literature called *Screaming Monkeys* and *Lolas' House*, a book of essays based on the experiences of surviving WWII Comfort Women. She has recently been named a Senior Research Scholar by Fulbright and will continue her research in the Philippines in January of 2002.

**Corrinne Clegg Hales** is the author of four books of poems, most recently *Reconstruction*, winner of the Richard Snyder Poetry Prize, forthcoming from Ashland Poetry Press. Other awards include two NEA grants and the *River Styx* International Poetry Prize for 2000. Her poems have appeared in *The North American Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *River Styx*, *The Hudson Review*, and elsewhere, and she currently lives in Fresno, CA, where she teaches Creative Writing and American Literature in the MFA program at California State University, Fresno.

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**Allison Joseph** teaches at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, where she also serves as editor for *Crab Orchard Review* and director of the Young Writers Workshop, a summer conference for high school writers. Her latest book is *In Every Seam* (University of Pittsburgh Press).

**Joanne Lowery's** poems have appeared in many literary magazines, including *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, and *River Styx*. Her most recent collection is *Double Feature* from Pygmy Forest Press. She lives in Michigan.

**Loren MacLeod** has been learning how to write speculative fiction since 1996. Her work has been published in both cyberspace and print, and new stories are scheduled to appear next year in the anthologies *Dead But Dreaming* and *Wet: More Aqua Erotica*.

**Eileen Malone** freelances in the foggy necropolis of unincorporated Colma, where San Francisco buries its dead. She most recently won awards for poetry published in *Abiko Quarterly* (Japan), *So to Speak*, *Comstock Review*, and *Briar Cliff Review*.

**Beth Martinelli** is finishing her PhD in English at Western Michigan University.

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**Mokuo Nagayama** was born in Kurashiki, Japan. He worked as a translator at Kobe Custom House and then became a high school teacher. He belongs to the Poetry Society of Japan and has published five books of poetry: *Snow Bridge*, *Mist on the Ridge*, *To the Zodiac*, *Animals*, *Lost Ledge*, and *Squeals of the Wheel*. In 1985 he won 1st prize in the American Poetry Association Contest. He is now retired and lives in Kurashiki.

**Adela Najarro** completed her MFA at Vermont College in June of 1998. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in literature and creative writing at Western Michigan University. She works as an assistant editor for New Issues Press. Her poetry has appeared in *ACM: Another Chicago Magazine*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Artful Dodge* and elsewhere.

**Ward Parker** lives in Florida and is currently at work on his second novel. Since there are no basements in Florida, his plans for a model railroad empire have been put on hold.

**Leigh Phillips** has recently finished a first collection of poems titled "Subject to Saturn" and has been previously published in *The Album*. She received her BA from Hollins College in 2001, and is now pursuing an MA in English from Binghamton University.

**Christina Pugh** is a recent winner of the Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship, sponsored by Poetry magazine; the Grolier Poetry Prize; and the Associated Writing Programs' INTRO Award in Poetry. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Harvard Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Smartish Pace*, and on the website *Poetry Daily*, among other publications. Her criticism has appeared in *Boston Review*, *Arts Media*, *Verse*, and is forthcoming in

*Interrogating Images* (Northwestern University Press). She holds a doctorate in comparative literature from Harvard University and an MFA in poetry from Emerson College and was a lecturer in the Literature Concentration at Harvard from 1998-2001. Currently she works as an assistant professor of creative writing at CUNY, College of Staten Island.

**Susan Rich** is the author of *The Cartographer's Tongue/Poems of the World* (White Pine Press), which won this year's PEN West award. Her poems have appeared in *DoubleTake*, *Harvard Magazine*, *The Massachusetts Review* and *Many Mountains Moving*. She lives in Seattle, Washington.

**Mark Terrill** is a former merchant seaman and road manager for bands and has lived in Germany since 1984. Recent books include *Kid With Gray Eyes* from Cedar Hill Publications, *Love-Hate Continuum* from Green Bean Press, and a collection of his translations of the poetry of Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, *Like a Pilot*, from *Sulphur River Literary Review Press*. A collection of his prose poems, *Bread & Fish*, is forthcoming from The Figures.

**Richard K. Weems** has appeared in *The Mississippi Review*, *The Crescent Review* and *The Beloit Fiction Journal*. He is a regular contributor to *Pif Magazine*. He lives in New Jersey with a cat named Mathilde.

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