

# Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

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## Harpur Palate, Volume 5 Issue 2, Winter 2006

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# Harpur Palate

Volume 5 Issue 2



# Harpur Palate

Volume 5 Issue 2 Winter 2006



Binghamton University  
New York

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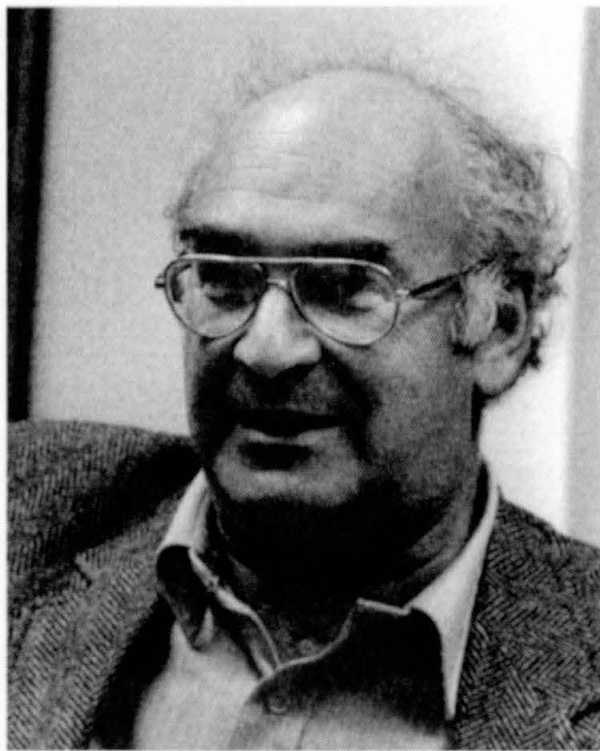
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## THE MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE FOR POETRY



WINNER

DARK SKY, WHITE SANDS, NEW MEXICO, 1956

Amanda Auchter

*after Ernst Haas*

The desert peels back to the black sky  
and the only horizon is sand.  
There is a city under a hood of ash,  
where the earth is a loom of dusk.  
Evening, a brush with memory.  
Pray to the gray river-bed for its lack  
of river. Kneel in this white-swept  
wasteland, press your cheek to the dirt.  
Never ask for an ocean. Believe  
in this sunless city, this pastoral grit.  
Jog the stars, the rising dunes.

MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE  
FINALIST

AFTER THE FALL OF ALL OF THIS  
Amanda Auchter

The sun collapses through pickets of trees,  
the caterpillar's cocoon. Inside the kitchen,  
the walls listen to this ruin of ours—  
fingers strayed from teacups, the flicked  
orange leaf. Let's leave the earth beneath  
our shoes on the porch, and the wasps  
asleep in their hive above the lamppost.  
The moss unwinds from our branches,  
our empty bird nests. The paint continues  
to chip long into winter, and our houses  
wind backwards: clapboard finish,  
an original varnish. After the fall of all of this  
(last year's burnt harvest, the bayou that ran  
wild across our floors), we continue to grow  
towards the ground. Let's imagine ourselves  
bottom heavy, toe-rooted, limbs  
dragging the soil. When the hour turns  
dark sooner than expected, remember  
to plant the bulbs. Expect a longer sleep,  
a slow steam rising from the street. The air  
too will quiet down on this flat land,  
settle into its frozen pockets, its waning light.

MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE  
FINALIST

JUBILATION

Margaret A. Robinson

1.

one instant I'm  
too weak to cut  
a frozen lime pie  
the next flat  
on the linoleum  
staring into lights

2.

buzz rumble clunk  
in the E.R. all night  
head and heart tests  
somebody's blood smears  
the sink  
I should feel  
for a stranger's cut  
instead dread  
HIV, hepatitis

3.

morning  
more tests  
brain MRI drowns out

HARPUR PALATE

Sinatra  
on a screen, pulpy  
muscle pumps, looks  
diseased  
is not

do I trust these results?  
will the chest wires chart  
my many betrayals  
as lines jig down and up?

4.

behind a curtain  
my roommate gets bad news  
parts of her body telegraphing  
defeat from the front  
*I'm so pissed off!* she rants to visitors  
speaks on the phone of her garden  
I poke my head around cloth  
we make small tomato talk

5.

my pal in bed  
Hayden Carruth, 84,  
survived poverty,  
electroshock, alcohol, divorces  
his daughter died  
he can scarcely breathe yet  
stands writes reads laughs

6.

*Can't we have happy poems?*  
students ask

7.

diagnosis        *syncope*  
loose silken word        skipping a beat  
door    bench    smokers wearing pajamas  
my friend picks me up  
back to the kitchen  
pie still in the fridge

8.

dear students  
this poem is about  
jubilation

MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE  
FINALIST

IN DEFENSE OF OBJECTS

Linda Dove

*An object...is what makes infinity private.*

*Joseph Brodsky, Watermark*

Unlikely winters: San Francisco and its trolley  
car stuck in snow, Bangkok blizzard white.

Flakes shake to life, bright and insular. Cities  
fade in the blur of a handmade storm.

Despite the dizzying effects, the eye rests  
there, at home in beauty's small arcade.

No sirens sound, no policemen sew their yellow  
threads to these streets. The past collects

on souvenirs, turning kitsch to treasure.  
When the Wedgwood knife falls

to the floor, shards of blue shed like tears.  
Yet the eye is safe here, even in pieces.

The pink Christmas ball shatters to an inner life  
of mirrors. It's what confounds the mendicant:

the object's pull, the need for pockets to keep  
stuff in. What amounts to wonder lurks in things,

whole or broken, near, as distant as the gray  
gargoyle where the eye's balloon comes to rest.

Rusted keys, horseshoe, rust itself, color of burnt  
sienna. The word itself: *burnt sienna*.

Petals pool beneath a tree. In morning light,  
the snow globe glows like a translucent papoose.

MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE  
FINALIST

COUNTING DOWN

Kate Beles

3 *a man, a woman, and a girl*

Outside, they often were and the house was too.  
The bungalow was peeling blue but the steps  
were painted a glistening red. There was a man  
and woman in bed. They lay back  
to back. One night, the woman spat  
blood into a clay cup and the man looked out  
an open window. Under stars, the small girl ran  
her hand down a cedar fence and got a palm  
full of wood. She fell from a swing.

2 *a woman and a girl*

Inside it was light. An ironing board was a table. The back  
porch housed a bed. One evening, a woman read alone  
at a cherry wood desk. As she wrote, ink spilled  
down her ring finger. The small girl played under  
a hawthorn tree. She climbed up a wall of white stucco. She hung  
on the sill, peered through a red-trimmed window  
at red hair hanging over a percussive face. The woman inside  
did not look up.

1 *a girl*

In and outside of this house it is dark.  
It is old, and painted like pitch.  
Maples lean heavy over a covered porch.

Somewhere, a ball bounces. Somewhere,  
a hammer pounds. The girl sits in a white  
nightgown atop a garage, above  
a red car, which is closed behind  
doors held shut with a stick. The shingles under  
her bottom catch on cotton, her toes skim gutter  
water, and wind blows hair into her mouth.

MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE  
FINALIST

DIP YOUR FINGER IN THE WATER, COME AND COOL  
YOUR TONGUE

Lori Anderson Moseman

This dude ranch so arid  
we got but an inch  
in our half-foot creek.  
Not enough for guests  
bent on baptism.  
Their theology of immersion  
leaves them no choice  
but the sewage leaching pond.  
Kinda hard to get into  
a god like that.

Those of us working here  
have no choice but to become  
a river each day after lunch.  
When the hailstorm hits,  
we hustle kids off rock  
and run with the ropes.  
We take water's path,  
act all gully-wash,  
side-winding boulder  
after boulder compacting  
the path as a pack  
down canyon's steep ravine.

We run 'til we feel  
our lungs in our throat.  
Altitude clamps down

on oxygen. I reckon  
 when blood pulses in sync  
 with surface water,  
 we're finally *in*  
 geological time not *on* it.  
 Closest to god I get.

It's dry by dusk  
 and locals in pick-ups shoot up  
 road signs then send boulders  
 down Devil's Slide.  
 Sound will send you up a tree.  
 Best not to look.  
 Momentum no more  
 desirable than immersion.  
 Times like this, all you want is  
 to step outside the flow.  
 But, who's ready to test  
 resurrection theory?

That summer's monotheism  
 was a unicycle.  
 One mountaineer managed  
 to navigate glacial scree  
 in drag on one wheel,  
 hands free to finger  
 the notes of his favorite Bach.  
 Human achievement (Amen)  
 The force of water (Amen)  
 You'd raise your hands high  
 for a story that praises both.

Best our east coast spiritual  
 guide could muster was Woody  
 Allen's early work: island  
 allusions and *Manhattan's*

cadences lost on western  
laborers who only wanted  
an afternoon off, a summit  
sunset, a dark walk down,  
heat lightening lighting  
eroded stone all the way  
to (Praise the Lord)  
that temporary bunk.

## EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUNSPHERE

Andrew Farkas

The roads in Knoxville never end, the names just change.

It was the Summer of the Phlogistonites. That gang of arsonists who burned up the town. Scared the hell out of everyone. I was waiting at the intersection of Broadway/Henley and Western/Summit Hill looking at the Sunsphere when I first saw her. The Sunsphere is dilapidated. Some of the panels in the golf ball top have fallen out. They might still be on the ground, skidding through the park. She stood in the shade of a lone magnolia tree. Her hair was short and black. Black, the color of her clothes. Even in the intense heat (about 100°), she looked cool. Chilled. As if she had her own refrigeration unit that controlled her bodily and atmospheric temperature. A quick glance at the lights, and then . . . but she was gone.

At the Sunsphere, which I visited everyday, I walked down by the dried-out fountain trying to imagine what it's like when it's filled. I'd never seen it filled. The few stagnant puddles inside somehow made the weather seem even hotter. I wipe away the perspiration with a pocket handkerchief I always carry. In summer, it's never cool enough for me. The sweat seethes forth in continuous rivulets, draining down my head, behind my ears, over my face. Soon the handkerchief is soaked through and I squeegee it off with my hands. A losing battle. I'll end up drenched no matter.

An out-of-body, out-of-time experience: me leaping into the fountain, plunging into the cool, clear water, saved from the sweat and the sun, never again assaulted by either of those caloric forces.

My apartment was no escape. It lacked air conditioning. And I lacked the funds to run air conditioning. So the sun bakes my mind and its faculties boil over. This is a common story for me. There is a way to battle the torrid world, a way to understand it. But somehow, I'm on the outside. Even when the answer appears

so simple, obvious: get a job that affords air conditioning; move to a place that has it.

I blame the heat. And my sweating.

Often I visit cooled places. But since I don't live in them . . . well, you can only stay somewhere that isn't yours for so long. My territory is the outdoors. I would sweat at my place just as much; might as well go where there's something to look at. The Sunsphere is across from my apartment. So I'm here everyday. Even then.

A ritual I have: when I get to the Sunsphere, I press the button that should summon the elevator.

But it doesn't work. Much as some of the golden panels are missing, much as the green paint on the shaft of the tower is flaking away. Nothing is in there anyhow. No one can get to the top. It's just a derelict reminder of the past. I pressed the button, no matter. I press the button and wait for the elevator to come down and get me, take me to the top where it will be air conditioned and I will understand everything.

While I wait, I look at the dried-up fountain. I might wait forever. Until the sun boils all the sense out of me. My end will be in a stagnant pool of myself.

In a shadow, in the distance, I saw that girl with the black hair, sitting on a bench.

"I just can't take this heat," I told her, sitting down.

"Why don't you go back to your place and sit in the air conditioning?" she said.

"I don't have air conditioning."

"This is the South. Everyone has air conditioning." From up close I could see she wore white lipstick.

"I don't," I said.

She turned and looked at me. Her eyes were probably sympathetic behind her sunglasses.

"What's your name?" I said.

"Sophia White. But my friends call me Stiria."

"Stiria? What's that mean?"

"'Icicle,' in Latin. What's your name?"

"Gene," I said, and shrugged my shoulders like I always do.

"*Eugene?* 'Well born'?"

"Nope. Just *Gene*. 'Born.'"

"Why don't you come back to my place, Gene? I have air conditioning."

"Cool," I said.

"Absolutely," said Stiria.



Then:

It was night. You could feel the fear in the air. The sheets stuck to me in the dense humidity. The temperature didn't drop at all from day to evening. All I could think about was people who didn't perspire. They wore sunglasses. Somehow they tapped into an ethereal icy source unknown to me. It pervaded their entire existence. They would never sweat. No matter how hot it was. I see them and ask what I have to do. But they ignore me. I want to be like them. They're sleek. Suave. Knowing.

They're cool.

I turned on the radio. After the song, "The Heat is On," ends (a DJ's inspired joke), I heard:

*It has been over 100° for an entire month now*, in a crazy radio voice. I shut it off.

Unhelpful: the fact that during the heat wave there was a group of arsonists at work. The first building to go was an apartment complex on Highland/Bridge. Only a couple blocks from my place. The heat from the sun and from the potential fire invaded my dreams. I would see the cool people with their sunglasses outside of my window. And my building's on fire. Disinterested, they watch. Right in front of me is an escape route: a staircase. But I've forgotten how to walk down stairs.



Stiria and I would watch old reruns in her loft apartment

in the Sterchi Building (a palace compared to my place) on State Street (one of the few roads whose name stays the same). We talked very little. She sat on the couch, still wearing her sunglasses, and I lay with my head in her lap. Neither of us ever got too warm. Maybe because she had the AC turned down to 65° for me. Maybe she was naturally hypothermic. For me, she was perfect.

In the chilled loft, I would slip in and out of consciousness. I am awake long enough to see an old episode of *The Dukes of Hazzard*. One where Beau and Luke are absent, replaced by men who resemble them, but who aren't.

"When I was a kid I felt cheated when Beau and Luke disappeared and these guys took over," I said.

Stiria didn't respond. She petted my head, as if trying to calm my overcooked mind. At the end of the episode, I realized that since I'd been in the South, I'd never met anyone named Beauregard. For some reason that bothered me.



Images of heat from that Summer: a man jogging down Forest Park/Forest Hills. He was a marathon runner. Suddenly he falls over. He ran everyday. He knew what he was doing. But his body temperature was 114° when they found him sprawled on the ground.

A car driving along Kingston/Cumberland/Main dings another. The two drivers get out. Without speaking, they fall into a fist fight. When another driver tries to stop the fist fight, he is beaten almost to death. The police use rubber bullets to stop the two men.

There is sun-poisoning. Heat sickness. Heat delirium. The inflamed, demented, diseased city runs wild. Careens down streets whose names change so often they have no names at all. Afterwards, people say, "It was so hot. So hot." And as atoms are enervated into chaos, people are morphed into demons. The city becomes hell. And the Phlogistonites thrived amongst them,

burning buildings. So many buildings no one ever knew which was next. Everyone positive it would be theirs.

A man on the news says:

*You know it's hot. You try not to think about it. You don't bring enough water. You're not wearing sunblock. The water boils out of you in streams you find annoying. You can feel how hot it is. But you don't think about your body temperature. You assume it will always stay the same. You don't think about how you're slowly dehydrating. You don't realize that you're slowly being cooked. And then it happens. Stick a fork in you. You're done.*



A video shows Phlogistonite leader Paula Reddenbach (aka Paula the Pyro) speaking to her fire cult.

She screams and stalks about, her fiery red hair a mop soaked in sweat, her whole body soaked in sweat, she is covered with brown freckles, together a million, a billion fires blazing on her skin, firing her torrid purpose and she dances around the fire with the rest of her cult who are also covered in sweat, pressed together, generating more and more heat, the bodies sticking together, everyone chanting to the fire god or about fire or some scorched something that would inflame the world, a world half-naked, writhing, pulsating in the accumulation of bodies made into one with Paula as the shrieking, blazing head.

The tape ended with a close-up of the Pyro. Eyes aflame, a lurid grin on her face. As if she would devour the world with her inner inferno. I could feel the heat through the television.

I looked at Stiria, wondering why. But I didn't ask. Instead, I saw a reflection of a fire from the TV in Stiria's lenses. And I thought about the fact that in Stiria's loft it was always 65° just for me.



A guy pulled up and asked me how to get to Chapman

Highway.

"You're on it," I said.

He frowned.

"No, no, no. This is Broadway. I want Chapman Highway."

"Right. But if you keep going, through Henley in downtown . . ."

"Turn right on Henley downtown. Got it."

"No. You're already on Chapman Highway. It's this road. It becomes . . ."

"What?!" Sweat poured down his face since the window was open in his car and the AC was venting outside.

"This is Chapman Highway. It's also Henley. It's also Broadway."

"Son, what the hell are you talking about? Are you on drugs? Let me say it slowly. I want to get *to* Chapman Highway. We're currently *on* Broadway. How do I get to Chapman Highway *from here*?"

"From here?" I asked.

"*From here*," he said.

"You can't," I said. And walked off, wiping perspiration off of my forehead, from behind my ears. But the handkerchief was soaked. So I just ended up making myself sweatier.



Night. Sitting up in my room. Not even bothering to sleep. It's so hot. The radio's on. The fear in the city growing thicker. More buildings burned down: the apartments on Highland/Bridge, offices on Cumberland/Kingston/Main (also known as routes 11, 70, and 1), a short but wide schoolhouse where Magnolia branches into Asheville and Rutledge. The DJ says the Phlogistonites could be anywhere. No one was safe. The cops were clueless. At any time we could burst into flames, erupt into madness. It had been over 100° for an eternity. People were already hot, irritated. Now they were paranoid. If the

Phlogistonites weren't captured soon, we would set ourselves ablaze.



A confusion of voices spilled into the hall. Everyone trying to talk at once. And it came from Stiria's apartment. I'd never met any of her friends. I'd never heard about any. Stiria didn't talk much. Whenever I came over, it was just me and her. Nobody called. Nobody stopped by.

When I knocked on the door, the room beyond went silent. I immediately thought of school. A group of kids would be talking. Then I'd show up. They'd go mute. Nothing to say. Weren't talking about anything anyway, why? And there's the door. Closed. As if it was open a moment ago. Only I hadn't seen it in time. So it was slammed shut. Me on the outside.

A moment later, Stiria answered the door, adjusting her sunglasses, running her fingers through her black hair.

"Hello, Gene," she said.

Inside the place was a bit warmer than usual. Probably because of all the bodies. Or something like that. Stiria introduced me to everyone:

"This is Samuel Carrick, George McNutt, John Adair, James White (my cousin), and William Blount."

"Where's all the ladies?" I asked.

"Out scouting," one of them said. Then another shut him up with a punch in the arm.

The group seemed amiable enough. But everyone was awkward since they didn't know me. Shuffling around, staring at the floor. They left soon after I was introduced.

"Tomorrow," they said to Stiria on their way out. She nods and lowered the thermostat to 65°.

"Those your friends?" I said.

"Yeah. I work with them. . . . Oh, I think *The Dukes of Hazzard's* on," she said.

For a second, it looked like it was. But it wasn't *The Dukes*

at all. Instead it was some drawn-out infomercial pretending to be *The Dukes of Hazzard*. The actors only sort of resembled the people they were supposed to be playing. If you knew what to look for, though . . . well, they're not convincing. The guys pretending to be Beau and Luke aren't even the second rate copy cats that filled in on the show for a while.



I was down near campus, where Volunteer becomes 16th, when Hodges Library burst into flames. It used to be a simple, squat, rectangular building. Then they pumped money into it. Made the library this sprawling, postmodern structure that reminded me of the old video game *Q-bert*. Now it's a charred husk. *Q-bert* could've still jumped around on it. Only he'd probably fall through.

The fire was fuel for more fear. Where were the Phlogistonites? Who knows where anyone is in a town like this? Who knows anything? The heat confuses everything; the fire devours all.

Amidst the crowd watching the conflagration, I thought I saw Stiria. Black hair, sunglasses. She was walking away. But as I tried to catch up with her, she walked faster and faster. Until I figured it must not be her. Just some girl who realized that some guy she didn't know was gaining on her. So I stopped and thought of Stiria.

Stiria: her name, so mysterious, relaxes me. Cools me down wherever I am. She keeps me away from the heat, the burning, the scorching, the chaotic inferno, whether I'm with her or not.



