

# Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

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## Harpur Palate, Volume 3 Number 1, Summer 2003

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## Harpur Palate, Volume 3 Number 1, Summer 2003

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# Harpur Palate



VOLUME 3 NUMBER 1  
Summer 2003

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## Submissions

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. No multiple submissions. To submit to *Harpur Palate*, please send an SASE, cover letter (including an email address you check regularly) and 1 story or 3-5 poems (no poems longer than 10 pages) addressed to the appropriate editor(s) to:

*Harpur Palate*  
Dept. of English  
Binghamton University  
PO Box 6000  
Binghamton, NY 13902-6000

**READING PERIODS:** January 1-March 15 (Summer); August 1-October 15 (Winter). Submissions received outside of reading periods will not be evaluated. For more information please visit: <http://harpurpalate.binghamton.edu>.

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Before I say my goodbyes, let me first congratulate Scott Wolven, whose story "Controlled Burn" (vol. 2.2) was chosen for *Best American Mystery Stories* 2003. I'm also proud to announce that Sheree Renée Thomas's poem, "Black River Ritual" (vol. 2.2), was given an honorable mention by Terri Windling for *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* #16. Congratulations are also in order for Owen King, winner of the 2003 John Gardner Memorial Prize for Fiction. Laima Srugonis is the winner of the first *Harpur Palate*/TRIP/CRIT Translation Award for Lithuanian-born Tomas Venclova's "R. K." King's "Frozen Animals" and "R. K." appear in these pages.

This is my last issue as Managing and Fiction Editor of *Harpur Palate*. Three years ago, when I first came to Binghamton University, I was determined to start a student-run journal that embraced all genres of fiction and poetry instead of deciding what was "in" and "out." The graduates and undergraduates who have been a part of HP seek to present an eclectic selection to our readers; I thank those of you who sent e-mails or mentioned in your cover letters that you appreciated the variety.

Genre and mainstream. Form and free verse. They don't have to be at odds with each other. I hope that HP has helped, in some miniscule way, to expose readers to types of fiction and poetry that they may not normally have read. There are many genre ghettos, and they all deserve to be visited. My sincere thanks to everyone who has appeared in these pages and to the many writers and poets from around the world who have allowed us to read their work.

Letitia Moffitt and Doris Umbers will serve as the new Co-Managing Editors. Letitia will also be the new Fiction Editor. Anne Rashid and Thomas Rehtin will continue their wonderful work as the Poetry Editors. Thanks, Tom and Anne, for all you've done for HP. And thanks also to Joe Bisz, Associate Editor—you were a riot to work with.

Okay, so now this seems like a funeral. Before it really starts to sound like a dirge, I'd just like to thank all of the readers—past and present—for taking the time out of your already busy lives, working so hard through the slush piles, and adding your voices to the debates. Thanks also to all of you—all **THREE** of you—for reading these little editorial thingies.

Not an ending; just the beginning,  
Toiya Kristen Finley  
HP Managing and Fiction Editor  
May 7, 2003

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Coral Smart  
**Meal of bones**

After clearing the table, I collect the chicken bones from another dinner onto one chipped plate. The gristle is apparent on mine, chewed to the nub on my husband's, and merely licked on the boys'.

The corner nook was supposed to have a kitchen cubby table we never got around to buying. I settle into that corner, sitting cross-legged with the plate on my knees. The first bone is one of my own; even now I'm afraid of other people's germs. I gnaw on the joint clamping and releasing, twisting the bone held firm by my molars, waiting for the first break, the splintering of bone I can feel on my tongue, digging into my cheek. The bone snaps smoothly, the broken ends mutely raw. I chew—testing the edges with my teeth, searching for that jagged piece that would neatly snag in my throat, saliva pooling in my mouth from the incomplete swallow—to feel the gag reflex swimming over me again and again, the only thing moving down my throat the esophageal blood. But the first wing goes down without a hitch. I must have broken it down too much.

The next is my husband's. I snap the bone in half with my hands, hoping this tactic will yield sharper results. Slivers of bone appear above my clenched fists. Scooping them into my mouth I let them wander around, scraping the insides of my cheeks, nicking my tongue. I maneuver them with my tongue into the back of my mouth. I use my fingers to shove them in farther and one catches.

I cough and choke, trying to breathe around the bone. It is much more painful than I had imagined. My breath whistles around the fragment. I try to focus on the taste of blood, something I had anticipated. A salty taste lines my throat, intermingling with saliva. I lean back against the wall, trying to relax, enjoy the moment with control. The plate shifts on my knees, the bones rattle.

I focus on the overhead bulb with the vining globe. I try to pull together my last thoughts. Blackberry picking with my brother, scars from the thistles lining the patch and thorns from the bushes that

## Coral Smart

pierced my gloves. Walking the trestles under the bridge spanning the Oswego River. I was with people I grew to hate but it didn't matter then. Something that would have made this life worthwhile. But nothing rises to the challenge. When I try to focus on something it becomes clouded, leaving me as I am, a lonely wife staring at a cracked light fixture.

I hear the TV volume spike up as a commercial comes on. Footsteps from the other room move in my direction. I haven't fixed on a good memory to leave with, so I yank the bone out of my throat, filmy strings of blood and spit trailing out of my mouth. I wipe my mouth and chin on my sleeve. My husband comes into the kitchen, empty beer bottle in hand. He tosses it in the grocery bag hanging over the pantry door and opens the fridge for another. I slip the plate off my lap onto the floor and slide it towards the wall, hidden by my bulk.

He turns with another bottle in hand, sees me sitting here. A familiar cockeyed smile crinkles across his face. The bottle spins a little as he sets it on the table. He crosses the room to me, kneels down. His hand stroking my face postpones my intended meal. His eyes scrutinize mine, looking for something. I keep my face blank. He shrugs, takes my hands in his. I stand up, pulling him with me.

I make his body turn with mine so he can't see the plate of half-eaten bones. My fingers fumble, unbutton his shirt, reveal his raised collarbone. I wrap my left leg around his right knee, pull him closer, suck on his exposed chest. A noise from the living room turns his head. I put my finger to my lips, walk him into the bedroom.

I trace his eyebrows with the tip of my nose, he unbuttons my blouse. I hold my breath, waiting for his tongue to delineate each section of my body, the haggard figure-eight around my breasts, the v of the thighs, the slack of my belly button. After, I roll away from him, lounge in the warmth of his arm draped over my waist, kiss his wristbone.

HP

Richard Jordan  
**One Way to Go**

I asked him one time, "How did Grandma die?"  
and Grandpa said, "Well, blame the goddamn cats."  
He claimed that one had crawled up Grandma's chest  
while she was sleeping, glued its mouth to hers,  
and sucked out all her breath. But, still, I knew  
he must have taken in a dozen more  
after Grandma passed away. He swore  
the coeds dumped them in his yard before  
graduation. "Like abortions. Christ,  
I don't need another pissing flea  
hotel," he bitched, while warming buttermilk.  
"So why then, Grandpa? I mean if Grandma..." "Shush,"  
he cut me short and gave the pot a stir.  
"Look, kid," he said. "There are worse ways to go."

Richard Jordan  
**Learning To Spar**

Go back before the day I found you, Dad,  
firmly bound and cuffed. And who was that  
on top of you in spurs and tasseled bra,  
as if you were a sacrificial bull?

I'm eight years old and hanging by my briefs  
from a tree limb, wedgie buried deep.  
That's Chuck, the thug, all 5 foot 10 of him.  
"You wuss," he taunts. "Cry baby, Mama's boy."

And here you come. Chuck peels off on my bike.  
The branch gives out, I fall and whack my head.  
You snort and spit, "Can't you defend yourself?"

So Dad, I dedicate this verse to you  
and Chuck. I've given Mom a copy, too.  
She says she'll help you with the imagery.

Aimee Parkison  
Collecting

The wood from the carousel kit took a long time coming. While Nicky waited, Shane walked her two blocks away from his gravel yard to the house lightning had struck. All that was left on the hill was debris, the concrete foundation, and the charred, curving stairs.

The day before she had found a gold-tassel earring on the bottom step. Now she carried it in a black case. Climbing the stairs, she let the case knock against her knees so she could hear the contents rattling on the inside.

Leaning against the maple tree, Shane waved to her when she reached the top. She didn't wave back. Today was her ninth birthday, and she was waiting for her present. The week before Shane had promised the carousel. She didn't want him to build it, would rather spend her time studying what remained of the burnt house. If she listened long enough, she could hear the ashes scattering over the concrete.

She stood perfectly still for a moment to watch the bright space between his front teeth glinting like a diamond stolen from her mother's necklace. Holding the case over her head, she shook it furiously in the air. She heard a pearl bouncing over the scissors inside.

She was tired of Shane following her to the edge of the ruined house. He was twenty-nine, her father's son but too old to be her brother. He refused to climb the stairs or even set foot on the foundation. He brought along a knife to carve a circle into the maple tree.

"A pregnant lady used to live here before the big storm," Shane called up.

Nicky wasn't surprised to hear the lady was gone. Nicky's parents had also been taken by a storm while driving down the highway, but their house had survived. Shane sold it a week ago. Inside the black case, secrets of their old house remained.

When Nicky held the case close to her head and shook it, she heard the lady's tassel-chain earring drizzling into her father's shot glass inside. The day before Nicky had found the keyhole of an old

Aimee Parkison

doorknob. Today, the keyhole jangled inside her case like a coin hitting the side of a fountain.

She could see birds landing on the lower housetops. A squirrel jumped onto the chimney of Shane's roof and was frightened away by a crow's circling shadow. Now that Shane was the one who took care of her, she had moved into his painted-wood house. She thought she had stayed with him for at least a month. But in his dingy neighborhood, the days passed by so slowly she couldn't be sure. Nicky looked down at her feet as the crow landed. She saw the gilded handle of a teacup. When Shane wasn't looking, she picked it up, slipping the handle into her pocket.



Nicky kept the silver latch clamped and hung the key from the gold string around her neck like a common charm. At night, she slept with the case clutched in her arms and the blanket draped over the peeling leather.

If she ever had to open the case to add to her collection, she unlatched it in the dark. She hadn't looked inside since she left the land her parents used to live on. She didn't need to. She could see everything in the case with her eyes shut just like she could still see the land unfolding on either side of the river. The sound of the keyhole clacking against her father's glasses assured her everything was still in its place.

The case had belonged to her mother, who threw it away because the red velvet on the inside was wearing back, leaving behind patches of dirty gauze. Round as the dial of the cuckoo clock at the old house, the case had once been trusted to hold her mother's famous jewelry. Now it contained items much more rare. Nicky decided to keep the contents a secret until she was a very old woman.

She never went anywhere without it. As she walked, she heard the contents rolling over the gauze: a gold screw knocking against the white top of a glass flower. In the bathroom, she laid the case beside the old tub and heard a single bead hit the blue bottle filled with water taken from the river on the land her parents used to own.

Like the soap bars in the sink, the case smelled of her mother's dresses. It once sat on top of the wardrobe in her parents' bedroom.

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Collecting

When her mother unlocked the wardrobe doors, her skirts bellowed like carnations strewn upside-down across the floor.

Nicky scraped her fingernails on the lock and heard her mother graze the mirror with the tiny key she held between her thumb and forefinger. She remembered her mother lifting the lid of the case, the shadow of her gloved hands falling dark over the jewels.

The case had been full of gold and silver jewelry, necklaces, pendants, and pins shaped like dancers and noble insects: lady beetles, black monarchs, blue dragonflies, a praying mantis with red-bead eyes. Her mother had picked up the mantis the night of the Scygazers' cocktail party.

"Which one do you want to hold?" her mother had asked. Her parents had been dressing for the party when the summer storm rolled in with a gentle rumbling across the sky. The thunder made Nicky afraid for Canbury Green, her black horse in the barn.

"I really hate this old case," her mother had said, pouring all the jewels onto her pillow. "It's older than I am, and I'm retiring it." Nicky heard the dull thud of the case hitting the wastebasket before her mother slipped the jewelry into a velvet pouch.



Now Shane was tapping his fingers on the case as if it were a toy drum.

"I wonder whatever happened to all your mother's old jewelry," he said.

"What jewelry?" Nicky asked, pushing the case under the rug in Shane's living room.

Nicky pulled the case back toward her and spun it on its string. Inside, she heard her father's after-shave splashing in its bottle. She slapped the string hard against her thighs until it mimicked the taunt sound of her mother's ballerina hair snagging on the brush. Inside the case, one of the loose mantis eyes rolled over her mother's ivory comb. Nicky heard the silver hum of the zipper on the evening dress as it glided up her mother's straight back.

"I didn't mean it that way," Shane said. "Little sister, you know I didn't."

He was drinking ice water out of a highball glass when he began

Aimee Parkison

talking about the carousel kit. "\$199 in shipping fees alone. It goes from a ship to a plane to a truck on the highway." He flipped through the old carpenter's manual. "Perfect for birthday parties, big enough for all the neighborhood kids to ride on. Think of all the friends you'll have over." When he was finished with the water, swishing and swirling into his open mouth, he spat out the piece of squeezed lemon.

"My birthday was yesterday," Nicky said.

Every time a car passed by the house, he looked out the window. "You'll love it, honey. I'll bet you'll never want to ride a real horse again," he said. "How many girls do you know with a carousel in their front yard?"

"I want to go outside," she said, "to the lady's house."

"That skeleton of a burnt house is no place for a girl to play," he said, laying the manual down, "even if the staircase is in perfectly good condition."

She let go of the case as the hinges of its handle sighed. She heard the sound of her mother dropping a handful of necklaces onto the tile floor of the old house. Nicky held onto the strap, cracking it at Shane like a whip, before twirling the case through the air. She heard her mother's wedding ring graze a bottle of her father's after-shave.

"Quit waving that damn thing in my face," Shane shouted.

"What?" she asked. "I couldn't hear you."

"If you want the carousel, put that case down!"

She held on tighter.

That week Shane scattered lemons all over his house. At night, she heard a clink and saw the glasses glinting when the headlights of a passing car shone on her window. She thought of his Adam's apple bobbing on his throat while he drank. She listened for the heavy, sinking sound of his swallow, which reminded her of a man dropping a child into a lake. Her mattress level with the tabletops, she fell asleep breathing lemon air.



Shane's house was full of books she wasn't allowed to open and trinket boxes he hadn't offered to unlatch. He didn't have much furniture, only a piano that didn't play, a few round tables littered with

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Collecting

gyroscopes and yo-yos, and a giant, ironwood chair stacked with leather cushions.

Shane said the chair was priceless and weighed over 200 pounds. The legs were carved into lion's paws resting on solid globes. The chair's arms tapered off in two women's round faces. She pinched one of the women's noses. On the crest was a jester crying smooth tears.

She took an empty glass off of the piano and pretended to drink. On the walls were photographs of the moon in all phases of its cycle and a single wagon wheel rolling past a tumbleweed. Shane's knife collection was locked in a glass display, but Nicky wasn't interested in his tools. She flipped through a heavy book next to the carpenter's manual and found pictures of jigsaws and diagrams of windmills and carousels. Her name was written in pencil under the drawing of a lighthouse. She tried to rub it out with her finger.

She felt it was her duty to tamper with possessions that were not her own. The many questions she had wanted to ask her mother should have been spread out across her entire lifetime. Even if she had known her parents' end was near, there would have been no time to ask such questions before the storm.

She put the book down and reached for a pearly trinket box. Opening the latch, she found a steel marble, fish bones, and a wooden doll on a chain. She untangled the doll, gave her case a single pat, and dropped the chain into her pocket. It poured in like a narrow stream of water.

Shane walked into the room and the trinket box fell to the floor. "What are you doing?" he asked, looking at his throne.

"I dropped it."

The fish bones rattled a while after fracturing into scattered shards.

"Where's the doll? I made it as a surprise for you. But you can't keep out of my things, and now you've ruined it," he said, his eye-balls rolling behind his round glasses.

She motioned to the floor by tapping her shoes.

"Bring it here, or you don't get your carousel," he said.

"You're not my mom." Holding the case close to her ear like a

Aimee Parkison

giant seashell, she heard the river rolling over a tree that had fallen into its water.

“Do it.”

“You’re not my dad.” She clutched the case tighter and listened for the metallic moan of the garage door opening at her parent’s house. Instead, she heard the key turning in the doorknob of the burnt house on the hill.

“You think you’re so smart with your little case, don’t you?”

As she swung around to walk away, she heard her mother’s wedding ring hit the handle of the teacup.



The tip of Shane’s pencil scratched furiously in the margins of the carpenter’s manual. The sound was more terrible than the talons of a hawk on a string clutching a banister. Nicky lay her head on the case and heard her father talking to the fierce birds he used for hunting, the silence of the dust from the owls’ wings falling as the barn doors opened.

She held the case over her belly as she crept near to Shane to see what he was writing. He was sitting in his enormous chair.

“What now?” he asked. The pencil stopped moving. She had seen two words written in scrawling letters, *over roof*, before Shane closed the manual gently on his long finger.

Place markers with frayed edges stuck out from between the pages, causing the manual to bulge thick in Shane’s hands. The cover was slick and barely blue where the letters of the title had been rubbed away. A photograph fell out of the manual.

Nicky stepped back. Shane opened the manual slowly while keeping his gaze fixed on her. She looked down at the case in her hands and smiled.

“Do you want me to take that away from you?” he asked, reaching for the photograph. “You’re tempting me, right? You’re so cute with that little key dangling from your necklace.”

“Am not.” When she tossed the case into the air and caught it, she heard her father’s razor snagging on her mother’s lace garter, the hands of the old clock clanging against a tiny green light bulb inside.

“What’s in there anyway?”

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"Plenty."

Shane kept his right hand inside the manual. With his left arm, he reached down slyly. Nicky saw him reclaim the black and white photograph of a woman leaning over a chair. He put it back inside the manual, unaware that another had slipped out.

Nicky laughed to herself. The other photograph had fallen under the shadow of the piano bench. She tried to look away from where it had landed. Shane watched her with squinting eyes as he straightened in his chair.

"What's so funny?" he asked, the sweat trickling from under the curls of his dark hair onto his forehead.

"Can't say." She was amused by the trembling in his voice. She balanced the case high on her head and curtsied slowly.

"Oh, I think you can."

She started to shiver. The case fell to the floor and rolled away from her toward Shane. She heard a single jingle bell tumbling into a porcelain pepper shaker inside. Shane stopped the case with the shiny, pointed toes of his shoes.

"What did you see?" he asked. "Nicky, who was in the photograph?"

"I didn't see."

He kicked the case across the floor to her. She leaned over it as it slowed down. The glass cover of a small frame cracked against the lip of a wine bottle. The cork was also inside. When the case hit the wall, she heard her mother's violin falling to the floor, the delicate neck breaking in three exquisite places, the strings crossed and bent.



Nicky crawled under the piano bench, holding the case between her ankles to keep her arms and hands free. When she picked up the photograph, she let out a long breath of air, whistling through her bottom teeth. It was black and white, a picture of a boy about her age fishing in a river valley. She thought the boy had Shane's cutting eyes. The boy's river could have been the one she left behind, but in the photograph the trees looked shorter along the bank and the rocks, more jagged.

She scraped the boy's face off the slick paper with her fingernails.

Aimee Parkison

She ran into the dark closet in the room where she slept and slipped the river photograph into her case.

When she shook the case, she jostled the bottle of her father's after-shave and heard the sound of his skipping a flat rock over the water. In her parents' house, no matter where she stood, she had been able to hear the river rushing over the hills not far away. Her dark horse Canbury Green often leaned over in silence to drink from its edge.

She had seven strands of her horse's mane and shavings from its hooves inside her case. But she would not touch them. She listened for the hoof shavings twanging darkly against a twig from the silver maple that once rustled outside her bedroom window.

It had been her sleeping tree. The thin branches twitched at the slightest movement of an owl landing. The white-gray bottoms of the blown leaves were the last interesting colors she had seen every night before she closed her eyes under the shadow-canopy of her old room. But the night of the storm she watched the leaves thrashing as branches were torn away by the wind, shattering her window. The damaged tree was not what she chose to remember. She remembered the house the way it was, the window before it was broken, and the maple tree while it was still whole.

Thoughts of silver leaves still made her yawn. She had three of them tucked away inside her case. When she scuffed it against the closet walls, she heard the leaves crackling and the static sounds of her mother's long robe picking up electricity on the carpet, her mother's frightened cry when her charged fingertips touched the doorknob.

Nicky didn't have the tree to herself for long. She had been waiting at her window the morning after the Scygazers' party, looking out past the damaged trunk, waiting for her father's car to pull into the driveway. She heard the rumbling of Shane's black truck instead. The silver maple was dying. Too many of its branches had broken off during the storm.

When Shane told her to pack her things, he was holding an ax to the maple trunk. She ran inside, flung the case out of the wastebasket then ran with it all over the house and the land. She pulled tassels off curtains, wicks out of candles, pages out of encyclopedias. Anything

Collecting

she admired she broke into small pieces. She took the best of the pieces with her. She gathered her father's clippers, laces from his boots, strands of his beard. She kept her mother's lip-gloss, the glass lids of her mother's perfume bottles. She chose smooth, amber stones from the river, cattails, a tiny bottle filled with its water.

After collecting, she went back inside her parents' house where Shane had been pacing, his breath ragged and strange.

"Was it you?" he asked. "Oh my God, was it you who tore this place apart?"

Before they left, he picked up her mother's violin and threw it across the kitchen tile. Nicky reached for a few of its splinters.



Now there were only two rules for collecting: first, every item had to be small enough to fit inside the case; second, she had to take what she wanted without being seen. Most of the time, the items were of little value to others: a dog's tooth, a feather off of a dead bird, a sliver of Shane's toenail. But if she needed something that already belonged to someone else, the owner was no matter as long as she kept to the rules.

So far, she had taken a barrette out of a little girl's hair, a pair of scissors from an old woman's pocket, the handle off of a toilet, the tag off of a cat's collar. She especially didn't want Shane to discover the pouch of lemon seeds she had gathered from his water glasses. Next summer she hoped to be far away from the carousel, planting a grove of citrus trees by the river.

At the moment, she had her eyes on the one item that would be harder to collect than all the others. Although Shane rarely laughed, he had a nice, bright smile because of the tiny, white diamond glinting in between his front teeth. Once she had slipped the diamond into her case and heard it rolling into the keyhole, she would drop the key inside, leaving the latch clamped shut forever.



After straightening the frames on the walls, Shane paced by the windows with a satisfied expression. He made more frantic notes in his manual, stopping occasionally to sharpen his pencil with a knife he took out of his pocket. Sometimes he would whittle the pencil

Aimee Parkison

down to nothing then begin a long spell of cursing, as if he just realized what he had done. When he left to search for another pencil, Nicky crept towards the manual. But he was never gone long enough for her to lay her hands on it.

She heard the sputtering of a truck engine shutting off. She ran with the case to the window. She saw Shane signing a piece of paper and three men in yellow shirts unloading wooden boxes from their truck. They carried six trunks into Shane's living room then left without a word. Shane came in with a crow bar. As he began hacking and prying at the lids, Nicky waited for him to unpack intricate painted horses. Instead, he uncovered her mother's dresses drowning in Styrofoam chips.

He threw the dresses aside as carelessly as if he were handling old newspapers. Some of the silk snagged and ripped on the trunk's edge.

"Come on. Come on," he said. "Where is it?"

He tossed away her mother's lace robes and her father's shoes. Bottles of her mother's make-up shattered on the floor. He flung a portrait of her parents in its glass frame at the window. He slowly lifted the lid of the cigar boxes that contained her father's coin collection then let the coins fall gently through his fingers.

Nicky lay down on the dresses and took in the scent of her mother's sachet balls. She began tearing the buttons off the dresses. They were made of cut glass and shell. When the case bounced lightly on her hip, the buttons sounded like hail hitting her mother's open parasol.



The evening light was still warm. The shadow of herself and her case stretched out long and narrow on the road before her. She heard the hard bottoms of her shoes tapping the asphalt softer than the hooves of Canbury Green. Inside her case, the tip of a dart pecked at a yellow pool ball. She heard the pregnant lady talking to her parakeet before the rain came.

A few of the neighborhood dogs had gathered at the burnt house. Two red Chows and a German shepherd were fighting over a can leaking yellow liquid. Nicky raked her fingers through the white-gray powder covering the rubble. The ashes were the color of the sil-

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ver maple but as dull and scattered as the life that remained after the thunder. She found the door of a birdcage, the shell of a small turtle, a paintbrush, a metal ruler, a pacifier on a string. She picked up a jointed bone so tiny it might have been a sparrow toe.

She climbed to the top of the staircase to watch the dog fight die down below her. She saw Shane running up the road, his hair blowing as his head turned abruptly from side to side. He was calling her name.

He came to the edge of the concrete foundation but didn't step onto its surface. "Nicky," he said, looking around at the other houses, "what are you doing up there? Come down."

"Never." She sat down on her case. The buttons spilled over the hoof shavings inside. She heard Canbury Green galloping out of the barn before the summer storm.

"You have to come down sometime, don't you? When you do, I'll be home waiting."

"Come up here and get me. What are you afraid of?"

"I don't have time to play games."

She watched him walk back to his house and shut the door. The wind died down first to a breeze then to silence. The dogs looked at her for an instant and went on fighting.



She walked slowly back to Shane's house. The light was fading fast, and there was no place left for her to go. She expected him to be waiting. But the house was quiet inside. In the living room the shadow of the throne stretched across the floor. She felt afraid until she saw the carpenter's manual sitting by itself in the center of a small, round table.

She picked up the manual and ran with it into the bathroom. She set the manual and her case down beside the tub and turned on the water. She shed her clothes, dropping her shirt on top of the case. She heard the river rushing and her mother dropping bath beads into the water.

She stepped into the tub, reached over its side, picked up the manual by its spine. It was heavy in her hands. She was careful not to drop it as she spread it open on her knees and began to flip through

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its pages. The inside cover read, "To Shane from Grandpa Newly." She couldn't remember much about Grandpa Newly, who had died years ago, only the clicking noises he had made with his dentures to make her smile.

An envelope slipped out from the pages. She opened it and found photographs of a woman polishing a table, painting a picture of a forest, holding a small bird on her finger.

The steam from the bath water was beginning to crinkle the pages. Nicky studied the sketches of watch gears, guitar saddles, oval-backed chairs. Articles had been clipped and pasted onto the pages. She read their titles: "The Carousel, A Thing of Beauty," "On Carving Horses," "Mechanics and Motion." Her name was written under a drawing of the giant water wheel of a steamboat.

She heard footsteps in the hall and dropped the manual into the water. When she tried to squeeze the pages dry, they stuck together. The manual had swollen to twice its size. She heard Shane's breathing outside the door and dressed in a hurry. She stuck her head through an armhole of her shirt and slipped on the slick floor in terror.

The manual was still dripping when she handed it to Shane. The dark ink stained her wrists and palms. She leaned against the case, securing it against her back and the wall. As she shifted, she felt the case slipping and heard the heel of her mother's shoe touch down on the staircase.

When Shane took the manual from her, he held it in silence as if he didn't know what it was. She felt afraid for her case. She began to walk away with it.

"This has been in the family for generations," Shane said, smoothing his hands over the wet cover. "I kept a record of everything, everything." He began to wipe the cover on his pant legs. "How the hell am I supposed to build the carousel without it?"



Shane was smiling the day the carousel kit came in a silver truck. He arranged the cut wood in an arc on his gravel yard. He slit the cardboard boxes with his pocketknife. Inside were more boxes full of sawdust, planks tied with cord, and discs of all sizes.

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"Don't say I never did anything for you, honey. You and that little black case."