More buildings got burned down: the hospital on Broadway/Henley/Chapman (also known as routes 33, 441, 44, and 71), the University Club on Concord/Neyland, a house on Forest Park/Forest Hills, and another place on James Agee, which used

to be 15th, and following the order of the numbered streets, in a way still is. The buildings on the transiently named roads remind me that the University of Tennessee was originally called Blount College, that the Tennessee River somehow runs right through Fort Loudon Lake, so it's a river and a lake at the same time, and then it goes off and splits into two other rivers: the French Broad and the Holston, which makes me think about the flag of the State of Tennessee, which has three stars because at one time the State of Tennessee could have split into three separate states (West, Middle, East), and I'm sure somebody somewhere knows what the names of those states would have been if they ever came to exist. But that somebody isn't me. I don't want to know. I wish that the roads would have one name in one city. So Kingston Pike shouldn't also be Cumberland Avenue and Main Street (along with the various route numbers it also goes by); it should be Kingston Pike and nothing else. When the road leaves Knoxville, it can have another name if the people in that town find it fit to name it something else. Same goes for the river. Cause, really, how does a river become a lake but stay a river, even coming out on the other side to be just a river again for a little while, before splitting into two other rivers?

It doesn't make any sense. Which makes me think of the fact that we didn't always have air conditioning. So the problem for the namers was the same problem I have: too much heat. Too much chaos. Their sense was boiled out of them. Squeegeed away with their own hands. Consequently, they forgot what a street was called. Or if it had a name in the first place. And when all the naming was done, they didn't bother to change any of it. The various appellations seemed sensible enough to them. Or something like that.



The police were everywhere outside of the Sterchi. They told me I shouldn't go inside. I asked why. They told me I ought to go on home. Cops always want you to go home.

“Why?”

“It’s just better you don’t go inside, sir. That’s all,” said the police officer. Even in the uniform he didn’t sweat. He wore mirrored sunglasses. I watched myself sweat in his eyes. I didn’t bother with the handkerchief. I went straight to my squeegee hands.

Then I told the police officer that although he’s a police officer, he couldn’t tell me where I could and couldn’t go unless there was a good reason. A detective overheard me talking, and came over. He looked at me like he was my dad. And he has really bad news. And he didn’t know how to give it. Another police officer whispered something to the detective.

“Yeah, that’s him,” said the detective.

To me: “Son, I think it’d be a good idea if you went home. Now I can tell you you can’t go in that building, son, because we got something going on in there we can’t talk about right now, and I’m sure you understand what that means. We’re not trying to be pricks or anything. It’s just in your best interest to go on back to your place and cool off. Please, son?”

“Well, all right,” I said. “But I can’t cool off back at my place.”

“Why’s that?”

“I don’t have air conditioning.”

“This is the South,” the cop said, distracted by something going on near the front of the Sterchi. “Everyone has air conditioning.”

“Everyone,” I said.

And I left.



The day after, I was back, ready to talk to Stiria about the whole thing. There weren’t any police at the Sterchi that day. Outside, there weren’t any people anywhere. Except for one guy who kept crossing and re-crossing State Street on three different corners. Inside, there were people everywhere, whispering. Like

they had this big secret, and all of them knew about it. Everyone knew about it. But me. Only, it seemed the secret was about me. Whenever the people saw I was approaching, they stopped talking. And looked at me sympathetically, like someone had died.

When I got to Stiria's place, I had a lot on my mind. And it was all about roads changing names and rivers and lakes and cities driven insane by heat and paranoid by arsonists, and even about cops and what they think is in your best interest and how they always seem to want you to go home. The cops' paradise: everyone everywhere staying in their houses or apartments, never leaving. Which makes sense, now that I think about it. Less chance for crime, for chaos, for fires, if everyone stays at home.

The door was wide open. I walked through and it's like 120° inside. The heat knocked the wind out of me. Sliding against a wall, I found myself on the floor. Luckily the loft had carpet. But that's all it had. Everything was gone. Even the TV.

Right away, I figured Stiria'd been robbed. That's why the police were outside the day before. Only I didn't know how you could get robbed of everything you own living on the eighth floor of a loft apartment building. Especially a nice one like that. Then I thought maybe she was kidnapped and her family's already shown up and taken her stuff. Really, that didn't make any sense either. When I could finally move, I ambled out into the hall and asked the first person what happened.

"Didn't you hear?" the guy said. My eyes were full of sweat, so I didn't see him too well.

"What?" I said.

"They caught the Phlogistonites. Turns out they were not only arsonists, but they were also masters of disguise and forgery. They stole a lot of identities. Used all kinds of names. Last bunch of names they stole were from the old Presbyterian graveyard."

But I didn't care about the names, so I interrupted him.

"Where's Stiria?"

Pause.

“Sophia White? The woman who used to live here?”

Finally, I got the sweat out of my eyes, although I still couldn't see too well. The guy looked like he felt sorry for me. It was just sweat in my eyes.

“She's gone, man. She's gone.”

Later on, I found out that Paula and her band were arrested yesterday at the Sterchi. She was going to set it on fire, I guess. Or she ended up there after running from the cops. Which is why the cops were there when I arrived. The only thing I could think of was that Stiria had gotten so frightened by Paula that she took off right away. Headed for someplace where she could feel safe. Or something like that.



Walking through Market Square. To Stiria's. Before she disappeared. There's a party. One of those CityFest shindigs where cover bands play and business people drink alcohol out of plastic cups. And dance. And don't sweat even though it's like a thousand degrees out. But they're working on Market Square. They've got it all torn up. So there are fences everywhere. And I'm on the outside of the fence. And all the dancing, drinking business folks are inside. I can't find a way to get around the fence. There isn't a gate. I have no idea how they got in there. So I stood on the outside and watched. Wondering how to get inside.

At Stiria's I told her I either wanted to get in or I wanted to escape.

“Which one?”

“I wish I knew.”

“I want to escape,” she said. “I want to go far, far away where it isn't too hot or too cold.”

“Why don't you?”

But she didn't answer. She put her arm around me. She was warm that day. Amazingly warm. She turned on the TV. It was my favorite show. When I think about her now, that's the day

I remember. . . .

And now, I like to think Stiria slid across the hood of her car when she escaped the Sterchi. Just like Beau and Luke. The *real* Beau and Luke.



Of course none of what follows actually happened:

The button glows red when I press it. I hear a whirring from inside. The fountain is still dried out, except for a few puddles. The park is littered with scratched, golden panels from the golf ball top. I am covered in sweat. Let it roll down my face. But the elevator is on its way.

There is a ding and the doors open. When I get inside, I see that it was all an optical illusion. Although the elevator appears to be opaque, it's actually all glass. So I can see the entire city as I ascend. I can see all the people and the buildings and the University of Tennessee (Blount College) and all of the variously named and route numbered streets.

On the way up: I like to think that I was made in God's own image. That God is just as awkward, and ridiculous, and sweaty as me, that He has so many names because He's too timid to tell anyone they're wrong, that His real name is . . .

When I get to the top, I find myself in an all-white room made of cinderblocks. I don't understand how the inside of the Sunsphere can be made of cinderblocks, but it is. There is no air conditioning. In the room there is a man sitting in a chair. He looks like a burned out, confused, sweaty version of Colonel Sanders. The author of my story. For fun, I will call him Beauregard.

He offers me some fried chicken.

I ask how come the inside of the Sunsphere isn't gold. It becomes gold. Even in the heat, I'm cheered up a little by this.

Then we look at the world through the golden glass. Me and Beauregard. Neither one of us knows what to do in this world. Neither one of us knows how to make sense of it. Our sense has

been boiled away in the heat. Squeegeed away by our own hands. But for a brief moment, me and Beauregard make a connection. Because just as I am about to ask, Beauregard makes it come true. And suddenly, from the Sunsphere, that broken down remnant of the past, we're able to look past the city of Knoxville, we're able to look past all of it, and we're able to see the place where the roads run logically and the streets' names never change.

## STATEMENT

Thom Ward

He said he wanted to be the only one at his interment. Of course, he didn't count on the sky showing up, a clump of grey, nor one pop of thunder like the burst of a pistol. A few daisies stretched their necks to get a glimpse of the sun, which, respecting his statement, refused to glare. Beneath the pile of dirt, strands of grass tried to move their green fingers. Three crows watched from the branches of an oak. Gravestones waited. A congregation of nothing's everything. Or was it he said he wanted to be the only thing at his funeral. Admirable, perhaps. But there is always the matter of the casket.

# BLACK TUPELO COUNTRY

Doug Ramspeck

Down amid the bottomlands,  
                                where the backwater woods  
reshuffle themselves from stuporous summer  
into fall,  
                                these black tupelos  
and their deep blue fruit make a salve to fend off  
                                ghosts.  
And beneath the flickering, wind-trembling canopy,  
                                pileated woodpeckers  
batter out their secret message to the invisible.

A message

that old man Llewellyn, dying in his cabin since July,  
half-hears inside a dream  
                                of a speckled king snake swallowing  
a mouse head first. Dreams like these, as he knows,  
are trying to carry him into the belly of the  
                                infinite.

And though his wife and sister and grandchildren  
make a potion of corydalis, wild buttercup, and larkspur,  
he sees the world  
                                dimming transparent all around h  
transparent as the moonlit view from the pond bottom  
                                amid the cattail stalks.

And too soon, he believes, the black tupelo will lift him in it  
                                inexorable arms,  
and its lapis-lazuli-blue berries will fade paler  
                                and paler  
until his skin falls as loose as the king snake's—  
then the pileated woodpecker will  
                                sound the funeral drum,

and only the black tupelo salve smeared  
out of familial mercy  
on his stilled chest will prevent his released spirit from  
swooping beneath the wind-moaning  
canopy.

## LIVELY OAKS TRAILER PARK

Farrah Field

There are no dragon  
flies here and sweepers

don't hum like Mama.  
The ground cracks

if you think about it.  
Phoenix has tennis courts

and a Bingo hall.  
My sister says people

who stay here, well,  
Grandma sent her last

husband to a Carolina  
and she won't let us say

*leukemia*. At dry dusk,  
snails crawl peeling

paint and we lock  
her neighbor inside

his trailer, a veteran.  
Everyone has patios,

Astroturf and during  
Sunday lunch we listen

to piano-finger legs  
of tarantulas, walking.

## LOUISIANA PHONE CALL

Farrah Field

Yes, weather is humid there, cold here,  
and I am your only daughter alive.

If my sister hadn't been killed,  
I'd tell you about my new man,  
where I met him and his humming.

And you would say more than *oh*.  
I can't promise I won't die before you.

Daddy'd rather talk of cats  
and I hear Mama doodling stars.

We are strangers now, never proud,  
always blood-nervous, even at a pig roast.

The phone's static taps  
the close distance of the never-said.  
Everyone who can think has a weapon.

## BAPTISM IN THE RIVER

James Doyle

The cypresses have running water  
from the recent rains. Heads bent

under the swamp feel the glide  
of words down their bodies, runoff

among the tree roots and reptile  
hides. The prehistoric floor muscles

into sand and fossil whatever  
it is given—flash flood, mosquito

swarm, prayer sidling underwater  
like vines. The river is sluggish

with new bodies in white gowns.  
The rock holds are steady for climbing

out, drying skins on the other shore,  
lying down for the next cloud to break.

## ALL THE MEN

Anne Germanacos

### *Dog*

Before I moved in to the house next door, he thought I would be the type of woman who would have a dog.

For weeks, he must have been excited with the assumed knowledge. But then, moving day came and it turned out I had no dog, cat, or child. So he, Jordan, became my dog and like a river, ran between the houses.

A little wild, somewhat rough. He knocks things over as if he had a tail—a small table, a chair. But it turns out that even if I don't have a dog, I'm used to that kind of wildness. Saying never mind, I take him inside my lilac and green kitchen for frothy milk. I don't know yet to shout across the driveway to his mother: Is milk okay?

### *That thick blue vein*

Being dog comes naturally to him. Even cat wouldn't be hard. It's the other seducers that seem to confuse him: rat, lizard, sparrow. Pecking in the crook of my arm, the sensitive place where the vein shows blue and thick.

I'm reminded of others who've pecked at my veins, men I've known along the way:

### *A Ted*

A saint takes on the contours of his time. People rush to listen to the storm that issues from his lips.

HARPUR PALATE

This is where I was: inside the house, doing his dishes.

Who has time for saints?

*That Attraction*

His saintliness, my barrenness: each a riff on saying no.

Engulfed by sameness, we split ourselves at the core. Two  
not very neat parts.

It's opposites that attract.

(That same Ted.)

*Mid-Life*

Never having thought of myself as shrink, healer, or shaman,  
certainly not mother, I know Jordan, the boy next door,  
sometimes thinks I'm a bird. He becomes dog whenever he  
comes near.

No men for a while now, but I have important relationships with  
my stuff. Cigarettes, car. The way I combine the two.

With needle and thread, glue and paint, I make things do what  
they seem to have not done before. But—epilepsy?

Could I lure him away from his malady?

Mid-life, half a century here with the rest of you.

*Curiosity*

I'm curious: Are there people who enjoy the fits? Could it ever  
be construed as interesting? Or always painful and terrifying?

(not to mention embarrassing)

*Jordan*

He gives me a sideways look, actually turning his head away from me then looking back, whenever he feels I'm about to say something dishonest or sentimental.

*A Sampson, a Donald*

In the desert, he wore everything he owned to protect himself from the day's sun, the night's cold, eventually donning a toga—half-sheet, half-drapery, like a woman. Only his eyes were open on the world.

This is where he learned to see and be seen. In the sand-filled atmosphere, the scorching heat.

The desert: a place he returned to, in his heart if not with the soles of his feet. We used to go down to the dirty sand beach, pretending.

This period was long before he met me. I've never been to any desert but the internal one. The presence of men has prevented me from donning their clothing.

Two slits for my eyes.

These Donalds, these Sampsons.

*Sound's Color*

It takes too long to figure out: he hears color. That is: each color sounds.

The painting he makes in the living room (blue and orange paint

on the rug, green on the wooden floorboards, sofa, his face, my arm) has a song to go with it. At first it's just noise but heard repeatedly, I begin to get the hang of it. A jingle, it plays in my mind all night, threads itself through my dreams.

I wonder if he's singing it to himself at home in the house next door, waking himself up out of sleep with the force of his voice.

In the morning, I make coffee cake with blue and green frosting, trying to imagine the song it'll be: up-and-down, dancing around?

*Fit*

The world zooms in on him. Lights dance. Windows smash into "thousands of trillions of sparkles."

Is there anything in it to like? If he were cured, would he miss it?

*Daniel, Donald, Michael, Stephen, Anthony, Jason.*

Artist? Seer? Fame-seeker? Saint? Actor?

Leery of shows of all kinds.

Too many times, I thought: artist. But now know: actor.

*Question*

How does a lie detector work?

*Math*

How not to be the sum of their discordant parts? The bright

heights they'd be better off not knowing. The darks they'd do anything not to dredge.

*Here, again*

Deposited back on earth, the resumption of gravity is never without its shock. Here. Again. Oh. With a bark or a meow, a warm lick of the hand. This, I can take.

He licks it repeatedly, tongue warm as the milk he's just swallowed, wet on my smooth palm. He doesn't stop there. Bites my nails as if they're his own. I shoo him away.

Later, he finds me in another room, this one magenta, where I'm sewing old things together. Thinking I've not seen him, he retreats, placing the screen door as silently as he can, then jumps the four wooden steps, springs across the thin rectangle of grass that divides the houses.

Bounds home.

*Half a century, revisited*

Are there foods that can protect him? Words that push him over the edge? Thoughts? Has he ever dreamed a fit and awakened to find it was only a dream?

Cold shower? Hot bath? Blue jeans? Naked?

Are the conditions only internal? What about the weather—clouds, pelting rain, harsh sunlight? Snow?

And me? Half-a-century in the world and besotted with a wily five-year-old.

### *Close-up*

That morning, he was making a mask with bits and pieces found on the kitchen floor: carrot top, button, cancelled stamps, mouse droppings. I screamed. He dropped to the floor, unable to stop his laughter. Then I saw what epilepsy looked like close-up, but still from the outside.

### *Discretion*

We're all continually exchanging molecules, nothing being truly discrete.

### *Stephen, the one and only.*

After each "game," his father left something for his mother—a piece of jewelry, bottle of perfume, a scarf. Or simply a fresh bill off his wad of cash.

Later, she took Stephen, her son, through her treasure chamber, a room at the end of the attic he and his brothers had never discovered in all their years of hide-and-seek. Had the wall absorbed the door to protect them? But it was there. He saw it. A museum of expensive belongings, crystal and scented, colored, heavy or light.

If I were you, he told me he'd told her, I'd have put a match to it all long ago.

But a person's feelings are so much more complicated than another can imagine.

### *Shame*

Desire can be humiliating, especially after the heat of it wears off. Shame confines us to such narrow regions of desire. But

cutting designs on your wife's skin as you take her?

Stephen said: It's impossible, even at forty, to stop being a son, without a son of your own to make you a father.

This was our dilemma; I couldn't help him out of it.

*Nothing: more Stephen*

He said he wanted nothing but nothing, the purity of nothing, the clean air of emptiness. He coveted nothing the way he once died for certain obscure exhibits of the flesh: pouring over the flashy garter strap of a woman showing herself to a roomful of men.

He couldn't give up watching in the quiet cave of his mind (so he may as well have watched it in the flesh). In the end, he no longer touched any flesh but his own, when he had to, and that included (unfortunately) mine.

I understood that he had problems but I couldn't follow him toward the solution he'd devised.

*Our Children (Stephen, again)*

The many children lost, months before their tiny lives were tenable. I still love him enough to believe the lost babies weren't his fault or mine.

Does he spend hours pursuing gloomy nothingness because he sees his children there? Do they smile at him from within the frail purity of his achieved state? (A state that toppled if the phone rang, a fly buzzed, or I walked carefully down the stairs, not ordinarily meaning to bother him.)

We left one another not cold but too sad for excitement:

sadness bears little sensual fruit.

*Shit (Paolo)*

To himself he called it the shit. There were pictures that went along: finely detailed turds, curly and moist. Great pipelines of it, liquid and pungent. Shit surrounded him, infested him like something animal and alive.

I left quickly.

*Future*

Time, for him, breaks up. Like a telephone conversation interrupted by static, or a lightning bolt.

Will he ever look back on these early days of fits as something rare and coveted? Wanting again to be that boy, driven from the ordinary by swirling lights and animal voices?

*My eyes*

Writing around the bright scintillating scatoma that light (and obscure) my way. Is it anything like this?

*Stephen's Dogs*

Speaks with the lost babies, words that aren't exactly words, nothing he'd ever say to another human being.

Perhaps the dogs are recipients of these syllables, in a whispered rush, more caress than sense, but heartfelt.

*Jordan, like a swift river,*

destroys the plants I left on the bottom step of the porch,

ANNE GERMANACOS

planning to work them into the soil the next morning. I'm certain he's the one who threw them randomly across my hardly fertile yard, blossoms torn from weak vines, clumped dirt bottoms up on on ratty grass.

Surveying it from the kitchen window, coffee cup in hand, I think maybe he was right. Who wants to spend a Sunday digging around in wormy earth?

He arrives later, feigning distraction, his chirpy bright eyes darting around the need to pretend. I offer him foamy milk, add a drop of whisky for early morning solace.

Continues his life with women.

## UPON CHARLEY'S MARRIAGE TO A GIRL FROM IDAHO

T. J. Beitelman

*for CH & TT*

My friend Charley cleans up real  
nice and is handsome in his red  
silk shirt. We are on the beach.  
It is March and that means wind  
and a smudged, slate sky. The bride  
wears green. She shimmers. Her babies  
toe the sand. They don't wear shoes.  
It is almost cold. The Officiant  
gathers us in a circle. A circle means  
things. Charley reads Neruda in his  
red shirt. She reads Rilke. *Letters*  
*to a Young Poet*. She is green and Charley  
is red. At the end, they vow to each  
other: Christ said, "I commit my  
spirit unto you." They say this.  
They join hands. Charley has rolled  
the Neruda up like a racing program.  
She takes his hand, rolled poem and all.  
The circle parts for them.

# UPON THE BIRTH OF MIKE'S DAUGHTER, SOME UNSOLICITED ADVICE REGARDING LOVE AND OTHER SUCH VAGARIES

T. J. Beitelman

*for MH & MH*

## I. The Underworld.

I will tell you this, dear little girl,  
there is a Hades and it can be found  
everywhere. I imagine your course:  
there will be places you go. Just as  
important, there will be places you  
never go. To wit: Appalachicola,  
Florida. Its own kind of Underworld.  
I shudder at the memory—a pea-soupy  
night in March after eating succulent  
oysters from a bed gone bad. Teens  
in pick-ups tear down the quiet streets,  
whine through their gears. If you do  
not end up there on what, God willing,  
will be your long, strange ride, know  
that you are lucky, that it is a hell-hole.  
Know, too, that it's just as hellish to love  
and lose as it is to have never loved  
at all. That night in Appalachicola, I saw  
a thick-necked, tattooed man.  
His back was rigid, his hair clipped  
tight. I was afraid of him because  
I believed he was ignorant. He retrieved  
a woman, a barmaid with floppy  
breasts. She, too, had tattoos. They  
stumbled off to a Lincoln, their life

## HARPUR PALATE

together. Hell is tattoos and oysters,  
ignorance. Hell is unlucky geography.  
Hell is knowing the rest of the story.