"You mind your own business. You're not my daddy," she said. Shane swallowed hard. She put her ear to the case and heard her father in his heavy boots stepping into the river.

"Thank God for that."

She loved the smell of the new wood, like a whole forest had been cut down to nothing. While Shane hammered, she tapped on the sides of her case. The way the carousel was turning out, all splintery and lop-sided, made her want to run to the house lightning had struck. Inside her case, a teaspoon hit the lens of a camera, making a sound like a single drop of rain hitting the tin roof of the barn.

"You stay here, now," Shane said. He dropped the hammer and ran his fingers through his hair. A glossy strand fell away. She walked over the round base. "You're a good girl," he said. When he turned away from her and started hammering again, she picked up the single hair. He turned back to her suspiciously. "I'm not doing all this work for nothing, am I?"

"No," she said. The staircase loomed twisted on the hill, as charred and spare as a backbone after the flesh had been burnt away.

"So you like your carousel?"

✦ He was out in the yard hammering every day that week. She had nothing to do but watch every thundering moment surrounded by unfinished wood and horses impaled on long poles. They were leaning on each other and badly formed. They seemed to her not really horses at all. She threw the case into the air and caught it again and again. From the inside, came the sound of hooves coming down on the meadowland.



"Nothing will ever take the place of my Canbury Green," Nicky said.

Shane spilled a bucket of nails on the circle base. "I should have known better than to start this," he said, picking up a hammer. He had already secured the umbrella canopy. "You were spoiled rotten by the time you came to me, and now nothing I could do would ever please you." He looked down at the new scuffmarks on his shoes.

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"Your daddy should have never given you a real horse to ride."

"Canbury Green," she said, swinging the case over her hair.

"Why don't you name one of the carousel horses?"

"I want to go to the lady's house," Nicky said. She dropped the case to the ground and heard the pacifier hit the metal ruler.

"What lady?"

"The pregnant lady on the hill who left when the storm came."

"What do you want with her?"

"I'll give one of the horses her name."

"Like hell you will. I never knew it anyway."

"So," Nicky said, rocking the case in her arms. She heard the sparrow bone hit her mother's curler.

"Maybe she wasn't even pregnant. She might have been just fat. A rich woman, young and living alone, she had the finest house on the block."

"And it burnt down," Nicky said. Inside her case, the paintbrush fell on her father's clippers. She thought she heard the camelhair bristles swipe over the velvet.

"I only saw her from far away," he said, "high up on her little hill. Serves her right, trying to live above the rest of us."

Nicky put her face on the case and began to shiver.

♦ "That's not what I meant," Shane said, dropping the hammer. ♦  
"God, that sounded awful. I've been working like a dog these last couple of days. I never really knew her. I shouldn't have brought you to her house."

"I was sorry that night when I saw the fire," he said, sitting down on the carousel. "It had been storming a long time. I thought I heard a baby cry a little before the thunder."



Shane painted the carousel blue, white, and gold. Nicky noticed the horses had no distinguishable manes or tails. He waited for the paint to dry before he put on another coat. Gold enamel flaked over the horses' eyes.

"Get on," he said, but there were no painted saddles and no music. The carousel wasn't turning. He helped her onto the back of what she thought was a blue dog. From where she sat, the neighbor-

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hood was carved up into long sections by the gold poles. In the middle of the carousel was a large, white box with a door. Shane walked into it as if it were a closet.

"It's powered by wind," he said, coming out. "But I have to start the gears turning."

He grabbed onto one of the poles and started running. The carousel picked up speed until the house was a blur. She held on tighter to the black case. The staircase on the hill was just a white streak. She heard the scissors hit the dog's tooth and shouted, "Slow down." Dobermans, not horses, were rushing in on every side.

"I don't know how," Shane was saying as he ran with the pole still in his hands.

The neighborhood eventually stopped turning. The bottle of river water cracked against the bottle of her father's after-shave. As Shane lifted her off the blue dog, splinters cut into her legs.

"What's the matter?" he asked while she was still in his arms. "Don't you like your carousel? That was only the first pony," he said. "You've still got twelve more left to ride."

"I hurt my leg," she said, holding onto her case with both hands. Water began to trickle out of a crease on the lid. As the glass bead skipped over the shards of the broken bottles, she heard her mother singing in the shower.

"Want me to kiss it and make it better?"

She saw the white diamond flare twice before he puckered his lips. Through the dark hole in his mouth, it glinted in her direction like a baby bird's winking eye.

He was laughing hard and trying to cover up the diamond while he smiled. "Did you really think I was going to kiss you?" he asked.

She spat in his eye. Shane dropped her on the gravel. She got up and kicked the horse she had been riding. When its slender leg broke apart, she saw it was as delicate and hollow as her mother's violin.



She tried to run away, but Shane was right behind her. She felt his hand touching her arm. As she ran faster, the case bounced hard on her right knee. Inside, the lemon seeds poured out of the pouch and trickled over her mother's wedding ring, the dog's tooth, the blue

Aimee Parkison

bottle, and one of Shane's eyelashes. When she lifted the case over her head to put the strap around her neck, she heard the woman who used to live in the burnt house pouring cereal into a bowl before the storm.

Nicky climbed to the top of the stairs and lay down on the case. She could see the carousel below her turning by itself on the wind. Shane hesitated a moment before stepping onto the house's foundation. He towered above her, sobbing until his whole body shook the stairs. When he finally smiled again, Nicky thought she saw the diamond slipping out of his front teeth or a fleck of spittle catching the sunlight as it fell. She almost reached for it.

With one hand, his fingers clutching her hair, Shane lifted her body off the highest stair. The latch on her case broke apart. Her collection fell through the air: her mother's wedding ring, the teacup handle, the glass bead, the white top of the flower, gone. A strand of Shane's hair and a bird's feather blew far past the dog's tooth.

"You're not my mommy. You're not my daddy," she kept saying, the lid of the empty case flapping like the wing of a stunned bird.

He carried her down the stairs. From far away, the carousel looked beautiful, horses, not Dobermans, leaping in a swirl of blue and gold.

HP

Karen R. Porter  
**The Fat Boy Dreams of Russian Springs**

The fat boy dreams of St. Petersburg  
while lazily dipping his fries in ketchup.  
He tries to imagine a Russian April.  
His straw is sucking air,

and he's lazily dipping his fries in ketchup.  
He tries to belch demurely.  
His straw is sucking air.  
It must be pretty when the ice melts.

He tries to belch demurely  
holding a hand in front of his lips.  
It must be pretty when the ice melts  
and flowers push through the mud.

Holding a hand in front of his lips  
he says a small prayer.  
Flowers push through the mud  
like Christ rising from the dead.

He says a small prayer  
for all the people in Russia.  
Like Christ rising from the dead,  
the warmth always returns

for all the people in Russia  
in their sturdy, snowy homes.  
The warmth always returns.  
He takes a final bite of burger.

In their sturdy, snowy homes,  
they await spring's arrival.  
He takes a final bite of burger  
then hoists his girth from the plastic seat.

James Norcliffe  
how to talk to a peacock

he will not want to know  
about the harsh whistle of oxygen  
the gasp beneath the plastic face mask

he cannot anticipate things beyond  
the immediate strut flounce and flourish  
so if you don't mind  
keep it light

shining  
keep it iridescent  
don't mention the blood

the wail of distant ambulances  
is an unnecessary distraction  
he would prefer the deep silence  
of black waters studded with lilies  
their mute admiration

but if you must mention stethoscopes  
(or calipers or scalpels)  
just speak of them as  
bright shiny objects  
of things perhaps  
with their own beauty  
although not the beauty  
of the fabulous eye

in his fan tail  
(at which you must gasp)  
of perfect feathers

WINNER  
JOHN GARDNER MEMORIAL PRIZE FOR FICTION  
Owen King  
**Frozen Animals**

*Winter 1925*

The three men moved in a close line, tied to one another by a hemp cord: Kosskoff, the biggest man, took the point; second in the procession was Funt, the other trapper, and third was Pinet, the dentist. A heavy snow was falling, thickening the pass, and slowing the trek. They were on their way to Kosskoff's wife. The trappers had a cabin and a meat house on the south side of the mountain, three or four more miles up. Kosskoff's wife had something wrong with her teeth. She was pregnant; it wasn't safe for her to travel.

The way between the two cliffs was a bottleneck of snow curving gradually up and out of sight. It narrowed as they ascended, but there was still room for as many as five men to move comfortably. Whorls of deep freeze marked the rock faces on either side. Rising hundreds of feet, the cliffs folded in jutting piles of slate, stopping only where they seemed to meet the sky—a sliding gray-black mat of clouds—as if the weather were made of something solid. The snow fell over and across everything.

Several times the third man, the dentist, seemed to lag, perhaps staggered by the wind, perhaps tiring. He would pause, appearing to collect himself, and rub his arms through his parka. The dentist would touch his scarf-covered throat with a mitten, appearing to check for a pulse. Then, he would plod forward.

Behind the men, their tracks walked away on the wind.



Powerful, intermittent gusts obscured Funt, the second trapper, from Pinet's window of vision. The dentist was still a bit drunk; he worried something would happen and the line would break and they could be separated. In his life Pinet admitted that he was far from guiltless—he had, for instance, been unfaithful to his wife—but he felt

Owen King

that a death by freezing was a punishment that should be reserved for sins greater than his own. He understood that he was a weak man, susceptible to temptation, cringing in confrontation—and wasn't the knowing of it punishment enough? This was the way the dentist was thinking as he walked, putting one heavy boot in front of the other, the nose on his face like a stalactite.

The prospect of spending the night with two trappers and the woman made him gloomy. In this weather there was no chance that they would be able to go back down the mountain until the next day.

Pinet knew Funt vaguely from the town's only tavern, and disliked him. The tavern, a black belly of a place, windowless and airless, had only a few tables and on a couple of occasions the dentist had been forced to sit with the small trapper. Funt was crude and bad smelling, and talked of nothing except whores and killing animals; he seemed emblematic of everything Pinet disliked about the backwoods town and the life it condemned him to. Once, over pints of half-rancid potato vodka, he told Pinet a horrible story about a prostitute with no legs who performed obscene magic tricks. For a period of weeks the dentist suffered from recurring nightmares about the poor woman.

Kosskoff he had never seen before. He was large, and, Pinet guessed, very stupid. The big trapper had been brief when they woke the dentist, simply explaining the situation, and producing the wad of bills from an inner pocket of his great coat. In the lead of Funt and Pinet the man climbed tirelessly, the black train of his fur coat sliding over the snow like a living creature.

Moving uphill against the wind, and with the snow in their faces and stinging their eyes, Pinet tried to imagine the life of the woman who was stuck—*trapped*, by his way of thinking—in the same cabin with them. A toothache probably seemed like relief to her. The dentist shivered; he was tired and he needed a drink; the shiver collected in his groin, and Pinet realized that he needed to piss, badly.



He yanked on the cord. The other two stopped, and waded back to the dentist, pushing through waves of snow.

Kosskoff drew the other two men into a huddle, their arms over

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each others' shoulders, heads together. In the circle of bodies they could speak with relative ease while the wind rose in a muffled roar at their backs. All three men wore heavy weather masks with holes for the eyes and nose.

"You stopped," said Kosskoff.

"I have to piss," gasped Pinet, "Stand there, please. I can't go in the wind—I'll freeze up. Just give me a minute." He bit at his mitten, trying to pull the ice-stiffed thing off.

"The vodka, right? Rum?" Funt sounded merry.

"Just stand there and break the damn wind," said Pinet, getting the mitten loose. The tips of his fingers were without feeling. He fumbled under his parka, searching for the buttons of his fly.

The snow dropped in sheets, powder rolled off their shoulders.

Popping the buttons loose, Pinet touched his penis and winced at the cold of his fingers.

He looked up, suddenly aware of the closeness of the other two men huddled around him; they still had their arms over his shoulders. They were watching him through the gaps of their masks. "Back up a little," said Pinet. "I've got to piss."

"The vodka, right?" Funt smiled and nodded.

Kosskoff blinked a few times, but said nothing. There were flakes of ice on his beard.

"Back up," said Pinet. "It'll only be a moment. If you don't back up I'm going to piss on your shoes."

Funt's smile widened. He chuckled.

"What?" The dentist was getting irritated. He clutched his penis beneath the skirt of the parka. His bladder throbbed.

Pinet looked again at Kosskoff. The big trapper shrugged and took a couple of steps back. Funt took a couple of steps back.

"Thank you," said Pinet. The dentist had heard stories about trappers, about men who lived together in the mountains. He didn't like them standing there, but it was too cold to piss against the wind.

The dentist lifted up the skirt of his parka. It was still very cold; the shock of the air brought tears to his eyes. His testicles shrank with goosepimples. He ground his teeth and squeezed his eyes shut. His urethra stung at the effort, but nothing came. For a second he

## Owen King

thought a piece of ice had lodged itself into his urethra, but when he looked down at his penis—a blue tinge had colored the tip—he saw there was nothing.

“Turn around,” he called to the trappers. “Fucking turn around—I can’t go with you watching me.”

The two trappers exchanged glances. Funt laughed, but the sound was whipped away by a hurtle of snow. They turned slowly around until their backs were facing the dentist.

Pinet was trembling and there was a wobbly feeling in his knees. Looming through the rolling snow devils, the lead cloud cover seemed to press against the cliff tops. Pinet felt a touch of vertigo and wondered what would come first, the piss, or the vomit. The house call was worth fifty dollars, no small sum to the dentist.

He made the water in painful spurts. The yellow water pattered in the snow at his feet, and a few droplets blew onto the dentist’s own boots.

When he was done, Pinet put his penis back into his pants, and took several deep breaths. Maybe he wouldn’t be sick.

He hauled on the nylon cord and the other two men turned around. They huddled up again.

“You think that’s bad,” said Funt, “The clap, *mon ami*—it’s like broken teeth chewing—”

Pinet bent forward, gagging, but managed to hold back from vomiting. The mixture of vodka and bile was coppery on his tongue. He dropped to his knees in the snow. He wanted to lie down and hug himself. Kosskoff grabbed the dentist’s elbow and pulled him up straight.

“Not much farther,” said Kosskoff. “My wife will make food. You can get a drink then.”

The snow rained against their bodies. The weather seemed to be getting heavier. Pinet’s groin burned from the exposure to the cold. He wasn’t used to this kind of exertion. He gradually felt his balance returning.

“Not much farther?” he asked.

Kosskoff shook his big head, No.

“And there’s something to drink there? Vodka?”

"You bet," said Funt, winking, "Vodka and whores and cards and an accordion player who sings out his ass. Steaks, too. Big fucking steaks. Yessir, we got a saloon up there, and it's a pretty nice one."

Pinet shrugged off Kosskoff's hand. The other two men started to move away. The dentist watched the cord that connected them together as it played out, snaking uncertainly through the snow.

Something occurred to him—it was often like that lately, things would rush up at him from nowhere, things that didn't make sense, and he'd find his hands were trembling, his heart crashing, his head crowded. The shelves of the rock gathered around them, bearded with ice, the spinning snow, the sliding gray mat of the sky, the clawing lifelessness of it all, had brought it back to him: as a boy, he'd been a great keeper of pets. He'd had a pair of black gerbils. Twins, his mother said, and he named them Molly and Polly after two girls in a storybook. Pinet let Molly and Polly run up and down his arms, squeaking and playing. He stroked their fur carefully, with just his index finger, because they were small and fragile. Pinet was a very young boy when he kept Molly and Polly. And he loved the black gerbils and tried to take as good care of them as he knew, but an illness got one of them; he couldn't recall which one. It happened over night and in the morning, they found the one chewing on the other, nibbling its leg. Of course, that meant they had to kill the living one, too, because it had got the sickness from eating its sister. Pinet had observed dutifully as his mother put the survivor in the steel ice box they kept in the basement. Pinet had been permitted to give the gerbil a few strokes to say good-bye. There wouldn't be any pain, his mother promised, but thinking of it now, he wondered.

The dentist pulled on the cord again. Kosskoff came back. Funt threw up his arms.

"Yes?" asked Kosskoff.

"We're not going to freeze are we?" asked Pinet.

Kosskoff squinted at him.

"I don't want to freeze," said Pinet, "I just want a drink." He knew it was unreasonable, maybe even mad, but the memory of the gerbil, curled up in a comma, fur stiff with ice, black eyes clouded white, seemed like a premonition.

Owen King

"You'll live," said Kosskoff, "You'll have a drink. But only if you move your ass." He reached forward and gave the dentist a firm push, square in the chest. Pinet staggered.

The big trapper turned and went forward. Funt let him get ahead, then followed.

Dragging his boots—one step and then another—Pinet started, too.

The snow thickened, and even Funt disappeared. The dentist concentrated on the cord. One step and then another. It was like sleep-walking, but he did not dream.

Over and across everything, the snow fell.

When he awoke, they were banging on the door for the girl to let them in, out of the storm.



"I'm divorced," said Pinet. Funt had asked him if the mark on his neck was a love bite. They were in the cabin.

The trapper's wife was cooking fish and the room was close with the smell. She was a sparrow of a girl, whose distended belly stretched her stiff dress to a second skin.

Pinet sipped vodka from a tin cup. He was okay now, he was calm. The vodka was horrible, but it would do; he rolled it around in his mouth. The dentist wasn't sure how long it had taken them after the piss break, but he was warm again, that was the main thing.

Outside, the wind roared and whipped, throwing snow against the house.

"You've learned your lesson," said Funt. The light of the small trapper's cigarette ember painted deep hollows in his thin cheeks. Above his lip the trapper had an unbecoming wisp of mustache and his hands were small and white around his own cup. "Stick to whores, keep it business."

Coming in from the cold, the girl had helped the men discard their frozen layers. Stripped down to their long johns they had sat on a bear skin a couple of feet in front of the stove and she had draped them in furs. The sound of the wind was a faint roar.

"Sure," said Pinet.

"Just a piece of business," said Funt, "I always approach a whore

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just that way. 'Whore,' I say, 'I got a small piece of business I'd like to transact with you.' That's just what I say."

Except for the closet that contained the toilet, the cabin was only a single room. The stove was in the middle of the room. Shelves, neatly arranged with jars and pans, lined one wall. Furs were piled on the beds. Two small oil lamps were strung from the center rafter, exuding a weak light which failed to illuminate the corners of the room. Pinet, who lived poorly in a two room apartment and kept his practice in the basement of another boarding house, thought it was a ghastly place. He imagined Kosskoff humping the girl, and Funt in the next bed, smoking and watching, tending his mustache with flicks of his black tongue.

Pinet drank steadily, unconcerned about his ability to examine the woman's teeth.

Kosskoff's wife served them the fish on tin plates and stood watching them eat. She hadn't spoken, yet, and Pinet supposed she wouldn't.

The food was blackened and tasteless, and even if the dentist had cared for fish, he doubted he could have eaten much. The sound of Funt and Kosskoff, barbarically crunching the tiny bones, eating the creature whole, nauseated Pinet. He didn't want to be sick. It embarrassed him to think of the way he'd behaved on the mountain. The dentist drank steadily.

When she was certain that the dentist was finished poking at his food, the girl took his plate and went to sit on one of the beds. She ate with her fingers.



After awhile, Kosskoff said it was time for the dentist to work. "Fix her mouth now," said the big man.

Pinet had the girl stay on the edge of the bed. He had Kosskoff bring over the lines attached to both lamps and hang them above the bed; they dangled above the bed like lynched partners. The trappers gathered close behind the dentist to watch.

Face-to-face with her now, Pinet saw that the girl was not quite plain. She was dark, probably a full-blooded Pasamaquoddy or a Penobscot, and had striking blue eyes. Her nose, slightly crooked to

## Owen King

the left, had been broken once and never set. It was pretty in a way, the dentist thought, and he would have liked to touch it, to run his finger over the healed place where there was a tiny bump.

"What seems to be the problem?" the dentist asked.

The girl blinked at him.

"She can't sleep. Her mouth hurts," said Kosskoff. "It hurts to eat."

Pinet nodded, sipped from the cup. He noticed a puffy swelling on the left side of her jaw, just below the mandible. "Open wide," he said.

Her breath was bad; this didn't surprise or bother the dentist, who was, after more than two years of exile, well-accustomed to the unhappy mouths of country people. The girl's teeth were stained in the typical red and yellow tints of the chronic tobacco chewer. Pinet doubted if she'd ever brushed her teeth in her life. The discoloration of the gums indicated the beginning stages of gum disease. Pinet noticed a little flake of meat stuck between the upper right cuspid and the upper right lateral.

He probed the girl's mouth with the small mirror, walking his eyes over the rows of dying teeth. He gave Kosskoff's wife ten years before she needed a full set of falsies, and maybe not that long. It was a shame, thought the dentist. He could visualize the nice straight set of teeth that she might have enjoyed with proper dental treatment and care. Pinet could see the yellowed, meat-jammed upper right cuspid as it ought to have been: a tiny pinnacle of bone, glistening enamel, smiling with a tiny fleck of chocolate, before a sweet girlish tongue swabbed it clean. Pinet lifted his cup to his lips, but it was empty.

The immediate problem was the two abscesses side-by-side, one of the lower left first molar and another of the lower left lateral. The lateral wasn't as bad. He touched them with the dental pick at the opposite end of the mirror: the tell-tale rotten softness of each tooth gave a little beneath the prick of the needle tip. The girl winced, but stayed still.

"Where do you hold your pouch?" asked the dentist.

The girl touched her mouth in the area of the infections.

"You've got two abscesses," Pinet lightly touched each tooth,

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"here and here. An abscess is an infection in the tooth. These are from diet—you eat too much meat—and from tobacco juice.

"The one in the back has to go. It's dead as well as rotten. I can probably cap the other one, give you a root canal, but you'll have to come into town for me to fill it. If you can't come to town in the next couple of weeks, then we should pull that one, too, because it won't last any longer."

The girl blinked and wrinkled her pretty crooked nose.

"How far along are you?" asked Pinet.

"She's got about a month," answered Kosskoff.

"That makes one month and thirteen years until I take the little critter down to Maisie's and treat him to the whole house," said Funt. "Those girls'll work him until his pecker falls off."

"Be quiet," said Pinet.

"Is it safe?" said Kosskoff. "Is she too far along?"

"*Pardon, mon ami,*" said Funt.

"Probably," said the dentist, "It'll probably be fine. I won't be able to give her anything really strong for the pain. And, of course, there's always a chance that something could happen with any procedure. But I don't—"

"—Pull," said Kosskoff's wife. "Pull both."



Using his finger, Pinet dabbed vodka around the girl's gums, doing what he could to numb the tissue. He also soaked his pliers in vodka. He set out some cotton balls. He told the two trappers not to stand so near behind him. He had a tin bowl for the teeth.

Braced beneath her lower back by some pillows and bedding, the girl was tilted at an angle for the surgery. Calmly, she folded her hands across her pregnant belly. Her dark face, the blue eyes and the handsomely bent nose, registered nothing. She waited with her mouth gaped, like a child expecting a candy drop. Pinet thought she would do very well.

The dentist was drunk, but not overly so. He was confident of his abilities under far more impaired conditions.

He screwed the pliers tight around the molar until there was a crunch: this was the sound of the rotten tooth fissuring from the pres-

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sure of the squeezing pliers. Some of the infection, a gray-red pus, drooled over the girl's lip. She flinched, but that was all.

"Stay still," said Pinet.

He yanked: the tooth pulled easily loose, the roots tearing free. A few drops of blood leaked from the small black roots of the tooth and the pliers heads. "Sorry about that," said the dentist, meaning the stain on the girl's dress.

The bad tooth pinged in the bowl.

Pinet reached into her mouth and with his bare fingers the dentist squeezed the infected gum area. More of the red-gray pus oozed out. The girl clenched and unclenched her hands. He continued to press until the blood was clear. He wiped the area with vodka and gave her a piece of cotton to hold against the area of the wound.

"It was ready to go," said Pinet. "You practically didn't need me at all."

She smiled, displaying the new bloody gap.

"One more," said the dentist. "Want to get it over with?"

The girl nodded.

Funt tapped the dentist on the shoulder and handed him a fresh cup of vodka. "You're doing good, doc."

Pinet thanked him and took the cup. He soaked the pliers again. He took the piece of cotton from the girl and looked at the empty socket. It was fine, fine.

"Okay," he said, "right."

Kosskoff had come up close again, scratching his beard and looking with something like amazement at his wife. Pinet told him to back up.

The dentist locked his pliers around the girl's lower left lateral tooth. He turned the screw. It was more difficult this time; there was living material still left in the bone; he turned the screw again. The girl shivered. The dentist turned the screw again, and the tooth splintered, cracking all the way through. He staggered back, and the pliers flew from his hand. The pliers clattered against the far wall and onto the floor. Blood splashed from the girl's mouth and she gave a shriek.

Funt caught the dentist from falling over. Kosskoff, roaring, grabbed the front of Pinet's long johns. The big trapper's fist, like a

Frozen Animals

giant mallet, was drawn behind his head, ready to slam down.

"I'm sorry," said Pinet, "I'm sorry, Jesus—the tooth—that happens once in awhile—Jesus, I'm sor—"

The girl's laughter froze her husband's fist. He let it drop to his side.

"Look," she said, her voice garbled by the blood in her mouth. The three chips of the lateral tooth lay on her palm. She laughed with her lips very wide, revealing the new bloody space. A couple of tears dribbled from her eyes.

She stood up. Her laugh fell down so high, it seemed to bounce. She patted her pregnant belly. "Pretty soon, he have more teeth than me."



They celebrated the successful procedure with the dentist's rum. Kosskoff's wife mixed it with maple syrup and snow, then garnished it with brown sugar. Together they shared a single bowl.

When the desert was gone, they went back to the vodka.

One of the oil lamps sputtered out, dimming the room. Snow scraped the cabin walls, wind whistled through an invisible crack.

Pinet told the girl about how he tried to urinate outside in the storm. She laughed, showing her bloody gums. Kosskoff excitedly banged a pot with a spoon. "It's true," he said, "it's true."

"I thought it was gonna freeze clean off," said Funt, reaching over and slapping Pinet's knee.

"You could have sent it to my ex-wife," cried the dentist.

Kosskoff roared and drummed the pot.

The girl laughed, laughed, laughed. She also cried, because it made her mouth hurt even more to laugh.

For comfort she brought out her bag of chewing tobacco and took a pinch. Pinet meant to tell her it was bad for her teeth, that it would surely aggravate the raw gums, but instead heard himself asking for some.

He had never chewed before, and the sickly sweet taste revolted him. He spat it out. "Shit," said the dentist, "that's shit."

The others laughed. Kosskoff beat the pot. Pinet laughed himself.

From his leather satchel the dentist removed his tooth brush and

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the jar of paste. Briskly, he scraped his teeth until foam came from the corners of his mouth. Some of it dripped over his chin.

It was not until he finished, rinsing his mouth clean with water and spitting it into a cup, that he realized that the two trappers and the girl had been watching him, fixated.

"Does it hurt?" asked the girl, her cheek puffed with tobacco. She absently touched her own front teeth, as if to check that they were still they were there.

"No," Pinet assured her, "it's sweet. It feels good."

The girl shook her head. "Does it *really* hurt?"

"I knew a whore, brushed her teeth all the time," lied Funt, "She had a whole collection of fancy tooth scrapers. It was something to see."



For whatever reason, the spectacle of the tooth brushing quieted the group. The girl chewed her tobacco, seeming to think. Funt and Kosskoff drank, and appeared to think of nothing. Kosskoff's beard was as big and wiry as an eagle's nest.

The dentist felt oddly embarrassed, as if he had done something wrong. He was reminded of the unfortunate episode with his wife, the one which had resulted in his ignominious dismissal as a spouse: his wife had caught him with another woman, a prostitute with an underbite. They had only just come to an agreement—services in exchange for services—when the dentist's wife unexpectedly returned home.

"I ought to have insisted on going to her rooms," said the dentist. He was too drunk to remember that he had not told them about his wife, and how she had walked into the room, and how she had walked back out of the room, for good.

The others showed no sign of having heard the dentist's words at all.

"Who is going to deliver the damn child, anyway?" asked Pinet, suddenly offended that no one was paying attention to him.

"Let's get out the good stuff," suggested Funt, and Kosskoff grunted his approval. The trapper's wife got up and found another bottle.

"The child?" Pinet asked, weakly. "Who will deliver the child?"

Opening his mouth wide—the dentist saw rows of crooked yellow-green teeth—Funt let loose a long, pungent belch. The small trapper screeched with laughter. “That’s it,” he said, “that’s it!”

Koskoff hit the pot several times.

Fresh cups were poured all around.

The dentist made no further effort to speak. He concentrated on the drinking. The new vodka was more potent—his mouth burned and his eyeballs felt as though they were drying up in the sockets—and he half hoped that it was poisonous as well.



In college the dentist had taken a trip west with his wife-to-be and her brother. They had gone by train, and it was difficult for the dentist and his girlfriend to find the privacy to make love, but they were imaginative and persistent. Once, they did it in the luggage compartment, rolling around on top of bulky pieces of portage, handles and strap buckles jabbing them in their backs and buttocks. In the frenzy, the dentist kicked over a parrot cage, releasing the bird: it flapped, screeching above their heads, while the lovers tumbled.

Somewhere beyond the Rockies, in the desert, they smoked peyote and drank wine with some of the kitchen staff. It was a good time. The desert was so black, there seemed to be no end to it.

The peyote gave the dentist a vision, but he had no memory of it. Later, his future wife related it to him: “You said you saw a giant mouth and that it was going to eat everything. ‘It’s eating the world!’ you screamed, and then you started crying, and just a minute or two later, you said, ‘Oh, oh, I’m sorry! It’s on our side. The mouth is on our side.’”

“You were crazy,” said his wife, making eyes. They had only recently been married when she related the story.

“It’s true,” he had responded, “and I still am—come over here, I’ll show you.”



“I asked you about your wife,” said Funt.

Pinet stared at him. “Fuck you,” he managed.

But the trapper had already forgotten his question. He pondered a ragged hole in his long underwear, plucking the threads with a black-

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ened finger.



The dentist groaned. The vodka had killed most of his body—only his face was alive. He was being moved, propped between Kosskoff and Funt, but the motion was odd. His eyes rolled in their sockets like greased ball bearings. Pinet tried to catch sight of his hands, but only saw the walls of the cabin, which appeared, incredibly, to be melting in the cold. He seemed to be sinking into something. The trappers laid him on the bed.

He blinked up at the large faces of the two trappers. They loomed above him: Kosskoff bristling with beard, Funt licking at his mustache. Then, the girl's face slid past. She bent over the dentist, until her lips brushed over his nose, his chin, his lips. Pinet smelled the tobacco on her breath. Fingers gently peeled back his lips. A tongue slowly licked across his teeth.

The dentist groaned.

Her bloody mouth stopped at the sore mark on his neck. She kissed it.

The earth shook below him. Pinet realized that the two beds were being pushed together. The dentist's limbs flopped about him. "The bird's out of the cage," he managed to say.

Somehow his long johns had been stripped away. The dentist supposed he had been skinned alive. One had to skin a fish before it could be cooked. Gerbils did not require skinning. Gerbils could keep their skins. Gerbils could be frozen. Gerbils were best eaten cold. "Don't put me in the ice box," insisted the dentist wildly, as Kosskoff laid down beside him, and began to kiss his ear. The wires of the big trapper's beard tickled Pinet's ear.

The pregnant woman's belly pressed against the dentist thigh. Her breath was near, but he could not find her mouth.

Then, there was a hand reaching between his legs, and a soothing voice spoke, "Here it is, *mon ami*," and the dentist was swept away, lifted on the wind, frozen in the snow, painted black.



When he awoke he was alone in the single bed. The beds had been pulled apart again. Someone had shifted the dentist onto his side

to keep him from choking if he vomited. Shafts of daylight stabbed through the gaps in the boards which covered the windows.

Or perhaps the beds had never been pushed together.

The dentist was naked and achy beneath the furs.

He stumbled to the bathroom closet. There was a bucket of cold water and he washed himself as best he could. He came out, feeling no better, but thinking more clearly. There was no one else in the cabin. His clothes were folded on a chair.

After dressing, Pinet searched for a bottle of something to pick himself up. In a cigar box tucked in a corner he found a few dollars and a watch with no lid. He took these things.

But there was no liquor and Pinet settled instead for some weak, cold tea that had been left unfinished on a sideboard. He would have to wait until he got home to the boarding house.

With shaking hands, the dentist gathered together his pliers and swabs, packed his satchel. Then, he went outside to look for the others.

Half out the door, Pinet leaned against the frame and squinted at the brilliant vista of snow and light and line and sky. In the clarity of day he saw the small distant shape of the pass they had walked through the previous evening; the cliffs were merely outcroppings. Farther off, much farther, he saw the lake where the local children went to swim in the brief northern summers. The spire of the town's Methodist church was not visible.

A little way off the ice-sheathed, clapboard structure of the meat house puffed gray smoke from a stone chimney. It was an open-faced structure, the three walls making a C and the last wall just a pair of large barn doors, as with a wheel house or a blacksmith's shop. A pair of large hooks hung from the front of the slanted roof.

Head down, Pinet made his way down to the meat house.

The dentist found them just inside, scraping down a mink skin. Funt and Kosskoff held the skin flat across a cold-scarred table, while the pregnant girl dragged a blade, nicking off the bits of gristle and muscle. Steam came from their mouths despite the presence of the fire burning in the chimney grate. The guts and body of the mink were in a pail on the ground; steam came from this, too.

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Watching them, Pinet decided that he had imagined the previous evening entirely. He was a drunk, he told himself, and the mind of the drunk was easily confused. It was the same argument he had made to his wife. The pregnant girl chewed on her lip as she worked the blade, inching it over the flesh parchment. Sweat beaded on her temples.

"I have to go," said Pinet.

"We paid you," said Kosskoff.

"*Tabernacle*," swore Funt, straining to hold down his end of the skin.

The smell of the animal guts drifted to the dentist. When he had been married, his wife, a careful shopper, had often bought tripe rather than the butcher's more expensive meats. Pinet had never complained; in fact, he liked it, liked the taste, the richness, the salt. Over dinner his wife had giggled to him once, abruptly, that when the tripe was raw, it smelled to her like it did when they made love. Pinet had been confused. "Do I smell?" he had asked. "No, No," said his wife, "I wasn't talking about you. I was talking about—about the love we make together—I was just saying—it's not a bad thing, that smell—" She had pinched his cheek and kissed him. Taking the plate from Pinet, she had fed him chunks of the meat with her fingers.

"Why are you standing there?" asked Kosskoff.

"It smells like fucking out here," said Pinet, and gave a short screechy laugh, pointing to the bloody bucket. His drunk hand fluttered up. The dentist slapped it down, against his thigh.

The girl spat something dark in the snow.

HP

HONORABLE MENTION  
JOHN GARDNER MEMORIAL PRIZE FOR FICTION

Leslie Birdwell  
**However Unwilling**

On the occasion of his twelfth birthday, my son Thomas received a set of in-line skates, a book, clothing, and the Amphibian Environment: Guaranteed Educational Toy. I gave him the book, *The Dream of the Blue Heron*, because I loved it when I was his age. It was ignored, along with the clothes. The Amphibian Environment was ceded to Meggy, our six-year-old.

"Where did this thing come from," I asked my wife, Dorothy. The Amphibian Environment package was illustrated with a trio of unnaturally tinted frogs cavorting across a lush landscape.

"It came from the mall," explained Dorothy, "It was on sale. So I defy you," she added, without any challenge from me, "to call me anything less than thrifty."

"Like Christmas," said Meggy as she examined it. "Our Christmas presents were on sale, too."

"Honey," I said, "your Christmas gifts came from Santa."

Thomas snorted when he heard that as he strapped himself into his new black skates. Dorothy crossed her arms and looked at me, making a point of not saying anything. "Not inside," I told my son as he stood in the living room in his new skates.

"I don't believe in Santa Clause," said Meggy, all business. She opened the box and dumped the contents onto the floor: one plastic oval Environment (18" by 6"), six green plastic trees, an azure pool, and a gray plastic cave.

"Where are the frogs?" she asked.

"You have to send away for them," explained Dorothy. "There's a coupon in here someplace." Dorothy crouched over the plastic, sorted, then took the box from Meggy and gave it a shake. Out fluttered the garish coupon that promised the joys of pet ownership, which I mailed the next afternoon, on my way to work, to the Life Supply Company of Monroe Station, Florida.

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Ten days later (and not one day passing without Meggy's questions about her frogs), we received a leak-proof box. Dorothy handed me a knife. I opened the box. It contained a water-filled chamber in which three tadpoles thrashed—one blue, one green, and the third without any pigmentation at all. That last one was a strange little thing. All during its growth you could see the organs, like shadows, under its skin.

Meggy decorated the Environment with an old Barrel-Of-Monkeys game. The creatures hung by their question-mark arms in swags from the plastic trees. They looked festive. I put the Environment up on the kitchen counter and gingerly spilled the tadpoles into the new home in the azure pool. Upside-down at first, they soon righted themselves and whipsawed around the pool, their flagellate tails propelling them in loopy circles.

"You'll have to take good care of them," I cautioned Meggy. "That means catching live insects for food. We stood together, looking. I remembered a science-and-nature kit from my childhood, but I lost interest in it and after a family vacation to Florida, I returned home to an Ant Farm was an Ant Tomb of Ant Husks, forgotten in a shadowy corner of my bedroom.

"She won't have to catch anything," said Dorothy as she dug around in the packing. "The tadpoles came with a six month supply of feed pellets." She dropped a few out onto the counter. They were beige and clattered lightly as they fell. I picked up the feeding instructions that came with the package.

"Is this possible?" I asked as I read. "They do tricks when they're mature?"

"That's why I got them," explained my wife. "They're designed to do tricks." The Life Supply Company included colorful little balls for the grown amphibians to push with their squared-off snouts. A partial set of dice-sized pastel colored alphabet blocks was included also. For the creatures to stack? Surely not.

"Genetic engineering," explained Dorothy.

Within two days, they sprouted buds at the points of their limbs and their tails began shrinking. They passed through adolescence and gained some of the definition of their adult forms, growing to about

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an inch and a half in height.

Meggy was the first to see them climb out of their pool. They lined up in a row: blue, green, and nothing, their splayed front feet pointing pigeon-toed and their bulbous eyes blinking serenely. Meggy tapped on the plastic. They rocked back onto their powerful haunches, raised their front legs—and waved. It was the damndest thing.

“Come and see, Daddy! They waved at me!” Meggy dug into the old sugar bowl where Dorothy kept the feed pellets and dropped a few through the screen top of the cage.

“That was very good, honey. You reinforced their behavior.”

The green one and the blue one reared back up on their legs again, but the plain one didn’t. He took advantage of their performance to take extra pellets, snapping his pale tongue out of his mouth and French-kissing his food.

“Which is your favorite?” Meggy asked.

“I like them all the same,” I told her. Which was to say, not at all. They were assuming a toad-like aspect, with bumpy skin and the shorter rear legs not found in frogs. They sat in a row like contented Buddhas. They took ungainly hops, heaving their tubby bodies to the limits of their Environment. The plain one reminded me of an old family photo of my great-grandfather. He was a boxer for a time, in the early 1900s. In that photo, my great-grandfather assumed a classic pugilist’s pose, his lower jaw jutting out and his face set with a heavy scowl while his fists, like hammers, kept their frozen guard on his upper body.

Meggy took off the Environment top and reached in.

“I’m not sure that’s such a good idea,” I said, ready to pull her and her hand back.

“It’s purring!” She was touching the blue one. It made a trilling sound, not unpleasant, not unlike a tree frog. I stuck my arm in too and touched the green one, who began to thrum with his fellow. I touched the plain one. Nothing. It looked at me, though, steadily, then made a slow blink. I liked how he felt, like a snake but without the scales. He was smoother than the others.

“They need names,” said Meggy. “Let’s call the blue one Blue and

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the green one Green. I don't know what to call yours."

"He's not mine. He belongs to you and Thomas."

"I think he likes you."

"He's not purring."

"Maybe he can't?" Meggy looked up at me, sad.

"I hadn't thought of that," I said. "Let's call him Pig, since he has none—no pigmentation."

"That's silly, Daddy." She sighed and rolled her eyes, looking exactly like her mother.



Meggy would stack up the blocks in the Environment and Thomas sometimes tapped the plastic. When he did, Green and Blue would hop to the clear wall. Pig would stay in the plastic cave. This irritated Dorothy. She felt as if she had not received good value.

"After all, she said, "we can't afford to waste money. Especially now."

I advised her to write to the company and ask for a refund.

"Daddy," asked Meggy, "are they boys or girls? Is Green a girl?"

"Why do you think Green is a girl?"

"She has eyelashes. Look! They're playing leap-frog!"

They were trying to mate and to distract them I tapped on the plastic. Green and Blue came forward but Pig launched himself into the pyramid of alphabet blocks, which clattered to the floor of the environment. Green and Blue jumped and blinked. Pig looked at them, then looked at me.



Dorothy accommodated me that night in bed. I released my grip on her shoulders. We separated. She rolled away to her side and I followed, pressing myself against her back. I kissed her and touched the hair at the nape of her neck, but she was already lost to me in sleep.

I got up, shrugged myself into my robe and went downstairs into the kitchen to look at the frogs. Only Pig was active, hopping straight up and knocking into a red plastic monkey hanging from a tree. It was the only one left; the others were down. He was fast—one moment on the ground, the next airborne. The red monkey

swayed on its branch. Pig hit it again, like a boxer practicing, the rhythm of his jumping like the pummeling roll of a leather glove against a leather bag.

As I went back to our room, I saw the book I'd given Thomas. It's about a boy, an Indian, taken from his family and forced to live in a government school and give up his culture. But he stole himself away for three days of fasting and dreaming and found his spirit animal. I always wished that the book stopped right there and I briefly considered slicing away the last chapters, when he returned to school, to the bigger world that he had to live in.



We lost Blue the day my wife cleaned the Environment. She fished out Green and Pig with a small net, transporting them to a high-sided stockpot, but Blue proved intractable so she simply cleaned around him, spraying down the plastic with a bleach solution. The resultant haze of household cleaner gas caused Blue to cry out. Cry out. I came running into the kitchen. Meggy was already there but I grabbed the environment first and took it outside, as if fresh air would help. He gasped a little and then died.

"Didn't you think?" I said to Dorothy when I came back in, sans Blue.

"Christ," she said. "I didn't do it on purpose." Her eyes were dry. Did the woman never cry anymore?

Meggy was crying. Thomas stood at the front door, holding his roller blades and twirling his helmet by the strap, ready to let himself out. I went over to the stockpot and looked in. Green was looking up, but Pig was trying to scale the sides of the pot.



I went to work that afternoon. I had once looked forward to working at the warehouse, thinking I would spend the empty time productively. I worked from 12:30 to 9:00 pm, until the night watchman came on duty and after 5:00 pm, I was the only employee. I planned to read *War and Peace*, to study a language. The free time would compensate for the loss of income, but I never used it productively. I managed to let the simple paper work jobs seep into those four silent hours; there were always Bills of Lading to verify, shipping

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numbers to confirm, and excess filing. We were warehousing for a scientific supply company and the manifest made distracting reading—One Gross Locusts in Formaldehyde. Feline—MALE. Feline—FEMALE.

The last year I taught biology at West Marion High, my senior class was preparing to dissect pigs. My lab assistant (a resourceful boy who sported a white lab coat, one of the perks of the position) brought in a box of them, little Wilburs, like the redeemed pig in *Charlotte's Web*, their little mouths arched in something like a smile.

My students started with sheep eyes when they were 14, the year of 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Like meat in the grocery store, the eye no longer held anything. Then my students dissected frogs in their freshman year. They used a wire attached to a battery to send current into the legs, to make them mimic the jump they once made from pond's edge to water. Now that they were juniors and seniors, they came closer to the mystery of the human body and learned how to cut open unborn pigs. My assistant dug into the box and pulled one out, slapping it onto the black lab desk in front of another student, Sarah Nelson. I watched her face change over the corpse. She began to sob. Sarah was a quiet girl who handed in perfect lab notebooks and caused offense to no one. One afternoon, at the end of the school day, she came in and asked for an extension on a project. There were various problems at home, nothing she wouldn't grow out of one day. She touched on these lightly, and then stopped by to talk two or three times more. That was all. I stand by that.

But that day, when she cried, I thought of *Charlotte's Web* and vowed right then and there never to give the book to my daughter Meggy even though some other teacher would, knowing she'd love the story of Wilbur, the pig who lived because someone loved him, and then the whole damn thing would start up for Meggy. I instructed my assistant to cart the things to the school incinerator.

"Why—" he started.

"Look at her," I said, astonished by his callousness, his ignorance, "this has made her so unhappy." And I went over to the girl, as if I'd been drawn to her by sinews, cords made of dried flesh, ropes of

faith. And then, as if no one else was in the room, I put my arms around her and felt tears prick at my own eyes. My arms wound around her narrow shoulders and I felt the smallness of her, how flat her back was under my hands and how her poor breast heaved as she gave in to her misery. I felt her arms tighten in answer to mine.

I was reminded that I was teaching an upper-level biology course for college-bound seniors. I was reminded that I was paid to teach, not dispense sympathy. There were well-trained counselors for that. I was reminded that I wasn't being a team player. I was reminded and informed of a number of things during this and several meetings and conferences that followed hard upon.

It takes a long time to pack up the detritus of a teaching career. The collected books and lesson plans, fossils and bird nests, seemed to occupy an infinite number of boxes. I looked up from my warehouse desk, green metal with a glass top, the top supported by four pennies, one at each corner, all heads-up. It was 8:00 pm. Still light outside. I had another hour. I read the packing slips and spot-checked them against various containers. Locusts: check. Flatworms: check. Frogs: Check. An accounting of plagues. I came to the last lot. Fetal pigs, declared the black letters stenciled on the side of the box. I took a utility knife from my back pocket and eased the blade forward to slice the packing tape. I opened the heavy cardboard flaps. The aroma of preservative wafted out as I untwisted the opaque plastic bag to reveal the unborn litter. The top one was hairless, his skin mottled with black patches. His mouth hung open slightly, an imitation of a smile, and his eyes were half open too. The umbilical cord was still attached. He was flat, as newborn things can be, especially multiples to make room for their siblings in the belly of their mother, who had undoubtedly gone forward to some useful fate herself.



We kept Pig and Green in the stockpot. Green refused his pellets and starved to death. His skin dried quickly, like a veil stretched across the fine bones of his feet.

Thomas started football practice and was late for dinner on Saturday night, which irritated me since we could only eat together as a family two nights a week. When he did arrive, banging in the front

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door, still gird with pads and helmet, I gave him a look of silent disapproval. If it registered, he gave no sign.

I picked up my knife and fork. The meat before me was tough. I looked down and saw the bones and tendons of my hand as I sawed at the meat on the white plate with the pattern of ivy leaves on the border. The white fat was cooked away, but the striated fibers of the muscle were still intact.

"Dad," said Thomas, "if you're not going to eat yours, can I have it?"



I dreamed about Pig. He was as lithe and supple as a newt. When he jumped, he reached an attenuated grace in mid-air. He spelled for me with his alphabet blocks. He did not spell P-L-E-A-S-E or H-E-L-P, but O-U-T. He blinked and looked at me.



Pig's appetite increased. With more pellets than we would ever need, I got in the habit of giving him extra. He was growing.

"Looks the same to me," said Thomas after I asked him to confirm.

While I was at work and Meggy and Thomas were at school, Dorothy tricked Pig into getting inside the return box from the Life Supply Company and shipped him back to Monroe Station, Florida.

"It was easy," she explained, "I baited the container with lady bugs and he hopped right in it."

"He's not a tadpole anymore," I said when I came home to the empty stock pot, "He might not survive the journey."

"The company doesn't care," explained Dorothy, "They'll give me a full refund anyway. Pretty good deal, don't you think?"

Oh God. Pig in a dark place, tumbled like an imperfect stone in a polisher, finding balance as arbitrarily as he lost balance when his prison world came to rest, passed between the unknowing hands of letter carriers. I saw his box in a white canvas mail cart, then on a conveyer belt, then on a truck driving through a narrow road in the Everglades until whatever was left of him came back home. Home—or where he started.

When Meggy asked me where Pig went, I told her that he had

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gotten out and was now living in the attic. We both heard scrabbling in the rafters the other day. Mice, I assume. Dorothy will figure it out and expect me to set the traps and lay the poison, as I now understand my duty, as I now understand what I should have done when Sarah was crying in my classroom over the dead pig lying on the black desk. I should have walked over to her. I should have closed my hand around her fist as she held the scalpel and, however unwilling, forced her to drive the blade home.

HP

WINNER  
HARPUR PALATE/TRIP/CRIT  
TRANSLATION CONTEST

Tomas Venclova

R. K.

Translated from the Lithuanian by Laima Sruoginis

All I know is this, that it has passed (or is passing)—  
this century of blackness, maybe not any blacker  
than a few others, but on an incredible scale.  
It was consistent. It turned bodies into numbers,  
and crumbled souls into sawdust and naught,  
so it'd seemed as though the mind had won. A precipice  
pretending to be hope—I'd say, somewhat successfully.

Conceit's evil designs were loyally executed by furnaces,  
and in the next ring was solid ice  
under a stony star. Choking freight trains  
labored towards nothingness, to the West and to the North.  
But everything is temporary. Monuments to the Empire—  
in the mud between tenacious thistles and burrs.  
The megaphones grew quiet and the granite weathered.

We were born in that land. Now, as we leave it behind,  
we don't even dare turn around, like Orpheus.  
What did we have with us? Irony, patience,  
and very rarely—courage. Often it was the undefined feeling  
that you'd done far less than you could have  
(a sinking realization of guilt—or sin—that your children  
would not forgive you even if God did.)

That is all we chose. And even so we knew how  
to accept the bitter truth as though it were a gift.  
We did not worship death. Above the tracks and the cement  
we watched the angels. We loved them. We lit the lamp  
in the library. We called evil by its name  
and good, knowing how hard it was to tell them apart.  
We carry the lamp into the darkness and that is probably  
enough.

*"R. K." originally appeared in Rinktime (Collected Works), Baltos Lankos.*

Knute Skinner  
**A Fine Rain**

“No, Freddy, it’s not what you think.”  
He turned away as he said these words  
and stood facing the door to the house.  
The defiant cast of his head  
reminded me of our father.

The figures were large and unevenly drawn,  
and the bright red was a contrast  
to the pale green of the plaster.  
His hands were smeared with the same red paint,  
and his shirt and his jeans were splotched.

“It’s not what you think,” he said again,  
but the fact is I didn’t  
know what to think.

We stood there a long minute,  
and I welcomed the fine rain on my face.  
Then he turned to me quickly,  
giving me no chance at all  
to avoid his embrace.  
“Do what you want,” he said.  
“It’s your door now.”

Brendan Connell  
**The Dancing Billionaire**

*Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers?  
O sweet content!  
Art thou rich, yet is thy mind perplex'd?  
O punishment!*

—Thomas Dekker

I

“I am afraid that he is an ineffectual boy.”

“Is a boy meant to be effectual? What exactly is it you expect him to effect?”

“I have always hoped that he would become more...Strident.”

“You have strange ambitions and, pardon my saying, unrealistic expectations. Every human being has its own temperament,—an artistic nature should not be manhandled.”

“I have the ambitions of a father. A man does not like to see his son peter out so early in life.”

“I did not notice that he had ever petered on. To me he simply seems like a rather frail boy. He may not have the over—Well, the same bearing as his father, but he is a nice enough child—Have some sympathy for him Ralph. A man should love his offspring.”

The man and woman walked over the grounds, and though one man, one woman, they were the same of nose, of gesture, the family's eyes, brownish beads floating on oval faces, jaws ever so slightly salient ...They rise on their toes, their gait, uplifting in aspiration, uncapped pride...Sun, moon; organs sexual, jointly different, german; beads quivering down the atavistic rosary, dropped from ovaries consanguineous, spermazoa mutual, produced in similar sessions of grave copulation.

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## II

The child stood alone on the lawn beside the great house. You know that the sky was blue, that there were a few white clouds. You know that the weather was warm, and all around the smell of fresh cut grass.

He heard the laughter, from an open window, and knew that they, the adults, were within,—drinking things that he could not drink, bitter sweet, the cause of that mild, quaint delirium.

He walked to the tennis court and watched the groundskeeper pull minute weeds from the cracks. The man looked up and smiled at him, a little sadly, and he, condescendingly, smiled back.

With arms folded the child kicked his toe against the court—a piquant spasm of dissatisfaction—and studied the other opposite him—The man on hands and knees, his years doing little to distinguish him from the worm of the earth, the groping creature of the soil...A bird sung from a nearby tree. The young, upright human both enjoyed and respected that beauty of nature, though he might despise the callousness of man.

The groundskeeper, whose name was Oliver, took up the bucket of weeds he had pulled and walked to the flower garden. The child, whose name was Allen, followed him, without speaking. He watched in silent disdain and interest as Oliver weeded around the French marigolds, of which there was a full bed. He could smell the pregnant, female earth, but was not tempted to touch it, just as he liked the brown back of the man's neck, wrinkled and rough, without desire for more intimate knowledge of its texture.

A butterfly fluttered by Allen, landing amid nearby carnations. He snuck up to it and grabbed it in his pale and delicate hands, crushing it, painting them with the powder of its wings.

"A painted lady," he lisped, letting the corpse drop to the ground.



His father, thick figured, mustached, hair tending to mouse color, a small glass of hard drink in hand; his father laughed, the sound swelling from deep in his torso, organic; teeth showing, a cigar rolling between fingers, smoke magnetizing toward the ceiling...Allen saw the eyes meet him, momentarily, traitors of the man's apprehen-

## The Dancing Billionaire

sion...Yes, he, Ralph, was made nervous by that thin, China white manikin standing there, that pompous sprout of unwanted fiber, that child against nature, even at such a young age haloed by an aura of self satisfaction—God knows he must have questioned his wife's fidelity, or put all the blame on her sickly, inbred line...But maybe that woman's weakness, her frailty of carriage, her demi-royal descent, had been the real, original attraction. Was not love that melting confusion, recklessness, of contorted limbs, slaverling of eyes, words said and compression of hopes to pain?

There were those suited giants, billowy women, enjoyment, or what adults call enjoyment, seek for. And in the library, where he wandered to with surly steps, a piece of marzipan in hand, dissolving in his mouth, creamed along his gums; in the library he saw her sitting. A girl about his own age, a large picture book on her lap.

"Hello," he said.

The scrutiny on his part was obvious, lids half closed, mouth slowly churning.

"There is more in the kitchen," he remarked.

"More?"

"There is more marzipan in the kitchen, if that's what you want. I won't get it for you, but it is sitting there,—a whole bowl of it."

"I don't like marzipan, and I'm not to eat sweets except at dessert," her girl's voice, crisp with English accent, upper class cadence.

And then there was his aunt, echoing from without, calling his name.

"Allen!" she cried, as she came blowing through the door. "There you are Allen...There you are children," her eyes wide with eccentricity.

### III

You were very near being a naughty boy—a boy one might have called atrocious, except that you had such pretty skin, such winning ways when it pleased you to charm.