### II. Orpheus & Eurydice.

Once there was a nymph—  
Eurydice. Nymphs are beautiful, so she  
was. Orpheus sang every chance he got.  
Saturdays was karaoke.  
Eurydice came into the bar baring  
her midriff as was the fashion then.  
The bikers dropped their jaws.  
Orpheus put down his beer and sang  
her an Elvis song. They became lost  
in their mutual charms. Together they  
were young and pretty and in love.  
They smelled good and they tasted  
good and there was no place on their  
bodies that was not smooth and good.  
They spent blissful Appalachicola days.  
It was hell.

### III. An Interlude.

What I am trying to say is that hell  
*is*. Much fruitless effort can be spent  
looking for places where it is not.  
But it *is*. Everywhere. Do you know  
that I am smiling? I am smiling.  
There are certain things you do not yet  
know. That is probably best, but I will  
tell you a secret because I can, because  
soon enough you will figure it out  
for yourself:

#### IV. The Rest of the Story.

Orpheus and Eurydice had many trials.  
 They churned through life on the Panhandle.  
 They loved and lost. It ended. Orpheus sang  
 a sad song. And then, alone, he gave in.  
 His music was full. Perfect. Ripe.  
 It was midnight on a Saturday. No one  
 in the bar but him. Eurydice long gone.  
 Stolen by a mean old snake from Wisconsin.  
 There was the ubiquitous pea soup.  
 His throat warbled to nobody. Then he  
 realized the secret in a flash: Wisconsin  
 is a bus ride away. Surely it is an iced-  
 over hell. A nightmare worse than this.  
 But it can be got to from here, and there  
 I will find my beautiful nymph.  
 I will be with her in the ice so our lips  
 freeze together. Or we will flee that old  
 man. We will scamper through the hellish  
 landscape. We will melt and we will freeze.  
 We will be wet, dry, thirsty, full as ticks,  
 rubbed raw in the genitals from love.  
 We will read too much and not enough.  
 We will snort Ritalin, shoot up. We will  
 abstain. We will know the word of God.  
 We will do things our mothers cannot  
 imagine. There will be unnamable  
 objects, acts, purity, peace. All of it is hell,  
 yes, but I will be singing and she will be  
 Eurydice and we will know everything  
 there is to know. Where is Wisconsin?  
 What if I don't remember her face?

Then he strikes out into the misty night,  
 blissful for the first time in days.

## TEENAGER: *THIRTEEN*

Neil Shepard

Old Orchard Beach, first beach  
down from the border, Quebec girls  
speak a tongue more foreign  
than the put-downs and come-  
ons of American girls.

Perched on the boardwalk,  
you listen to the bright lure  
of their words, your teeth sunk  
in candied apple, your tongue  
curled around a few French phrases:

*Bonjour, Bonsoir, Bonne nuit, Je t'aime.*

Their skimpy bikinis, atomic  
in impact, power the Ferris wheel  
in your blood hauling up hidden  
fish from the salt marshes, hidden

stink of flopped kisses, flubbed  
unbuttonings. This year you'll get your first  
wet kiss—but wait!—first  
cocked fist in your eye  
from a French girl whose name

you'll never know—you'll know  
her simply as "Elbows" for the tomboy  
swing of her arms as she beelines  
away from you, your one rehearsed line:  
*Voulez vous couchez avec moi sur la plage?*

which probably sounds as garbled  
as Marconi's invitation to the Queen  
of England, 1902, via transatlantic cable,  
to return his call. But you don't know that yet.  
And that's the difference between

us. Benighted and ballsy at thirteen,  
you're neurons and raw nerve, ganglia and gangly  
indifference to risk. You're as close  
to siren-singing as you'll ever be.  
No wax in your ears

to block the electric  
hum of the blood's dictation.  
Whether a reefer on the beach  
leads to enormous appetite  
sated by French fries or French kisses,  
you'll stuff your mouth with some  
thing and feel good, if not lucky.  
But why stop there? Tonight,  
we're betting on saltwater kisses  
and something steaming in your hand—

a wedge of pizza or hand-cut fries,  
and a girl's hand warm in yours  
as you move away from amusement  
lights and begin the mouth-to-mouth  
resuscitation of desire.

## DUETS

Neil Shepard

I've left you, my daughter, for the first time,  
quite cavalierly, to arrive at this colony.

And everything was planned, the wild, reclusive, looping lines  
of mind's indulgence, the world's static filtered out.

But I had not reckoned with the twined song in my chest,  
the subtle couplets you've written everywhere on my being.

I cannot hear my own voice without hearing yours. How odd,  
this lyrical interference comes from another source,

another powerful voice whose self-promotions send waves  
of song into the future. Shall I tune you out, set the frequency

to something further down the dial, some golden oldies?  
You're merely three years old, in love with this new language

that beams forth with every breath. You're all experiment:  
Why is a madhouse a house that's mad? Where's the arrow

fired from the string of a rainbow? Little literalist, maker  
of new meanings, the world's freshly sung, the forms undiscovered.

The waveband's broad enough to hum in four-dimensional time,  
beyond AM, FM, shortwave, curving to the edge of time-

lessness where memory converts to song. Does love for what's gone  
explode in sonic booms? Out there, in uncircumscribed air,

is the world circular? Can your eccentric namings bring me round  
again, or will it all be squared by schoolmarms and golems?

Courage, little one, and songs of your own transmission.  
Should you see me out there, along the edge, cosmic dust

in your eye, as my father was stardust for me, hum a few bars  
of something unforgettable—as another singer  
did for her father. Make it in quaint couplets across the  
distances, and let these old emissions echo back to you.

## EXCERPT FROM THE NOVEL *SHARK GIRLS*

Jaimee Wriston Colbert

We were herding ducks just a week before it happened, *the tragedy at the seat of our lives*, Willi Beever attacked by the shark. Nuuanu stream, that cold river green, Father, Willi and me (who knows where Robbie was, was he even then becoming the underexposed negative, part of the photo where not enough light gets in, shape rimmed in fuzziness, our shadow sibling?). We're bringing these ducks from Honolulu home to our mother, three little yellow baby ducks and their big white mama duck in a wire mesh duck cage, back seat of the Plymouth, quacking their little duck heads off. Hush up! Willi orders them, demanding little Willi, pretty fair-haired Willi, gets to sit next to them, did she never question then that the world would always listen? The mother duck, alarmed little pebble duck eyes, squawks and squawks.

Up then over the Old Pali Road, around the Windy Corner, cars shaking like the hand of God's playing jacks with them, shak'em up, splat! To this day if you take pork in your car over the Pali at midnight your car will tremble and rock so hard it won't move forward, and it's not the hand of God, it's ghosts—vengeful Hawaiian soldier spirits, you can hear their yelling in the wind, clashing of their wooden spears and clubs, fierce *mano* shark teeth fastened on the ends of these—warriors Kamehameha the Great pushed off the Pali in 1795, Battle of Nuuanu. They're not keen on pork being schlepped, it's *kapu*! But that's another story. Quite a ride back with a car full of ducks, a *commitment*, and Father decides we can't make it all the way out to Kailua after all, over the Pali these quacking ducks, that they need a bit of a dip first, get their clipped little duck wings wet, clipped so they can't fly away. But they can swim! Father said, A chance to be ducks, Father said.

Four of them paddling dizzily about that stream, ecstatic and confused in their sudden freedom, not exactly in a line, not

exactly little soldiers these ducks—what's that expression, have your ducks in a row? No row, these ducks are all over the place, yellow and white feathers twirling and drifting like clouds, little dartings of yellow, here, there, *everywhere!* And the noises they make, never mind the quack quack, more of a sick and throaty squaaaaawk, like we had been trying to murder the things and at long last they've escaped.

And just what the heck Father was thinking, buying those ducks in the first place I'll never know. Did he get it in his head that having a family of ducks in the itty bitty pond he built for our mother off the lanai (a wishing well, he told Jaycee) in our Kailua yard might inspire family tendencies among us, Father, Jaycee, Robbie, Willi and me? Did he think the example they set, sated duck mom and her obedient little ducklings might make it such that Jaycee wouldn't want to slip out to the Base, haole-hula for the hard shaven marines? Their particular mostly vegetarian duck diets might make her want to eat a healthy breakfast, stop guzzling quite so many gin and tonics, become the sober generous housewife only he could dream her to be? Our mother loved Willi best and that's a thing we all understand now, even better than she loved our father. Do ducks prefer one over the next just because she looks more like the mother duck? Loving the mirror image to love yourself? Gazing at me Jaycee would announce: Willi favors me, but you . . . and she'd ponder this a bit, her slender hand resting under that perfectly pointed chin, staring at the knobby little swells of my own stubby knuckles, my ridiculously long and twisted *Marfanish* fingers; You must take after *someone*, Scat, I was there when you were born after all, hah hah hah! Even the tinkling of their laughs were the same, back when Willi still remembered how to laugh. Mine's more horsey, neigh, neigh, though not Father's either. How could it be? Father rarely laughed.

So we're all flapping around in the cold dark water, ducks, Beevers, the muck, slippery rounds of rocks at the bottom, rock surrounds covered with moss, algae, grimy, slimy stuff. These darn ducks are leading us on a wild goose chase! says Father.

Is he making a joke? Willi gets a look in her eyes, little Beaver sister's silvery eyeballing glint she gets in the wake of a joke she would never be the brunt of and she lunges out, grabbing one of the squawking baby ducks by one paddling orange leg, and lifting it upside down out of the black water she whips around, tossing it at me. I see a blur of yellow, the terrified squaaaaawk and before we know it I'm butt down in the cold shallow water, legs splayed, me and the duck, a flutter in my arms.

You look ridiculous! Father exclaims. Get up, Scat, and for heaven's sake hold onto that duckling! We haven't got all day. Why can I not count on you, Scat? I need to be able to depend on *someone*.

I try to do this, I do, try to please my father but the slippery, sloppy, grungy feeling of the moss between my toes on the underwater rocks is so *gross* as I attempt to stand, that down I go again and up goes the duck and my head slides under water for just a second, eyes popping open in the murky green. I see the baby duck feet paddling away from me, fast as they can go. I don't take hold.

Instead I sit there, that slimy rock, and I grab onto the St. Christopher medal hanging by a cheap chain around my neck, close my eyes and think. My mother was outraged when I first started wearing this a couple months ago. It's a fad, Jaycee insisted to my father, I'm sitting right there in the living room as well; She's trying to be *with it*. A Catholic thing, and she's not even Catholic. Oh for crying out loud! Jaycee shrilled, when my father said nothing. Bloody hell, what you probably don't realize, Scat, is medals have to be blessed in order to be *holy as holy*, in order to make any difference at all. Yours is unblessed, so what good can it be? Only Catholic girls get to have their medals blessed.

Thinking about this now I wonder what made my mother so uneasy? Probably that others could believe in it, Catholicism, believe in something beyond themselves. But what did I know? This necklace was one more thing about me that irritated her, that was outside her control.

I clutch the unblessed medal in my tingling wet hand. I know

a *real* blessing: if you go steady with someone you exchange your medal with his and everyone sees his medal around your neck so this is proof that someone likes you. And I also know the St. Christopher story, because Kathy Connely is Catholic and she told me. He was a giant of a man and he made his living ferrying people across a fierce and mighty stream on his huge shoulders so they'd be safe. So one day he carries such a heavy child he thinks he'll fall down into the raging water. But the child tells him he's Jesus and the heaviness is caused by the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Rising slowly out of the water I climb up on the bank, duckless, hopeless, *unblessed*, my father glaring angrily at me. Then his face softens, that distracted look he gets and I am young enough at this point, innocent enough, *naive* enough to believe everything is going to be all right, after all. I offer him my elbow, bleeding from where I skritch'd it against a rock. He stares, first at the blood, then at the ducks drifting gracefully away, all in a row now behind the mother duck, down the Nuuanu stream.

It's OK, Scat, my father says wearily, Don't cry. (I wasn't going to, crying got you nowhere in my family; it was merely viewed as someone's last straw, a final indignity, a trip to the bedroom behind a slammed door for the crier.) Look Scat! he says, leaning down closer to my face, pointing. Those ducks' wings were clipped so they couldn't fly free and will you look at that. There they go anyway, by God! My father lifts up my elbow, dabbing gently at the blood with his own wet hand.



Eight years later and everything changed. A memory from a fourth of July, eight years after *it* happened but still in its wake, its fallout, its renegotiating of the family lines, alliances, who does what, who we could be and with whom now that Willi was . . . who? Hadn't been dubbed Shark Girl yet, still hidden from the eyes of the world in that bed, breasts poking up under the sheet, that shock of blond hair, the incredible, unsmiling face.

She was more beautiful than I, no one ever doubted that she would be. She refused to get up out of that bed and the rest of us—at this point we're talking Father and me, Grandma's moved back to Newwwwwengland, and Jaycee? who knows?—we had long since given up coaxing her, urging her, asking Willi if she'd ever get up. Robbie was gone. I was who was there. Just turned eighteen and in my head I too was mostly gone.

I lied, lied, lied about my whereabouts, to my father who did care and Jaycee who pretended to, who became annoyed, anyway, at the things I did, places I went, people I saw. But I don't think she was really all that bothered; if anything, she was amused at the ways I could disappoint my father, my lies lies lies. *Her* daughter, of course, didn't lie . . . didn't speak, didn't move.

It was 1969 and I was *into it* with relish, gusto, what that year had to offer, *heavy man*, drugs. I hadn't developed my taste, my terrible thirst for alcohol yet but I might've guessed its hovering shadow by how readily I took to dope, a duck to water as they say: grass, hashish, opium, LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, speed, uppers, downers, reds, ludes, bennies, poppers, anything that walked, crawled, flew my way, grew in the ground, grubbed onto my tongue by way of a postage stamp, a blotter, folded into a slip of paper, choked, inhaled, snorted, chewed, stuck in my ear, under my arm, needled under my skin—get ripped, mellow out, *blow your mind*—I did it all. Everything except heroin; I had a few principles, after all. Getting high meant not having to think. Not having to try and make sense of things.

So here's the memory. My last summer in Hawai'i before escaping to the West Coast for college and I had a friend. Foxy hapa-haole Meena—one half haole and the other half all kinds of good local stuff, paints your skin that crisp sun-brown, Hawaiian, Chinese, Filipino, etc. etc. All the guys wanted to *ball* her but she was precious and shy and maybe more into chicks anyway. Meena had a much older brother called Rake, for a reason that was never completely clear to me. Rake was a *beautiful cat*, as we said of sexy looking guys then, that olivey-smooth skin, black eyes, shoulder length squiggle of curls, his

rakish smile—this the name? He was also a dealer, a *pusher*, we all knew it and this made him the more visible to me. His up front job building surf boards and catamaran sailboats for a shop off Kailua road called Wind and Fin.

Too old for me, my father proclaimed when one day I caught Rake's eye, smoking dope with his sister on their lanai in my bikini, baby oil slathered skin, legs long and pink as two wet tongues. (Marfans was the still uncertain future, whether I had it or not, but by then I had learned to use my height, gangly arms, legs, general gawkiness to its bone-thin, braless, hippie bare advantage. If my heart *was* in trouble, telltale swelling at the root of the aorta, I was dutifully stunting its further engorgement, my near-religious drug intake.) Rake invited me to a concert, the Jefferson Airplane in the Diamond Head Crater, and this time, bad choice, I didn't lie when I asked my father if I could go.

The camping trip to the Mokulua Islands off the Lanikai coast for the fourth of July was to have been Meena, Rake and me, and so I told my parents I was spending the July 3rd night with Meena. I believed this to be almost true, a half lie, you wouldn't fry quite so hot and if they caught you, you could lie yourself down a different path, plans suddenly changed, a victim in their wake. But when I arrived at their house, my packed hippie-bag, my mother called it, a conglomeration of colorful threads woven from some ancient and well-trod carpet, Meena suddenly couldn't go. And she couldn't look me in the eye telling me this so I knew her brother had got to her in some way, a kind of bribe maybe, baseball cards or a rare shell. Meena had this obsession collecting stuff; back then we never questioned these things, wondered about them, it was just something she *got off on*.

But I saw through it. Rake wanted to get me out on those islands, at night, alone. Loyalties are fickle at just eighteen, easily purchased. I merely nodded at Meena, said yes, I could go. I climbed into Rake's flowers and peace sign decal van (the war in Vietnam escalating but was I thinking of anything larger than my own heart-hammering night ahead, riding in his van?), filled

with the food he packed, gear for the boat he borrowed from Wind and Fin, one *he* built, he informed me, that *beautiful cat* grin and off we went. At the least I was anticipating a good high; Rake had some orange sunshine acid. But I knew he had other ideas and this excited me, frightened me, made me ache, jagged breath, unsure. I was more at home with the drugs of the sixties than sex, got stoned way more than I got laid, but I was willing to try anything that would drive me further from my family, release me from the chains of my reassigned future, for however long. Vietnam War. A man on the moon. Equal Rights. Civil Rights. Black Panther Party. Altamonte. The larger, messier world. The Beaver that was left. I was ready.

We sailed out to the bigger island, a whale's hump in the near-dark, purpling sky, slap slap of the water against the boat, slap slap of my heart beat; a bird preserve Rake told me, disturbing the terns and boobies, the *iwa* birds as we dragged the catamaran up onto the sand, all rising in a shadowy bird cloud above us. Frigates, *man-of-war birds*, I stared at his sharp brown shoulders in the dying light, sinewy, hard, shuttling the supplies from the catamaran then spreading a lauhala mat on the sand. It was almost night. There were no other humans nor would there be, on this little rock island. I drummed in a breath, slunk down on the mat and Rake passed me a joint then the orange acid tab, psychedelic chaser.

He lit the fire, greasing up our hamburgers and dumping our canned corn into a rickety handled pan, then suggested I take a swim. I knew what he was getting at. And I wanted to do this for him, I really did, slither out of my clothes like some hippie sea goddess, uninhibited (*Are you experienced!*), dive into the ocean a thrillingly sensual, naked arch so he could stare at me, so he would want me. But this was the *ocean*. Swimming just after the sun went down! We knew what was out there, my family and me, if nobody else remembered. I hesitated, and Rake must've thought it was the naked thing. He shrugged, Did you bring a bathing suit? I could hear the letdown in those words.

Well of course I did, this was to have been a camping trip

after all, but I shook my head.

He shrugged again, said our meal would be ready soon. *I know what's in that water.*

After dinner I was reeling, acid kicked in, stars burst out, night air steaming of salt and wind, sounds of the dark the birds the roiling waves, things immense. The roof of my mouth tingled and Rake was staring hard at me, giving me the up and down and all over, and what I wanted to do was please him, *belong* to him make him *dig* me, glad he went to whatever trouble, whatever deception to get me out here, away from his sister, away from the world for this night anyway. Tomorrow the fourth, fireworks, a celebration. I needed to believe.

Will you swim right beside me if I go in? I asked hoarsely, My sister, you know?

He nodded, though who knows if he did know, most in Hawai'i had forgotten, had stopped caring. Only when the first article suddenly appeared, late seventies or thereabouts, proclaiming *Shark Girl!* some sort of miracle! did some in Hawai'i remember her, claim her as theirs.

Slowly, fingers shaking, working loose the buttons of my shirt, getting only halfway before his fingers were there too, long and quick and certain. And these fingers were unbuttoning my pants, inside my pants, my underpants, me, and I knew I wouldn't have to worry about the swimming part.

He lay me down on the lauhala mat, shifting of the cool sand under us. I could see the shadow of his penis coming down on me, a *kiaawe* branch as it poked about between my legs, searching for the *enter*—we were both pretty high and maybe our sonar for this thing was off. For a moment I thought of begging him to stop, sudden panic, choke of fear, what the hell am I doing! And then he's in me and it doesn't hurt and I'm being BALLED, SCREWED, MADE LOVE TO, FUCKED, FUCKING, FUCK! Loving the sound of this word in my brain, rattling about in there like something with teeth, something that could tear through those chains binding me to my family, chew up the metal like masticating nails, spit out the shavings and I'd be

free of this, *the tragedy at the seat of our lives*.