Remember, it was me who took you clothes shopping, to indulge my broken feminine streak, if you wish to call it so . . . But I did

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enjoy expending my taste—Yes, I was born with a few lumps of that—on suiting you elegantly, protecting your genteel instincts...Of course I realize that you got them from her—There is not a marked degree of refinement on *my* side of the family. Still, I have always recognized and respected beauty when it condescended to enter my sphere—And, believe me, I mean to imply no negative undertones.

—But you did look so cute, in your little garments, selected by me, my chapped hands; a little gentleman—And then we styled your hair...You were my doll, the baby doll of a big, graying girl— You were much more to me.

#### IV

*Allen Hutton appears in a violet jacket, an avocado tie, terminating a full three inches above his waistline, and a simple fine weave cotton shirt of the lightest shade of blue. His pants, tan, immaculately pressed, form two slashes above black booties.*

Guests mingle, thin stemmed glasses growing from hands like effervescent fungi. Women gossip over diminutive plates of mulberry salad, Vicksburg cheese balls, and aspic glazed shrimp. Here a fashion is made of laziness and many smile, for they can fathom, in their spoon-like existences, no reason to frown: A woman with the head of a sheep plugged on the neck of a turtle talks in low tones to a gentleman resembling, to a startling degree, a well groomed summer sausage. An ex-senator staggers unsteadily by, the flesh of his face flopping beneath a protruding jowl. A hired pianist, placed discretely off to one side, plays Chopin, a subservient smile freezing his blanched and meager lips.

Allen, standing hipshot before the bar, was just taking the first sip of his Alexander and noting the strangeness of the group of guests his father and aunt has assembled when she herself, the aunt, appeared, pulling him off to one side.

"I would like to introduce you to someone," she said. "Or I should say re-introduce. I believe that you met as children...Allen Hutton, Lady Helen Ashe."

"A lady...well," he said, taking her fingertips and signaling mock deference with a downward inclination of his head.

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"Helen is the Earl of Saxelby's daughter," Aunt Margaret remarked.

"Yes, I remember," Allen commented suavely. "And how is the Right Honorable Earl? I seem to recall visiting some old castle of his, on a greenish sort of hillside, a lot of long shrubbery, a bit depressing... But maybe I am being too forward. I remember you, but you might not remember me. This violet jacket throws people."

"To be frank, the violet jacket was the only thing I did think I recognized."

Large-kneed Aunt Margaret smiled nervously as she looked at the two, both so attractive, both so much more feminine than she.



Later, as the guests began to filter out, Mr. Hutton took Allen apart to the study. Lighting a cigarette and leaning his healthy rump against a desk he proceeded:

"Allen, I am going to broach a subject which I know is distasteful to you, but you are going to have to face sometime, and I believe now is as good as any."

"Father, really," the young man replied, throwing his body into the soft mass of a leather armchair.

"Occupation Allen. You have to choose some kind of occupation...At school you took in a pretty good variety of directionless classes: film appreciation, Greek drama, dancing for god's sake!...Don't you realize that your family is sitting on a fortune; a fortune which it takes outrageous energy and prudence to manage, to maintain, grow...A great deal of responsibility..."

Allen looked on with raised eyebrows and an amused expression.

"You don't expect me to work, do you?" he asked.

"I not only expect you to work, but to make something of yourself. It is obvious that business does not appeal to you at present. Fine—You're young—Time will undoubtedly show you its value. But for now, choose some occupation, some honorable occupation, and follow it...So...What do you want to do? Tell me."

"Shop."

"Excuse me?"

"Shop . . . I really do like clothes you know. I could spend a few

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years inspecting the various boutiques and—”

“Enough,” his father, Ralph Hutton, cried out. “Being a clothes horse is not an occupation—It is a moral failing. Now *what* are you going to do with yourself?”

The younger man rolled his eyes back in his head, and stroked his mustache. The role of son bored him. The things he liked were not tasks but fantasies. There was pleasure, the absurd and the sensual; there was what could be paid for and what he did not care to touch; and other things he was willing to sample.

V

Bipeds moved along the streets of the city, many bearing themselves with the ease of the financially secure; the smile of laziness adhered to faces; women’s puffed lips strangely decorous: We see opulence and laugh, hear the languages of the world warbled...And then the click of Italianate shoes, red heels gliding over the deeper shade of brick. Eccentric he was, walking as if those around him did not exist, were invisible, certainly not worth notice. But her, strangely his wife, honeymoon fresh, if not dripping sweet, bizarre.

Before the glass panes of a jewelry establishment, whose reputation was not in the least exaggerated, Allen stopped, the woman following suite.

“What a gorgeous display,” he said.

The Etruscan fibula shaped like a twisted pelican; the bracelet a golden serpent eating its own tail, eyes of sphene, body marked with red enamel; earrings, thin, sunny disks showing the river god Achelous; a necklace, each bead a golden, pregnant woman, each womb a semiprecious stone; and that tiara, simple, like a cluster of aspen leaves in fall.

“I want you to have them,” Allen said, an odd sparkle in his eyes. “The entire collection...My wedding present...To you.”

“I don’t think this is the kind of jewelry one actually *wears*,” she commented.

“Of course it is. You’ll wear it,” he said, going through the door.



“Undress,” he said.

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She blushed, guardedly satisfied, breasts stiffened, risen. The dress dropped from her shoulders, girdle unfastened, drawers, like a crumpled petal of orchid, lay at her feet. She stood, legs pressed together, a white, bare stroke of apparent virginity, a conflux of drooling stars.

I am molten love, she knew. I am a sea anemone, a fluctuating bubble of blood. I am in need, of taking, entwining, wrapping my boneless limbs around, burping gorgeous obscenities—I am snow coated coal—I am a moon lit well—I am naked, a woman, beauty of woman, in long of love. I am me. I am me.

"Put the jewels on now," he said.

"Jewels?"

"The diamonds, the necklace, that lovely bracelet. And, oh yes—the tiara, the tiara."

His voice hoarse.

"You *are* a funny one," she said.

She felt them cold against her skin, grinning around her neck, licking her wrists, lashed to her head. She felt something spook around her, enter into her, as yet undefined, inscrutable...

She walked toward him, feeling the carpet beneath her feet.

"No," he said. "Just stay there. Let me look at you."

"I am cold."

"Stay there! The jewelry is so wonderful. It really is."

Pleasure unsought, untasted. Breasts of bread, thighs, joining in a bottomless pit that yet bears reflection; a bubbling slug. Perversion, the skinless dog of art, crawls, flesh bare, an exposed and living wound, salivating magenta, pools of slick filth.

And, to awake in humiliation,—that fear of the living being—her hair heavy as that final departure into night, and tears, the swelling of pus of nightmares.

## VI

Denny held the mushroom stuffed with duck sausage between two fingers.

"You've come into it," he said. "Of course it *is* in bad taste to word it that way...But amongst friends...And, you know, money can be a real consolation at a time like this."

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He bit into the mushroom cap and chewed, his eyes, those of a voluptuary, half closed. There was no denying that Pellington could cook. Allen was tolerable company, but Denny's primary interest was in the food.

"I feel rather despondent," said Allen as he sipped his mint julep. It was difficult to add appropriate gravity to the action. "I would cry if I knew it would help."

"Yes," said Denny, that young gentleman with short maize-colored hair, an extremely delicate tan, a feathery voice and much appreciation for his own beauty, "I would shed tears with you if I knew it would help...But it won't. It won't help at all. So we must not spoil our lunch on some fruitless, rather straining endeavor. A quick cry would not add the smallest bit of enjoyment to this mushroom stuffed with duck sausage...Life is for the living. We should always remember that."

After inhaling the last morsel of mushroom he sliced an asparagus spear into three parts, wondering if he should not take a bite of crab cake before proceeding.

"Yes," clipping off a chunk of the crab cake with his fork after surmising that the asparagus would undoubtedly wait for him. "Yes, my heart goes out to you Allen, but we must find a way to distract our minds from morbid thoughts, depression. Good dining and sophisticated company are a starting point."

## VII

Your mother, what she would think, I cannot guess. I did not love her, I will admit that, but do not press me for more...Your father cared for her, and I saw that she was elegant, refined—Oh, she had much of what I lacked.

But do not think that any of...of that emotional disarray—Do not think that it has prejudiced me against you. No, I have always been your strongest advocate, and will defend you, even if it were to mean draining my veins dry of their sap—Yes, you are a handsome, so handsome young man.

—Allen, I will be there for you, when you have discarded fresher blooms.

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### VIII

He had always liked theatre, movies, dancing, entertainment of all description as long it tended toward the benign, the sensual. Astair was a well tailored god; *Swing Time*, *Top Hat*, ecstatic suavity. Allen Hutton's face would burn with the flush of blood, then grow suddenly pale, the tapping, the orchestra crying into the secret places of his being—Fred Astair dancing off chairs, tables, desks, steps, dogs, walls, ceilings; the perfectly cut suit never gathering up, the sunshine smile never betraying the whisper of death.

In the subdued light of the movie room Allen lay on his side, one elbow embedded in a soft pillow, a hand supporting his weary head. The stem of a hookah extended from his sentient lips...The screen before him, of generous proportion—Women blooming into flowers, the petals of their lower limbs, and those stamen arms; *Golddiggers of 1938*; one thousand legs lashing as whips, the sex subdued into patterns of cosmic grandeur...Sets of dreams, opulence of love beyond his grasp...Busby Berkeley, took away his body, those instants, tender as the skin of boiled milk.

And in his study he would sometimes read the first few lines of Helen's letters in disgust. But more often than not he simply threw them away unopened. And then, to Allen's relief, they stopped...Subsequently only vague reports, of the woman's frantic, sluttish romances with Portuguese gigolos and decaying aristocratic rakes.

### IX

"Do you want me to be saucy, or submissive?"

"Surprise me," Allen said, with a gesture worthy of a Caesar, yellowish smoke spiraling from the Turkish oval balanced between his fingertips.

The creature was at his feet, nestled up and caressing his calves. Allen bent, letting his hand scrub through the short black hair.

"Li Chi, you little beast, demean yourself."

The slobber ran from the young man's mouth as he raised that pants' leg, licking shin and kneecap. Allen laughed weakly at the contortions below him. The face lifted, two teardrops arrested, then

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rolling from the eyes.

"Why do you weep my child?" voice saccharine, darkly soothing.

The mouth opened, explained:...His wife, children, family...in China...so poor...He was an astrologer...not a love toy...The honor of his family...He sent them money...but...

"You're not a love toy?" cried Allen. "Finding that there was no work in the first world for an astrologer, you advertised, I responded. Tears of remorse were not part of the bargain...Pout you dog!"

His walking stick was at hand. He struck viciously, excited by the squeals induced. The corrupt fist tensed white. Expensive paste of raw man.

When he, Allen, left the house, his face was decorated with a plastic smile. Dressed to the perfection of his taste, he strode to the flower garden. The carnations were in full bloom, their scent heavy through the air. Oliver was there, crawling amidst the stalks.

Allen, without speaking a word to the old gardener, plucked a blossom and stuck it in the button hole of his jacket. Whistling, he made his way to the garage, the shadow of his body crossing over the other man, a black mass; like some slow moving buzzard that passed overhead.

X

Like a rattlesnake are the cabasas, the hands holding them moving rhythmically through the cuffs of a garish gold shirt. There are four of these sentinels, men dressed like the sun, bodies jerking, swaying, aggregating, dispensing music latin,—sticks and palms frolic on drums, fingers flit over keys, slam, press until knuckles bend. The voices join up, swelling Spanish, an inundation of ebon joy. Colored lights flash pathetically over bobbing heads; smiles on most; a few serious men, lips gravitated to decorous frowns. One young man, in jeans skintight and a blousy shirt, moves his arms like a windmill, one leg bent, taught, angular. An older woman flings herself in tribal indecorum before a young partner of indeterminate sex. Limbs madly wag, pulsate and reach like a cage full of millipedes.

Li Chi sat at a corner table, nursing a Corona, a slice of lime lodged in the bottle top. His eyes rested blankly on the dance floor,

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on Allen salsa dancing with a young woman in a tight red tank top. She thrust her small, pigeon like breasts toward him, flapped her arms like chicken wings. Her eyebrows, extremely black, acted as bees floating above the ochre calyxes of her irises. Enchanted, Allen Hutton displayed his best footwork, took her by one hand, smiled as her arm passed over his head; her body quickly circumnavigated his.

He was slumming. Over the course of a few months he had passed through many of the low bars and dancehalls, discothèques, drunk. movement. energy. design. The folk dances of the peasants, vulgar cha-cha, salsa at Enrico's, the waltz, a resurgence of the fashion of ballroom dancing...The earliest form of artistic and personal expression; the prehistorics thus worshipped gods, petitioned for success on the battlefield, the hunting ground; to celebrate birth, heal the sick, mourn for the dead...Allen practiced the various mudras of the art, thought himself rather brave to frequent spheres where most were of darker colored skin than he, the rich and delicate white man...A cloud, infectious heat, the people, heady vapor of nescience.

Plato recommended, urged, all Greek citizens to take up the art.

### XI

A)

Nephew, when you came, into my room of a sudden...I blush at the recollection—Let me admit it, my shame is streaked with pleasure. What did you think though, of your aunt revealed, of her desire unsheathed.

Child, child.

B)

*Because she, not unlike some strange and enormous unfertilized insect, virgin martyr, first in awe of her older brother, Ralph Hutton (intrigued by, almost attracted to his wife) and then (when that one was no more) a profoundly tender and passionate affection developed within her for pale young Allen (he saw her without the usual covering, the usual pastels, flower-patterned dress; atrocious accident)...The woman's feelings existing in a strange no-man's-land, unclaimed, impossible to define, intelligent thought certainly mixed with dark unsexed lusts and animal hungers, that haze of secret desires which never was exposed to the world,*

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*but which stewed constantly within her, made her bosom swell.*

XII

The invitations to Allen's debut caused more than a few eyebrows to rise in the best society. Yet, an evening's amusement was a given; for amusing it *would* be.

So as gentlemen knotted their ties before mirrors and women felt the sheerness of the stockings ascend their legs, conjecture was given as to the nature of the entertainment. The little square of gilt edged, maroon invitation received through the mail described it simply as "A Musical and Theatrical Extravaganza."



Against a background of painted profiles, sandy stone and a distant oasis, he appears, the Queen of the Nile. A tight dress of hand-dyed cotton sets off his slim yet not unmanly figure, from beneath which emerge two feet adorned in simple sandals; a reddish-gold head-dress serves as crown; precious jewelry adorns his waist, wrists, neck and ears; the nails of his fingers and toes are painted the color of claret, while, beneath his thick mustache, abide lips painted a dark shade of pink; eyes outlined in circles of swamp green, eyebrows colored leaden gray.

\* Music strikes up, serpentine, flute and violin, rattle and tabla.

*Rather a ditch in Egypt be gentle grave unto me! Rather on Nilus' mud lay me stark nak'd, and let the water-flies blow me into abhorring! Rather make my country's high pyramids my gibbet, and hang me up in chains!*

Next tableau:

The curtains glide open.

He appears, cane in hand, in black coat and tails, bow tie, top hat, tipped negligently to one side, and spats.

The orchestra bursts forth, coolly, his mouth drops open, utters words of song, strangely pathetic, ridiculously melancholy.

guests twist  
that embarrassed sweat

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glistening brows of red madness

*Stepping out with my baby...*

The cane toyed with, an extension of the procreative obsession, violins waves of colorful insects

*smooth sailing 'cause I'm trimming my sails...*

Third:

From the sidelines a dulcet but delusively virile voice:

*Down in the West Texas town of El Paso...*

He immerses, from the cactus flecked desert, grimly romantic, in a tight and black silk dress flaring out at the base, over the clicking heels...

*I fell in love with a Mexican girl.*

Gliding across the stage, ultra serious, eyes half closed in fervor...

*Nighttime I found her at Rosie's cantina...*

The dance is performed, strongly reminiscent of the death throws of a butterfly, a burnt insect.

*...nice senorita...*

The bellows huffing in the fear, well guarded panic,  
taps, bullets of decadence  
the porcelain shatters  
his eyes left lidless  
independent and moist beings.

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### XIII

He sat, looking at the room around him, the high ceilings, oblong blocks of light thrust through the windows, shaded darker where intercepted by the bangs of curtain. The pedestal on which sat the bronze hands did nothing for him; he had paid one hundred thousand dollars; Bruce Nauman's name was a name, but his hands, at that moment, were empty of life, let alone lust for it.

He looked at his own, bony, white, ten tentacles of sensitive desperation; a wedding ring still banded to one, from that farce; lunacy.

Rising, his legs circumambulated the chamber, past the coffee table, select magazines spread in fan shaped perfection, the stone statue of Uma, the flamboyant Gilbert & George...He caressed the leaves of a few tropical plants, and looked fondly at the Venus' fly trap, the fanged chartreuse...In front of the high windows he found himself, overlooking the estate, the gardens.

He could see Oliver out there, under a straw hat, back bent, hands moving in slow, regular motions. The aging man spent those years there, amongst the plants, a friend of the trees, collecting soil beneath his fingernails, his face webbed with wrinkles from the sun.

There are these creatures, believed Allen, who take up tasks, work at contemptible, obscure trades, squeezed like rags, swept aside like dirt: Before the dawn breaks they crawl out of their kennels, wear their heels thin against abrasive streets—some off to waitress in diners to the smell of burnt suet—delivery boys eking out a pittance hauling ill burgers and sandwiches up through high rises, skyscrapers—scroungers, cripples, begging for quarters...men who pick up trash for a living...butchers whacking at thick red meat...There are those who lay bricks, paint houses, mix cement, clothes worn and splattered, arms thick with plebian strength...Others, women, selling wares behind counters, answering telephones, putting on bright, silly smiles, for what they call a wage, for a few worthless rectangles of paper...Yes, people sew and set bones, try cases in miserable court, douse out fires, cuff criminals, tinker on ridiculous machinery, scrambling like insects, poisoned like roaches....And then there are groundskeepers, gardeners...And those who keep them and watch them sweat.

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Later he saw his aunt. They dined together. He talked, tried to give voice to his emptiness, said that he felt like a hollow pot.

Aunt Margaret's nostrils quivered. Her eyes were moist, languorous. "Yes," she murmured, placing her hand atop Allen's, "my life also seems empty."

Allen, self-involved, self-centered, did not seem to notice the relative's half muffled, fully desperate emotion.

"There is always travel," he said.

"Yes...we could...you might...travel."

"India." Thinking of the land of self-revelation; for one pampered since birth on every material object conducive to sumptuous living the raw struggles of the world held a sudden attraction, as some cheeses, offensive of smell and crawling with maggots, are the most savory; with vague images of renunciation coated in pink sugar and perfumed with sandalwood, served with smooth blue-skinned youths stuffed with juicy slices of bright orange mango. "...to discover myself ...travel alone...I believe that is requisite for a spiritual sort of quest."

"Yes," said Aunt Margaret, "I believe it is," and she felt her lips grow cold, could hardly keep from uttering inarticulate sounds of suffering, keep from letting drops of saline, watery fluid flow from her eyes, throw herself wildly at his feet even if it meant being butchered by his scorn.

### XIV

"Would you like something to drink with your meal?" asked the first class stewardess, displaying the seemingly prefabricated smile of her trade.

The meal consisted of a slight mound of diced vegetables of questionable origin, tasting as if seasoned with ground copper, cooked by some nefarious process...A chunk of flesh abiding beneath a semenish sauce,—poultry produced in a test tube, devoid alike of skin, bone, texture and flavor...A salad of sickly forage, hardly fit for the snout of a pig...Dessert, a brownie, chemically sweet.

The man sitting next to Allen—a hairless cranium loosely placed on a great ball of fat—had set to the mastication process with undisguised vigor, apparently well satisfied with the fare...Allen merely

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dipped his fork into the substance; the odor made him undeniably queasy. He regretted having not arranged for a private flight.

"A cloudberry liquor," he told the young woman, his pale temples dewed with perspiration.

When the head of blond hair shook, negating his request, and strawberry colored lips opened, expressing the actual state of the alcohol selection, Allen knew that he was amidst savages, on a downward course through trials and sufferings.

Sufficing himself, morosely, with a whisky sour, he curled up toward the window, withdrawing his organ of smell away from the bovine aroma that surrounded his neighbor. Down below he could see what he believed to be Pakistan, or Iran, an immense stretch of desert, pock marked like the surface of the moon,—dried up canals scoring it, lonely hills casting blotches of shadow,—yellows, reds and browns,—tranquil, verdureless landscape.

He swallowed at the mixture in his hand, trying hard, desperately, to repress all thought...The reason he was flying...Uncertainty, crawling through him like a caterpillar...Images entering, then fleeing his mind...of debauch, power, shame.

## XV

✦ When he returned, his cheeks were hollow, his moustache an enormous black and misshapen patch, like Indian ink spilt on fresh fallen snow. The wilderness of his eyes revealed nothing,—they were inscrutable, at times shining like tin in the sun, then becoming suddenly dull, lifeless as those of a frozen fish.

A solid gold Genesh now hung from his neck, its four arms swimming beneath his throat, its trunk and the viper curling around its body seeming to curve with undulations of mystical life. When Li Chi innocently asked about it, Allen's face grew ashen, his lips tightened, he drew further into himself, scurrying off, shutting his unsteady body within the walls of the library, out of which were heard groans and the sound of weeping.

Later, he emerged like a beast, threw a half dozen of his best suites in the fireplace and ignited them. With quick, whip like words he dismissed all but the most necessary staff. He wrote a check for a

## The Dancing Billionaire

large sum, flung it at Li Chi, and, with a voice shrill as a birds cry, sent him packing.

Savagely he strode from room to room, hands clasped behind back, his hair flying with impetuous motion. The mansion seemed too small for his flurry, for the breadth of his shame. How much he would have liked to have spit out his suffering like the pit of an olive. Thoughts of severe acts of penance rode through his heated mind. He could picture himself stripped naked, rolling across North America, over the busy highways of the East Coast, through the Midwest, past thousands of miles of corn, the skin rubbed clean off his flesh, him spiraling over the Rocky Mountains, into California, his body one open sore,—sand, pebbles, bits of broken glass embedded in his carcass ...Or else he could sleep on a bed of nails, prostrate on razor blades, brush his teeth with a butcher's knife, bath in burning coals...In India, from his hotel window, he had seen men, there on the public streets, saw off their limbs, howl out mantras, prayers, while the bluebottle flies thickened around their bleeding stumps, a few devalued coins occasionally clinking before them, from the hands of a passerby...Others, on pilgrimages, hooks buried in their sides, carts attached to the hooks, the weight of the load stressing the meat of the body, creating open holes, pliable and repugnant...Yes, he could see himself running through the streets, flogging himself with tassels of wet leather, a crown of thorns on his head, thick, sappy blood drooling down his face...Because, after all, it seemed to him as if those emaciated ascetics he had witnessed were, if not happy, certainly content,—something he had never been. And then his ego had been attacked; he had unsystematically read, perused in confused incomprehension, countless ashramic and indological publications, crypto-Buddhistic, overtly Jainist—poor, outdated translations from the Prakrit, the Pali, the Sanskrit, which spoke of liberators of living beings, the practice of diverse penances devoid of a desire for acquisition in paudgalic terms, the ever peaceful soundless and of infinite sounds, the sameness, the illusory nature of waking and dream states;—so a vague, not quite solidified question now haunted his mind: If the objects cognized in both those conditions are illusory, who is it who cognizes them and who is it who imagines them?

Brendan Connell

XVI

A)

I am willing, even more than willing, to take the full responsibility for all your little quirks—For me they are so many lovely things; they are things that I admire and believe the world should relish... You are you, never be another; rest awhile, and then visit me, in my humble temple.

Others say that you could never love, but they have not nurtured you, my sprout, my tree...are you my all?

Just think on me once in a while, and try not to forget the woman who sheltered and taught. There are still deep chasms for me to bridge for you—Walk my body underfoot; there is no need to be gentle.

B)

*...as she, buried her head in his shirts, sniffed at his discarded socks, slept with a lock of his hair beneath her pillow...It was an obsession, single minded, that strangled the life from any real, material affection she might have ventured on; and even in the future, when her withered breasts would hang limply from her chest and her back would be bent, that pathetic fantasy would continue, as the most bitter and true pleasure of her life.*

XVII

Denny waited in the library of the great house, one leg draped over the next, a French cigarette hanging from his lax fingers. He had not been invited to lunch, or dinner, or an evening party. He had not been invited at all and had no expectations of receiving exotic nourishment from Pellington's kitchen. He was there solely for Allen—for his supposed benefit.

For Denny to be concerned with anyone but Denny, the situation must have been grave.

"Make yourself at home," said Allen as he walked in, his feet dragging lazily in slippers, body entrenched in a silk paisley bathrobe. "I wasn't expecting you... Might have called before coming."

"No. I might not have. You might not have let me come."

"Well, you came, were let in the front door,—so that's about it.

## The Dancing Billionaire

But I may as well tell you,—it's Pellington's day off."

"It decimates me to hear that I will not be fed a reasonable lunch, but the real reason that I'm here is to talk about you my friend."

"Well, it seems to me you've picked the wrong person to talk to then. The best policy, generally speaking, is to talk about someone behind their back, not straight at them."

Denny took a long drag of his French cigarette, and, exhaling, said, "But you see, you are not a general case, you're peculiar...Don't look so faux-shocked. Rumors have been spreading themselves through the social circuit that you're going a bit...Well, whack-o to put it bluntly...People are saying that you're turning into a sort of Howard Hughes...And by the way, you needn't fib to me about Pellington. I know very well that you let him go. He came to my door with the whole story...Told me about all kinds of monstrous things you wanted him to serve you...Plain rice and unseasoned vegetables...Really!...Naturally I hired him on the spot. Of course, when you come around you can have him back. Only a truly mad man would let a fellow like Pellington go...In other words, if it was not for this gross proof I might not believe the rumors."

The silence lasted several minutes. Denny extinguished the butt of his French cigarette and lit another. Allen circled the room slowly in his slippers, hands tucked in the pockets of his night robe.

"Denny," he said, stopping abruptly and looking fervently at the other man. "Denny, have you ever considered that there might be something more important in life than choosing whether to wear the apricot tie with the beige sports jacket or the mauve?"

"Well," Denny replied, "I have always considered the fruit shades to be out of the question in neckwear. As for the mauve, I do believe I owned a tie of that color some time ago—I think it got misplaced...Why, have you seen it?"

"The point was not about the ties exactly...You see, I'm fed up...with life...Ambitions come to nothing...My money will not buy me happiness you know."

"A startling revelation. I hope you haven't been sticking your nose in Thomas Merton again. Trust me, you would make a ludicrous dessert father...Even without the apricot tie."

Brendan Connell

"Joking aside Denny, I am a desperate man," his face assuming the role.

After a pause in which Denny thoughtfully rolled a third, yet unlit, cigarette between his thumb and forefinger, he said, "Tell me Allen. If I had a sure-fire cure for your malaise, would you take it, no questions asked? Would you let me be your physician, your nurse, even though admittedly I am not tailored for the part? Would you be willing to take some strong medicine administered by my hand?"

"If it would alleviate this depression I would take a bullet administered by that hand."

"I hadn't anything so gauche in mind," said Denny with a melancholy smile. "What you need to do is to get yourself out of that robe, and into a decent summer suit. Then we can apply the antidote...And please, don't forget to shave. Your cheeks look like a coal miner's."

Allen appeared thirty minutes later dressed in a double breasted silk suit of extreme burgundy, with lemon pin stripes. A pomegranate cravat was wrapped boldly around his neck.