OK, so here comes the bottom line. Honest to God I actually thought this, high out of my skull on LSD, Rake lurching about inside me: I could do what Willi couldn't, stunning Willi, once believed likely to *husband* best, languishing in her bed and I am here GETTING LAID on the beach. When he was done he rolled off of me, sweaty heap, musky sea-smelling air playing down the long cool wet of my body. I shivered, leaned over and stroked the coarse curls on his head, his chest, asked him, holding my breath for his answer, did he come in me? I was thinking even if he did, if I had to have a baby from this it would be OK; I would *experience* it. Acid will do that to you. Makes you damn crazy sometimes.

Rake reached over and scrabbled the top of my head like I was a pet, his child, almost ten years younger than him, after all. Wow babe, he said, You couldn't tell? Wasn't hard enough, the orange sunshine, yeah? Felt good though, huh? You one foxy chick, Scat, he said earnestly, positioning my head into the crook of his shoulder, his delightfully funk-smelling arm pit. We lay like that for the rest of the evening, sleeping occasionally, staring at the billions of stars doing their pulsing LSD-induced star dances, birds like dark angels rising off the rocks here and there, a twit a whoop a sigh; tomorrow was the fourth of July and (foxy chick!) I'd been FUCKED, FUCKED, FUCKED, those hot arms, not another soul for miles, black forever ocean, shush and hush of its waves sweeping then retreating from the shore, our shore. Or so it seemed. Forever was longer in those days, and still with some hope.

I *went with* Rake for the rest of the summer, became with his diligent and regular instruction as nimble in sex as I was with drugs. Lied to my parents for a while about it, then quit lying. What could they do? I was already mostly gone. Wrote him long rambling letters when I went off to college which he rarely answered, nights up on bennies, revelational soul searching naked before him on a tangle of words. Sometimes I'd get back a How are you? I am cool. What you doing? This is what

I'm doing, response, nothing personal, nothing heartfelt. But imagining he might have loved me, that he *did* once love me, having to eventually accept that he would love someone else, that he was loving someone else, making love to someone else. Rake, free spirit of the islands, the times, and I craved that in him. How it ached to finally understand something of myself, not being able to *be* that. A few more years I'd be lost to the bottle, staggered days, nights, one drunk to the next, the dizzying blindness, having to wake up occasionally to a dead black sight then collapse into the next needful drunk. Last summer in Hawai'i, summer of my eighteenth year, the closest I've come yet to something called love.



There are other moments, bits and pieces of memory that float suddenly back the way a dream does, unanchored. Willi before *it* happened, my principle playmate, maybe my only friend. Willi assuming every gift I received into her world, assuming *my* world, my things, thoughts, dreams, who I am as her older sister, to be her world. The Betty Crocker bake set given to me by some auntie, some Christmas. Play oven with the shiny black plastic knobs, painted paper wheels for the stove. The message: Robbie with his cowboys and Indians, who would have guessed he'd become the Indian and disappear? Willi, her baby dolls, the children she would never have. And me? Here is where you belong, this gift spoke, Behind a stove is where you can hope to end up.

Willi, mixing up the grainy floaty white contents from the little bake set packaged play foods—You *can* eat it! the words announced, not that you should eat it or that it's good for you to eat or even that it tastes good. It tastes like glue, gloppy pasty stuff, the consistency of poi with the flavor of chemically sugared paste and I'm shaking my head, *No way!* And Willi, pouting little pink bud lips, teary blue eyes, running (still those two perfect legs!) to tell Jaycee. Play nicely with your sister! Jaycee demands,

If she fixed you something to eat, you eat it for heaven's sake. Have you no manners? Honestly, Scat, can't you see I've got one of my headaches? Bloody hell. *Do* something, for crying out loud! So of course I do it, so my mother will love me, so her headache will go away, I eat that soggy, gloppy mess to keep Willi quiet, to keep us at peace. I would have eaten my own hand for her.

My father, pulling me into the bathroom with him after closing tight the living room louvers so the Connelys across the street can't see, can't hear, shutting the door on Jaycee in one of her frantic, shattering moods, who had grabbed up eight year old Willi, maybe a month before the shark? wheeling with her around the living room, singing at the top of her voice—*I'm going to wash that man right out of my hair!* over and over, higher and shriller, and I could hear Willi's laughter, her delight to be the one included in this frenzy, the one *always* included in our mother's frenzies, our father called them. And Father, who wouldn't speak of them other than this label—*your* mother's frenzies, as if they were something every mother had, just that these in particular happened to be Jaycee's—calmly removing his tie, taking an aloha shirt off the hook inside the bathroom closet where he's carefully hung it, turning delicately away from me to put it on, his bare back, long and tangled web of freckles on such a loose sagging frame. *Where is the Hawaiian in this?* I'm sitting on the closed toilet seat, peering down at my feet, jerky ridiculous toes, the nails that need clipping. Whoever bothered to clip my nails? Tell me to clip my nails? His back still turned, raw neck, the high wobbly sound of my mother's laughter, higher still Willi's squeals. I can see them even now, my mother holding Willi under her arms and she's swinging her, around and around they wheel, that fast dizzying way makes nothing else in the world matter, spun moments like your own personal wind blowing about you and everything else disappears, these wholly consumed seconds. He asked me: Scat, has your mother explained to you about the facts of life?

I nodded solemnly. After all, wasn't Jaycee always explaining one fact of life or another to me, what I can expect from my

future, what I could expect from her?

Well, he said, hesitating, turning around to gaze at me, that sad, slight smile, the weariness of his too colorful aloha shirt, orange spiky birds of paradise mingling with the lime green finches, wings spread wide like they were flying for the moon maybe, the stars, anywhere just get them out of this shirt! Well, Father began again, The reason I ask, it's dangerous out there in the world. Silvery tinkle of splintering glass, she's raging again, throwing things; earlier Father had brought her back from the Base, hauled her out of the Plymouth, kicking and screaming into the house. I imagine Willi face down on the couch now, plugging her ears with her fingers the way she does if I am not there to rescue her, ferret her away into our room behind our closed locked door. My father sighs, You just never know, Scat, you never know what you're going to get, what hand you'll be dealt. I've tried, God knows, to give you kids a regular childhood. But I don't even know who I am anymore. You understand me? Caution is in order here. You can't always know.



And this. Why, despite everything, I so desperately yearned for, would die for, still do, still would God help me, my mother, Jaycee Anderson Beever. I'm fifteen, sullen and apart. My grandmother's going back to Newwwengland and it wasn't a happy day for any of us. It was a giving up, her leaving, giving up on Willi's recovering, giving up on my mother and my grandmother ever being able to share a life again. Recently we had learned that my grandfather, whom I never knew, had finally died. This too a silence in our house. Over the years the most I picked up, Jaycee's slurred and struggled words when she'd been drinking too much: Got off the bus from third grade, the story would begin, tears drenching her cheeks, Mother always met me. This time she wasn't there. Ambulance lights in our driveway, I run into our house and everything's broken, turned upside down, such a mess like some furious storm battered through.

We stood there like soldiers my mother and me, either side of the door, not touching you see while they wheeled him out, his hands, arms, shoulders bound in white like they've cemented him, or maybe he's a mummy—I remember thinking that, what did I know?—swathed in bandages. The last time I saw him. My father. *In an institution!* this last part always whispered.

Keep it to yourselves, our own father would admonish us; Nothing you've heard goes outside these walls!

Shame in this, these family secrets, we learned it well. Who knows if our grandmother missed her husband? She never spoke of it. Who knows if she ever visited him after he was institutionalized? Apparently even Jaycee was not allowed to speak it. Her father a silence and now he's gone. Once, years ago, I asked her what he was like and Jaycee got that faraway look, eyes focused somewhere inside, not at me, not at whatever her life had become. Well, Jaycee said, My father was very, very . . . compelling, but difficult, of course, terribly difficult. . . . She could have been talking about herself. We call our Hawai'i State Hospital (*mental* hospital Robbie said, almost got his mouth washed out with soap), we call it the *pupule house*, crazy people's hospital.

My grandmother wasn't well and was afraid to make the trip back to Newwwengland. Maybe more afraid not to. She had gained a lot of weight despite the gourmet jello diet she survived these past five years. Her limbs were swollen and immovable with *the arthritis*, she called it. Perhaps she was grieving her husband too, whatever small window of possibility she might've kept cracked open, now shut. Who would know? Gone so many years, might there yet have been hope? Brain sick! my mother shrieked once, one of her frenzies, gin bottle pitched against the dining room wall; Brain sick brain sick brain sick! That's what they said about him and bloody hell! nobody even questioned it.

How much denial can we bear? How drunk must we get to silence the silence?

My father was on the mainland, Robbie already gone and Willi, of course, in bed. So it was I who was forced to accompany

them to the airport instead of who knows what I would've rather been doing, just about anything. And of course I let my mother know this. Bloody hell! Jaycee snapped, Your own grandmother and God knows if you'll ever see her again. You can act decent for once, Scat, it's about The Family.

I hung back from them at the airport, dragging Grandma's suitcase behind, embarrassed by them, the old woman in her drab grey NeeeeewwEngland coat and matching hat, despite (to spite?) the grand and sunny tropical afternoon, her swollen, lunging gait; Jaycee, her arm held gallantly out so her mother could clutch onto it, all made up and dressed in a white linen suit like this was some sort of occasion. All the Other Mothers at the airport with their local families, aloha wear, slippers and smiles. My mother in her painted scarlet lips, her *haole* perfumy airs.

Where she'd be leaving from was part of the old airport, the new one still in the process of being built, open air decks and steps that led down to the tarmac, more steps leading up into the planes. Grandma was concerned about the steps, kept saying she would fall, she just knew she would fall. We sat on a bench in the yellow sunlight, breezy trade winds, sky the blue of the sea and the heady scent of pikake from the nearby lei stands. Hibiscus in the planters behind us, royal reds and yellow.

My mother dug her spiky painted fingernails into her lauhala bag, emerging with two plastic lei bags, an orchid lei for me to give to my grandmother and a red carnation from Jaycee. I rose up off the bench where I was crunched as far from them as I could get, placed the lavender lei around my grandmother's meaty neck, knocking to the side her little old lady's pill box hat in the process. I kissed her rouged cheek whispering the requisite *Aloha*, and slunk back down to the other end of the bench, eying the people around us to see who saw, who I would care if they saw.

Then it was Jaycee's turn. She fussed with Grandma's little grey hat first, righting it, clucking gently like Grandma was a child who had somehow managed to mess herself, pinning it into place, then she smoothed out Grandma's crinkly foil-colored

curls beneath the hat. Such love at times in those fingertips, that patient, consuming care. She really was capable of this, you could see it, this caring, the heartbreaking gentleness—how I hungered for its touch! Grandma whimpered a bit, murmured something about the steps, she was scared of those steps. I watched from where I sat, scowling down into myself, and I felt a lump of something so needful, so *wanting* rise up in my throat.

When she put the carnation lei around my grandmother's neck, gently placing it on Grandma's stooped and fleshy shoulders, Jaycee kissed her mother on her mother's mouth then held onto her, not letting go. Her mother, my grandmother, those blue clawed hands, held on back. Jaycee rocking them both, humming a bit; I could hear her whispering to Grandma, her tender voice, the voice that really must believe, after all, in *some* sort of redemption, telling her everything was going to be OK. Everything was going to be just fine.

## FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR THE STORY

Eric Rawson

Let's insist on people who neglect the  
Consequences and so can live without  
Taste rather free—they may squabble even  
Murder but they must be of a circle  
Like bridge players—give them wealth that spoils  
Them like fruit and hot wet afternoons when  
Time stands as still as a herd of cattle  
There must be blue patches of snow and the  
Branches dissolving in an acid-bath  
Of yellow light while always the longing  
For the rank bars of midcentury thrillers  
For love give them the salt of memory  
Give them a belief in sunrises—life  
Should progress as it should—accident or  
Fever may interfere blunder or whim  
May interfere but these people must en-  
Joy their world—why don't we insist on that

## DECLARATIONS FROM GHOSTS

Rachel Eliza Griffiths

Some days I go to Saint Monica's  
and touch the pews: I cannot pray  
to wood. Instead I watch the old  
women who have outlived you.  
I study their wrinkled hands, hues  
of liver spots, the wedding  
rings slipping around their knuckles.  
I pray for death before my body can betray  
me: brief cathedral of miracle.

You were not a small woman. Large  
and full, you filled the chambers of my living  
heart with your study of details: the miracle  
of miniature, the pause between chords.  
I had not put my arms around you enough.  
The last day I came to your house I stood in the foyer,  
needing to say something. Too late,  
your husband said. One year later he was betrayed  
by the cancer in his throat. He couldn't swallow  
that sight: a silent kettle on the stove  
in a cold, green kitchen.

I study calendars while I sit in the pews  
counting the empty boxes. The perfect empty  
days are vacant coffins, the comfort  
of numbers like condolences. I do not live  
by calendars anymore. My own time is the passing  
of light and dream and love over  
my face like saltwater drenching a rock.  
At the repast, I held your remains, the box  
less than ten pounds, as though you were again

an infant. The royal blue velvet softened the hard  
corners of the urn. I imagined the once beating heart, no more  
than a pound while you lived.

Tell me you are dead. Declare it  
a certainty. So that, in my dreams and days  
and daily routes, I will not pause and call  
for you. I will worship the grocery store,  
the cathedral, the yellow café, and the park,  
not stopping for ghosts who, over and over,  
call out your name.

## A PARTIAL GENEALOGY OF SPOKEN WAVES

Bradford Gray Telford

*for Nan Worman and j. Kastely*

*beyond the reach of words*

*Sophocles*

I have two friends—both reading the same tragedy.  
One friend's a philosopher, the other a retired dancer.  
They both like wine and travel. Both work in the academy.  
Both of them will ask a question with a question and an answer.

The philosopher was a medic. Two full tours. Vietnam.  
The dancer, upon retirement, became a top-notch Hellenist.  
The dancer, upon a *battement*, broke her hip. *Trop grande*.  
The philosopher, while a medic, became a (hurried, bloody) optimist.

The philosopher reads from how it works to how it feels.  
It doesn't, surprise-surprise, feel good in any way.  
The dancer reads from how it feels to how it works. She feels  
there's work to do on how she feels about the play.

The dancer, she walks fine despite all her injuries.  
Years and years of treatment and she's not even done yet.  
The philosopher, he talks in these wry, wry similes—  
academic politics? *Like Crimp, like Laos. Like Tet.*

And the play? It's about pain, about time, about what on earth to do.  
Whatever can be said and to what kind of spirit.  
There is an island, there is a when, is a how. An almost-who.  
There is a soul-tree that has fallen and there's no one left to hear it.

No one but a reader, maybe. Okay, maybe an audience.  
Maybe a moment shatters on stage and then it's done.  
Philosopher, Dancer—maybe they shudder and wince  
as a man undergoes his birth—his birth as No One—

undergoes self cracked clean and sheared off the body,  
leaving self to trickle and ooze and then dissolve into the sea,  
where waves hammer the blank beach—*pappapappapai*—  
waves and waves. Not dying. Artistically.

## BOUCLÉ

Richard Robbins

*Bouclé yarn was originally developed in order to frustrate mass machine production.*

How does a small kink begin to answer  
the factory's dazzling, rapid line? How to do  
more damage now than Luddites ten years before,  
all hung now or shipped to Australia? How to

speak the hook of the word by day and gather,  
dressed as men, to use the word by night when,  
dressed in bonnets and skirts, they shatter  
the huge inhuman looms? Centuries gone:

He wears the rough loops Leicestershire weavers  
used to compete with machines. All the way  
out the door, through traffic, through piano  
wire of noise, he's walking toward a great  
unplanned place—alley, park, broken pot or bowl—  
a place where shaped things can't help but unravel.

OTIS BARDWELL



*Skyful Water Light*



*Four Red Chairs*



*Elephants Bathe in Dust*



*Ostrich Skeleton*

## THE SEXUAL PREDATOR'S HANDBOOK

Viet Dinh

1. Always stay alert, remain vigilant.
2. Assure yourself: there is nothing wrong. They are old enough to kill grandparents for another day of vacation, to wear boxers with baggy carpenter jeans. They yawn and stretch like Teamsters, arms raised and backs arched, interrupting your *Romeo and Juliet* lecture with an elastic waistband, a white flash of stomach, a bellybutton trailing hair. When you show the movie, they stifle laughter when Romeo stands naked, bathed in sunlight, and they bite their knuckles when Juliet's breasts flash across the screen. Don't be obvious when they cross their legs and fold their hands in their laps, desire and shame irreducible.
3. Demand respect. Make them take off their baseball caps. They run fingers through their lopsided hair and stumble over the 'thee's, 'thy's, and 'doth's. On the day the girls are called out of class for an in-service, they snigger when the scrawny boy, the one who hangs out in the empty theater room during lunchtime, volunteers to read Juliet. Learn to cherish him. The others have sun-dappled legs or wear satiny soccer shorts that offer a shadowed crux of crotch when they prop their feet on the back of other students' chairs—but he, he reminds you of yourself at that age, and you close your eyes as his voice quavers: *Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay.'*
4. Find excuses. Help the chain-smoking drama teacher with her production of *Annie Get Your Gun*; edit the expletives out of the yearbook; monitor the

lunchroom. Each time you see him, act surprised: *What a coincidence!* Even if he doesn't look you in the eye, examine how his bones push against his skin, as if testing its elasticity; his body is a lesson in skeletal anatomy: *fibula, scapula, femur, pelvis*. Make your presence known. Wave with a solicitous smile. Others equate your enthusiasm with an unspeakable lack of cool, but they don't see the tongue behind your lips, tracing the sharp edges of your teeth.

5. Persistence pays. One day while forming red Cs on quizzes, using the same motion with which you stir coffee, he asks you to look over his essay for a Veterans of Foreign Wars contest: What Patriotism Means to Me. Nonchalance is a weapon: *Sure, why not?* He looks at you with earnest awe. Help shape mediocre platitudes into astounding platitudes. Push yourself further under your desk so that he won't notice your erection. After he thanks you, pat his shoulder *You're welcome* and, quickly, imperceptibly, brush your thumb against his shirt. Imagine, if you will, the flesh underneath.

6. Remember this first touch. Let it linger on your tongue like hard candy. Rub your thumb and forefinger together in an approximation of contact. You will need this feeling on nights you find yourself tortured and alone. Desire is a mystery. A therapist would likely pin your desires to a childhood trauma, but what if there is no trauma? What if you begged to be touched, wanted to be held, demanded to be loved? What if you knew exactly what you wanted—and still do?

7. Give favors. Leniency for a two-day-late paper. Absences that would normally be reported to the attendance office. Hall passes for spurious reasons—or no reason whatsoever. He tries your generosity, but don't be petty.

An implicit secrecy exists. These lagniappes accumulate as a bill to collect later.

8. Wait with leonine patience. He advances to the state competition, and other civic clubs beckon: The Optimists, the Kiwanis, the Jaycees: gatherings of old men who pay to hear their past glory reflected back by the young. During the field trip to the Shakespeare festival, he rides in the front seat of your car. You almost feel embarrassed by your preference for easy listening music, but he mouths the words to the Burt Bacharach tunes. He fingers the vinyl piping on the side of the seat, and you could, if you dared, stretch a pinkie from the stick shift and touch his knuckle. But witnesses surround you; the school bus honks in good fun when you pass. He looks out the window, as if memorizing this escape route from school. Your heart beats so fast it almost breaks.

9. Avoid distractions. There are many: jocks teasing midriff-baring girls with breezy brutality; hangers-on with eager smiles and secondhand laughter who snap up the jocks' crumbs; nerds who cradle their books like babies, instead of holding them under their arms; football players whose thick muscles render their necks immobile; black boys who don't react when everyone turns to them during *Othello's* racist sentiments; skater boys sporting scuffed knees, scarred elbows, and airs of invulnerability; basketball boys with legs that branch out voraciously; preternaturally high-voiced choir boys who daily are slammed against the lockers; boys who wear sweatpants every day; boys who wear the same pair of sweatpants every day; boys who move through class heads down, hoping not to attract attention and dying from lack of it simultaneously. So many boys, so much suffering: you want to help them all.

10. Know when the tide turns. He eats lunch in your classroom and empties his tray in the waste bin by your desk: apple cores, pizza crusts, chicken nugget breading. When the two of you work on his speech late into the evening, after the janitors have turned out the hallway lights, offer to drive him home. Ask if he wants something to eat, your treat. Between French fries, he tells you how his parents pressured him to join Future Business Leaders of America, how drama was a waste of time. *You're the only one who listens to me*, he says, holding a burger. Sesame seeds stick to his greasy fingers, and you want to grab his wrist, hold his hand still, and lick them off. *No one understands me*, he continues, and you realize this truth, the loneliness implicit therein. How wise he is beyond his years; how adult he is!