Denny led him by the elbow, as one would a sick patient, out of the house, down the numerous front steps, and into the passenger seat of his car.

"Where are you taking me?" Allen asked in a quavering voice. "I hope it's not some kind of home for the uncontrollably eccentric...You know how much I hate to be around sick people."

"We are going to my house," said Denny.

And they drove, under the soft afternoon sun of late summer; into the city; to Denny's brownstone.

...Pellington had been at work all that day, under previous instruction from his new employer. Allen was reluctant at first to even sit at the dining table, but after a rather potent sour sop daiquiri, which Denny pushed on him with a grave and doctoral mien, he acquiesced.

The meal was simple, elegant and unparalleled. Red salmon roe and plantain fritters, a baby corn and conch salad, and, for the main dish, a lovely peacock Rouennaise.

It was eaten in silence, Denny glancing stealthily at the other man. He was glad to see that nourishment was being taken, but

uncertain of the ultimate results. Since all things are possible, it was possible that Allen could, even after dining sumptuously, return to his ascetic ways. Were he to do so, Denny pondered, a slice of fritter at the tip of his fork, then all hope would be lost. The flavor of the peacock was too extraordinary to leave his mind in any doubt on that score.

Three quarters of an hour later Allen arose from the meal, a freshly brought cappuccino in one hand. Sipping the foam from the rim of the cup, he strode over to the window. The city street below was quiet. The house was in an excellent neighborhood. A middle-aged man in tight slacks walked by. From across the way came the faint sound of music; the jazz of Dave Brubeck...Allen could see his reflection in the pane of glass before him; far from perfectly, but well enough. The feature appearing prominent was his untrimmed moustache. He could see it arching below his nose, crescentic, serrated and strangely exaggerated in the mirror of glass.

He wiped the bits of foam that clung to it away with his bottom lip and then, turning to Denny, said, "It is time to give this slip of hair stuck to my muzzle a trim; don't you think?"

"It might not hurt," Denny replied blandly. "A quick run over with the scissors would not be entirely uncalled for."

"Yes," said Allen, a speck of scintillation appearing in each eye, "I might even consider shaving the whole shag off. I am about due for a makeover."

HP

Jim Douglas  
**Manufactured Housing**

I see it every day, parked parallel  
to Oklahoma 58.  
It's a 1965 New Moon:  
ten by fifty-five,  
a gigantic sheet metal aluminum  
shoebox,  
sides hand-brushed a pastel wildflower  
lavender,  
no skirting, tires rotting in the dirt,  
broken concrete blocks  
for front door  
steps,  
a drop-off at the back door,  
a white 72 Chevy van rusting and immobile  
out front,  
sometimes a well-dented, oxidized red 81  
Silverado  
for a companion,  
and directly across the highway,  
on three acre lots,  
guarded by a man at a gate,  
with views of the lake  
and the mountains, are houses built  
by contractors:  
four five six thousand square foot houses,  
all brick or stone, all roofs steeply pitched  
and many gabled,  
all with three car  
76 Harpur

garages out back, or off to one side,  
for doctors, lawyers, bankers, CEO's,  
and smugglers;  
I see its chalky lavender every day  
and it always cheers me up.

Elizabeth Bear  
Excerpt from **HAMMERED**

*"Friends may come and go, but enemies accumulate."*

—Thomas Jones



0307 hours, Wednesday August 29, 2062  
Hartford, Connecticut  
Sigourney Street  
Abandoned North End

I never sleep if I can help it.

So when somebody starts trying to kick down my door at 0300 hours on a rank hot summer night, it isn't quite the surprise for me that it might be for some people. When the noise starts, I'm sitting on a gouged orange plastic chair in my shop. I drop my old-fashioned paperback book, stand and draw my sidearm before sidling across oil-stained concrete to flick the monitor on. The air thickens in my lungs; my heartbeat slows ominously.

And then I curse out loud and go open up the big blue steel door, holding the safetied pistol casually in my meat hand while the metal one turns the knob.

"You wanna pound the damn door down?" I accuse, and then I get a good look at the purple-faced kid dying in Razorface's arms and I'm all somebody's sergeant, somebody's mother. *Not that the two are all that different.*

"Ah, shit, Face. This kid is hammered. What do you expect me to do with this?"

Face shoves past me, skirting a dangling engine block and a neat pile of sheet metal, two of his 'boys'—teenaged hoods—trailing like ducklings. He doesn't answer immediately. Even as I take his name

loudly in vain, Razorface carries the baby gangster gently around the scarred steel lab table that holds up my hotplate. He lays the kid on my cot in the corner of the shop, wrinkling the taut brown blanket. Razorface, Razorface. Gets his name from a triple row of stainless steel choppers. Skin black as velvet and shoulders wide as a football star's. No, the old kind of football. Yeah.

I know the kid: maybe fourteen, maybe twelve. His name is Mercedes. He's rigid, trying to suck air and failing. *Anaphylactic shock*. Besides that, dark red viscous blood oozes out of his nose, and his skin looks like pounded meat. The nosebleed and the wide-open capillary color of his face are dead giveaways, but I give him the once-over anyway. Then I grab my kit and lug it over, dropping to my knees on the cold damp concrete beside the cot. Bones and metal creak. The room reeks of Razorface's sweaty leather, the kid's blood, diesel fuel. Once it would have made me gag. *I ain't what I used to be*.

"Can you fix him, Maker?" Face's boys stand twitching just inside the doorway.

I fumble in my kit, finding epinephrine, the long needle. Even as I fill a syringe I know the answer. "Nah, Face. There's no fucking way." But I have to try. 'Cause Face is one of mine, and the kid is one of his.

I don't look at the punks. "Will one of you two be so fucking kind as to lock the god-damned door?"

"Derek," Razorface says, "do it," and the taller of the two shoots him a sullen-jawed look and stalks away. The other one nods to me, a single sharp jab of his chin. I return the gesture, no eye contact, no smile. They never know what to make of me, these kids. I'm not one of Razorface's old ladies—except in the sense of being old as their grandmothers—but they know he trusts me. And most of them were raised by their grandmothers, so I do receive a certain amount of respect on that front, too.

I'm certain none of them understand the real deal, and I bet it drives them buggy.

When you save somebody's life—especially another warrior's—you're brothers. Maman taught me that. Face's Mama apparently taught him the same thing. It all works out in the end. *Assuming you*

Elizabeth Bear

*live that long.* But I digress.

I know already, from the color of Merc's skin, but I need to ask—so I turn my grim expression on Razorface.

"What'd he O.D. on?" *Please God let me be wrong.*

They can break you of religion, but they can't break you of praying.

Face holds out a twist of pills, and a chill snakes up my spine. I reach out with my metal hand and take the packet away from him, squeezing the ends to pop the slit. Peering in, I curse in French. Yellow pills, small as saccharine tablets, with a fine red line across the diameter. Rigathalonin. Hyperex.

We used to call it the Hammer.

*How did a two-bit piece of street trash get his hands on something like this? And just what on God's grey earth do you think I can do for a kid who chewed down a handful of Hammers, Face? But I don't say that.* I say, "How long ago? When did he take them?"

Face answers. "An hour ago. About an hour ago," and the taller gangster starts to whine.

I glare up at Whiny. "Shut up. How many of these did he take? Anybody see?" Nothing I can manage—that anybody can manage—is going to make a difference for this kid. If Merc's central nervous system isn't already so much soft-serve, I'm not a card-carrying member of the Teamster's Union.

"One," Whiny says. I curse him for a liar, but the other one—Dopey? Doc?—backs him up. *Allergic reaction? Merci à Dieu.* I drive the needle into his flesh, through cartilage, into the spasming muscle of the heart.

He quits twitching and his eyes fly open, but there's nobody home. I've seen it before. The funny purple color will drain out of his face in a couple of hours, and he'll be just like any other vegetable. I should have let him kick it when I could. Kinder than letting him live.

*You're a hard woman, Jenny Casey.* Yeah, well, I come by it honestly. "Shit," I whisper. "Another kid. Shit."

I wipe cold sweat from my face, flesh hand trembling with the aftershock. I'll be sick for hours. The only thing worse than the after-

Hammered

math of a plunge into combat-time is stepping up to the edge and then backing off.

All right. *Time to make coffee. And throw Razorface's gangsters out onto the street so I can pat him on the shoulder, with nobody else to see.*



Later, I wash my face in the stained steel sink and dry it on a clean rag. I catch myself staring into my own eyes, reflected in the unbreakable mirror hanging on my wall. I look chewed. *Hell, you can barely tell I'm a girl. Not exactly girlish anymore, Jenny.*

*Hah. I won't be fifty for a month.*

You wouldn't think I'd spend a lot of time staring in mirrors, but I never got used to that face. I used to stand there and study it every morning when I brushed my teeth, trying to figure out what the rest of the world saw. Vain as a cat of my glamorous good looks, don't you know?

Stained torn sleeveless shirt and cami pants over a frame like rawhide boiled and wired to bone. An eagle's nose—*how come you never broke that witch's nose, Jenny?*—brown skin and cheekbones proclaim my three mostly-Mohawk grandparents. Shiny pink burn scars. A prosthetic eye on the left half of the face.

Oh, yeah. And the arm. The left arm. From just below the shoulder it's dull, scratched steel—a clicking horror of a twenty-year-old Canadian Army prosthesis.

"Shit." I glance over at Face, who hands me another cup of coffee. After turning back to the steel table, I pour bourbon into it. Shaking my head, I set mug and bottle aside. My arm clicking, I hoist my butt onto the counter edge.

"Where'd he get it?" I hook the orange chair closer with my right foot and plant it on the seat, my bad leg propped on the back. Hell of a stinking summer night, and it's raining again. The tin roof leaks in three places; rain drums melodiously into the buckets I've set underneath. I run wet fingers through white-stippled hair. It won't lie flat. Too much sweat and grime, and I need a shower, so it's a good thing the rain's filling the rooftop tanks.

The left side of my body aches like the aftermath of a nasty electrical jolt.

Elizabeth Bear

Face rolls big shoulders, lifting his coffee cup to his mouth. The ceramic clinks against his prosthetic teeth, and then he eases his body down into another old chair. It creaks under his weight as he swings his feet up onto the counter beside me, leaning way back. Regarding me impassively, he shrugs again—a giant, shaven-headed figure with an ear and a nose full of gold and a mouth full of knife-edged, gleaming steel. The palms of his hands are pink and soft where he rolls them over the warmth of the mug; the rest of him shines dark and hard as some exotic wood. A little more than two-thirds my age, maybe. *Getting old for a gangster, Face.*

“Shit, Maker. I got to do me some asking about that.”

I nod, pursing my lips. The scars on my cheek pull the expression out of shape. Face’s gaze is level as I finish the spiked coffee in a long, searing swallow. The thermostat reads 27°C. I shiver. *It’s too damn cold in here.* “Hand me that sweater.”

He rises and does it wordlessly, and then refills my cup without my asking. “You drink less coffee, maybe eat something once in a while, you wouldn’t be so damn cold all the time.”

*It’s not being skinny makes me shiver, Face.* It’s a real old problem, but they give it a longer name every war.

“All right,” I mumble. “So what do you want to do about it?” He knows I don’t mean the cold.

Face turns his attention to the corpse-silent child on my narrow bed. “You think the shit was bad?”

I bite my lip. “I hope he was allergic. Otherwise...” I can’t finish. I wonder how many more of those little plastic twists are out in the neighborhoods. I rake my hand through stiff hair and shake my head. Hyperex is not a street drug. It is produced by two licensed pharmaceutical companies under contract for the United States Armed Forces and—chiefly—for the CA. Classified. And complicated.

The chances of a street level knockoff are slim, and I don’t think a multinational would touch it.

“What the hell else could it be?” I wave my left hand at the twist on the table. The light glitters on the scratches and dents marking my prosthesis. He doesn’t answer.

After setting my cup aside, I raise my arm to pull the sweater up

to my shoulder. Face doesn't stare at the puckered line of scar a few centimeters below the proximal end of my humerus. Did I mention that I like that man? I pause to comment, "Half a dozen tabs in there. You want to try one out, eh?"

Then I drag the black sweater over my head, twisting the sleeves around so the canvas elbow patches are where they should be, moth-ball-scented cotton-wool warm on my right arm only. The left one aches—phantom pain. My body trying to tell me something's wrong with a hand I lost a quarter-century back.

Long slow shake of that massive head, bulldog muscle rippling along the column of his neck. "I don't want this shit on my street, Maker." A deep frown. I hand him the bottle of bourbon by my elbow, and he adds a healthy dose to his cup along with a double spoonful of creamer and enough sugar to make me queasy. What is it about big macho men that they have to ruin perfectly good coffee?

I'm shaking less. I nearly triggered earlier, and the reaction won't wear off for a while yet, but the booze and the caffeine double-teaming my system help to smooth things. I raise my own cup to my lips, inhale alcohol fumes and the good rich smell of the roasted beans. Fortified, I brace myself and go down deep, after the memories I usually leave to rot. Old blood, that. Old, bad blood.

Two more breaths, and I'm as ready to talk about it as I'll ever be. "I've never seen anybody do that off a single hit, Face. We'd get guys once in a while, who'd been strung out and on the front line for weeks, who'd push it too far and do the froth-and-foam. But not off a tablet. The Hammer's not like that." I glance over at Mercedes, who is resting quietly on my cot. "Poor stupid kid."

"He's cooked, ain't he?" He's got his pistol out and he's checking the loads.

I nod slowly, tasting bile, and reach for the bourbon. Razorface hands it to me without even looking, and I kick the chair away and hop down, holster creaking, wincing as weight hits my left knee and hip. There's a lot of ceramic in there.

I gulp a quarter-mug. It burns going down. Nothing in the world ever tasted quite so good. *Jean-Michel. Katya. Nell.* Oh, God. Nell.

I fight my face under control and turn back to him, thrusting the

## Elizabeth Bear

bourbon his way. "Drink to your dead, Face?"

Face's lips skin back from his shark smile as he waves the bottle away. Thick, sensitive lips, with the grey edge of an armor weave visible along the inside rim where they should have been pink with blood. I don't like to think about his sex life. "I'm gonna find that dealer, Maker."

"What about Merc?"

Face stands up and drops the pistol into a shoulder holster and shrugs it on. He used to shove it into his waistband until I told him a story about a guy I knew in the army who shot his balls off doing that. Standing there in the shade of the porch on a bright September day, I abruptly remember him as a skinny pre-adolescent, blood running down his soot-covered face from a glancing wound on his forehead. It's so vivid an image I can almost smell the smoke. Those were bad years, in the Thirties when things in the States were even worse than they are now. My first time in Hartford, I wore a baby-blue peacekeeper beret and thought I was invincible. South Africa didn't happen until two years later.

No, I really don't have any idea why I came back here to retire. Must be the fond memories. I'm so wrapped up in them I miss the first part of his sentence when he speaks again. "His momma will take care of him."

"Better to put a bullet in his head."

He looks at me, expressionless.

"What's his mother going to do with him? Better to tell her he's dead. He isn't coming back from this."

Another slow roll of his shoulders. "Shit, Maker. I don't know if I can do that." He's one of my boys, one of my kids, his eyes tell me. I wonder if Mercedes is Face's son. I wonder if he knows. Half the bastards in Hartford are his, likely as not.

"I can," I offer. His eyes flicker from mine down to the piece strapped to my thigh, and then back. The muscles in his face tense and go slack.

"No," he says after a moment. "He's mine."

He hands me back my mug and scoops Mercedes into his arms, letting me hold the door. I lock up after they go, and watch on the

monitors as his back recedes into the blood-warm predawn drizzle, leaving me alone with my thoughts and most of a bottle.

That bottle looks back at me for long seconds before I take it and climb into the front seat of a half-restored gasoline convertible, getting comfortable for a long night of thinking.



*Twenty-five years earlier:  
Approximately 1300 hours  
Wednesday, 15 July 2037  
Near Pretoria  
South Africa*

Fire is a bad way to die.

Even as I jerk back against my restraints, consciousness returning with the caress of flames on my face, I know I am dreaming. It's not always the same dream, but I always know I am dreaming. And in the dream, I always know I am going to die.

I suck in air to scream, choke on acrid smoke and heat. The sweet thick taste of blood clots my mouth; something sharp twists inside of me with every breath. Coughing hurts more than anything survivable should have a right to. The panel clamors for attention, but I can't move or feel my left hand to slap the cutoff. Jammed crash webbing binds me tightly into my chair.

I breathe shallowly against the smoke, against the pain in my chest, retching as I fumble for my knife with blood-slick fingers. The hilt of the thing skitters away from my hand. As I scrabble after it, seething agony like a runnel of lava bathes my left arm. I think I liked it better when I couldn't feel.

The world goes dim around the edges, and the flames gutter and kiss me again.

The pain reminds me of a son-of-a-bitch I used to know, a piece of street trash named Chrétien. I never thought I could like a kiss less than I did his. I guess I know better, now.

I try to turn my head to get a glimpse of what's going on with my left arm, and that's when I realize that I can't see out of my left

Elizabeth Bear

eye and I'm dying, oh God, I'm going to burn up right here in the hot, tight coffin of my cockpit.

*If I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take...* hah. Right. The hell you say. Pain is God's way of telling you it's not time to quit kicking yet.

Whimpering, I stretch away from the flames, reaching out toward the impossibly distant hilt of my knife. I'm listening for movement or voices from the back of my A.P.C. Nothing. I hope to hell they're all dead back there, or far enough gone that they won't wake up to burn.

Something tears in my left arm as I lean against the pain, clinging to it as my vision darkens again and I hear myself sob, coughing, terrified.

*Please, Jesus, I don't want to burn alive.* Well, we don't always get what we want, Jenny Casey.

And then I hear voices, and the complaint of warped metal, and a rush of light and air that makes the flames gutter and then flare. They reach for me again, and I draw a single excruciating breath and scream with all my little might. A voice from outside, Quebecois accent like the voice of an angel. "Mon Dieu! The driver is alive!"

And then, scrabbling, hands tugging at my restraints, my would-be savior groaning as the flames kiss him as well. I catch a glimpse of fair skin, captain's insignia, Canadian Army special forces desert uniform, the burns and blisters on his hands. Another voice from outside pleads with the captain to get out and leave me.

He squeezes my right shoulder, and for a second his gaze meets mine. Blue eyes burn into my memory, the eyes of an angel in a stained-glass window. "I won't let you burn to death, Corporal." And then he slides back across the ragged metal and out of my little patch of Hell.

The voices come from outside, from Heaven. That's part of Hell: knowing that you can look up at any time and see salvation. "His god-damned arm is pinned. I can reach him, but I can't get him out." *That explains why I can't move it.* I am suddenly, curiously calm. They're arguing with him, and he cuts them off. "I wouldn't leave a dog to die that way. Clive, you got slugs in that thing? Good, give it here."

Hammered

I hear him before I see him, thud of his boots, scrape of the shotgun as he pushes it ahead. What the hell. *At least this will be quick.*

I turn my head to look at him. He has a boot-knife in his hand as well as the twelve-gauge, and I just don't understand why he is cutting the straps of my crash harness. He cuts me, too, and I jerk against the straps, against my left arm. "Dammit, Corporal, just sit still, will you?" I force myself to hold quiet, remembering my sidearm and worrying that the heat will make the cartridges cook off before I remember how soon I'm going to be dead.

His voice hauls me back when I start to drift. "Corporal. What's your name, eh?"

*Spider*, I start to say, but I want to die with my right name on someone's lips, not my rank, not my handle. "Casey. Jenny Casey."

I feel him hesitate, see his searching glance at my face. *He hadn't known I was a girl. I must look pretty bad.* "Gabe Castaign," he tells me.

*Gabriel. Mon ange.* It's one of those funny, fixed-time, incongruous thoughts you get when you know you're going to die. And then the knife moves, parting the last restraint, and he drops it to bring the gun up and brace it. I look at the barrel, fascinated, unable to look away. "Sorry about this, Casey."

"S'aright," I answer. "Preciate it."

And then the gun roars, and I feel the jarring shudder of the impact, and there is only blackness, blessed blackness...



*1930 hours, Monday 4 September 2062:*

*Hartford, Connecticut*

*Sigourney Street*

*Abandoned North End*

...and the buzz of the door com hauling me out of cobwebby darkness and into the blinking light. My hand's on my automatic, the safety thumbed off—"If I catch any of you using his finger, I will break it." *Master Corporal, I believe you would have*—before I'm fully awake and the reality of the situation comes back to me.

Elizabeth Bear

My clothes are wet, my neck is killing me, and my damn glass has broken on the floor, littering it with pale blue shards and a wet stain that soaks into the cement. The book I was reading is still sliding from my lap, the arrogant, aristocratic silhouette of a long-dead movie director embossed on the spine. I catch it before it hits the floor, check the page number and toss it into a crate with the others I haven't gotten around to yet. They are all paperback, ancient, and crumbling; they—the universal *them*—don't print much light reading anymore.

Holstering the sidearm, I creak upright and limp to the sink, first grabbing my jacket off the back of the chair I fell asleep in. I'll be paying for that lapse of judgment for a while.

The buzzer again, the echo made harsh by the cement-lined, metal-cluttered cavern I call home. I raise my eyes to my monitors. Activity on only one—the side door, a single figure in a familiar dark coat. Wet hair straggles into his eyes; he stares up at the optic and gives me the finger. Male, Caucasian, under six feet, slender but not skinny. The monitor is black and white, but I happen to know that he has brown hair and hazel eyes and a propensity for loud ties.

I lean over the sink and thumb on the com with my left hand.

♦ “Mitch.”

“Maker. You gonna let me in?”

“Got a warrant?”

“Hah. It's raining. Buzz me in or I'll go get one.”

He's kidding. I think. “Got probable cause?”

“You don't wanna know.” There is a certain grimness in his voice that cuts through the banter. I stump over to the door and open it. He drifts in with a smell of seasalt and Caribbean foliage—the alien breath of tropical storm Quigley, who left his fury over the Outer Banks two days before. Seems like we get further into the alphabet every year.

Turning my back and trusting Mitch to lock up, I think *I have to fix the buzzer one of these days*.

I put my jacket down on the counter and turn on the water in the sink, cold. Splash my face. Watching Mitch in the mirror, I stick my toothbrush into my mouth. Mitch slips into the shop and shuts the

door firmly, checking to make sure it latches. Then he picks his way catlike between the hulk of a Opel Manta *much* older than I am and a 2030 fuel cell Cadillac that probably has another life left in it.

Mitch circumnavigates a bucket and saunters over to my little nest of old furniture and ancient books. He pauses once to stoop and offer a greeting to Boris, the dignified old tomcat who comes by to get out of the rain.

I grin at myself and salute the mirror with my toothbrush. Spit in the sink, rinse, and turn off the water as Mitch leaves Boris and ducks under a hanging engine block. "Damn, Maker. It's like a blast furnace in here."

Cops are a lot like cats, come to think of it. They can tell when you don't want company. That's when they drop by.

"Been cold enough in my life." I tuck the hem of my t-shirt into the top of my old black fatigues and tighten the belt. Mitch stares for a second overlong at my chest, and then his eyes flick up to meet mine. He grins and I grunt.

"Save the flattery, eh? I own a mirror."

He crosses the last few feet between us. "I like tough girls." Matter-of-fact tone. Good God.

"I'm not exactly a girl anymore." I'm old enough to be his mother, and I wouldn't have had to start real young, either. "And I look like I've been through the wars."

His grin widens. "You have been through the wars, Maker." He hops onto the edge of the old steel table, with the agility of the young. I hate him for it for a moment, and then I swallow a grin. *If you'd died at 24, Jenny, you never would have found out how much fun it is to get old.* Mitch's jacket falling open to reveal the butt of his gun. Hip holster, not shoulder. He wants to be able to get at it fast, and he doesn't care who knows he has it.

I turn my back on him and pick up my own jacket from the edge of the sink, shrugging into it before turning my attention to the buckles, biting down on an urge to tell him the truth: that you think you have it under control and then one day you wake up and discover that you hurt all the time and everybody you love is dead or won't return your calls. You wake up one morning and discover you've

Elizabeth Bear

become a brutal old woman, and pain makes you nasty company.

If you're lucky enough to live that long.

A smaller population was a mixed blessing during the real bad years, a quarter-century or so ago. Canada stayed a little more civilized than most of the world—in part by selling itself to the highest bidder—but it also meant that my generation went almost entirely to the military, and our historic freedoms went out the window with the Military Powers Act of 2035, following our little altercation with Japan over panMalaysian trade when the beanstalk went in.

And then there was South Africa. And the U.S. And everywhere else I've been. Climate change makes for a lot of hungry people.

Despite the weapon on my own leg, I have an itch between my shoulder blades. Some people get used to guns, with practice. I never did. Guess I've been on both ends of them too many times.

I turn back to him. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

His smile becomes grim. "A bunch of dead people."

"We get a lot of those around here." I turn back and take three limping steps to fuss with the coffeepot. Damn knee hurts again, no doubt from the storm. What's worse is when my arm hurts, even now. Metal can't ache, but you could sure fool me.

"These dead people might worry you some."

"Why's that?" I pull gloves out of my pocket and yank them on. Driving gloves. The metal hand slips on the wheel, without. It's an excuse not to look him in the eye as I adjust black leather over rain-cold steel.

"Because you know something about the Hammer, Maker. From when you 'weren't' in the army. Special forces, was it? Nobody else gets that stuff."

In the silence that follows, the coffeepot burbles its last and I jump, fingers of my right hand twitching toward the piece strapped to my thigh before I stop them. Wisely, Mitch does not laugh. Jenny Casey's law of cops: there are three kinds—five percent are good, ten percent are bad, and the rest are just cops. The good ones want to help somebody. The bad ones want power. The rest want to ride around in a car with a light that lights up on the top.

I tolerate Mitch because he's one of the five percent. Snot-ass atti-

Hammered

tude and all.

He gets off the counter and reaches for the coffeepot, turning his back. "What makes you think I was Army?"

"Where'd you get the scars?" He hands me a cup of coffee before pouring one for himself.

I take it in my right hand, savoring the heat of the mug. "Playing with matches."

He laughs again, and again it doesn't sound forced. Stares at my tits, laughs at my jokes: boy knows the way to an old woman's heart. "Did Razor ever find that dealer?"

I don't wonder how he knows. "Any bodies turn up in the river?" The broad, blue Connecticut. Lake Ontario, it isn't. But hell, it's a decent sized river—and every time they drag it, they find a couple of people they didn't know were missing.

Mitch sets his cup aside and pins the floor between his lace-up boots with a glare. He's wearing brown corduroy trousers, ten years out of style.

I wonder if I'm still drunk. The glass on the floor annoys me, and I turn away to get the broom and dust pan. Stooping over, I look up at Mitch. He's stuffed his hands into his pockets, and he leans back against the table to watch while I sweep the concrete. I have to drop down to hands and knees to get the shards that scattered under the chair, and I wince and groan out loud when I do it. Something that feels like shattered pottery grinds in my knee and hip when I straighten.

Mitch chews his lip. "Getting old, Maker."

"Still kick your boyish bottom from here to Boston, detective." I carry my loaded dustpan over to the trash.

"Where the hell does that name come from, anyway? Maker. Radio handle? You guys used those, didn't you?"

I shrug, setting the cleaning tools aside. "Maybe it's my real name."

A tube of toothpicks squats among the clutter on my table. He opens it and selects a red one, working it into his teeth with the vigor of a man who is trying to quit smoking. "Yeah, a body turned up in the river." He hesitates.

## Elizabeth Bear

I award him the round. "Whose body was it, Mitch?"

He sweeps a chair over and throws himself into it with all the grace of youth. For a moment, I am insanely jealous, and then I make myself smile. *If you'd died at twenty-four, Jenny, you never would have found out how much fun it is to get old.*

But Mitch is talking, head down on his hands and words stumbling out in a rush. "So we've got this floater, right? Turns up three miles downriver, snagged on a boat anchor, just like the opening scene of a detective holo. A woman. About thirty. A cop." His voice trails off, and he pulls the toothpick out of his mouth and flicks it away, littering my clean-swept floor, but he does not raise his head.

"Is that important?"

"You tell me." He looks up finally, and digs in his jacket pocket for a minute before lighting a nicotine stick. The red light of the flame remakes his face into death's-head angles and the rich, hot scent reminds me that you can't quit smoking, any more than you can quit any of the other addictions of which I have had my share. He holds the smoke in for a long minute and then breathes out like a self-satisfied dragon, relishing every moment of sensation and effect.

He wants me to ask, and I don't want to give him another round, and so we hold an impromptu duel. He has a cigarette: something to do with his hands. I have years of practice waiting. I could pick up my mug, but I don't. Instead, I lean my head back and watch the unpleasant old movies inside my skull.

He finishes his cigarette and clears his throat. "She was a detective sergeant. Were you a sergeant, Maker? When you weren't in the Army?"

"I was Admiral of the Seventh Space Fleet, eh? What was her name?" *How much about me does he know? Or worse, think he knows?* I open my eyes and raise my head, catching him staring at me.

He waits again and again I do not ask. *He needs to learn who to play games with. It's not me.*

I grunt. My fingers—the metal ones—itch for a cigarette, and I get up and pour myself a bourbon instead, washing down a handful of aspirin with it. I turn around to face him and study the water stains on the wall behind his head. More every year.

Hammered

"You wanna avenge a dead cop, Mitch, I'm not who you're looking for. Get a ronin." *Why is he's coming to me for this? Why is he off the department investigation?*

*She must have been a partner. A friend. Or even dirtier than the general run, and they're covering it up. I'd like to say that sort of thing never went on back home in Kahnawá:ke, but I'd be lying. Warrior ethos. Whatever.*

"Don't need a hit. I need information."

"So tell me your girl's name, Kozlowski."

He laughs bitterly. "Mashaya Duclose. West Indian. You heard of her? She was a good cop, Maker."

I have not heard of her, but I don't know everybody. *Sure. They're all good cops when they're dead.*

Mitch continues. "She'd been supposed to meet up with your boy Razorfaced the night she vanished. Something about him having witnessed one of the kids who got hammered, and some question about whether his organization might be involved. You know about the O.D.s?"

"I've heard stuff."

He spreads his hands wide, helplessly: the look that breaks through his veneer chills me further. You get to know that expression, after a while. You see it on the ones who've adopted goals other than survival. Dead men walking.

"Look, Maker. I've got a dead detective. I've got Razorfaced maybe linked to a murder. And not one of his little cleanup killings. I don't give a damn about those. A dead cop. A dead cop is not good for you and it is not good for me and it is not good for your gangster boyfriend. I got a street full of kids poisoned by Canadian combat drugs—that's not good for you either. Since I know how much you like people poking into your history. No?"

Mitch's eyes flicker around my shop in that way he has, recording everything. I'm damned glad I took that little plastic twist elsewhere. I'm not in the US illegally. I have every right to be here. It's just there are some old friends I don't really want to run across any time soon. And. Kids.

I sigh, and the nod comes unwilling. "All right, Michael. I'll play."

HP

Deborah H. Doolittle  
**My Mother's Kitchen**

*"It helps if you actually draw the kitchen first, with crayons!"*

*—Rita Dove*

Where I turned my crayons  
to the parchment  
wall, pine blades of grass  
could not spring so high, jungle palm  
fronds never touched the ground, forest  
beetles clung to olive branches,  
secret shamrocks, jaded mushrooms.  
Where soon my fingers smelled  
of magic mint and eucalyptus,  
left their own wax impressions.  
Where the cat tip-toed  
through moldering African violets  
on the window sill.  
Where buns were in the oven,  
my grandma said.  
Who could tell which was more mellow:  
yellow-green or green-yellow?  
All I know is when my sister saw  
the wall, the look of triumph  
was all I saw, as she ran screamin'  
green through the house.  
Where I was left  
to form my first thought.

Richard William Pearce

**Cape Cod Evening**

*(from the painting by Edward Hopper)*

The woman leans back against the house.  
She's pale and run to fat: her wrists are bloated,  
gut sags to pubic line, breasts are supported only by  
the forearms crossed underneath.  
Beneath the woman's dress, her heavy thighs  
are tight together, guarding the only thing she owns  
that the man still finds of value. She has never "made love,"  
and hasn't fucked since shortly after they met.  
Sex steals her control, thus isn't allowed.  
She doesn't fear he'll search elsewhere.

The man sits on his stoop. He's thin and tanned,  
walks the beach alone and is reduced to masturbating  
in the nearby grove of locust trees. There's always a kind of  
night  
in their shade. He buries the days at their roots.  
At times he dreams he's a stone in the soil,  
or a mole who burrows away from its life.  
He dreams of existing without having to exist.

Around the house lies yellowed grass,  
Parched with mold-blue and grown to such a height  
that it conceals the legs of the collie.  
A handsome animal, quick, alert,  
he's admired by the couple, but  
the woman never shows this.  
She offers the dog no affection,  
presently won't even look directly at him.

Richard William Pearce

She watches from the corners of her eyes.  
The man leans forward with the usual weary countenance  
and snaps the fingers of an extended hand,  
hoping the collie will come; but a different thing's heeded,  
maybe a whippoorwill or a chirping frog.  
Facing away from the couple, the collie stands motionless,  
ears up, tail out. A breeze caresses his fur,  
ripples the grass against his belly.

The man, bunched up and still leaning forward  
as if suffering from painful constipation, snaps, snaps, snaps,  
snaps...

The woman grows angry at the collie  
without knowing why; yet is pleased, secretly,  
that the man is failing.

The collie listens intently,  
while blocking out the snapping.  
There is too much else the evening offers,  
too many beautiful Cape Cod songs  
and fascinating scents.

The man and woman  
do not matter.

Ryan Miller  
The Gift

*A note from the translator: This story was originally published in 1987 in a collection of historical essays and memoirs on the Algerian war, Alger: ville de guerre. It was written by Anatole Villeneuve, the correspondent and novelist, on the occasion of his return to Algiers after an absence of twenty-five years. Villeneuve died in December of 2001 while on assignment for Le Monde. He and his Algerian driver were killed—their throats had been cut—when their car was stopped by Salafist extremists at a roadblock on the way back to Algiers from Blida. He was doing research for a long article of analysis on the decade of sad and heavy violence that Algeria had endured at the hands of militant Islamic groups.*

—Raoul Mention

I was born in Algiers to French parents in the summer of 1949.

I grew up by the side of the sea in a postcard world beneath a high and open sky of transparent blue. The baffling maze of the city straddled the virid hills that ramped up from an immense, incurving harbor. Dazzling beaches skirted endlessly to the north and south. The air bore the giddy, evanescent perfumes of flora and the ever-present marine odors that surged up from the bay, and the city, hovering between illusion and reality, shimmered under the terrific onslaught of North African sunlight.

For the first years of my life, I lived with my father and mother and our aged housekeeper, Madame Corday, in a vast, airy apartment on the Boulevard du Télemly.

My early childhood knew an unbounded, an unfettered, happiness, then life changed.



On November 1<sup>st</sup> of 1954, the Algerian war broke out.<sup>1</sup>  
Where was the war?

It was not in the palmettos that thrived in the handsome terraced gardens in the well-tended French parts of the city. I did not find it in

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the endless thrum of cicadas that dwelled unseen in the cypresses in the park across from our building. The glut of blinding, unrefracted light along the arcaded seafront was insufficient to illuminate its dis-tempered face.

Where would I, at so young an age, find this war?



It was late on a September afternoon in 1956. The warm lemony-yellow sunlight filtered through the languid air heavy with sea-damp. My radiant young mother and I had been strolling down the Boulevard Michelet not far from the university where my father taught. Her step was unhurried; we were on our way to pick him up to go to the cinema and we were early. She paused for a lingering moment, her smiling green eyes drawn to a display of parti-colored dresses in the window of a boutique. I dashed ahead and rounded the corner and flattened myself against a wall, attempting to conceal myself behind a pilaster. We played this game often.

There was a shattering explosion. The building against my back trembled seismically.

I rushed back and beheld my mother, fallen onto the sidewalk. I saw only her and was deafened by my own overwhelming horror. She wore a boldly striped dress in vivid ultramarine and brilliant white—I still see this detail with exceptional clarity—and appeared unharmed. Small, insignificant pieces of debris were scattered around her, some across the top of her. Nothing was of a size I imagined possible to cause a mortal injury. I knelt next to her and picked a tiny stone from her russet hair. I shook her bare, freckled shoulder doubtfully, then with increasing vigor. I cried out, “*Maman*,” but got no response. Again and again I called to her, but she lay unquestionably still.

My reaction to this—and this was the fallen wonder of the world—was intuitive, visceral. My entire body jerked with breathless, disconsolate grief. I burst into tears, heaving convulsively. I was much too young to apprehend in full the nature, the gravity, of what had occurred, and I could in no way fathom why.

A small carmine spot appeared on her dress above the belt. My nose was beginning to run and I watched, hushed and immobile, as

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the specter grew larger. Mere elastic seconds had passed and everything felt arrantly different.

A gendarme pulled me away from her. I clutched her hand as he brought me to my feet, and called her name once more, though I knew she could not hear me. He unloosened my grasp and gently lowered her arm and led me away.

My mother and six others were killed by the blast of a bomb hidden inside the pannier of a bicycle that had been left leaning against a lamppost near the tables on the crowded terrace at a café.



My mother's brother, Philippe Quant, was a businessman. He made his home in Menton, but traveled often. He paid irregular visits to Algeria and, when in town, always stayed at our apartment. This practice continued even after the death of my mother. Though he and my father could not have been more different in appearance and conduct, their relationship—contrary to what might have been expected—had deepened following her death.

My uncle was everything my father was not. He towered in my mind like a monolith, some massive, unshaped stone that men before time had raised up for some human purpose that would forever remain unclear. He was a large man of imposing dimensions and a military demeanor, always tan and muscular. Impulsive and instinctive, my uncle was a man of action not given to contemplation. He made an effort to appear garrulous and warm and outgoing. His very otherness drew me to him like iron to lodestone.

I looked forward to his sojourns, which came without exception as a surprise. He would simply arrive unannounced and unexpected, but always welcome. His presence sparked a festival atmosphere; his company was enough to brighten all our moods. I welcomed his visits, his talk, as he sat at the table after dinner or paced across our balcony with a view of the Mediterranean and spoke of the excitements of his faraway world.

He never failed to bring me a gift. As it would any child, this pleased me tremendously. The bestowal of the present always took place in a carefully structured ritual of generosity. Following an elaborate dinner in our apartment the first night of his visit, he would

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excuse himself and disappear into his bedroom. He would return a minute later with pretty wrapped boxes of various sizes—gifts for everyone. This included Madame Corday, who was especially susceptible to his charms and had grown rather fond of him in a motherly way and catered to him shamelessly during his visits.

Each would be presented his or her gift in an unvarying sequence. My uncle set the box on the polished table in front of the beneficiary, in the spot occupied only moments earlier by the emptied bowl that had held dessert. Each present was to be unwrapped and acknowledged before the next one was handed over. Before her death, my mother had always come first, then my father. Madame Corday was summoned to the dining room and given her gift, which she opened, then retreated to the kitchen muttering her effusive thanks.

I always came last. The wait was a torment.

“And finally,” he said, “this is for you.” My gift was put before me.

Over the years, he had given me an illuminated globe, a telescope, postage stamps from around the world, a wrist compass, a leather-banded wristwatch, silver and gold coins, rich-colored and practically valueless foreign currency, an unwieldy French-Latin dictionary, and a legion of toys. In time, I came to understand how my acceptance of these gifts acknowledged obligation to my uncle and to his authority.



My father was a professor of philosophy. His was a world of ideas and books and reflection. He never spoke without first carefully choosing his words.

In my earliest memories, I saw him reviewing a manuscript at the cluttered desk in his study congested with books. They lined each wall from floor to ceiling and stood in tall, precarious stacks on the floor. He hunched within the bright loop of light cast by the desk lamp, his face inches from whatever he was looking over. From time to time he would sit up and take a long, thoughtful drag off of his cigarette, then replace it deliberately in the ashtray by his side. He removed the thick-lensed eyeglasses that he needed for reading and rubbed the bridge of his nose where the frames left wine-colored impressions in the skin if he wore them for long periods of time.

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I loved my father, of course, but it was the expected filial love foretold by the relationship of a child to a parent. A sense of pity prevailed in my feelings for him. It was as though something inside him, something essential and irremediable, had disintegrated when my mother was killed.



My uncle fascinated me. I was too recklessly callow to be skeptical of him, too hopefully young to know any better.

He was prone to unforeseeable shifts in temperament and, a number of times, I had observed an abrupt change in his mood in discussions with my father. They disagreed unequivocally on the matter of Algerian independence. When aggravated by something my father had said, his face turned a deep purplish-red and his breathing became noisy and uneven. Though seething and impatient to speak his mind, he said nothing if I were in the room. Their discussions were continued in loud, impassioned whispers long after I had gone to bed. He was not the kind of person to whom one could tell things he did not want to hear.

In the morning he was once again his jovial self and acted as though nothing had taken place the evening before.

When asked what he did, my uncle's answers were vague, unsatisfying. "Import-export" had been his customary response for many years. Later, this was changed to the no less inexact "construction."

He had been in the French army and had served as a junior officer in Indochina. He often told me rambling, captivating stories about the military and about life during wartime, but was little inclined to speak with me about what he had specifically done. He made it all sound like some magnificent glorious adventure, like wondrous scenes from a movie. His tales made me long to go where he had gone, to do what he had done. In many ways, he became my model.

He had witnessed the humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the loss of French hegemony in Indochina. Two years later he served for a brief period in the confusing intervention in Suez. Following these two embarrassments to French international prestige—one coming so soon after the other—he left the army.

He was a gambler and an irredeemable liar. He was a chauvinist,

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above all in that which concerned Algeria—the last significant interest of the French Empire—and a racist.

Once, outside the train station at Bab-el-Oued, his fury erupted against an Arab vendor selling candy and cigarettes who had given him incorrect change. He had purchased dragées for me, Chesterfields for himself. My uncle struck the Arab, whose left leg had been amputated at mid-thigh, with such sudden and surprising force that the man lost the balance his crutch provided and tumbled to the ground. His fall upset the wooden tray that held his wares. Packs of French and American cigarettes and small boxes of matches skittered across the sidewalk. Brightly colored balls of hard candy bounced into the street. My uncle stood above the man, who shielded his ears and face from the repeated blows with his upraised arms, and accused him of theft. He screamed an unending sequence of lashing racial slurs, the mildest of which, *sale arabe*, expressed clearly his contempt, his hatred, of the autochthonous Algerian population.

My uncle was a soldier and a patriot, both fiercely proud and critical of France. He remained confident that, despite the setbacks that had so demoralized him, he would once again see the mother country reclaim the glory that had been lost in the defeat and occupation of 1940.

He was a Roman Catholic and an alcoholic.

He was a terrorist.



For my twelfth birthday, he brought me a knife, keen as a razor. It was a United States Marine Corps combat knife. My father thoroughly disapproved of it. I prized it above all else that my uncle had given me.

It was a perhaps unwitting acknowledgement of the primacy of the position my uncle occupied in my life that I ignored my father's frequent requests that I not carry it with me. I was completely under the imprecise spell my uncle had cast; I breathed the heady perfume of disobedience.



One dreary, wet afternoon in March of 1962, I answered the ring of our bell—Madame Corday had taken the day off, she had gone to

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Hydra to visit her sister—and opened the door on my rain-soaked uncle. That sad year had been uncharacteristically damp and cold.

He showered, changed and borrowed one of my father's coats. Before leaving he asked that I say nothing of his visit. I looked into his eyes and saw the urgency in his request. I could not refuse and I was flattered to be included in what I imagined to be some sort of benign conspiracy. I agreed without a moment's thought.

"Will you be back for dinner?" I asked eagerly, expecting his affirmation.

His look was furtive. "I'll see you tomorrow." His manner was brusque and he turned on his heel and strode out of the apartment.

The next afternoon, at the end of my school day, I was walking with a group of my classmates down the arched passageway that led to the Rue Franklin. When I reached the sidewalk, I spotted my uncle waiting for me across the street.

"*Mon oncle*," I cried excitedly to my friends. I caught his eye and he took a last anxious draw on his cigarette, then ground out the stub on the pavement.

I had often boasted of him to them. On frequent occasions I had brought out the knife he had given me and held it before them. I exulted in their reverential and envious admiration of it.

I parroted his opinions on all matters, most fervidly on those concerning Algerian independence, and I spoke assuredly, almost arrogantly, as if his beliefs were both unassailable and genuinely my own.

I never mentioned to anyone my father's sentiments on the matter. He believed that greater violence would do nothing to remedy the injustices of the past, and that Algeria's eventual destiny did not lie in French hands. He was in agreement with de Gaulle, arguing that the days of French Algeria were ineluctably numbered. These were manifestly unpopular—and for me, dishonorable—attitudes for a *pied-noir*<sup>2</sup> to have held in the spring of 1962. I was not sufficiently mature to have thought through the issue and to have formed well-reasoned opinions of my own. Myopically, I took the side of my uncle in this matter.

Among those my age, there was unquestioning support for the

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OAS.<sup>3</sup> Its members seemed to me admirable, even romantic, heroes fighting for a worthwhile cause, though I truly understood little of what it was that they did. Because of the susceptibilities and inclinations of someone so young—I was that spring not yet thirteen years old—it was easy to ignore what I had heard about the methods the OAS employed. I believed that the end—the continuation of French authority over Algeria—justified the means. In those years my sympathy did not extend to the enemy.

Without looking, I darted toward where my uncle stood on the far sidewalk. A battered black Renault Dauphine skidded to a shrieking, sidling halt—I froze. The passenger door stopped only inches from me. The two men in the car had blanched, startled faces. My heart raced crazily; my whole body shook like the branches of a tree.

My uncle ran to the car, reproving the driver in harsh language for not driving more carefully. The driver turned a steely face to him and said not a word. My uncle became silent at once and the rabid color drained from his face. A look of recognition that neither man was able to conceal reciprocated between them.

"*Vas-y*," my uncle said in a diminished voice. The driver engaged the starter and it took a long while before the engine finally caught. He stared at me with slow-burning anger, then chose first gear with a hard gnashing crump and tore away from us.

I noticed that a shopping bag had fallen onto the floor behind the front seats. Some objects had spilled from inside of it—a baguette, a few oranges and a package wrapped in newspaper and bound with twine. I thought nothing of it at the time.

"Anatole?" a voice shouted.

Reluctantly I turned; some of my classmates had observed what had happened. They stood in a tight pack in front of the school.

"*Ça va*," I said in a wavering voice that I hoped sounded unconcerned to my friends, though my ear heard only the distress and the shame that my words contained.

"Are you coming?"

I waved at them to go on without me.

Once back on the sidewalk, my uncle put one strong hand on

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each of my shoulders. "You must be more careful," he admonished. His words held a harsh edge. I turned my attention toward my friends as they raced toward the corner, hollering gladly. The bite of his grip doubled and began to hurt. "You could have been killed."

I writhed, twisting out of his grasp, and stepped back into one of the soggy mounds of half-burnt rubbish that had been accumulating for days on the sidewalk. I slipped and fell onto my buttocks into the reeking trash. With a bone-jarring blow, my elbow slammed the ground. The hardness of the concrete took my breath away and the pain brought hot, mortifying tears that I was unable to restrain. I looked anywhere but at my uncle.

He stretched his hand down to me and began in a softer tone, "Listen to me..."

His words were buried by the deafening thud of an explosion from the direction of the Avenue de Bouzaréah. He reacted without hesitation.

I struggled to my feet and struck out after him and reached the intersection a few seconds later. My uncle was kneeling in the cobbled roadway, attempting to help one of my classmates. Henri Beyle, the boy who had called out to me, lay in a pool of dark, glistening blood and both his legs were gone below the knee. I saw him blink. His face had an oyster-gray tint and I found it unimaginable that he made not a sound. In his hand he still held his leather satchel.

Long orange flames and dense smoke of an extraordinarily rich blackness—the disjunctive thought came to me at the time that the billowing smoke and the bright jumping fire were somehow quite beautiful—lifted from the back of the Renault that had, a minute earlier, almost hit me. It was terribly mangled, its tires flattened, all its glass missing. Its right rear door had been blown open and dangled outward, held only by the lower hinge. It was the third car back in a chain of cars that had stopped to let my classmates cross the street.

A thinner grayish smoke, galling and caustic, clouded the air. My eyes watered, my vision blurred. I stood on the corner stock-still, trying once again to grasp the incomprehensible.

In the car behind the Renault, its front end twisted and scorched by the explosion, the driver still sat in his seat, his head canted back

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and to one side, his impassive face bloodied. The windshield had splintered and had been blown in against him. A man and a woman lay without moving on the sidewalk.

The ground where I stood was strewn with long slivers of glass from the goldsmith's windows. Across the street the tables and chairs at the Bar Palace were toppled and twisted and scattered in disorder along the sidewalk and into the street. The umbrellas that had once shaded the bar's patrons were in tatters.

From afar I heard the rueful wail of a siren and slowly I moved into the street. My uncle had unlaced his boots and fabricated crude tourniquets for Henri's legs. He went from boy to boy, helping those he could and offering words of encouragement to those less severely hurt. I was capable of doing nothing more than wander in a numb stupor among the moans and the weeping of the injured and stare at their wounds so grotesquely red and black. My emotions were confused, blunted by everything I heard and saw.

Often, I had imagined my uncle in battle, but what I now beheld bore no resemblance to the blithe portraits of martial life he had painted when I was younger.

This was merely one of several bombings that had taken place that day in Algiers. The only thing to differentiate it from the others was that so many of my friends—boys that had been companions for most of my life—had been victims. In addition to losing his legs, Henri Beyle suffered horrific internal injuries. He died two days later.

Four others died that afternoon in the explosion—the two men in the Renault along with a young couple who had been walking arm in arm along the sidewalk.



Sirens approached and with haste my uncle ushered me into a parked car and took me home. I didn't have the presence of mind to inquire where he had gotten a car, much less the fuel to put into it—a pronounced shortage of gasoline vexed Algeria. When we had stopped in front of my building, he held out my father's coat. "Here," he said.

Without a word I took it and his massive hand gripped my leg above the knee as I turned to open the door. I did not look at him.

"Don't tell anyone that you saw me."

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I very quietly said yes.

"This is not a game," he said gravely.

I waited for a long time in great indecision before I said, "You're OAS, aren't you?"

"Is that what you believe?"

I was unable to give him a clear idea of what I was thinking. One knotted thought succeeded another and supplanted it before the earlier one had had a chance to take root. I couldn't have spoken without appearing to talk nonsense. I nodded, murmuring an indistinct sound.

"Do you think France cares any longer what happens to Algeria?" He awaited my reply, but I was silent. "No one else can save this country."

Speech was impossible.

An expression of savage resentment passed across his face, as if spurred by a sudden disagreeable thought. "De Gaulle has betrayed us. We alone control our destiny." There was frenzy in what he said and I was, for the first time in my life, scared of him. "We are fighting to safeguard a Christian influence in Algeria." His breathing was broken and loud and a froth of saliva had accumulated below the lip in one corner of his mouth.

I made a move to get out of the car and he let go of me. I did not watch as he drove away.



I mounted the stairs to our apartment in a thoroughly downcast mood. My uncle had, for many years, been my idol. He had satisfied needs the existence of which I was consciously unaware and had served a role that I could not define. I grew up without a mother, and the emotional aspects of the relationship with my father had always remained in the shadows of the intellectual.

Nothing explicitly linked my uncle to what had occurred on the Avenue de Bouzaréah; it was simply something I felt. The thought I could not banish was that he knew the man in the Renault and had played some not insignificant role in the bombing that had injured my friends and had taken the lives of others. The corollary was that he shared responsibility for these casualties.

My sadness sprang from an abrupt awareness of how little I truly

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knew about my uncle and a sentiment that I could no longer trust him.

In the foyer I put down my books and went to the closet to hang up the coat he had returned. As I was putting it onto a hanger a small piece of paper fell to the floor. On it were written a date—four days away—a time and the name of a market near the medina.



These were the details of my uncle's life. So much of what he had told me was a bright, silver-tongued lie.

In Indochina he worked in intelligence. What this meant was that he questioned captured Vietminh guerillas. Many of the same methods of torture employed by the French to gather information in Southeast Asia would later be used systematically in North Africa.<sup>4</sup>

After the Suez Crisis in 1956, he had not retired from the army because of his disgust with French foreign policy and military failures, but had been court-martialed for insubordination. He was one of a small band of recalcitrant officers who had attempted to resist the withdrawal of French and British troops when the United States steadfastly opposed the Anglo-French intervention against the Egyptian nationalization of the canal.

He was a gunrunner. He sold weapons to almost anyone. His only scruple was that he would not knowingly sell arms or ammunition to any faction in opposition to French forces. This activity explained his peripatetic travels.

He suffered from depression, which he labored mightily to conceal, and was beset by an overarching pessimism. He was proud and arrogant, yet plagued by ingrained feelings of inferiority.

He came to the OAS shortly after it was organized in February of 1961. His principal areas of operation were explosives and finance. In March of that year, he had a role in the bombing in which the mayor of Evian was killed. He had coordinated the efforts to rob several banks, both in Algeria and in the *métropole*, to subsidize OAS operations.

In 1962, as the sodden winter came to a close, my uncle was summoned to Algiers.<sup>5</sup>

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For the third and last time the detonation of a bomb in Algiers figured significantly in my life.

Late on a Sunday afternoon, the 18<sup>th</sup> of March,<sup>6</sup> I walked downhill in fitful spring sunlight. Though the rains of that morning had stopped, the sky was interspersed with occasional heroic clouds, pearl-gray and cadmium-white. I followed the many twists of the Boulevard du Télemly toward the sea. Few cars circulated. Here and there a rare store was open. A silent, stationary line of about a dozen European women trailed away from the locked door of a bakery. Buildings bore the scars of combat and the markings of the warring partisans. The black-painted slogans of the OAS were sometimes covered over by the green of the FLN. Their message though was the same: "We will win."

On the sidewalk ahead, not far from the Chemin des Sept Merveilles, three women were sorting through clothes that another tossed down to them from the balcony of a second floor apartment with every one of its windows shattered. A dress in black toile fluttered down and landed in my path. I stopped and caught the dark cautious look of one of the women as she peered at me from within her haik and veil; her eyes glinted with covetousness. I wanted to kick the dress into the street, to rip it into scraps. I suppressed my rage and stepped over it. The women averted their gazes and moved aside. As I passed, I caught the flash of a hand embellished with intricate designs in henna, and saw the ringed fingers clutch the fabric like a claw. Her heavily braceleted wrist jingled.

Further on, the pavement was littered with photographs and with envelopes, their brightly colored airmail stamps cancelled with jet-black postmarks. Broken toys, shivered dishes and glassware, kitchen utensils disfigured beyond recognition. Torn clothing spilled from the broached carcasses of plundered suitcases and trunks. A motionless cat lay in the gutter; its tongue lilled a bit and a trickle of blood from its mouth formed a short stream.

My descent continued. The desolate quiet of the afternoon was broken by the buzz of a 2CV climbing the nearby Rue Rovigo. The

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noise lingered like an echo, a faint, uncertain palpitation in the heavy stillness that followed. A foul, stray wind from the south brought to me the stench from the morgue at the Hôpital Mustapha.