11. Seize the opportunity when it comes. Next year will be his last, a flurry of SAT Scantron sheets, college recruitment brochures, extra-curricular activities plotted to round out the most indifferent student. He will fade as soon as you turn the page in your grade book. Already, other boys clamor to replace him: colleagues warn of up-and-coming troublemakers in the sophomore class; warm weather brings out thinner and thinner t-shirts, biceps and pectorals taking shape underneath. The appetite for summer vacation threatens to shake the school apart; truancy cleans out more and more desks. You are running out of time.

12. Use your leverage. Schedule an after school conference. Tell him: you've been letting his poor class performance slide, but it can't continue. College acceptances hang on a knife's edge. Speak slowly. Lay out his misdemeanors, the circumstantial evidence, the damning truth. Listen

as footsteps and residual chatter drain from the halls. Pretend to straighten the desks in the corner of the classroom, away from the windows and the door. Let him know that you *know* he's a good student. You're concerned about his future. You want to help, but. . . . The trail you leave is full of ruin. Worry blots out the resistance behind his eyes; he tears up and trembles. Tell him: *It's okay. We can work something out.* Close in for a hug. Press his body against yours. Feel how reassurance comforts and stiffens. You could snap him in two if you wanted—leave him broken and bleeding at your feet—instead, envelop him in your arms. He no longer pulls away; the remnants of his urge to flee dissolve; his twitching dwindles to a shudder. Tilt your head and promise protection, safety, silence. Let him know he is loved. Brand his neck with a kiss.

13. Remember this moment. He will whimper and cry from the pain, sharp and unimaginable, but this is how it always is, isn't it? It's not just the physical pain—it's the pain of knowing who you really are. The pain of getting what you want. Afterwards, hold him. Smother the sobs falling into your shoulder. He will shake from the shock, and you will know that from now on, he will fear authority, he will worship authority, and he will shiver whenever someone grasps his upper arm. But by next year, you will no longer care. There will be another.

14. Congratulations.

## SLIDE SHOW

Dara Mandle

When my father returned  
from business in Rio,  
we crowded on the couch  
to see the tram to Corcovado,

to see Dad at the base of the statue,  
without his briefcase, without  
his suit, in frayed jeans,  
a leather camera bag dangling

from his shoulder.  
He tossed his head in the wind,  
his moustache untrimmed.  
I didn't know him.

I felt apart. Where did he go  
in the dark? I traced the circle  
my cup of juice had left  
on the glass table.

The shaft of light projected  
on the living room wall  
trapped specks of dust.  
The quick display:

image, blank. The beam  
and click. Ipanema beach,  
sunset over Guanabara Bay.  
I loved the slide tray

loaded with plastic plates.  
 I loved my father's narrating:  
 this concrete Jesus towers  
 thirty meters on the hilltop.

I loved how time stopped  
 when Dad came home and how,  
 on the sofa, orange as disco,  
 in the dark we each sat alone.

## STILLBIRTH

Peter B. Hyland

Daddy broke to his knees,  
Then made an unchildlike cry, right there  
In the red dirt.

Pressing his mouth to the warm foal's,  
He forced his human breath,  
The animal head wet and dumb,

My brother and I watching  
As he made a fist to summon  
Back the rush of blood,

Beating the chest as if the dead horse  
Were one of his own,  
Its birthcoat shimmering as he tried.

Weary with digging, Daddy told me  
To pour the lime, the brute foal a few feet  
Away in the restless sun.

A white cloud in the hollow ground  
Rose up; the wind  
Ran through the chicken wire.

In the dark I lay on the grave's belly,  
The cold earth beneath my palms.  
I watched the far house, the small square of light.

The brown coat my brother wore  
Was in the pasture.  
The gate shook against its metal latch.

Fenced in the next field,  
The black mane flared, month on month,  
Until the mound turned flat.

## THE IRIS HOUSE

E. R. Turner

### I. Her Garden in San Francisco

She has arranged iris from those years,  
and forsythia, roses into fads,  
territory of photographs, clasped  
jewels, shades of henna. Cataracts  
of the eye, never deep, array surfaces:  
raveled terracotta, scrim, pale birds  
on the window, persistent fogs,  
pinafores laundered many times—  
all clouded tan and tincture of pastels.

Inquiry behind many panes. Frosted  
fleur-de-lis, Victorian effervescence,  
vine curled glass falls like slow liquid,  
unperfections the iris. Leaf, vine, dot, line.

Time touches brittle jointure of forces.  
Crystalline mist, tiny imperfections,  
felt undulations. She waits for what  
the iris knows, nothing more than age.  
Widow, house, window.

### II. Who She Has Become

She watches from inside her frost of shapes,  
acid marked. Color streaks and blurs her  
iris bed, tinged, unsteady, reflecting parts—  
yellow stamens, orange petals etched  
at an indent. She is the iris, miniature  
of her memory. She escaped the house,

translucent egress, etched gray, ash-copper,  
 full flowered, before the borders disappeared.  
 Insistent beauty. Strong life. Weak life.  
 Her design—first, make small, in her eye  
 her image, shaped exactly for a key.

Spring brings prolific iris, earth-born,  
 raises variety of blue, stops passersby.  
 Iron wrought to a fence, no more  
 immune to rust than she who hides  
 among the many purples, escaped  
 from bordered beds through all the yard.  
 Hand, trowel, root, line, leaf.

### III. Iris of the Eye's Desire

I knew a girl whose eyes flecked magenta.  
 Other times, were mere green. I would  
 like to say we made love. When  
 the lover dies, the iris shrinks the pupil  
 to one black dot. Seeing is not believing.  
 She loved a woman named Fleur, who wore  
 chiffon, who prided her blue eyes beyond  
 all reason, but would trade them for violet,  
 dusky sienna, emerald, lavender.

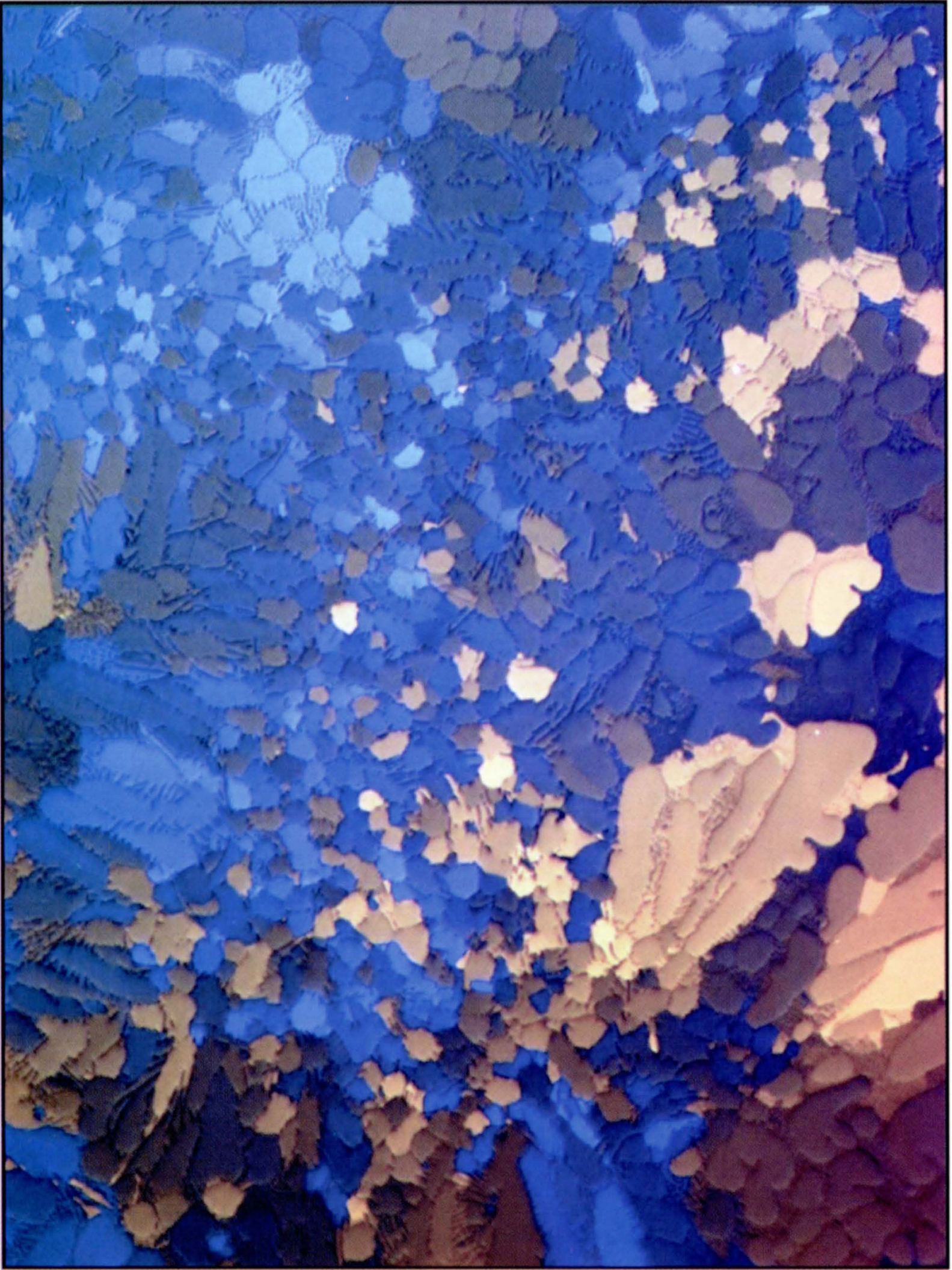
Behind her frosted window she owned  
 an old-fashioned name—Maude, Cora,  
 Agatha. I declare nobody knew her name,  
 the Iris Lady, except her former lovers.  
 Each told love in a special word.  
 She colored their gazes with desire.

I say her name is Fleur, which unwinds  
 her bunned hair and blossoms her lip

with coral, lifts her breasts, repaints  
her aureoles a deep pink, sets her running  
to the front gate, her soft hand on new-black  
wrought iron, her bodice demure, straining  
against the binding cotton, a signal the boys  
can read and love to dream of after prayers.  
Marriage, birth, flower, death, sun.

She waits to meet Ephraim, Clifford, Elihu.  
Presbyterian boys with a glint of softened  
blue in the iris of their eyes, gun-metal  
gray during work when they sell their goods  
at the emporium. She has skated on ice,  
laughed as swinging in the park she heated  
them to white desire. She once sat  
in the rumble seat of a yellow motor car  
and let the pale wind ruffle her hair,  
pick up her chiffon as picked up shame,  
something she delves into as years  
and years push her behind glass.

ERIC COTTS, LAWRENCE LEHMAN, YAN XIANG

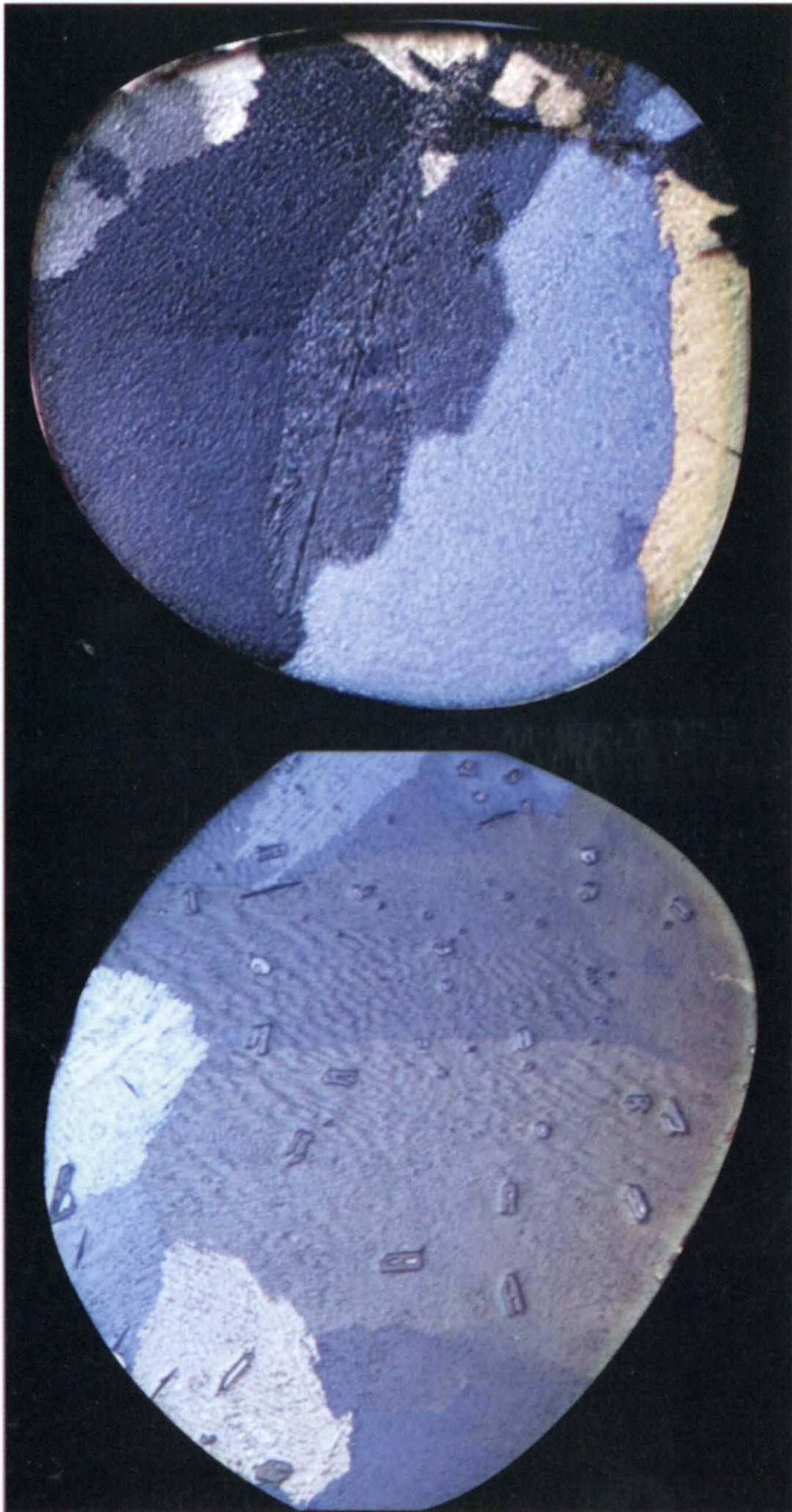


*Three crystals of tin grew from the same seed, but with different orientations, intertwining on their tortuous path to solidification.*

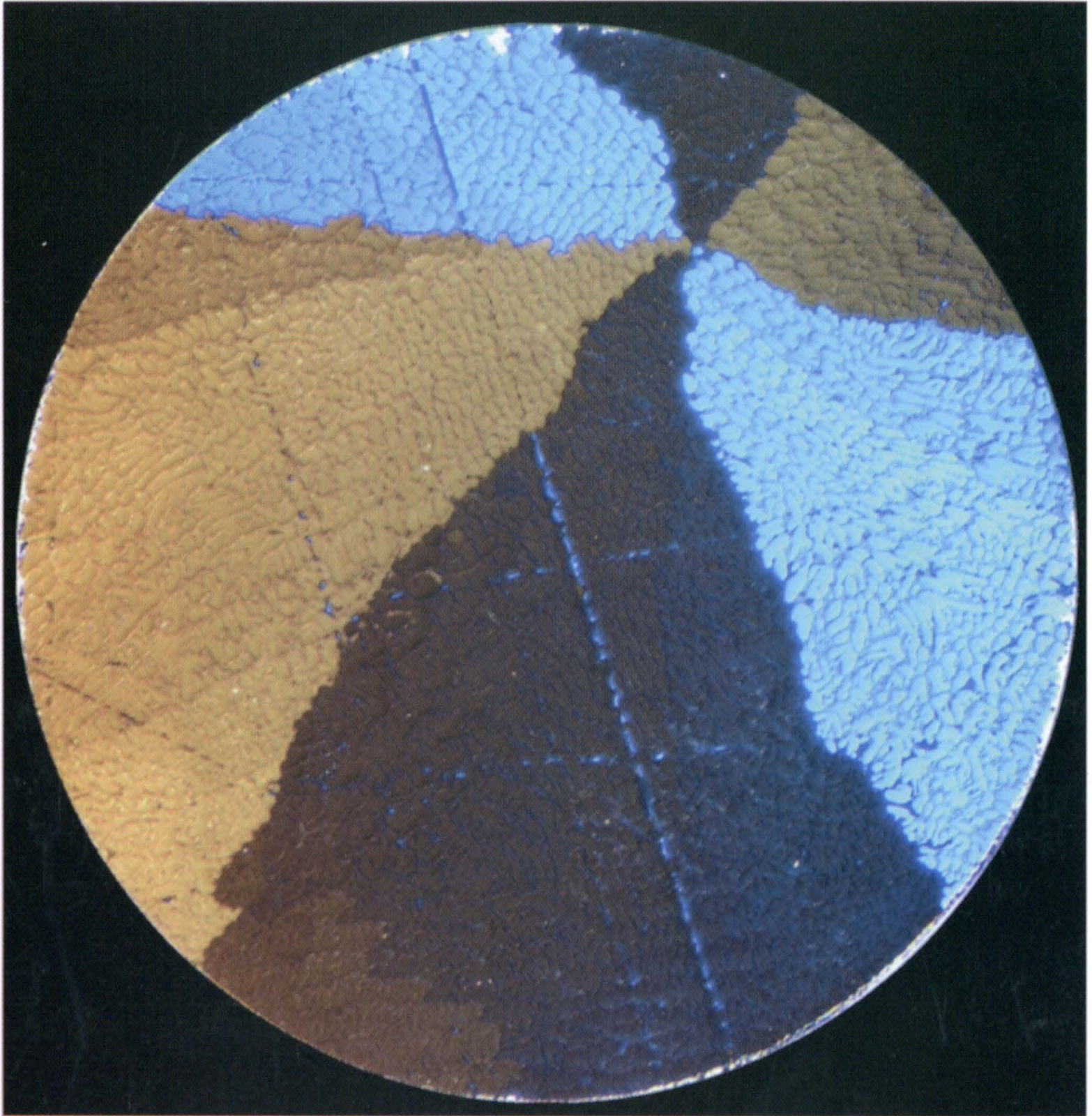


*The growth of tin crystals from a tin melt containing a dash of silver changes dramatically as a third element, copper, is added.*

ERIC COTTS, LAWRENCE LEHMAN, YAN XIANG



*The presence of more copper allows the tin crystals to grow out into the melt unimpeded by their brethren, developing into large, stout individuals.*



*Crystals of tin align themselves on the nucleus like a hexagonal wheel, each twisting sixty degrees. This special arrangement allows them to grow apart and together to form what we call Kara's Beachball.*

## DNA

Victoria Boynton

Before you go in, the undertaker warns you  
about his eyes, and indeed, they are bruised  
and collapsed, like tents without poles.  
The donor bank doesn't want his heart  
or his liver either. "Young for rejection,"  
they murmured.

They will push him off to the fire soon  
on those tiny gurney wheels,  
but for now, it's you  
and the kids and your mom and sister.  
It's early still.  
His mom's in the air.

And it's funny how you want  
to sit and drink out of that face,  
that bowl of his head above the sheet,  
that empty, shining plate.  
But there's no chair anywhere—  
economy arrangements—  
no fault of yours or anyone's.  
You stand and shade yourself with your hand;  
he is so bright it hurts.

And then you look up and see his DNA  
splitting itself among you all  
like a Jesus cracker;  
see the laced dance in your sister's kids  
and your boy with his father's tendons in his hands  
and your sister's girl whom the snake bit and  
shook her face out and those eyes,  
stamped like cookies with the father-cutter  
no doubt there, despite everything.

Here we are, claimed things, roped  
in this insistent helix, its double spun twists  
embrace this broken strand,  
stitched up, somehow,  
a snarled ball of freezing worms  
keeping themselves warm,  
waiting for the fire.

## EIGHT NAVY SEALS

Dara-Lyn Shrager

Afghanistan  
opened its mouth

and swallowed us,  
one by one

by one  
until we were  
none.

Our Chinook flew  
out on a rescue.

We were holding  
our packs and guns.

We exploded into  
a single-file line,

going black  
on the horizon.

Underneath us,  
a teeming city

of reporters  
spoke our history,

words that curled  
in the dry wind,

lifted off  
and away  
to America.

## A STORM AT DUSK

Amy Spade

On Christmas afternoon, we all—adults  
and kids alike—wanted to sled the curvy  
cross-country ski trail near my father's house.  
This was guaranteed fun—we'd never gone  
home disappointed. We would laugh so hard  
we'd forget about the hot chocolate, cold toes.