I stood in the doorway of a pharmacy at the bottom of the Boulevard Gambetta, a usually busy pedestrian thoroughfare, an almost perpendicular escalade of four hundred steps on the edge of the Casbah. At the end of the deserted street, corresponding to what was written on the wrinkled scrap of paper that had fallen from my father's coat, was the Marché de la Lyre. The market, frequented by the Arab population, sold fresh produce and flowers, and was untended at this hour on a Sunday.

Parked near the steps at the south entrance of the market was the sapphire blue Citroën DS my uncle had been driving a few days previous. A jeep with a pedestal-mounted machine gun rounded the corner, its long aerial whipsawing as it came to a stop next to the empty car. The soldier in the passenger seat spoke into the handset of his radio, then waited. The driver grabbed a rifle and with a swaggering gait walked over to a group of Arab men loitering just outside the market. The gunner kept the vented barrel of his automatic weapon trained on the men. Above circled a helicopter. With a brash wave of his weapon, the driver dismissed the men, and, without argument, they turned their backs on him and walked away. He got back in and with a lurch the jeep hurried off.

I waited for perhaps five minutes, minutes that felt like hours; no one returned. The clock at St. Augustine's rang the hour. In the sky, saturate blue and clear now, the sun was low and the violet shadows of the sudden North African sunset were lengthening rapidly, the air starting to cool. With the approach of nightfall, my solitude, my isolation, weighed more heavily and my thoughts focused on getting home before the curfew at eight. I had only two hours. The helicopter vanished. I listened purposefully. The clap of its rotors, simultaneously both sharp and dull, receded, leaving me alone with the sound of my breathing. A faint onshore breeze crept up—the odor of diesel from the fishing boats and that of their catch.

A long, anxious silence prevailed.

From within the market a thundering blast rang out, the air

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shook. Though it was a sound I had grown up with, I had never become fully accustomed to it, especially at such close range. An explosion never failed to quicken the rate of my pulse, to shake my nerves, to make me anticipate. When, where, will the next one be?

Preposterously, without concern for myself, I ran inside the market. Weak light filtered down from the grimy clerestory windows. Dust was everywhere in the air. I stumbled forward in the half-light, groped along the low wooden counters covered with canvas, finally hearing a slight grunting and a thumping, scuffling sound. After a while I located the source. My uncle sat on the ground attempting to push a fallen beam with his shoulder. He strained and groaned, but made no progress. The body of another man lay with fatal languor a few feet away. I approached and saw that the deep wooden beam had collapsed in such a way that my uncle's right hand was pinned.

Without a word I went to his side and tried with all my might to dislodge the beam. Even with the two of us working in concert, we could not budge it. We tried several approaches, each as futile as the one before.

He howled, a long string of indignant epithets suggesting a trapped animal.

Again we tried, and again.

I sat down after a while, breathing hard and thoroughly exhausted, and looked at my uncle's face, smeared with sweat and smudge and dust. "What happened?" Nothing had been said up to that point except words relating to our efforts to lift the beam.

My uncle ignored me, glaring with spite at the timber. He glanced around. "Get that." With his free hand he indicated a long wooden shaft. I followed his instructions to create a lever and how best to position my weight for greatest advantage. This I then did and, with a heartsickening snap, the shaft cracked and I plummeted to the ground.

A flicker of defiance continued to burn, fed more by tenacity than logic. Once more he strained against the implacable beam until it seemed the veins in his neck would burst. Suddenly, as if something vital had snapped, he went limp and let out an agonized moan.

After a long moment he asked, "Do you have your knife?"

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I removed it from my jacket pocket and slid the long blade from its sheath. "I always carry it." We exchanged a glance without a word. "You can not let them find me alive."

I realized immediately what he meant,<sup>7</sup> but I wasn't sure what he wanted me to do.

I heard voices jabbering in Arabic. He grimaced and closed his eyes.

"I don't understand." I could barely get the words out, my ungainly tongue caught and stuck inside my mouth.

He shook his head slowly, then opened his eyes and stared directly at me. "You must kill me," he whispered. And though he spoke with precise directness, the effect was almost that of absolute blandness.

I was stunned. My inclination was to refuse, to proclaim my inability to do any such thing, but I had no time to express my disbelief, my bewildered surprise. Again, the unnerving voices in Arabic—where were they coming from, were they any closer? I was unable to tell. My uncle's look was imperative, not just imploring but commanding me to act. I knew that he expected not to be disobeyed and in his eyes I saw real fear, something, certainly, he was not in the habit of displaying.

My chest was hollow, my heart clamoring like hammers on steel. Though light-minded and utterly confused—I was nonetheless certain we would both be killed if we were caught—I hesitated only an instant. Not knowing still from where the impulse came, I pressed the blade against his flesh, shut my eyes, and slashed with all my might.

Through the shaft of the knife, I felt sinew tear, then a slight, only momentary, resistance. There was a quick jerking release and I felt bone break. This brought an odd dissonant sensation into my fingers. All of this occurred in a single continuous motion that had taken place within a fraction of a second. I had severed the captive hand from his wrist.

Pain subverted his features. The anesthesia of shock was not immediate and the sound of his screams made me recoil and shudder. My intestines and rectum contracted. He was breathing loudly in ago-

nized, rapid gasps and tried to say something. I leaned in toward his lips. All I could make out were the words, "It's you."

"That's right," I said in a way I hoped would reassure him. I removed one of my bootlaces and lashed it around his forearm—it seemed to me that no one could survive the loss of so much blood. "It's me. I'm right here." I cut a swatch of fabric from my jacket and dressed the wound.

"That's not what..." His eyes bore into mine.

Suddenly, I understood.

The voices moved closer.

"You've got to get up." I spoke in a way I had never spoken before. All doubt was gone—I spoke with authority and certainty.

He made a first effort to stand and, drawing on strength I knew not existed, I hauled him to his feet and dragged, more than led, him to his car. Though I continued to hear distant voices from time to time, we encountered no one. Gradually, the throbbing murmur of a helicopter grew louder. From somewhere quite close, the dull thud of mortar fire drilled at my nerves. Once inside the Citroën, my uncle lapsed into complete unconsciousness. Though I had never before driven, I somehow got him to the Hôpital Maillot.



My father decided that I must leave Algeria. On another Sunday, the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, I sullenly boarded an Air France Caravelle. I flew first to Marseilles, then rode on a train bound for Paris. Another took me to sunless Lille, where I lived with my paternal grandmother until I was eighteen.

After Algiers life seemed far less remarkable, less new.

My uncle was tried by a French court and found guilty of sedition. He served eighteen months in the prison at Toulon. He died in an automobile accident in the north of Spain in 1975, four days shy of his fiftieth birthday. He had been supplying arms to Basque separatists, the ETA.

Though I wrote to him numerous times, he didn't answer my letters. I never learned what went wrong that day at the Marché de la Lyre.

My father believed the propaganda spouted by the FLN before

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independence. He was confident that a new Algerian government would welcome—indeed, it would have need of—those Europeans who desired to remain. He assured me that I could return home, should I wish, once the political situation stabilized.

His usual perspicacity was clouded by his optimism that the two communities could fashion a harmonious coexistence and by his sentimental attachment to Algiers—he had come there for the first time with the Free French during the Second World War and returned afterward. He failed to recognize that independence would represent a complete reversal of the patterns of existence for the French community, which had enjoyed the franchise of 130 years of colonial domination. On the Arab side, coexistence would demand the suppression of the instinct for vengeance that this domination would have inspired, an instinct made all the more sharp by eight years of savage war.

Not long after the creation of the Algerian republic, my father's mutilated body was found inside a sack at the foot of one of the red clocks in the Place des Trois Horloges. Three days earlier, he had been abducted when leaving his office at the university.<sup>8</sup> A letter from him, dated the day before his disappearance, spoke of the promising, though still volatile, situation in Algiers. He expressed cautious optimism that he would see me before the end of the year.



The Algiers I loved was sensual—scents, colors, sounds.

The fresh nimbus of cloud and light at sweet-smelling sunrise, primrose and pink. The magnetic blue of the whispering sea with its uncounted moods and scents. The irrepressible heat, the weight, of summer. The faintly irised light of the midday sun in cooler, damper weather. Winters were brief with rain, silvery white and chill, driven by a bawling northwest wind crossing the bay, sky and water the same grief-stricken tint, slate-gray and indistinguishable. And at night the silence breached by the barking of dogs, the long, swelling wail from the horns of departing steamers.

But was the city more than this—a succession of unreal, intoxicating sensations, images not only recallable, but which return all by themselves?

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Algiers was my infancy, my youth. My life there was a movement through the long, opaque years of childhood, a movement toward intensifying clarity. Algiers was also a place, a city, a marvelous landscape, where I first began to develop the memory of self and to grapple with the problems of necessity and possibility.

This was the place that has remained eternal in my heart, a city that has long ceased to exist.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> On that day, the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*), an indigenous nationalist movement, organized attacks on French military installations and public works. This initiated a campaign of terror that soon took as its primary target those who could not fight back—the civilian European population. The FLN's purpose was to bring the plight of Algeria to world attention with the ultimate goal of securing a sovereign Algerian state. Kidnappings, assassinations, and, above all, bombings became routine occurrences.

<sup>2</sup> Someone of French ancestry born or residing in North Africa, particularly in Algeria.

<sup>3</sup> The OAS (*Organisation Armée Secrète*) was a mutinous faction of the French military and those that shared its determination to maintain Algeria in French hands.

<sup>4</sup> The use of torture in interrogations during the Algerian war is well documented. General Jacques Massu, the commander of French forces during the Battle of Algiers, admitted without equivocation and without apology to the use of torture in his account of the campaign, *La vraie bataille d'Alger*. His justification was the immediate need to obtain FLN operational information to save innocent lives. The memoirs of General Paul Aussaresses, who served in Algeria from 1955 to 1957, have unrepentantly confirmed Massu's assertions. The name of Jean-Marie Le Pen, a frequent French presidential candidate from the extreme right, most recently in 2002, is often linked with the use of torture in North Africa. Le Pen served as a paratroop lieutenant for a brief time in Algeria in 1957. In 1962 Le Pen admitted to having participated in torture, a statement he later retracted, claiming that his

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actions did not warrant that characterization.

<sup>5</sup> The OAS was responding to an escalation of violence by the FLN. The OAS sought, as a final desperate measure, to trigger a direct confrontation between the Arab and European communities, which would, in turn, provoke the French forces of order to intervene. They adopted as their own the very same blind terrorism that had worked so effectively for the FLN.

<sup>6</sup> At six o'clock that evening, Algerian television announced the signing of the Evian Accords and the cease-fire between France and the FLN. For the *pièdes-noirs*, this signaled their indisputable abandonment by de Gaulle. The frantic response of the OAS was without precedent.

<sup>7</sup> It was a common practice of the FLN to cut off the sex organs of their prisoners, then to insert the genitalia into the victim's mouth.

<sup>8</sup> In the first few months after the Algerian war came to an official end, over 20,000 Europeans lost their lives in the violence that continued after independence was won. Of the over 3000 kidnapped in that period, a little more than 1200 were released.

HP

nila northSun  
**dancing in granny panties**

he's gone for 2 nites  
i do everything he'd hate  
he won't know  
& think his fantasy intact  
as he longs for me  
envisioning black lace

meanwhile  
i take a shower to wash the day off  
the scotch on the rocks crack  
i annoint myself with oil  
greasy in my need for moisture  
then  
the thing he hates most (i doubt it)  
i douse myself with powder  
so my clothes will slide over  
corpulent curves  
hey, i can make pancakes  
under the fold of my breasts  
& in the crack of my ass  
i'm that hot

next marvin gaye and barry white  
sing to me  
as i dance in white cotton granny panties  
the waistband short of my armpits  
& so comfortable  
as i snap my fingers  
bend my knees  
and let my ass bob like a.....  
what?  
full moon on a tumultuous ocean?  
a flaming marshmallow on a  
too thin campfire stick?  
whatever  
my white granny panties  
shine  
above my golden oak pedestal legs  
(geez, the scotch on the rocks must be working)  
marvin sings

nila northSun

that i am all he needs to get by  
barry says  
i'm the first, the last, his everything  
& i believe every word

now  
i throw on an old favorite sundress  
pink  
with a full short skirt  
i can no longer button the top  
so my tits  
that are talented enough to make pancakes  
hang out  
my granny panties still slightly exposed  
remember the waistband is way high  
& i dance  
and re-fill my drink  
bite my lower lip while i shimmy  
arms outstretched  
i'm some kind of wonderful

i feel good  
i look bad  
i don't care

he's gone 2 days  
i miss him  
very much  
want him back  
so i can  
clean up my act  
be the pulled together seductress  
at least until  
he's gone again  
and the granny panties can re-surface

Judy Klass  
Icon

Some people will try to con you. They swear some Clones are genuine. Elvis dug up at Graceland in the dead of night, they'll whisper, a few cells salvaged—that boy over there with the cowlick and the perfect sneer is the result. Little Miss Perfect Monroe? Look at the eyes, look at the smile! Don't you see, it's her DNA, it's Norma Jean, in the flesh . . .

Those people are liars, or fools. I con you not. Trannie or born gender-aligned, you *earn* your clonedom. You watch the person's films or videos. You watch him/her move, you practice the sighs, the screams, the tossed-off one-liners, you become your own tailor, you find a surgeon who is an artist, and you sculpt.

It means pain, and sweat, and if the *need* to be fabulous is not there, or the potential, you will never know what it means *to be real*.

I'm the best Garland I know, and I'm not Judy. Judy longed for a long neck; I agonize over the length of mine. The adam's apple isn't prominent enough to risk surgery, but the neck lifts the head too high. And I'm too tall to be a perfect Garland.

But surgery has given me The Face. Any Icon collector knows from a block away who I am. And perhaps most important, I have The Voice. The warmth, the nervous vibrancy, the huskiness, the liquid sob, the soaring, intoxicating joy—I have it all, when I speak *or* sing. That's why I'll never get that final cut done, frankly. A vagina would be nice, but I won't risk The Voice for one.

Not many Garlands in this city. Or anywhere. I'm not the Last of the Mohicans, but we are on the endangered species list. Was a time gay men knew what Judy meant; she was a touchstone. Now it's more recent pinups they ape. They've lost themselves, they've lost sight of Judy as our Rosa Parks: the spark of our civil rights movement.

But men who used to dress as Judy or Liza were Wannabes, not real Clones. Drag Queens of Olde were a crude minstrel show:

Parodies, not tributes to a goddess.

I have no patience with Wannabes. Honestly, it's better to be a Cape-Carrier without pretensions than some sad Madonna Wannabe, with cone tits but a face like a football player's. Some peroxide Bette with no sense of how to sweep up a Warner's staircase, some sad Crawford pseudo-clone, with inked-in lips and eyebrows, waving a wire hanger . . . There are no Wannabes in our gang—just Icons and Cape-Carriers. Some Icons are more fully realized than others, and I'd say that I'm one of the best—but these are all boys and girls who have studied their god or goddess, and worked at their mystery. And our Cape-Carriers know it.

Another nice thing about our gang is we're a homo/hetero mix. We have boy Monroes and girl Monroes, and those who'd rather you not know if they're pre-op or post-op unless they get you alone in a private place. Usually, you'll see a Family of XY boy Monroes turn up their noses at double-X girl Monroes and vice versa, or you'll even see them cat-fight with knives and laser-cigs. With us, there's tolerance, it's all about dedication and quality. And we're not such total divas toward our Cape-Carriers. A lot of us just date them.

Since before I joined, the gang was led by James Dean, and I respected him from the first as an authentic Clone. He had the red jacket, the hair, the quizzical wrinkled brows, he had the cigarette dangling from his lips—a real one, not a laser-cig. Some guys who clone male Icons eschew the nip and tuck. Jimmy had work done, I think—still, it was not too obvious, which is also crucial.

Things started getting weird on a Saturday night, when we were out, twenty strong, on the Boulevard. Out in force, almost all of us present, Jimmy and his entourage of Rebels, four or five Monroes, the usual chromosomal mix, a fabulous Mae West chick, done up as a Belle of the Nineties, our loyal Cape-Carriers, me, and a skinny Marlene who started life as a nerd named Harry, and who has been reborn through a dip in the baptismal fount of fabulousness, and looks better as a girl in mannish clothes than he ever did as a nerdling boy. I should know; I used to have PE with him in junior high, and he was as awkward and heinous a nerdling as my own terrified, miserable juvenile incarnation.

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We saw a Wayne crowd heading toward us, and no, I do not mean Wayne's World. You take an ugly, unimaginative guy who really should be a Colorless Straight, and he decides to "dress up," and all he needs to imitate is the drawl to convince himself he's a John Wayne Clone. Leaving the likes of me to wonder: why did he "dress up" in the first place?

Such a Wayne was at the front of the little procession that blocked our path. You could see by his walk, his sneer in our direction, that his gang is "straight" in the old sense, and obsessed with "straightness." When Icons use the word Straight, we're talking about the world of our childhood, the world of our parents, the world we have left. We're talking about businessmen and schoolboys and housewives. If you want to be part of the culture of fabulousness, whether you sleep with girls or boys, whatever you are or whatever you were, you must leave the world of Colorless (though they're not necessarily odorless!) Straights behind. Whether you are an Icon or a Cape-Carrier, you are transformed into someone with lyrical twists and Color and style. Have all the hetero sex you might desire, my dear; so long as one or both of you is an Icon, neither of you is a Straight.

And bear this in mind: a black man or woman can be Colorless too, if he or she plods to the office every day in magazine fashion drab. An Icon like myself has ten times the Color! So does *any* fabulous white boy or girl, and not only if he or she has the dedication to be skin-tinted-transformed into Aretha or one of the Supremes.

But these plodding Waynesmen (and they are usually all boys, which I find funny) are obsessed with people being "straight" in the Olde World sense. Their leading John blocked our Jimmy's path, planting his feet wide, in a V. Our Jimmy stopped. Grinned. Ducked his head and lit a cigarette. The Wannabe Wayne (why? why? why?) twirled a six-shooter. I hoped we would not have the chance to find out how real it was.

"Hey, there, pretty boy," he drawled, slow as molasses. "Which of these kewpie doll men are you doin' right now?"

Our Jimmy smoked and stared at him. He would never answer questions like that directly—kept things ambiguous, which I thought

Judy Klass

was fine. It's what the real Jimmy probably would have done.

"Well, now, then, there, sir, Mr. Wayne," he said with a grin. "Don't believe that's any of your business. Suppose you guys step aside. 'Cause we don't want any trouble."

There was an Elvis boy, at our Jimmy's elbow, as always. Hasn't had surgery, but he's got his own prettiness, he's not grotesque enough for me to call him a Wannabe. "Come away, Jimmy," he said, but Jimmy waved him away.

Now the big-eyed Sal Mineo kid moved forward. Like Elvis boy, I knew he was in love with Jimmy—just didn't know if he ever got to do him.

I hope so. I hope the real Sal made it with the real Jimmy, for that matter.

"Don't even bother with these Clones, Jimmy," he said now, intensely. "They're just a bunch of Straights in drag, pretending to have some Color."

I saw some of the Waynesmen bristle, and Jimmy kept the boy back with his hand. "Stay out of this, Plato," he said mildly. "It's under control."

The main, dull John narrowed his eyes. "Do the kewpie boys speak for you?"

"I speak for myself."

"Swell. Then, let's go. Your gang against my gang, homo-boy."

Jimmy shook his head. He grinned again, and you could see his long, authentic dimples. "My gang has much more to lose. Your pack is about as fabulous as a bunch of housewives playing bingo in a church basement in Omaha. We could cut them up and disfigure them, and who'd even notice the difference?"

Well, the Waynesmen didn't like that at all. Some of them were ready to go for Jimmy then and there. But their leader, Colorless John, waved them back also. "Fine then, Princess Tiny-Meat," and from the intensity of the Wayne's gaze, I wondered if, beneath all the Colorless, regular-guy swagger, he was hot for our Jimmy, "how 'bout just you and me?"

We all shivered inwardly, I think. A shuddering breeze. But there are responsibilities that come with leading an Icon gang, like

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any gang, and Jimmy never shirked them. He dropped the cigarette, ground it into a paving square of the Boulevard. "Name your weapons."

"Laser-cig."

"Don't own one."

"Guns."

"Don't own anything like your museum piece there."

"Knives?"

"Knives." Jimmy did carry a knife. He drew it out of the pocket of his blue jeans now, and popped out the blade. And I began to get really scared. If Wayne Wannabe was really hot for Jimmy, and hated himself for it, and hated Jimmy for it, he might cut him deep. We might lose our leader. Lose a leader and the whole tone of a gang can change. This gang had become Family for me, a Family where I belonged, as I never belonged to anyone or anything in my house full of Straights, except the television they left me with, and the places that portal took me. I did not want to lose my real Icon Family, and I did not want it to change, and I did not want our Jimmy to be hurt.

But he and the John were circling. Knives out. Waynesmen cheering their leader on, as we clutched each other, and called out warnings and encouragement to ours. How did we get here and why, I wondered, as their arms sliced the air, as they ducked away from each other, and danced. Do they really want this, do they really want to cut and be cut? I could not tell.

One burly Waynesman, even further off the mark in terms of looks than his leader, slouched under a ten-gallon hat and seemed poised to jump in. He looked to be his leader's second, and Elvis boy was Jimmy's second. He also stood poised. But I hoped the seconds would stay out of it. I wished I could find a way to break it up.

How ugly and dumb those Waynesmen are! I'm not a Judy who goes for Colorless Straights. Give me a gentle Cape-Carrier any day over a macho, beer-swilling fool. Only one of them had an interesting quality—a boy near the back, something between Gary Cooper and Alan Ladd, judging by his looks. What was he doing there, I wondered, in my racing mind, most of my energy focused on our cir-

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cling boy leaders with knives. Why had he wandered into the wrong gang?

The John made a leap, and Jimmy's red jacket was slashed, and some darker red seeped out onto it from his arm, and I knew the jacket would be hard to repair or replace. I knew Jimmy didn't have much money, and when I saw the John sneer, my fear of what he might do started to give way to anger. Here was a Straight, like any who had tripped me in the schoolyard, punched me in the locker room, taunted me and shoved me on a PE field while the PE teacher pretended not to notice—here was a plain, loutish Straight appropriating our tropes, pretending to be one of us. Out to slice up and disfigure and destroy our shining Jimmy.

And then suddenly—the rains came! Pouring down in a cascade! Dresses and wigs were soaked, ten-gallon hats were ruined, and cowboys and Monroes and Cape-Carriers gaped up at the darkening but still clear evening skies in confusion, and cursed and scattered in different directions. The Waynesmen herded back down a Metro hole, the one they had probably popped out of in the first place.

And we took refuge, most of us, beneath the awning of the nearest building. Once we were under there, we could see that the sudden shower was cascading down from its roof – the sprinkler system run amok.

My dress might be watermarked and ruined, and my mascara was running and smearing, turning me into Camille, but really I was glad. Jimmy had gotten off with just a cut to the sleeve; an efficient little girl Cape-Carrier was examining the wound and patching him up. Our clothes and accoutrements could be restored or replaced, so what did they really matter?

That's when Liza made her appearance. My eyes homed in on her, as any mother's eyes might light up when her child slinks shyly out of a doorway. She had laid on the mascara also. But she hadn't gone Cabaret-harlequin-extreme. Still, her hair was just right, her Fosse jacket and black leggings and hat were just right. She was a foolproof Icon—the kind that makes the easily awed nudge each other and speculate that here is a DNA-extract laboratory-gestated Clone.

Her features are plump, but then so were Liza's, and so were

Judy's much of the time. I've got an *Easter Parade* thinness, a *Meet Me In St. Louis* thinness. I didn't ask for it. I think I'd rather have a wide-eyed, round Dorothy face, a Mickey and Judy face. And age naturally into the Carnegie Hall thinness and chic of later Judy, as I grow older myself. But you work with what God gave you, learn to be the incarnation of your Clone you most resemble. This young Liza's chubbiness suited her.

Her eyes locked onto mine, just as I had been drawn to her immediately. Her face broke into a tremulous Liza smile. "Hi, Mama," she said to me. Laugh if you will, but I felt a lump rise in my throat, as she stepped toward us. "Sorry about the sun shower," she went on, speaking to all of us. "But at least the rains drove the Waynes away!" And she laughed uncertainly—perhaps a bit too long.

"You did that?" I asked. "You made it rain?"

She nodded. She now had the attention of the whole gang. "I was upstairs in this building, and I saw what was happening—I re-routed some connections in the sprinkler system." Her smile broke through again. "I'm good with the programming of systems and alarms, I'm a very useful person to have around a Sanctuary . . ."

Our Jimmy, his arm bandaged, his jacket off being mended somewhere, now stepped forward. "You belong to any group?"

She shook her head no. "Not for months! And even then, they were only karaoke buddies, it was never a real Family. I just quit high school," she explained, her voice becoming uncertain again. "I've by-passed alarms to sleep in old buildings. But I watch the Boulevard, and I've watched your gang." Her eyes were wide as she made her appeal to Jimmy. "I'd really like to join!"

You could see that Jimmy was considering what to say. This was not correct protocol—and he was supposed to be pretending he really had wanted to continue the knife-fight with the Duke, the one she had cut short. On the other hand, we'd been unsure about the wiring of our very own Sanctuary since we lost the Tallulah who designed it (she didn't join a rival gang, just found a rich businessman in the Straight world to keep her) and we needed someone new.

And deep down, I think he was grateful for the rains.

"Judy will take care of you," he told Liza, at last.

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Liza turned to me, beaming, and I took her hands in mine.

"We're goin' back to the Sanctuary now," Jimmy added. "We'll see if you can explain our alarm system just by lookin' at it."

The rest of us smiled inwardly. Some initiation test—he wanted her to explain it so he could begin to understand it himself!

We turned to head toward Sanctuary, which is the boiler room of an old building down a skinny side street off the Bouelevard. People were attempting to put themselves back together, as we stepped out from the shadows of the awning. Jimmy bummed a pocket mirror off of a Monroe Clone. "Hey, Judy. Wanna see a monkey?" He handed it to me.

Well, I gasped and then laughed when I saw what the mascara had done to my face. A Cape-Carrier named Billy approached me discreetly, offering me a tissue and a bottle of water, and I repaired some of the damage.

We had not traveled thirty yards when a figure stepped out of an alleyway toward us. It was the Gary Cooper/Alan Ladd boy. We halted, wondering if he were a scout for the Waynesmen, and if they were looking for trouble all over again.

"What can I do for you?" Jimmy asked him pleasantly.

"Name's Slim," he told us shyly. "I'd like to join."

Two in one day? You could see in Jimmy's face that that was more than he thought we could assimilate. But this one looked promising to me also, and so I intervened.

"Let me take charge of this one too, Jimmy," I urged him. "It will be all right."

Jimmy looked surprised, annoyed—and then Sal Mineo was at his elbow. Maybe, just like me, he saw in this new boy a certain quality.

"It makes sense, Jim. The Waynesmen wing you, but we claim one of theirs, so the round goes to us."

"I ain't passing no secrets of the Waynesmen," Slim warned us bluntly. "I'm leavin' them, whether you folks take me or not—but I ain't no spy."

His face was hard. But Jimmy Dean broke into a grin. I think this little speech caused him to like the new kid a whole lot more.

"Well, who asked you to be a damn spy? Just follow the crowd

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and move along with us now.”

And so Slim was in.

We all breathed easier once we reached Sanctuary, of course. You’d never recognize it as a boiler room, though sometimes you hear the pipes jerk and rattle, and the machinery hum. We’ve covered those things with hangings—Icons painted on black velvet, and black and white film posters, and Japanese screens. We have wires strung across the vast space, dripping with boas and scarves, weighed down by hangers heavy with clothes. We have large wooden flats, the murals covering them painted by all of us, and behind the flats are vanities and beds and divans for those who want to change or rest, or who need a little privacy together.

In the largest open space is our seventy-inch TV screen, and the chairs, and the sound system. This is the Family Room.

People flung themselves into chairs, or disappeared behind flats to reinvent themselves. I led Liza and Slim behind the screen where I kept my things.

“Sixteen?” I asked her, as I settled before the vanity and removed my damp wig.

“Fifteen,” she admitted, and hung her head.

I clicked my tongue. “And you?” I asked the boy.

“Seventeen.”

“A couple of very forward March chicks,” I told them, wondering who I was trying to quote. Alas, not Judy. “And do you have the loyalty to be part of a Family?”

“Yes!” they said together, with such urgency and intensity that I was touched to the depths of my cynical soul.

“Can you sing?” I asked Liza casually, as I reapplied base, and then blush, and then powder. I didn’t want her to know how crucial the question was to me—didn’t want her to feel pressured into lying.

“Of course I can sing, Mama! You taught me how to sing,” she answered promptly.

I patted her hand. “That’s my girl,” I said. “Well, we’ll soon see.”

When we emerged, the other Icons had all changed back into themselves, and a few Cape-Carriers were applying the final touches.

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Jimmy “tested” Liza by asking her to explain the alarm system to him. And I think she taught him much that that sour, spiteful Tallulah had neglected to make clear, before she disappeared.

Perhaps feeling spiteful myself, perhaps because she seemed too good to be true, I thought I’d catch the girl off-guard, when she and Jimmy re-joined the group.

“And now, everyone,” I announced, “Liza and I are going to sing for you all.” I turned to her, and launched right into: “Forget your troubles, come on, get happy . . .” And she sang it right back at me! “Shout hallelujah, come on, get happy . . .” It was magical. Everyone stopped, and stared. She had *The Voice* also, not only for speaking but also for singing, it was the same, and it bubbled up out of the two of us, warm, expansive, full of bittersweet richness, it was one, the strands of the harmony entwined like flowers climbing a wall, and rumbled and shook, more shimmering and shining than when Judy sang this song with Barbra, glorious, glorious . . .

We had found each other. Any fool listening to us would have known we were mother and daughter.

We finished. There was a moment of silence, then the room erupted in applause.

“Sing something else, Mama,” she asked me.

I thought for a moment. And I must have been feeling very foolish and sentimental indeed, because I launched into “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” from *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

But an ill-mannered little Marilyn interrupted, a few bars into it. “Do ‘Over the Rainbow!’” she yelled. “Together.”

Liza and I looked at each other, and I could see we were on the same wavelength. She turned to explain. “I don’t like to sing that song. That’s Mama’s song. Finish what you were singing, Mama.”

So I did, and then I asked her to do “Cabaret.” She belted it out, her arms spread wide, so that the rafters seemed to shake. I felt proud of her. And together we sang “It’s Wonderful,” from *Annie Get Your Gun*, the film that Judy recorded a few songs for and should have made, but the studio brought in hee-haw horrible Betty Hutton to replace her. We didn’t try to harmonize, we didn’t divide the parts, we just allowed *The Voice* to soar, in stereo. And we took everyone

in our Family with us.

After that, people began to retire for the night. I showed Slim and Liza where the three bathroom cubicles were. Generally, since there are so few to share, in the morning and at night, the guys and pre-op trannies among us allow the double Xers and post-ops to have the cubicles; we have a long urinal trough we make do with. I let the new kids sleep in my space, behind my screen, since I was taking them under my wing. Once they'd each selected a personal futon from Supplies, we bedded down for the night.

The next day was Sunday, and many in our Family like to head to the Watering Hole for brunch. Just to show off what they're wearing, and check out the talent in other gangs. It's a restaurant owned by Straights, but it's Icon-friendly, and just off the Boulevard. The weekend is the time to swan around, for Icons, if we want a proper entourage. On weekdays, many of our Cape-Carriers have to leave our district and work at Straight-world jobs, to provide for our Family.

There are even some Clones among us who remove their wigs and make-up, disguise themselves as Colorless Straights, and work at menial jobs in their world. I could never handle such a concept. I cook, and tidy the Sanctuary, do some mending and clothes-designing, and act as mother hen to the others. In these ways I feel I earn my keep.

Sometimes I go along for Sunday brunch, but on this morning I thought I would laze, and get to know the children better. There was milk in our Family fridge (our Cape-Carriers keep it well-stocked), and there were bowls and cartons of cereal—breakfast enough.

So, it was me, Slim, Liza, Harry the nerd-turned-Marlene, Sal Mineo and Billy the Cape-Carrier who stayed behind. Our voices seemed to echo through the vast space of the Sanctuary, with everyone else gone. I pulled a flapper dress with beaded tassels at the bottom off of a wire running across the room, and handed it to Liza. "Try this on, baby," I told her. "I'd really like to see you in it."

She disappeared behind my screen—and came back looking Erté fabulous, *Cabaret* fabulous, wearing a tiara with an ostrich plume. I hadn't seen her pick it up, but she understood the era she

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was cloning; she knew just what she was doing.

I was shocked to learn that Slim had seen *no* Judy or Liza films—not even *Wizard of Oz*!

“How can you clone, then?” I asked, genuinely puzzled. “How can you be an Icon—”

“I’m not, exactly, an Icon,” he reminded me. “Not tryin’ to be, not sure I *could* be. And they didn’t exactly smile on that musical theater stuff, amongst the Waynesmen.”

“So, your favorite movie is what? *Shane*?”

He nodded. “*Shane* is a fine film. That and *High Noon* are probably my top two.”

So, he saw himself as a Cooper/Ladd hybrid, just as I had seen him from the first. Figured.

“*Shane* is a wonderful movie,” Sal Mineo said shyly. And I realized that he was after Slim—he was making a play. Fair enough. Jimmy had been paying more attention to Elvis boy lately, anyhow.

Now Billy broke in severely. “But it’s sad and shameful that you’ve never seen *Wizard*. Clone culture, Color culture, demands that you understand about Judy and Liza. How can you be fabulous and leave the Straights behind, without even knowing these two?”

Suddenly, I realized that Billy was jealous. Perhaps he suspected that Slim interested me as he interested Sal. Perhaps he suspected more had happened behind my screen the previous night than a mother Icon saying goodnight to her chicks. Billy was my favorite Cape-Carrier, and on the nights when he had visited me behind the screen, it’s true that a lot more *had* gone on.

But he was wrong. Slim was sweet—but seventeen? I’m not a cradle robber. It’s not so much ethics as aesthetics. Children are not fully formed people yet, Slim was in the process of becoming rather than being—and that’s just not something I want to sleep with. Why, my Liza, at fifteen, was more fully realized than Slim.

But Slim did not rise to Billy’s bait. “I know I’m ignorant,” he said seriously. “And I’d like to learn. I know that Judy and Liza are Indelible Icons, a source of power and strength for all Clones. Can you tell me why?”

My daughter and I exchanged a glance. She let me begin.

"It comes out of gay culture," I explained. "Perhaps because Judy's father, back when she was Frances Gumm, was gay. And *Wizard* is a crucial world, and helps us all, gay and straight, distinguish between the world of Colorless Straights, and the world of Color we need to live in. And then of course, Vincent Minelli—her director husband, Liza's father—was gay."

My daughter took over. "And then Liza made *Cabaret*, and married Peter Allen, the boy from Oz, Australia, a gay man who later died of AIDS. And she married another gay man, and – there's an energy there, a force that's hard to define. It's *The Voice*, and the joy, and the pain in the smile, it's everything they are."

"It's everything they are," I repeated. "And when men at a gay bar finally fought back against the cops, it was because of Judy, the day she died. She brought us into a post-Stonewall world."

"What's Stonewall?" Slim asked.

I told myself not to roll my eyes. But how little the children know! I turned to Sal Mineo, and told him pointedly, so that Billy would know he had nothing to fear from Slim, as far as I was concerned: "Take this boy, get him some more sugar crisps, and tell him about Stonewall."

Sal needed no more encouragement. Once they were gone, I saw my old friend Marlene eyeing Liza resentfully. It wasn't that Liza was free of adolescent awkwardness; it simply suited the Icon she was cloning. And how blessed she was, with her darkly feminine Voice!

Harry/Marlene is not a Wannabe—but at times I feel s/he tries too hard. For one thing, besides ruthlessly plucking her brows, she's had too much surgery. Addicted, I'm afraid. It happens to some Clones. I've seen black young men become Michael Jackson beautiful, *Thriller* beautiful—and throw it all away, and get the next horrifying nose, and have their skin lasered white, and claim that they have simply become their Icon's next avatar. Ghastly and pointless. I con you not.

Marlene's latest nose is as pointy and pinched as poor Michael's was in later life. At the same time, there are a few details to the Dietrich persona which do not involve pluck and tuck, and which I think s/he could attend to, more thoroughly.

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"Are you pre-op or post-op?" s/he now asked Liza sharply. (It's cruel, I know, because s/he's post-op herself, but I still sometimes think of Harry/Marlene as a "he.")

Liza looked nonplussed. "Post-op," she said.

"And your voice didn't alter with surgery?"

"No, I've always been alto. I mean—I've always been able to sing this way."

"Hmm," Harry/Marlene said, and managed to sound vaguely disapproving.

I pointed to him/her. "What *she* needs is a German accent transplant," I told Liza. "And then she'll be complete."

"My accent is perfectly authentic," Harry/Marlene said defensively, laying it on thickly.

"Mmm, you should hear her sing 'Lily Marlene,'" I told Liza. "Sounds like a Norwegian airline hostess," I teased.

Marlene grabbed a pillow off a couch and swatted me with it.

"Now, now," I said laughing, putting up my hand, "it's just constructive criticism—"

And I guess that's when the XX Marilyn Clone ran in—a girl who calls herself Sugar, after the character in *Some Like it Hot*. She had lost a shoe, her make-up was smeared from crying, and she was panting from running. Between breaths, she screamed at us hysterically: "They're killing us! They're killing people at the Watering Hole!"

We stood, and stared at her. "Who's killing people?" I asked.

"The Iconoclasts! At the Watering Hole, and all along the Boulevard—a swarm of them, different gangs—they've all hooked up."

"But how did—"

"They got Jimmy!" she screamed. "They've turned laser cigs into laser-swords, they sliced him, he went down—I think he's dead."

There was a clatter, as Sal Mineo's cereal bowl hit the floor. No one seemed to know what to say or do, and so I found myself still asking questions.

"Are they outside the Sanctuary?"

"No. Mostly at the restaurant, on the Boulevard—not side streets.

"How many of them?"

"Thirty—maybe forty. The cowboys were trying to fight them—

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but they got some of them, too.”

Now I saw Slim look concerned. You don’t lose all your feelings for a Family just like that, when you leave it.

“Could you take us to the building where I met you?” Liza asked. “Would it be safe? ‘Cause I know a back entrance. We could see what was going on.”

We all looked at each other. No one wanted to leave Sanctuary. But we could not simply stand here while our Family was in trouble.

“I think it would be safe,” Sugar said at last, her blonde wig askew, her lip trembling.

Well, the weapons we took with us were just laughable. A length of pipe, kitchen forks and knives. One laser-cig, which none of us knew how to reconfigure into a lethal sword. We were not a violent gang, no desire to rumble, and whenever we faced off against violent groups, it was usually the men like Jimmy and Elvis boy who had fought for us. Leaders fight leaders, and we tried to keep ours out of harm’s way.

But Iconoclasts aren’t interested in following the rules of Clone culture. They are only interested in destroying it. In the name of Reality, of freeing the youth from “hype,” they bash, beat up, deface, destroy, try to grind beneath their heels every trace of Color and fabulousness, imagination and Oz dreaming. They hate us because Icons and their helpers know how to create beauty—and the Iconoclasts only know how to destroy it.

We could hear the sounds of fighting even as we slipped through the backstreets, clutching our pitiful weapons. Jeers cut through the air, and vicious Iconoclast laughter, and the screams and piteous cries of those with Color they were hurting. Liza knew a shortcut through a basement that left us directly behind the building where we had met her. She punched in a code, and the back entrance sprang open. She punched in another, and the service elevator took us to the roof.

The scene below was horrifying. There were literally bodies strewn along the Boulevard, Gables and Barbras and Selenas and Diana Rosses. The dead and the dying. I saw, I was sure of it, the Waynesman leader of Slim’s old family, his body in the middle of the

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Boulevard, sprawled at an unnatural angle. To my surprise, I felt pity and grief for him, though only yesterday I'd hated him for hurting our Jimmy. In his own twisted, pathetic way he had perhaps wanted to be fabulous, perhaps had even wanted Jimmy's love.

In case you are wondering, my dear, there was no hope of help for the police. They turn a blind eye to Boulevard violence—say it's as much as we deserve, that Clones are so twisted, what else can be expected of us? We turn on each other, or we provoke attacks from Straights. They look away, like the PE teachers of my and Harry's childhood, when we were slammed against a locker, or down onto a field—same principle. Some officers have been known to harass or beat us up when we stray too far from our district. I know people of Color who refer to the Iconoclasts as the sons of the cops—and I believe that a few of them genuinely are.

The Iconoclasts were coming back this way now—a group of them about twenty strong. They had prisoners they pushed, prodded, and groped—two Cape-Carriers and a beautiful, glamorous dark Garbo from a rival gang, whom I had long admired—and to our horror, they swung their laser-swords and executed them, before our eyes. Ran a Cape-Carrier through, and lopped off the heads of the others. We cried out as each fell. It was the cruelest, ugliest act I had ever seen.

I felt strange in the head—and realized vaguely, distractedly, that some of the Iconoclasts looked peculiar to me. Something was wrong with the picture. Many wore their “uniform” of a dark plaid shirt and jeans, unadorned. But some did not. One had a bowler hat, like Little Alex. One wore a Hannibal Lector metal mask, and one a Darth Vader mask—swinging his laser-sword, thin as a cig though it was, like a light saber. One had Freddie Kreuger fingernails, I saw. And one a Jason mask. That one clumsily twirled a gun probably lifted off of a Waynesman.

Slim was near me as I murmured aloud: “They’re dressing up? The Iconoclasts? Trying to be fabulous, trying to clone, even as they kill us off for cloning Icons?”

“Some of them do dress up now,” he told me tightly. “I con you not. In my old Family, we heard about it. That Little Alex over

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there wears the false eyelash—everything. Fighting fire with fire, they call it—they only dress up to bash Icons. But it shows there's nothing to their philosophy, to what they say they're trying to protect."

"They just want to hurt and kill."

"They just want to hurt and kill," he agreed.

Liza was huddled over the computer box in one corner of the roof, trying to re-program, trying to master her options, as the Iconoclast pack frisked the corpses of their latest victims, and then slouched and ambled toward our building. Behind us, honeycombing the buildings on side streets, were basement Sanctuaries that might not stand up to an attack.

"What can you do?" I asked Liza.

"I don't know. There are lasers to repel intruders. But I don't think I can aim them down at people, at the street. I don't have that kind of control."

"Can you do anything? Make it rain again? Anything at all?"

We waited tense seconds while the killers moved forward, and she punched buttons and traveled through the security system of the building one more time.

"I could laser-fry the rain," she said at last.

"Do it!" I told her.

And as the Iconoclasts approached the building where the Waynesmen had attacked us the day before, and paused to survey the damage they had wrought in all directions, from that beautiful vantage point, Liza caused the building to shoot out a hundred cross-hatching laser beams, that cooked the sprinkling water as it fell. Some of the droplets disappeared in a hiss of steam. But the rest tumbled down onto the Boulevard below, like a scalding plague of boils.

I am not vengeful or sadistic, but it satisfied something bitter and furious within me to hear the screams of those Iconoclasts as the boiling rain fell down on them, blinded them and burned them. The shock and disorientation of a moment was enough to halt their escape—long enough for the pack of them to be hit. And then they ran screaming, in all directions.

And so the Iconoclasts were routed. And within a few hours,

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those of our Family who had survived had made it back to Sanctuary, and we were caring for them. I hugged sobbing children to me, to my padded bosom (for I do not take hormones either, for fear they might tamper with The Voice) and soothed them, and we bandaged their wounds. We learned about the attack at the Watering Hole, and what gangs were there, and what had happened, blow by blow. All told, we lost four ubiquitous Cape-Carriers, two Rebels, and three Marilyn Monroes that day—and our Mae West.

And Jimmy Dean. Our Jimmy was really gone. Elvis boy had lost an arm, and came back from a Straight hospital a few days later. But without his arm, without Jimmy . . . he had entered a twilight world where none of us could reach him, and to this day no one really can.

We did not know if we could survive as a Family. But Marlene surprised me—Marlene to whom I am not always kind. “I nominate Judy to lead us,” she said.

“And I second the nomination,” Sal Mineo said.

“Third,” Billy said hoarsely.

I gazed around at the wounded children in wonder. It’s almost unheard of for a female Icon—whether born double X, or transformed like myself—to lead a gang or Family. We can be the heart and soul of Families, but it is usually the Jimmys and the Clints, the Tupacs and the Bruce Lees who lead.

And yet, they all seemed to feel the same way. I could not let them down. “I accept,” I said, looking around the Sanctuary, looking each one in turn in the eye. “I ask that I might choose my daughter Liza as my lieutenant and my second. Although she is young, although she only just joined the Family—she drove away the Iconoclasts and stopped the massacre. And my connection with her is greatest.”

No one objected. Except, strangely, Liza.

She looked as though she might cry. “Mama,” she said. “May I talk to you privately?”

We went behind my screen.

She hung her head. And she was crying, and blowing her nose loudly, with tissue. “Mama,” she said shakily. “I’m not what I seem.”

Icon

"You're an Icon," I said gently. "That's a given."

"No, I mean . . ." she smiled through the tears. "Maybe the trouble is that I *am* what I seem. I lied when I said I was post-op. I'm no op. I'm double X."

I blinked at her. I confess that I had felt a twinge of professional jealousy when she told Harry/Marlene that her Voice didn't change at all after surgery—because I ponder the problem all the time. And where, I had wondered, had a fifteen-year-old gotten the money and the courage and the where-with-all to have his/her male organs removed? And now she was saying—she had never had them?

"Why did you lie?"

She looked down. "I was afraid you wouldn't want me here, if you knew."

"We have many double X female Icons. We have Marilyns, we—"

"But not every Family feels that way. I've watched you guys for weeks. I've watched *you*, Mama." She was crying again. "I wanted to join. And especially cloning Judy or Liza, to not have been born male, to think a woman can do it right . . ."

"They were women," I reminded her gently. "And they did it right. I can see that you're a real, authentic Liza Clone, even if you are double X."

"Thank you, Mama," she sobbed. "But with me, it's just—it's the old story of the drag queen trapped in the woman's body, you know?" Again, she laughed through the tears.

My Liza. My beautiful girl. I laid a hand on her shoulder. "You're my daughter," I told her. "And now you're my lieutenant. We need to learn to defend ourselves, when they return. I need to understand our Sanctuary's defenses better. Will you help me?"

"I'll help you, Mama." She embraced me, and buried her head in the padding of my bosom as I held her and rocked her.

When we came out from behind the screen, our make-up fixed, our nerves composed, we stared around the Sanctuary at our beautiful, damaged, defiant Family full of fabulousness and Color.

"You've got a leader and a lieutenant," I told them all. "I need people now to contact the Waynesmen, the Marilyn factions, every gang off the Boulevard. We need to come together, as one Family. We need to fight back."

HP

Frank Matagrano  
**Dreaming of the Neighbor's Wife**

I am not the only one who does it, but mine begins  
with a green crane on display in the foyer, the two of us speculating  
whether the bird is a three hundred year old heirloom with a history  
of cursed owners, or just the result of slave labor in the burnt umber  
hills of Niujuan, a forgotten hamlet where a plague of rats crawled  
down from the mountains to feed on a potato crop born  
from a late summer blessing of rain; and only mine involves  
a conversation about rough-straw paper, how it was spread  
under dead bodies as an absorbent during Qian Long's reign  
and how the town-home association would throw a fit if we dared  
to husk bamboo with pestle and mortar, the stench from a kiln  
reaching all the way to Jaycee Park; and only mine reckons  
with the threat of voodoo: a bowl of rice and pennies left  
at the back door, cooking oil thrown on the kitchen window,  
a cow's tongue drenched in herb and placed  
on the front steps, my name, among others, pinned to its side.

Guenter Eich  
**In Conclusion**

Translated from the German by Douglas Haynes

And let the snow come  
through the cracks around the door—  
the wind blows, that's its business.

And let Lena be forgotten,  
a girl who drank  
fuel from a lamp.

Gone into the illustrations  
of *Meyers Dictionary*,  
*Brehms Life of Animals*:

viscera, mountain ranges, beach carrion,  
and let the snow come  
through the cracks around the door

up to the bed, up to the spleen,  
where memory sits,  
where Lena sits,

the leopard, the ravenous gull,  
math tricks in yellow  
subscribed-to periodicals.

And let the wind blow,  
it can do nothing else,  
and grant Lena

Guenter Eich

one more gulp from the lamp,  
and let the snow come  
through the cracks around the door.

*"In Conclusion" ("Abschliessend") originally appeared in Analette und Steingaerten (Occassions and Rock Gardens), Suhrkamp Verlag. Published with permission of Suhrkamp Verlag.*  
Guenter Eich. Gesammelte Werke. © Suhrkamp Verlag  
Frankfurt am Main 1973; 1991

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Elizabeth Bear** shares a birthday with Frodo and Bilbo Baggins, which—coupled with a tendency to read the dictionary as a child—doomed her early to penury, friendlessness, intransigence, and the writing of speculative fiction. Additionally, she is a drinker of tea, a giant-breed dog rescue volunteer, and the managing editor of *Abyss & Apex* ezine. Her work has previously appeared in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and is forthcoming in the Del Rey anthology *Shadows Over Baker Street*.

**Leslie Birdwell** grew up in Michigan, grew up again in West Virginia, and now lives in Columbus, Ohio. She has her MA in English from Marshall University and she does some freelance writing on a variety of topics.

**Brendan Connell** has fiction published, or forthcoming, in numerous magazines, literary journals and anthologies, including *RE:AL*, *The Journal of Experimental Fiction*, *Fishdrum*, *Fantastic Metropolis*, *Neotrope*, *Darkness Rising* 4 (Prime Books 2002), *Redsine* (Cosmos Books 2002), *Leviathan* 3 (The Ministry of Whimsy 2002), *Bible Black* (Razorblade Press 2003), *Fresh Blood* (3F Publications 2003), *Further Tales from Tartarus* (Tartarus Press 2003), and *Album Zutique* (The Ministry of Whimsy 2003). He has had translations published in *Literature of Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Prentice Hall 1999).

German poet **Guenther Eich** was born in Lebus on the Oder in 1907. In 1959, he won the Georg Buechner Prize for his poetry and widely-acclaimed radio plays. He died in Salzburg, Austria in 1972.

**Deborah H. Doolittle** has had poems appear in *The Aurorean*, *Blue Violin*, *Borderlands*, *Cottonwood*, *International Poetry Review*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Yemassee*, among others. Her manuscript, *That Echo*, just won the Longleaf Press Chapbook Contest.

**Jim Douglas's** poems and short stories have appeared in many journals and magazines but most recently in: *Blue Mesa Review*, *The Chariton Review*, *Confrontation*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Phantasmagoria*, and *Portland Review*. He lives in southwestern Oklahoma and Guadalajara, Mexico, and as a member of the adjunct faculty at Cameron University in Lawton, he teaches creative writing.

In addition to working as a writer and translator, **Douglas Haynes** teaches writing at Sterling College in Craftsbury Common, Vermont. His translations of poems have also appeared in *Poetry Ireland Review* and *Natural*

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**Richard Jordan** is a Ph.D. mathematician who lives and works in the DC area, but soon will be moving to Massachusetts. He spends a lot of time tapping on a keyboard, and what results sometimes looks a bit like poetry. A Pushcart nominee, his poems have appeared in over 50 print and electronic magazines during the past 2 years.

**Owen King** is a graduate of the Columbia MFA writing program. His stories have appeared in the *Dickinson Review*, the *Bellingham Review*, and *Book Magazine*. He is at work on a collection of stories titled "The Famous Support Group."

**Judy Klass** co-wrote the Showtime cable movie adaptation of *In The Time of the Butterflies*. Sixteen of her one-act plays have been produced, as well as one full-length play. Her short fiction has appeared in *Phoebe*, *Darkling Plain*, *Satire*, *Auslander*, *Suffusion*, *Wind Magazine*, *Space & Time*, *Terra Incognita*, and *Tales of the Unanticipated*.

**Frank Matagrano**, born in New York, has appeared or will appear in *ACM (Another Chicago Magazine)*, *Northwest Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Flint Hills Review* and *Exquisite Corpse*, among others.

**Ryan Miller** has lived in New York, New Orleans, Fort Worth, and Paris. He lives now in Los Angeles. His work has appeared in numerous print and online journals.

**James Norcliffe** is an award-winning poet from New Zealand. His fourth collection *Rat Tickling* (Sudden Valley Press) was launched in April of this year. Recent work in the USA has appeared or will appear in *Verse*, the *New Delta Review*, *Porcupine* and the *Sycamore Review*.

**nila northSun's** 3rd book, *a snake in her mouth*, is available from west end press in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She currently lives near Sonora, CA with her 4th husband.

**Aimee Parkison** recently received her MFA from Cornell University, where she currently teaches Creative Writing and Writing About Film. Her stories have appeared in *Other Voices*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Fiction International*, *Denver Quarterly*, *American Literary Review*, and *River City*. Originally from Oklahoma, Aimee now resides in Ithaca, NY.

**Richard William Pearce** has had over 130 poems appear in a variety of publications, had a piece nominated for the 2000 Rhysling Award, and, in

the past year, has had two poems nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

**Karen R. Porter** resides in the Pine Barrens of southern New Jersey in a house of many critters. When not writing, she can be found studying the local cold-blooded fauna.

**Knute Skinner** lives in County Clare, Ireland. His most recent collections are *Greatest Hits 1964-2000*, from Pudding House and *Stretches*, from Salmon Publishing.

**Coral Smart** has an MFA in creative writing from Bowling Green State University and works for the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. Her fiction has appeared in *Denver Quarterly*, *Hayden's Ferry Review* and *Beloit Fiction Journal* and is forthcoming from *Lake Effect* and *ART:MAG*. A New York native, she currently lives in Milwaukee with three cats and a husband.

**Laima Srugonis** received her Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from Columbia University in 1994 and since then has received two Fulbright lecturships in Creative Writing to Lithuania, and has edited three anthologies of Lithuanian literature in English translation. She also writes poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and children's literature.

**Tomas Venclova** was born in 1937 in the port city of Klaipeda, Lithuania. He began publishing in Lithuania in 1965, but was forced to emigrate to the United States in 1977 after he publicly challenged the lack of freedom of expression in Soviet occupied Lithuania in his "Open Letter to the Communist Party." Presently, Venclova is a Professor of Slavic Literature at Yale University and has published several collections of poetry, essays, and numerous articles in the United States and Europe.

### The Milton Kessler Memorial Prize for Poetry 2003

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Milton Kessler—poet and teacher—was a great friend and mentor to students in Binghamton University's creative writing program. In honor of his dedication to the development of writers, *Harpur Palate* is pleased to announce The Third Annual Milton Kessler Memorial Prize for Poetry.

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