Someone always ran straight into a tree;  
a few always flew down the hill sideways.  
This day was no different, but we'd gotten  
a late start, had to head home when dusk  
came on. Jimmy wanted us to stay till dark,  
with a thirteen-year-old "double dare you."

We didn't dare. Snow was starting to come  
down in heavy flakes, and besides, plenty  
of activities lured us back. We gathered  
the plastic sleds and climbed into Dad's truck,  
all speaking at once, the Suburban's headlights  
shining against a sea of swirling white.

We'd left behind the worn wooden sleigh  
and Jimmy left Dad's new gloves on the trail.  
Dad yelled, "Well, get out and search for them,  
then walk home!" Jimmy jumped out, slammed  
the door, disappeared on the trail leading  
into the woods. We were all quiet.

Dad swore at his lack of sight as the road  
became blurred with furious flakes. Air blared  
hot from vents at our mittens packed frozen  
and dense with icy snow; sweat clung under

steamy layers; cheeks and lips were red,  
chapped dry; the Beatles sang "A Hard Day's Night."

The wind worsened, but Dad wouldn't turn  
back for Jimmy. We begged him to stop,  
but he did only when Emily's boyfriend  
gallantly volunteered to search, cheerier  
than all of us, wandering into the wild  
for a family still like a quaint dream.

Dad finally turned into the lurid sky  
and we were in the driveway. In the house,  
ten minutes, then half an hour went by—  
the trail was just half a mile away,  
but there was no sign of Jimmy or Larry  
as we posted ourselves at windows,

straining for a glimpse of them trudging  
blindly. We thought we saw their fleeting  
figures, "They're in the front yard!" No—trees.  
My stepmother was crying, yelling, saying  
"Your son is lost and it's all your fault!"  
I thought about which subtle differences

made Jimmy "your son," "my son" or "our son,"  
how anything that went irretrievably  
wrong allowed everyone to blame my father,  
me included. Dad said, "They'll show up,  
they'll show up soon," and with a blank stare  
sat in his favorite chair. Not one of us

was willing to move from the fogged glass:  
I saw my brother silent under a pine,  
needles lashing his face, his scarf like a red  
banner, Larry stumbling ten feet away.  
With patience, the snow slowed, shapes emerged  
throwing balls in the street, merry and strange.

## FORMAL DREAM STATE

Ed Zahniser

I dream Basho on the narrow road  
to the far north laying down his steps  
like written characters. He knows  
precisely every breath relationship  
between the journey and each metaphor.  
His brush pen mapping progress  
topples a saké glass and wakes me  
to his paperback on the night stand  
and thoughts of how its tight-packed  
squared-off angles might impress him as  
a narrow coffin for such flights of fancy.

## WRITING BY DEGREES PORTFOLIO



Photo by Kathryn Henion

### WRITING BY DEGREES

Binghamton University's graduate creative writing conference is now in its tenth year. Once an on-campus event of local colleges and universities, Writing By Degrees has expanded to host panels with writers from all over the globe, with readings taking place at the Decker Arts and Cultural Center, a restored classic revival mansion near downtown Binghamton. Recent guest readers have included Lee K. Abbott, Lydia Davis, Sascha Feinstein, B.H. Fairchild, M. Evelina Galang, Judith Harris, Sena Jeter Naslund, Neil Shepard, and Michael Steinberg. Panels include topics such as creative non-fiction/memoir, creative writing pedagogy, jazz poetry and prose, and the business of literary journals, as well as exceptional readings of graduate fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. The next Writing By Degrees conference will be held in October of 2006.

For more details, please visit our website at:  
<http://writingbydegrees.binghamton.edu>

## TWENTY-ONE STORIES ABOUT GUN CONTROL

Thomas Miller

1.

In 1967, my father, a freshman at Marquette University, joined the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps. He stood six feet three inches tall; his voice was low and slightly nasal. He would study comparative literature. On October 17, riots broke out ninety miles away at the University of Wisconsin over whether Dow Chemical, a manufacturer of napalm, should be permitted to recruit undergraduates. The administration at Marquette feared sympathy demonstrations might break out and deployed the ROTC to secure high-risk areas. Because my father and the rest of the freshmen cadets had not yet received weapons training, they were allowed to carry only walkie-talkies. My father was stationed at the entrance of the university library, which relieved my mother—she says he wouldn't have defended any other building on campus.

Several weeks later, his squad went to the rifle range, where, after several rounds of target practice, they stacked their guns and took a short breather. When my father returned, he had a problem. As he said to his drill instructor:

"I can't find my gun. Sir."

"First off, son, we call it a weapon, not a gun. Second, *how the Hell did you lose your weapon!*"

2.

Because my mother disliked the idea of children playing with toy guns, I didn't have one until I was six years old. I didn't mind. Andy Burgmeier and Pete Gingrass, who lived across the street, had Nerf guns and cap pistols and let me play with them. Besides, you could always pick up a tree branch, point it, and make machine gun noises. My mom eventually relented and

for Christmas bought me a Star Wars gun, a chunky, squarish block of hard, black plastic, with a grip and barrel stuck on at comical angles. No one would have mistaken it for a real gun. It shrieked in three pitches, depending on how far back you pulled the trigger—deafen the enemy must have been the theory. It took four D batteries, which made it weigh about two pounds, and much better for whacking people than a lighter, more realistic looking toy gun.

3.

My mother and I shot BB guns at the Mom and Me overnight campout. We were surprised to learn she was as good a markswoman as any of the Cub Scout mothers there. She said she wouldn't have minded every nine-year-old in the country owning a BB gun provided they had to follow the same rules we did: the mother loads when the son shoots and the son loads when the mother shoots.

4.

My fifth grade class went on a fall nature hike at the Audubon Center. We were learning to identify different trees and collecting leaves to press together between sheets of wax paper. My classmates and I wanted sugar maple leaves (glossy and scarlet) without too many insect holes in them, but our park ranger guide was into oak leaves—he offered us this mnemonic: “The red oak has pointed ends on its leaves, just like the pointy ends of the arrows the red man used. The white oak has round ends, like the round ends of the bullets the white man used.”

5.

Each Friday, we had an hour of Drug Abuse Resistance Education, or D.A.R.E., which was taught by a bald police officer. He was on duty while teaching, so he wore his utility

belt with all its equipment. Naturally, Jason Luell asked him if he'd ever killed anybody. He said no, but he'd fired his gun in the line of duty.

"Do you shoot someone in the leg if they're running away?" Jason asked.

"Never," the officer said. "We use force appropriate to the situation. We shoot only as a last resort and we shoot for either the head or the chest. They're dead in two seconds." He snapped his fingers. "Just like that."

6.

In May of that year, the LAPD cops who had beaten Rodney King were acquitted and riots erupted in Los Angeles. King appeared on television and famously said, "Can't we all just get along?" For weeks, we all aped Rodney. Playing dodgeball or capture the flag: "Can't we all just get along? [Thwack!] Can't we all just get along?"

7.

When the Boy Scouts came to recruit the Cub Scouts, they told us, "In the Boy Scouts, we don't shoot BB guns. [Restive murmurs from the crowd.] *We shoot .22 rifles!*" [Excited hooting.]

8.

At summer camp, five kids at a time lay prone on thin plastic mattresses, the stocks of their rifles snuggled up against their cheeks, the butts braced against their shoulders. The range master called out, "Put on your eyes and ears," which I thought meant, "Pay attention!" but which really meant, "Put on your goggles and ear protectors."

We used bolt-action .22s, which required us to manually eject the casing after each shot and reload a fresh cartridge. Five

shots at a target fifty feet distant. A “qualifying” target meant grouping all five shots closely enough that a quarter could cover them. Earning the merit badge required five qualifying targets. One target with ammunition cost twenty-five cents, so it was a relatively cheap merit badge, or an expensive one, depending on your aim.

I was nearsighted and had left my glasses at home. When I sighted in on the target all I could see was a big, black blur. I’d take as long as half a minute to aim—by my second shot the guys were screaming at me to hurry *up*, everybody else was *done* already—but when I pulled the trigger I couldn’t even tell whether I’d hit the target or missed it entirely. I had no trouble with the rest of the requirements. Some safety stuff, a few questions we were supposed to answer. We covered it in a half-hour on the first day. My favorite question was, “Describe how you would react if a friend visiting your home asked to see your or your family’s firearm(s).” After my smart aleck answer, the instructor asked me again: “*If* your family owned firearm(s) . . .” He didn’t smile.

My dad came up halfway through the week for his three-day shift as an adult leader. He brought my glasses. Suddenly I could see the concentric black rings on the target, each with a white number printed inside. Not that I could hit them, but I could see them. I needed twenty-five or thirty targets to qualify. A .22 doesn’t kick much, but it does sort of tap your cheek each time you fire. I had a tender spot beneath my left eye by the end of the week.

My rifl emanship merit badge is sewn on my uniform sash between my patches for coin collecting and first aid.

9.

Leonard McDowell, twenty-two, was a dropout from Wauwatos a West, the high school I later attended. On December 1, 1993, he returned to his alma mater and wandered the halls. One of his former teachers recognized him and immediately

called the office; they dispatched Dale Breitlow, the associate principal in charge of discipline, who had dealt frequently with Leonard when Leonard was a student. Mr. Breitlow confronted Leonard, who pulled a pistol from the waistband of his pants, shot Mr. Breitlow in the chest and walked away. A student in a nearby classroom—a lifeguard—attempted CPR, but failed to resuscitate Mr. Breitlow.

One hundred yards west of the high school was Eisenhower Elementary, where my brother and sister were locked down. One block east of the high school was Whitman Middle School, where I was locked down along with my fourth period German class. All we knew was that after a two-word announcement on the PA system Frau Witzke had locked the classroom door and told us we were not allowed to leave the room. She didn't know why. We cracked jokes and threw paper. No one needed to go to the bathroom until I asked if we could and Frau Witzke said no. Then everyone needed to.

We did not learn what had happened until several hours later, when we were dismissed. All the local news stations gave the shooting round-the-clock coverage and Tom Brokaw led with it on the *NBC Nightly News* (the only time in my childhood Wauwatosa was mentioned, aside from the *E. coli* outbreak at Sizzler's).

The police found the gun lying in the street near the apartment complex where my friend Justin Drane lived. They found Leonard a few hours after that. The guy was clearly crazy, but none of us cried six months later when he got life in prison instead of life in a mental institution.

We had school the day after the shooting, but no class. Instead, we had “sharing sessions” where we talked about how bad we felt or how bad we felt for Ty Breitlow, a fellow seventh grader. I played center behind him on the basketball team and had been assigned to him as a math tutor and mostly what I thought was that he'd use it as an excuse to act like an even bigger asshole than he usually did.

I went to the funeral with my parents. Ty hugged me in the receiving line. His mother burst into tears.

10.

When I started high school, I thought it lent me a tough guy legitimacy. Cross country meet, marching band competition: *Where's that guy from?* Nicolet. *Oh—rich suburban kid. Where's that guy from?* 'Tosa West. *Oh typical—wait, no . . . they were the ones that . . . yeah.*

11.

A dozen kids from my high school went to Fulda, Germany as exchange students. In history class, I looked at my host-brother's textbook. I was interested to see how the Germans wrote about World War II. Though the text was too complicated for me to follow, I realized I hadn't seen most of the pictures before—none of the familiar shots, no D-Day or Yalta Conference or atom bomb. The only photograph I recognized was one in which six *Wehrmacht* are pointing their rifles at a grinning, blindfolded member of the French resistance, who is lined up against the corner of a stone barn. He's positioned at the corner to prevent ricochets from rebounding toward the soldiers executing him.

12.

I wanted to say something about it, say, "You have all different pictures in your books, except for this one, which I have seen before." But it was a difficult sentence to translate and by the time I had parsed it, the teacher had decided her class should have a question and answer session with their visitor about life in America. They were to ask questions in English and I was to answer in German.

Is America a dangerous place? *Well, parts are. But I feel safe nearly always.* Is it very violent? Your news is quite violent. *Yes,*

*the news is sometimes quite bad. But mostly it is not like that. Do you know people who have guns? Yes. But one must be eighteen years old. Also, one must not be a criminal. Would you be able to buy a gun? No, I am not eighteen. But if you wanted, could you get one? No, I could not do that. But perhaps some of my classmates could. Does anyone ever bring a gun to school?*

*Nein, nein, nein. Nie. Never. In Milwaukee, maybe. Then I realized I was lying. Not lying, really—it had been five years and I just never thought about it anymore. So I said, Der Hauptman von unsere Schüle war in 1993 geschossen. Aber nicht bei ein Student, bei ein verrückte Mann, der Leonard McDowell heisst. Aber das ist sehr untypisch—jederman in der USA hat über das gesprochen.*

“Shit,” said my friend Erik Schleiker, afterwards. “Nice job. Now they think people shoot each other at American schools all the time.” I felt bad about giving the Germans the wrong impression. Then came 1999 and by the end of it, it had begun to feel like people really *did* shoot each other at American schools all the time.

13.

I took American Public Policy—civics, essentially—my senior year of high school. During the first week, our teacher drew a line on the chalkboard, marked one side “left” and one side “right” and told us to stand where on the political spectrum we thought we belonged on different issues. Due to a scheduling peculiarity, most students in my section were repeating the class, some for the second time, and were shaky on what constituted liberal versus conservative positions. The activity rapidly degenerated into a game of “Look at where Tom’s standing and figure out if you think you’re on the same side or on the other side.” When the issue of gun control came up, I held my position on the far left side and a dozen of my classmates bunched around me. The teacher asked me to explain what my position was. When

they heard the words “handgun ban” all but two of the students moved to the other side.

14.

Public school kids who were members of St. Joseph’s parish didn’t get confirmed until they were seventeen. I spent the two-day preparatory retreat trying to find a way to spend a few minutes alone with my girlfriend and speaking as little as possible in the group discussions out of fear that I’d be found out and sent home. (“If I think the teachings of Jesus are a good ethical code, but don’t really believe more than that, should I get confirmed?” Or, “Say you’re engaging in an activity you know is sinful and that you feel guilty about, but don’t want to stop doing it. Should you confess that?”)

As a bonding activity on the first night, we sat in a circle on wooden chairs and answered questions that the group leader read off index cards. I got “What’s the most useless invention ever?” I said paperclip. Second time around, I got, “What’s the cruelest thing someone has ever said or done to you?” The only thing I could think of was, “Dear Tom, I really don’t want to go out with you. Sorry. Kristin.” (In the form of a note delivered by a third party.) Only she was in the room. As was my infamously jealous girlfriend. So I said I didn’t know.

“Well, I know,” said Ty Breitlow, who was sitting next to me. “Leonard McDowell shot my father. That’s the cruelest thing anybody ever did to me.” He got up from the circle and left. We didn’t do any more questions after that.

15.

When the math team competed, I took both my calculators, a TI-34 and a TI-85, rectangular machines with heavy, black plastic cases. I liked to walk into the room where the test was being administered without my backpack. My calculators in my

back pockets, pencils in my front pocket. Unencumbered, like a Wild West gunslinger, all my weapons in easy reach. Removing the cover from the calculator felt like pulling back the slide on a pistol, I thought. The clack of the calculator shoved home in its case at the end of a test sounded not unlike a fresh magazine being inserted.

16.

In the forty-four-hour First Responder course I took before becoming a lifeguard, we learned to treat gunshot wounds or “GSWs.” (There had been shots fired at a county pool the year before, but no one had been hit.)

Things become complicated when the victim is PNB—pulseless non-breathing. In a group of three responders, two perform CPR and one patches the GSW, so the victim doesn’t bleed out. The tricky part is keeping the neck immobilized while rolling the victim to sweep the back for an exit wound—you assume that your victim has a C-spine injury and if the neck moves, he dies. My group couldn’t for the life of us (or of our instructor) roll him correctly. We killed him three times in a row.

“Yeah, don’t worry about it,” he said. “A PNB GSW—you’re not gonna bring him back with CPR. Maybe one percent of the time. Learn something else.”

17.

During the emergency preparedness test that summer, our examiner drafted me to play the victim’s friend in the GSW scenario. My job was to inform the lifeguards that there was an emergency and lead them to the site of the shooting. When the examiner said go, I ran up to Tracey Stayton and deadpanned, “Lifeguard, lifeguard, somebody just shot my friend!”

Afterwards, everybody got the giggles about it. “Jesus, you

sounded dumb,” Tracey said.

“What was I supposed to say?” I asked.

18.

The tenth word of my first real short story was “gunshot.”

19.

I read Timothy Zahn’s novel *Star Wars: Heir to the Empire* when I was eleven years old and started working on a sequel the day after I finished it. Over the next seven years, in the back of my school notebooks, I designed weapons systems for my stories—starfighters and shield generators and body armor and ejection seats. Over three hundred pages in all.

During my first week of college, I sat up one night diagramming a blaster in the back of my physics notebook. It was a BlasTech DL-44 heavy blaster pistol—Han Solo’s preferred weapon and the toy gun I had owned as a kid. I should have been working on a problem set—it was due the next day—but it required math I had never even heard of. A half-hour before, I had nearly walked out to the dumpster in the courtyard and chucked in my books. So there I sat, in my dormitory’s common room, sketching, working first in light pencil, then adding highlights with marker and ballpoint pen. I shielded my drawings with my body. I thought that if I caught a guy in my dorm drawing guns, I’d probably turn him in. Or I’d at least give him plenty of space if I were in line behind him for the shower.

20.

I joined an improvisational comedy team. Some of our members had favorite offensive jokes they told backstage, partly to break the tension but also in hopes that they would exhaust their supply of nastiness so it wouldn’t come out on stage. Rob

Dubbin did an impression of the Kennedy assassination in which he played the president, the side of the president's head, and Jackie crawling across the back of the limo. He'd studied the Zapruder tape, he knew Jack's little "That's odd—something seems to have bitten me in the shoulder" movement before the third shot. He understood ballistics, that the spray of blood and tissue particles moves in the *opposite* direction of a bullet, because the bullet creates a vacuum behind it. He knew that the conspiracy buffs who claim Lee Harvey Oswald couldn't have been the real assassin, because he would have been shooting from the wrong angle, have the physics backwards.

21.

After I graduated, I moved into an apartment with two guys I found online. One roommate, Benny, took medication for a facial tic. He thought our other roommate, Hayden, whom he had met only a couple of weeks before, was some sort of genius who inhabited a world of pure thought—you had to repeat something four or five times before Hayden realized you were speaking to him. I thought Hayden was hard of hearing.

I came home one Saturday afternoon to discover that Benny had allowed the apartment to be burglarized. It had happened while he was in the shower—Benny's showers lasted a half-hour, the same length of time as his Bon Jovi repertoire. He had walked out of the bathroom surrounded by a whoosh of steam, towel wrapped around his waist, and hadn't been able to find his glasses, which he had left on his dresser. They had been knocked to the floor. When he put them on, he discovered that the candy dish that he kept his change in was empty. He thought he heard a door slam.

I came home two hours later. Benny grabbed me by the shoulders and asked, "Where's Hayden?"

"At work," I said. "What . . ."

"On a Saturday? When did he leave?"

“He always works on Saturday. He left at like seven this morning. Why?”

“Because someone *knew* I was in the shower.” He explained about the burglary. He’d lost his change, his watch, and most of his DVD collection, including *Sorority Sex Kittens* (which the cops had been especially interested in—if they bagged a guy with that particular film they could trace him to our apartment). Benny thought it was an inside job. “Hayden,” he said again.

“Then why didn’t he take your computer?” I asked.

“Okay, maybe not him, maybe one of the neighbors.” Benny said. “I swear to God, though, if they try it again and that guy’s here when I come out of the shower—BAM! I take him down, and I’m not responsible for what happens next.”

It kept coming back to me over the following weeks, a prickle of anticipation in the time it took me to wipe the steam from the bathroom mirror, and hang up my towel, and stretch out the shower curtain to dry. Walk out of the bathroom, skin still soft and damp, water dripping down the folds of your ears, profoundly nearsighted, and there’s a guy in the living room with a knife. Benny had wrestled at the 185-pound weight class in college—it was one thing for him to talk about *BAM!*-ing someone while armed with a bathrobe and soap-on-a-rope. But I thought I’d want something more than that.

When I sublet my room several months later, I called my dad for advice. “So let’s say your apartment hypothetically gets broken into. Do you have a legal obligation to tell a potential sub-lessee?”

“When did this hypothetically happen?”

“October.”

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

“I didn’t want Mom to worry. The neighborhood’s safe, it was just sort of a freak thing. It happened while Benny was in the shower. They took my camera.”

“Uh-huh.”

“You know all those people who say they want a gun for

protection? I mean, you'd have to shower with it for it to do you any good, but what if you get out and find somebody in the living room? You know what I mean?" I straightened a stack of books on my desk. "Is that stupid?"

"Yeah," my dad said. "Yeah, you're right. You have a legal obligation to tell them."

"Thanks," I said. I switched the phone from my left ear to my right. "Hey, did you see the game this afternoon?"

"Yeah. Favre shot the goddamn lights out, didn't he?"

MEGAN, INSIDE  
Tom Haushalter

Then I am back in Indiana. That house having  
never not held the ruddy October tone

is all over again. My sister carries dish-towels  
and a shoebox to the foot of the walnut tree

where an infant squirrel has landed and lies,  
a separate planet. There isn't a verb

tender enough for her manner of guardianship.  
For that reason, there is nothing she can do.

Back of the barn, a new shoebox-size hole  
will lengthen a hidden timeline of seasons: summers

and autumns of feline funerals, a retriever's passing,  
a glut of hamsters, the outright plague of goldfish.

Her brothers, pallbearers, carve out a plot  
as Megan, inside, falls apart, her chagrin dear  
among the terrible floorboards in that house.

## THINKING ABOUT EMERSON

Judith Harris

*for Catherine*

I remember the place  
behind my mother's ear  
always a little sunburned,  
smelling of sweat, or lilac,  
waxy as an apple's skin.

That was the place,  
I first breathed, and whispered  
the way gulls must fly inside the cove,  
when the sea is rough,  
when the wind shakes out of its bones.

"Tell me a secret," she said,  
and I watched it tangle in her hair.

## MY MOTHER'S GHOST

Judith Harris

From behind the rift of dreamy shadow,  
I see her cross the garden's line,  
and then alight on the birch's minor limb,  
with its bark sloughed off and paper thin, and there  
she spreads her topaz wings,  
like a tiny drop cloth, and fixes  
on the purple hyacinth, her kite string legs  
black as a man's moustache, her pinions pressed  
as two palms in statue prayer.

And here, I stop to watch her  
on her morning task, a nibbling  
on a bronzed green leaf,  
so absorbed in her matter, she hardly flaps  
or turns to notice me,  
but instead, she stays still as stone,  
her snowflake sleeves opening and closing,  
as a book breaking its spine.

Then all at once, she changes course,  
sails scampering into the distant sky,  
suddenly metamorphosed, back  
into a haze of fog, the woosack cloud,  
a miner's path with her lamp held up,  
like a darkness lost without a flame.

## SCHOOL DAZE: REFLECTIONS AND RIFFS ON A NEW YORK CHILDHOOD

Michael Steinberg

### *Junior High School Bus*

Junior high is the universe's cruel joke on adolescent males. Had it been up to me, I'd have skipped ages twelve and thirteen and gone straight to high school.



P.S. 44, the junior high, was located on Beach 98th street, less than five miles from my house. Yet it took the school bus almost an hour to get there. The ride took us through neighborhoods our parents had warned us about since we were little kids. Once you got past McGuire's Bar and Grill on Beach 108th, all you'd see were seedy looking bars, gated liquor stores, run-down markets, weed-choked vacant lots, shuttered stores, ramshackle houses, and shops with iron bars on the windows. Ever since I'd read *The Amboy Dukes* over the summer, I'd been romanticizing sleazy, run-down neighborhoods like these. But when I saw them for the first time, I was unnerved by the ugliness and squalor. I couldn't imagine growing up in these conditions.



The junior high itself was a dilapidated turn-of-the-century red brick building. With its old, peeling paint and barb wire fenced school yard, P.S. 44 sat squarely in the heart of the Arverne-Hammels-Holland section of Rockaway Beach—one of the roughest, most run-down areas in south Queens.

The neighborhood and the junior high were in dramatic contrast to P.S. 114, the suburban grade school we'd all been

attending for the last six years. For one, the school was less than a ten-minute walk—close enough for us to go home for lunch. Plus, we mixed with the same middle class, college prep kids year in and year out. To the likes of us then, P.S. 44 might as well have been on the far side of the moon. Nothing we'd experienced at home or in grade school could have prepared us for *this* junior high.



The pecking order on the school bus was a microcosm of the junior high social hierarchy—one that had even more sharply defined boundaries than those we'd established in grade school.

The guys who got on the bus after Beach 79th street were predominantly Irish and Italian Catholics. Most lived in dilapidated old wooden homes with two, sometimes three, other families. The Blacks and Puerto Ricans, who got on next, lived in the city funded housing projects close to the El.

A lot of the white guys belonged to street gangs like the “South Laverne Boy’s Club” and the “Hammels’ Raiders.” They took special classes like automotive shop and woodworking. Many were just biding their time until they turned sixteen and could legally quit school.

We sarcastically referred to these guys as “greasers,” but we all knew better than to mess with them. Like the characters in *The Amboy Dukes*, they had slicked back D. A.’s and wore the same clothes each day; black motorcycle jackets with upturned collars, tight black tee shirts with cigarette packs rolled up in the sleeves, Garrison belts and dungarees, or pegged pants with white stitches running down the sides, and black “shit kickers” (steel-toed boots with straps and buckles).

The girls often came to school with curlers in their hair. They wore breast-hugging black sweaters, tight black wool skirts with slits down the side, black nylons with seams running down the back, and open-toed flats. Some had black cloth jackets with

club names, like “Pink Pussycats” embroidered on the back. Most of them smoked cigarettes and chewed gum.

The greasers and their “gun moll” girlfriends commandeered the back of the bus, their feet up on the seat backs, smoking and cursing loudly enough for everyone to hear.

Up front were the guys in the Belle Harbor-Neponsit clique (Louie Mandel, Freddy Klein, Allen Nathanson, and Frank Pearlman), who I thought of as over-privileged Archies and Reggies. They preened and held court with their Betty and Veronica girlfriends.

The four guys were clean-cut preppies—future class presidents and school leaders. All of them had VO-5-styled crew cuts, and they wore blue oxford button-downs, khaki pants, and scuffed white bucks. Their companions—would-be cheerleaders, baton twirlers and boosters—were well-scrubbed, pony-tailed girls dressed in starchy white blouses, plaid, pleated skirts, and white bobby-sox, with either penny loafers or saddle shoes.

A row behind them was another group of four guys who I thought of as the “genteel greasers.” All of them went to my grade school, and none were aspiring athletes, big brains, social movers, or even hard-core greasers. Yet, they had an aura about them.

Their leader was Manny Angell—a ruggedly handsome Sephardic Jew, whose father was rumored to be in the Jewish Mafia. Manny was tall, lean and broad shouldered with a chiseled profile and a thick mane of dark, unruly hair. He had a brooding insolence reminiscent of a young Marlon Brando, or of the James Dean character in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

Manny’s comrades—Stuie Issacs, Mark Goldman, and Larry Ramis—were always in some kind of trouble. The buzz back in sixth grade was that Manny and Stuie had already been to reform school. They’d got caught hot-wiring stolen cars and taking them for joy rides in the Riis Park parking lot. I’d also heard that they all smoked reefer, and that Mark and Larry drag-raced their souped-up Harley’s. But the most titillating rumors were the ones about Manny and Stuie “going all the way” with

the rich high school girls from the Five Towns—an enclave of gated villages just across the county line.

On the school bus, these four had an air of defiance that bought them a kind of unspoken respect. The greasers, I noticed, never taunted them like they did everyone else. And the pretty, popular girls would steal furtive glances at them when the guys in the clique weren't looking.

Sandwiched in between the preppies, genteel greasers, and the real greasers, were the four losers and social outcasts. Poor Eli Rubinstein and Bernard Schoenberg still had Vitalis-trained hair and wore blue or brown gabardine pants and Buster Brown shoes. The girls, Stephanie Sterner and Francine Leibler, were overweight and had oily skin and acne. They wore gray felt poodle skirts to school. At dances and make-out parties, they'd always end up doing the Lindy Hop with each other.

The greasers taunted the two guys unmercifully, sometimes called them "kikes," even "dirty Jews." I felt sorry for those four. And I sometimes wanted to intervene—to stand up for them. Yet, like everyone else who didn't want to be typecast as a loser, I kept my distance from them.

Where, I wondered, did I belong in this deviant hierarchy?



At thirteen, I was a short, chubby kid, *persona non-gratis* with the clique, as well as with Elaine Rosen, Alice Hirsch, Sandy Kaufman, and Linda Firestone, the popular girls they hung out with.

Ambivalent as I felt about them, I still held out hope that those guys would someday accept me into the group. And so, I sat right behind them on the bus, listened in on their conversations, and tried to put in my two cents worth every so often. Yet, no one went out of his way to invite me to the Friday night make-out parties or the after school pick-up basketball games in Frank Pearlman's driveway.

Sure, the snubs were painful, but the more indifferent they

acted toward me, the more determined I was to court their approval. Whenever I asked myself why I was so desperate for their attention, all I had to do was look at the circle of girls (and guys) who were also vying for their approval.

Just what would it take, I wondered, to wedge my way into that crowd?

### *Temple Beth El Dance*

By the middle of my first term of junior high, I was still having no success getting the guys in the clique to notice me. Maybe I'd get their attention if I could catch the interest of one of the popular girls in their entourage.

I'd had a crush on Elaine Rosen since back in fifth grade. And so did everyone else. She was slender, about my height, with dimples and sandy blonde hair that curled in ringlets around her ears. The guys in the clique, naturally, fawned all over her.

Normally, I wouldn't even think about approaching someone who was so far out of my league. And on top of that, like the other three girls she hung out with, Elaine had the reputation of being stuck up and aloof. But in fifth grade, for reasons I couldn't immediately understand, Elaine asked me to help her write a book report on *The Yearling*. I took the bait. I was so surprised I couldn't say yes fast enough. Her request flattered me so much that I volunteered to write the book report myself. And she didn't bother to protest.

The book report got an A, and I was bitterly disappointed that all she said was a polite "Thank you." She couldn't get away from me fast enough.

Clearly, I'd misread her signals. It was as if she'd planned the whole scenario right from the beginning.

But several days later, Elaine threw me a bone. She made it a point to wave or say hello to me before class or at recess. It was just enough to build some hope on.

You'd have thought I might have learned my lesson. But it's

strange what you'll do when you're so desperate for attention. Elaine was the only popular girl who'd so much as even spoken to me.



I was always self-conscious and shy at social events—particularly, dances, mixers, and make-out parties. So much so that I rarely attended them. But this time, I'd risk it and attend the first neighborhood dance. I'd already decided that I was going to ask Elaine Rosen to dance. If she said yes, it would boost my stock with the guys in the clique. If she turned me down, at least I'd had the guts to try.

Temple Beth El mixers were typical of most neighborhood dances. The guys—even the clique—stood around on one side of the synagogue's rec room, while the popular girls clustered on the other side. The boys shuffled their feet, nervously laughing, telling jokes, and making snide comments about the girls. The girls, in turn, giggled and pointed across the dance floor at the boys.

That night, I stood off to the side rehearsing what I'd say to Elaine. She was standing with Alice Hirsch, another of the popular girls who'd never acknowledged me. I could feel the lump in my throat tighten as I walked across the room. Real or imagined, I felt that every eye in the room was on me—especially the guys in the clique. I thought about chickening out. But I was already half way across the rec room floor when Alice spotted me first. She signaled to Elaine with a slight tilt of her head.

Just as I blurted out "Would you like to dan . . ." Elaine cut me off. "Sorry, but thanks anyway," she said. Just like that. No excuses, no explanations. Why had I expected any other kind of response?

Then, she abruptly turned back toward Alice, and both of them started to giggle. I trudged back to the boy's side of the gym. I didn't dare pick up my head for fear of having to confront all those laughing faces. My scalp tingled, my legs felt wobbly, and

my face was flushed. The last time I felt so mortified was when I threw up in kindergarten, after our teacher, Mrs. Buckley, had publicly criticized my drawings.

Before I'd even made it back to the boys' side, I heard Alice say—loudly enough for all the others to hear—"I'd never dance with him; he's too short. Besides, he hangs around with those other losers. At recess, all they ever talk about is stupid baseball."

I swallowed hard and tried not to cry. My legs felt so heavy. I wondered if I had enough strength to make it to the entrance. Knees shaking, I skulked out of the rec room and headed straight home. I crawled into bed without saying good night to anyone. I was too numb with humiliation to even take off my clothes.

The next day, I ducked around stairwells and hid in dark corners of the hallway. I kept my head down during class, at lunch, and at recess. I even avoided Peter and Mike, my two recess cronies. Every two minutes, it seemed, I checked my watch. By three o'clock, I couldn't wait to get the hell out of there.



I had to admit that Alice's cruel remark did have some truth to it. Mike Rubin and Peter Schwartz, the two social outcasts I hung out with, spent most of our time at recess talking about baseball.

And it's true that baseball had been my safe haven ever since fifth grade. Except for reading books, baseball was the only thing that made me feel knowledgeable and secure.

So I ran home, grabbed a broomstick out of the closet, put on my Converse high-tops and old torn corduroys and raced down to Casey's Lot—a weed-choked, rock-strewn open field on the corner of 129th and Beach Channel Drive. As I swatted handfuls of stones into Jamaica Bay, I pretended I was Duke Snider, then Jackie Robinson, then Gil Hodges. It was a familiar ritual—a world I retreated to whenever I needed to escape from

disappointments at home or in school.

I kept it up until the broom handle was covered with nicks and cuts, and my palms had sprouted blood blisters. And with each swing of the broom handle, a nagging voice inside me kept saying, "I'll show them. Someday, they'll all be paying a half-a-buck to watch me play."

### *Junior High Yearbook*

As far back as I could remember, I idolized writers the same way I worshipped professional baseball players. They were Olympian gods whose powers sprang from some magical source that would, I thought, always remain elusive to me. But it didn't stop me from wanting to write.

In eighth grade, the only class I looked forward to was Language Arts. My teacher, Mr. Aaron, was always praising my book reports and papers, which only made me want to work harder to please him. When he gave my *Huck Finn* paper back, he handed me a hardcover novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*.

"If you liked Huck," he told me, "you'll really get on with this Holden Caulfield character."



Holden quickly became my new role model. He could articulate my own deepest yearnings. I, in turn, understood his angst and self-imposed isolation, identified with his compassion for all the losers and outcasts, and shared his disdain for the "phonies." For weeks, I went around imitating the hip, witty way he talked. I even wrote an unmailed fan letter to J.D. Salinger.

So for my Language Arts term project, I wrote a series of Holden Caulfield knock-offs—short sketches that plumbed my deepest fears and secret prejudices. I wrote about the dark thoughts I harbored toward teachers, my family, and myself. But I reserved my nastiest barbs and diatribes for classmates,

especially the clique and the popular girls.

Mr. Aaron encouraged me to show the sketches to the school yearbook editors. I was flattered, but I wasn't sure I could show anything this personal to strangers. Suppose they hated it? Worse yet, what if they wanted to publish it? Then everyone would know what I was thinking.



I'd always been curious about Rita Caselli and Sarah Broomfield, the yearbook's editors. I'd observed them in the halls and in the cafeteria talking to their Bohemian friends. Both were eighth graders who looked older and acted far more aloof and sophisticated than any of the other girls. Both had dark, braided long hair, and they dressed like identical twins: loose-fitting black cable-knit sweaters, black wool scarves that hung down to their knees, baggy black skirts, black socks, and either high, black boots or Indian moccasins. Their faces were pale and washed-out looking. And they never wore make-up or lipstick. They always looked like they'd stayed out all night at some Greenwich Village jazz club, smoking reefer and drinking hard whiskey. I could imagine them five years from now studying literature or philosophy at Mount Holyoke, Smith, or Radcliff—or any of the other exclusive “Seven Sisters” colleges.

Whenever I'd see them in the cafeteria, they'd be hanging out with a small entourage of eighth grade girls who looked and dressed just like they did. I'd sometimes eavesdrop while they spoke in hushed, serious tones about the books they were reading and the cool musicians who were “gigging down in the Village.” I knew I wasn't “hip” enough for this crowd. Yet these two girls were the only ones I'd encountered in seven years of school who even talked about books and writers. For a moment, I entertained the fantasy that we were kindred spirits—and so, perhaps they might even like my sketches. But I couldn't just barge in on them and say, “My teacher, Mr. Aaron, told me to give these to you.”

To find out, then, what I was up against, I made a scouting trip to the yearbook's office.



The "office" was at the far end of the third floor, right next to the fire escape. The room was a converted supply closet that reeked of stale cigarette smoke, Clorox, and coffee grinds.

For all its grunginess, the place had kind of musty old bookstore charm about it. The chipped, peeling walls were covered with black and white posters of writers from the 20s and 30s, like Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Steinbeck.

When I peeked through the half-opened door, the two girls had their backs to me. They were leaning over a scratched oak desk that was strewn with sheets of wrinkled, typewritten pages. Both were chain-smoking and sipping coffee as they passed the pages back and forth. I could hear faint muted strains of music coming from a radio. It sounded like the jazz—Miles Davis, Coltrane, Monk—that I listened to on the Jazzbo Collins show late at night.

I felt a sharp pang in my chest. I pictured myself sitting with Rita and Sarah at some imagined jazz club in the West Village, smoking, talking about our favorite books and writers, and intermittently downing shots of Scotch.

After a week of procrastination and worry, I finally put my sketches in a brown manila envelope and wrote my name and homeroom class on the front. Then I held onto the envelope for two more days. On a Friday afternoon when I knew everyone would be gone, I slid the envelope under the office door. As soon as it left my hand, I immediately wanted to take it back. I even tried to slide my hand under the door crack before giving up.

I fretted for days over what they'd think of my writing. Then one morning during homeroom, a hall monitor handed me a coffee-stained envelope. The stains had blurred all but my last name, and I could barely make out the homeroom number. I

instinctively knew it was bad news. Why else would they be sending back the envelope? My ears burned and my heart was thumping so loudly that I was sure everyone could hear it. I couldn't bring myself to open the envelope.

I thought about it all morning until I couldn't stand the tension any longer. In fourth period Social Studies, I asked for a bathroom pass and ducked beneath a staircase where no one could see me. All I could hope for was a polite rejection. Or maybe some suggestions on how to improve the writing. I ripped the envelope open and inside was a handwritten note. Two short sentences: "We don't accept work like this. Besides, it isn't typed." It was signed "the Editors."

My knees began to shake. I read those heartless comments over and over again. What did they mean by "work like this"? I felt a momentary stab of anger. It was all Mr. Aaron's fault. Why did he subject me to this? When the anger passed, I began to blame myself. I should have known better. I hadn't felt so shamed since the seventh grade dance.

All afternoon, I walked around in a stupor. In the halls, I avoided eye contact with everyone. On the bus ride home, I sat alone and buried my head in a book. The rejection stung so much that finally I couldn't keep it to myself. I blurted it out to my parents at dinner.

"You took a chance and it didn't work out," my father said. "You'll bounce back."

Easy for him to say. I wish I had his resilience.

My mother felt sorry for me—which was, of course, the sympathy I was looking for. She suggested I talk to Mr. Aaron. Maybe he could say something to the two editors. It was good of her to take my setback to heart. But the last thing I wanted was to give those two harpies the satisfaction of knowing how I felt.



For the next few weeks, I'd imagine them in that broom

closet, laughing and making fun of my writing. When I passed them in the halls, I couldn't bear to look either one in the eye. Even if I did have the balls to stare them down, they wouldn't have had the slightest idea who I was.

What's worse, I wondered, being rejected or being invisible? In two years of junior high, those seemed to be my only two options.

So, I turned my attention to making the summer V.F.W. baseball team. Fueled by the two editors' rejection, and still driven to prove myself to the clique and their arrogant girlfriends, all that summer it seemed as if I was on an urgent mission. If I didn't play for the V.F.W. team, there was virtually no chance of making the high school varsity—my obsessive dream since the seventh grade dance.

### *Pitcher Wannabe*

At thirteen, I was what baseball coaches called a "shlepper"—a slightly awkward but not entirely inept athlete. I knew I'd never be one of the top baseball players. I'd seen a lot of games, and I could spot the good ones in an instant. They have an effortless grace, an ease and fluidity that infuse every gesture. I'd never have that kind of raw ability. Still, I was driven to pitch.



That summer, I literally taught myself to pitch. I read dozens of how-to books and I scrutinized the mechanics and flaws of the major league hitters I watched on TV and in person. On home Saturdays, I went to Ebbets Field and sat directly behind the plate—the best angle for studying the Dodger pitchers' habits and delivery. And I took pages and pages of notes.

Preacher Roe was tall and lanky, all arms and legs. He had a big sweeping motion and high leg kick that shielded the ball from the batter's line of vision. Don Newcombe was built like

a lumberjack. He had a ninety mile-an-hour fastball, and a perpetual scowl designed to intimidate opposing hitters.

Still, Carl Erskine was the pitcher I identified with most. He had a slender build—narrow shoulders and a tapered waist. He looked more like a distance runner than a pitcher. But he threw a sneaky fastball and a wicked overhand sinker that induced hitters to beat the ball into the ground. I noticed too that he threw all his pitches, including the change-up, with the same motion. What made him so effective was that the hitters couldn't pick up the ball's rotation until it was right on top of them.

Moreover, I liked his cunning and resilience. In a *Sporting News* interview, an opposing manager had said that unless you got to him right away, you were in for long day. But even when he got roughed in the early innings, I noticed that Erskine rarely lost his composure. Usually, he'd settle down by the third inning. Just like the article said, he'd get stronger as the game went on. That summer, I studied him more carefully than the others.



There were moments that summer when pitching seemed to come naturally to me. If I concentrated hard enough, I could throw strikes, change speeds, and make the ball sink or break sharply away from the batter. I even had a knack for sizing up hitters' weaknesses. I could tell what a batter's blind spots were just by studying his habits and mannerisms.

As a pitcher, my inhibitions and self-doubts seemed to dissolve. Whenever I was out on the mound, I felt as self-assured as I did when I was sitting in the stands at Ebbets Field, studying pitchers' mechanics and explaining the ins and outs of the game to my cronies, Mike and Peter.

When I pitched, every inning and every batter was a challenge. On the mound, all of my senses were open. I could feel the warm breeze on my cheeks, hear the muffled noise of the crowd, my teammates' chatter, and the other team's barbs. None of it distracted me. In fact, it made me bear down harder.

Even the little gestures and rituals felt natural; tossing the spongy resin bag nonchalantly to the ground and watching the swirl of dust kick up, or inhaling a baseball's pungent scent, rubbing up its smooth, slick surface, wrapping my thumb, index, and middle fingers around the ball's raised seams, searching for the right grip on the curve, fastball, sinker, or change-up. Most of all, I relished the cat and mouse game that went on between pitcher and hitter—me deciding what pitches to throw, the hitter trying to guess.



I didn't throw hard enough to have what coaches call a "live arm." To build my strength and endurance, each morning I got up early and ran on the beach—wearing army boots and a rubber jacket. During the day, I pedaled my bike even harder when I delivered prescriptions. After work, I'd go down into our cool, damp cellar and lift weights.

I soon began to think of myself as a pitcher. In emulation of the big leaguers, I'd walk around the neighborhood, even on the hottest days, wearing a satin baseball jacket draped across my right shoulder. Whenever anyone asked me about it, I'd explain that it was to keep my pitching arm warm between games.

In the evenings, I set up a regular practice routine. First, I cut a twelve-inch hole (the size of home plate) in a bed sheet, and hung it on the backyard clothesline. Then every night until it got dark, I threw hundreds of rubber-covered baseballs at the target. I got those balls by trading my Topps and Bowman bubble gum cards with Arnold Berkowitz, who worked at the local batting range.

By mid-July, I could throw four out of every five pitches through the bed sheet hole. By the end of the summer, I could throw three of five with a blindfold on. Some evenings, my brother, Alan, stood in front of the garage door with a bat in his hand while I pitched shaved tennis balls to him. By trimming the ball's fuzz, you could make it break and dip crazily. The more I

worked at pitching, the more instinctive it felt. By mid-summer, it was as natural to me as reading a book.

I was convinced that with the right guidance and coaching, I could get a lot better at this.

Parts of this essay appeared in a different form in *Still Pitching: A Memoir*. Michigan State University Press, 2003.

## KNEADING BREAD EVERY SATURDAY

Roxana Cazan

Grandmother kneads bread early on Saturdays,  
And takes some to church  
For the Eucharist Father Necula drones the next morning.  
Through the village, the church bells clank  
Like a tardive train, waking the children up.  
They dingdong in the air long  
After the silence spreads over her shoulders.

In her wooden basin  
Carved irregularly in the section of a log,  
She adds flour and water, some yeast to raise the dough  
Like she did with progenies: hers, mother's...  
Her fingers break the clumps—  
Crippled serpents around Eve's ankle;  
They squirm, twist, wriggle, going up then deep  
Into the white clay of flour, like oak roots  
Along a trail of houses.

She squeezes the dough as if to silence Grandpa's cussing,  
As if to forget about tax raises,  
Or potato digging,  
Or abominable sun,  
Her sleeves rolled up her arms  
Where light spills along throbbing veins.

Sometimes she seems to pull our ears, or pinch us,  
Or tickle our armpits when she kneads,  
As if she sees our faces in the pale mixture,  
Our cheeky smirks  
When we descend from the old hayloft—  
Cows lowing warmly below—  
In the barn where ants chew slowly at its walls.

She's so beautiful and so childish  
 With her Play-Doh,  
 With her funny grunts and frowns just like in her sleep:  
 A crinkled forehead  
 And withered skin around her eyes,  
 Tracing the circles of Saturn,  
 Remain with her after the kneading is done,  
 When she goes to bed in the morning, the next one,  
 When her hands hurt, but she doesn't complain,  
 At least not in front of the children.

## THE LAST TASMANIAN

Sarah Klenbort

*Note to the reader: Twelve thousand years ago the land bridge that connected Tasmania to mainland Australia was covered by water. As a result the Aborigines of Tasmania developed differently from their ancestors on the mainland—they spoke their own language, had distinguishing physical characteristics, and, in short, were considered a separate race. The end of the eighteenth century brought English settlers to Tasmania, who felt that this island, surrounded by rugged coastline and rough seas, was the ideal place for a penal colony. Soon after the English and their convicts began arriving in Tasmania, Aborigines began to die. Some died from diseases brought by settlers; others were killed in conflicts as they tried to hold onto their land. Records show that often Tasmanians were simply shot dead by whites. As a result, the entire population of Aboriginal Tasmanians was killed just eighty years after the British settlers arrived. The last Tasmanian Aboriginal, a woman named Truganinni, died in 1876. What follows is her story, an account of the ghost of Truganinni.*

I am restless, unsatisfied. Lying on a cushioned sofa in a pink man's house, I dangle one weightless leg off the edge and think: in life I would've *killed* for this. One grows bored quickly in eternity. Every sofa feels the same. Every pink man's living room: identical. The same drawn curtains reveal the same bay window, looking out on the same shiny automobile.

Drifting into the pink man's bedroom, I watch him in his pink slumber. His mouth is open and one arm's flung carelessly over the woman next to him. A pink breast peeks out of the covers, reminding me that I, too, once had breasts that were full and round and weighty.

What pink worlds do they dream of? Children's soccer matches—pink kiddies chasing a ball down a field. Or office parties, secretaries in too much make-up drinking prickly rum and Coca-Cola. Maybe they dream of shoes, the sexy steady knock, knock, knock of high-heeled shoes on hardwood floors.

I want to sneak inside their heads, slip inside their dreams as I

slip into their houses, but this is one luxury I am not afforded.

Pacing without a sound from bed to window and back again, I listen to their rhythmic breaths. A crow caws outside, sounding like a sick cat or a baby. A crinkled Post-It note lies discarded on the windowsill: *toilet paper, bananas, razors, margarine*.

I want to *do* something, make something happen. The world changes all around me and I stay just the same.

Floating into the child's room, I watch the pink baby girl dream and think of doing something cruel. I place my old woman hands just above her soft pink neck and *squeeze* with all my might. Nothing. Calloused brown fingers slip through flesh like blades of grass slicing the breeze. I imagine the texture of this baby's neck; I've forgotten what flesh feels like. I imagine her large shrill scream—if only I could make her scream, crush that pink flesh. The baby gurgles, startling me; I jump back and remove my hands, ashamed of my thoughts and my cruel intentions.

The pink man reckons we're all sinners, even that lump of pink flesh in the cradle; the pink man has some funny ideas.

Passing through glass patio doors, I stand on the balcony that overlooks the city. Outside the wind has picked up. I can't feel wind but I can see its effects: trees shiver; a child's plastic toy blows across the lawn. Wind goes through me. I am alone.

The wind seems different tonight, looks as if it's carrying something. I try to see what this is but there are only trees swaying and that damned crow cawing, a low, guttural call now, like an old man dying.

Leaping off the balcony, I glide up the hill, against the wind. I pass planted citrus trees and then I see it. Could it be? Yes, the shape of another soul—a surprise. Mount Stuart is my haunt.

"Hello," I say.

"Hello?" the voice is timid, hesitant. "Can . . . you . . . see me?"

"Of course," I laugh. The newly dead are so refreshing. Like children, they are shy and curious. This one's pink and bald and clueless. "Welcome," I say.

"Who are you?" he whispers. As if someone could hear us.

"Truganinni."

He stares at me.

"You know," I say, "the last full-blooded Aboriginal Tasmanian. You read about me in school . . ."

"My God, you're . . ."

"Dead," I say, "like you."

I watch him watch himself. He slowly lifts a ghostly arm, studies it and puts it down. He walks through a lemon tree. "Ha ha!" he says, "Tee hee!" I don't tell him how fast he'll tire of this game, how soon he'll long to slap his hand against rough bark and *feel* the sting of it. In a few days or weeks or years—it's all the same now—he'll wrack his brain to remember what bark felt like.

"I *do* remember," he says, "your photograph . . . you look different. Younger."

"Thank you," I say, for vanity survives old age and even death. "I hate that picture," I tell him. "I look so proud, defiant, *old*. We had to sit so still, you see?"

"Um," he says, jumping through the lemon tree.

"It used to be you could see my skeleton, hanging, in the museum, *The Last Tasmanian*." This stills him. "Times have changed and so has my story."

"What is your story again? It's been awhile. I forget."

"Which version? I'm still waiting for the movie." I smile.

The pink soul looks confused.

"Okay," I say, "all right. This much is true: I tried to save my people. There was a pink Christian man who helped, Robinson—a friend, a lover . . ."

"Pink?"

"Like you. You say white but look at you."

He looks at the skin on his hands as if for the first time.

"Robinson convinced me to follow the pink man's rules. We went to that island the pink man gave us—a cold, windy place. It stunk of death before we even started dying. We had to go. Robinson said it was the only way. The pink men hated us, were

shooting us dead like kangaroos. I believed my pink Christian friend, and I convinced the others to follow. I even prayed to the pink man's bloody God. They all died there, on Flinders. Even though Robinson told us Flinders Island was the only way. He had the best intentions."

"I'm sorry," he says and shakes his head.

"This much is also true: I watched my mother stabbed to death by sealers; blood spurted from her heart like a tiny fountain. My father was murdered too, but I didn't see. My sister: raped, killed by a pink man. And my fiancé." I pause. "Paraweenaa. He swam out to get me one day. I was on a boat with two pink men, whalers—I know what you're thinking; I know what they said about me but I was young and curious. Paraweenaa thought I was in danger; he swam out to rescue me. But it was too far and he was not a strong swimmer. When he grabbed onto the pink man's boat, they chopped his hands off at the wrists. Paraweenaa drowned in purple water—you should've seen the color. His dead hands gripped the boat."

"Jesus," he says.

"And they say we were brutal."

A touch of pink man's guilt flashes cross his dead face. After a while, he asks, "Are there others? Like you?"

"A few," I say. "Mostly they're out west. They prefer the wilderness. It's only me that likes it urban. I like to slip through the pink man's picket fence, glide through his bolted door. I like to read his books—there's a lot of time. You'll see. I like to sit and listen to his modern noises: the rush of water through a tap, the tick, tick, tick of a gas burner lighting, the mechanical birdcall of the internet connecting."

The dead soul looks away.

"I don't fit in," I say. "It's been so long since I've talked to anyone, since I've told my story: I have to tell it or it stops being real. "I don't fit in with my people or with yours. It's because I'm half pink myself. Not in color . . ."

"Between worlds," he says.

Maybe he's not so clueless.

“What . . . what about the mainland? Have you been there? Victoria, New South Wales . . . Darwin! Have you been to Darwin, to see your cousins there?”

“Cousins? Well, it’s only been 12,000 years.” Why does the pink man think we’re all the same?

I watch him squirm inside his new dead soul.

“Goodbye,” I say and leave before he has a chance to leave me first.

“W-w-w-wait! I have to ask . . .”

I don’t wait. I float up Mount Stuart Road feeling angry and uneasy.

I fly straight up the tarmac road that overlooks the city. I pass square houses and square balconies—the pink man likes his squares. Hedges mark square lots of land. Roses peek through picket fences (nature prefers a circle). But even the pink man’s flowers have their spikes.

The pink man likes his barbs. His drink—we stole a bottle once when I was still alive, took it from the cold box and drank it down fast—it was filled with a thousand tiny spikes that prickled my tongue and throat. The drink made me warm and easy and then it made me sleep. When I woke, one of the spikes had grown large and lodged itself between my brow and skull.

The pink man likes his lines. Columns of words on a page, rows of grapevines up a hill, a strip of tarmac cross a harbor. I reckon it’s the lines that killed us. Not his guns or spikes, not all his fancy words, not even his disease. It was the borders, the squares: we could never get used to four walls. (At Flinders, we didn’t stay in the houses they had us build for ourselves. We sat on the beach instead and stared back at our homeland: it was close enough for us to see and far enough away for us never to get back. Distance made the mountains look soft and blue.)

The pink man likes to build. He likes his lights and so do I. At night they sparkle like sunlight on the sea, like stars in the sky only brighter, closer. At the top of Mount Stuart I look down at the city, such a beautiful city, and yet I want to crush it, plunge the pink man into darkness. I float around the top of

Mount Stuart until silhouettes of mountains appear with the dawn. They look more like hills today. I hate it when the pink man's right.

I make the crossing at night. I've always preferred the spirit who governs the night to the spirit who governs the day. Preledee—even his name is pretty, boring, bland—you can see right through him. Wrangiowrapper is the spirit of the dark and he's as infinite as I am. I float across waves lit only by the moon, over the sea the pink man calls Bass Straight—the pink man likes to name. We were satisfied with ocean. (Then again, we were satisfied with grease and charcoal smeared on skin to keep us warm in winter.)

The water is strangely calm. I look forward to getting there, to getting somewhere, to seeing these cousins of twelve thousand years ago. I wonder if they'll feel my presence.

It's been one hundred twenty-nine years since I was alive and even longer since I saw my mother, but it's her I think of now, as I glide across the sea. I remember her dark darting eyes, formed by fear. The pink man came when she was just a baby. Her family hid from him at first, watched him from behind the trees. *We should never have come out from the trees*, she used to say. I remember the jawbone that hung around my mother's neck. It was the bone of her sister, who'd died before I was born. The pink man called this sacrilegious and so did I, until they killed my mother and we buried her, *all* of her. I wanted to hold onto one small part of her, carry her with me like she carried her sister. She didn't carry much; they didn't. They traveled with the seasons and they traveled light. They went north for seals in autumn and south for swan eggs in spring. They carried a basket and a digger. They carried water, and around their necks, close to their breasts, they carried pieces of the dead, whose names were never mentioned.

I arrive at daybreak and rest—the dead get tired too, though we can never sleep. I stop and watch the waves. They rise up blue and clap down white against the beach.

Floating east, beach turns to cliffs, then bush, then beach again. I don't see any footprints. I've heard about the vast distances here but it's different to *see* it for yourself. Everything is bigger, even the kangaroos. Otherwise, it's much the same, there's just more of it. An echidna wobbles forward, his pointy snout scrounging in the dirt. Two seagulls chase each other across the sky. Black and white terns peck at wet sand. A white-bellied sea eagle follows me, so close I can hear the rustle of his great wings, and I think that he *must* sense my presence. It feels so good to be noticed until he flies off, out to sea, and I'm alone again.

Dusk arrives and I look for a place to rest. I find the perfect spot: a cliff that overlooks the sea. Perching on the ledge, I listen to the waves break below. It's a clear night and the moon outshines the stars again.

"Hey," I hear a squeaky voice say. "That's *my* seat, *thank* you."

A pink teenage ghost of a girl with long, white, wild hair floats in front of me over the ocean.

Her arms are crossed against a flat chest; her white hair blows out and all around her. "I'd appreciate it if you'd *move*. Pul-*ease*. I've been sitting here for, like, *seven years*."

Isn't it just like the pink to be as possessive in death as they were in life? "I'm sorry," I say and move.

She sits, then, like a princess, twirling a strand of long white hair. Her skin is almost as fair as the hair on her head. She looks thirteen.

"Where are you from?" I ask.

"Coober Pedy, South Australia. You?"

"Tasmania. I've just arrived . . ."

"There are plenty of other cliffs down that way," she points a skinny ashen finger east, "but none as nice as this. . . . *Look!*" She shouts, "A shooting star!" A light falls quickly cross the stars.

"Wish, wish, make a wish! Damn. They always go too fast. Usually I have a wish ready but you distracted me. Where are you from again? You don't *look* Australian."

"Tasmania. I'm Aboriginal."

“Oh, but I thought you were all *dead*.”

“We are.” We look at one another, the girl and I. She smirks, I smile and then we laugh. Deep, dead-belly laughs. We laugh at ourselves and our predicament.

“I was the last one,” I say.

“What a claim to fame!”

We laugh again and then there’s silence. “Tell me, girl,” I say. “Do you have a wish ready now?”

“Wishes are stupid,” she says and looks out at the blank, black ocean.

I leave the white-haired girl staring out to sea, and travel to the city.

Melbourne’s all trams and traffic jams, restaurants and coffee shops. Melbourne is more suits than I have ever seen—not in Hobart, not anywhere. I stand at the Flinders Street intersection, next to the big yellow building they call historical. It’s forty years younger than I am. Early evening comes; pink people push past one another. Of course the pink man’s not just pink anymore—he’s Chinese and Korean, Indian, Nigerian—he’s pink all the same. Pink’s not a color; it’s a state of being.

I float up and down the blocks: William Street and King Street, Leicester Street and Peel. A tram goes through me; I feel nothing.

All the time I’m looking for someone with skin like mine. When I finally see a brown man, he’s dressed just like the pink: belly bulging over belt, a pink tie strangling his neck. Floating next to him—he walks fast—I try to listen for his steps but there are so many steps around us that I can’t distinguish his from all the rest. I go in front of him, beside him. I scream a voiceless scream into his left ear. His mind is somewhere else, on a conference call at work, perhaps, or what he’ll have for dinner. I let him go, disappear inside the big yellow building. I sit on top of the train station and watch the rest of the businessmen and women pass by. Then I watch drunken backpackers come out and stumble from one pub to the next. Shoulders up against

the cold, they shiver inside their T-shirts. I miss being cold.

That night I fly north.

Sydney's Harbor is a children's picture book: the Opera House, the Harbor Bridge, the Manly Ferry and its tail of whitewater. Painted Aboriginals on Circular Quay don't look real.

I float up George Street with the morning rush, past the souvenir shops with singing stuffed koalas at *low, low prices!!!* When I arrive at that square stone building they call Town Hall, I spot them: five brown men in beards and blankets. They sit outside the main train station asking for money from passersby: busy businessmen, plump tourists, foreign students. The office-goer glares; the tourist gives a piteous glance; the student scuttles off to class.

I sit with them while they drink from brown bottles. Together we watch the world go by without us. "But you are still *alive!*" I shout, and either they don't hear or they pay no attention. As the morning wears on, my companions get progressively drunk. They begin to slur their words, which pick up a nasty tone. Someone starts an argument about ten dollars, *you owe me!* He shouts. Voices rise. Pink people scatter. A bottle is broken and I'm grateful for flight. As I float up and over them, I hear a howl and look down in time to see a sliver of glass skim a cheek and a thick drop of blood fall to the concrete. I don't miss blood.

Gliding over the postcard city, I pass crowded suburbs and white beaches. I speed up. I'm looking for something, but I don't know what it is.

When I finally stop, it's just before the other end of this vast continent.

The north is heavy with sun. Heat so strong I can *see* it. Heat so hot and dry, it sparks fires in the bush and sends small critters scattering. It warms the largest water hole. It keeps things slow. I watch people move through the long day, barefoot and sluggish. They look like how I feel. Brown people are everywhere here. They are strange and yet familiar. I feel both at home and very

far away.

Drifting above Kakadu, I see crocodiles baking in the sun. The river looks like a giant snake out of a story from my childhood. The bush is brown and stretches on for miles. Crackling dry, it waits for the next fire. If I were alive, I'd feel thirsty just looking at it.

Then I see the strangest sight: a group of pink people in line, hunched over, holding spears. They're following a brown woman through the bush.

Although I know that it's not possible, it looks like they are *stalking* her. It looks as if they're going to throw their spears at her back. Hunting her the same way we were hunted, one hundred fifty years ago. I go closer. My invisible heart pounds. The pink people are sweaty and smeared white with sunscreen. They have hats on their heads and cameras round their necks.

Then I see. The brown woman in front is also carrying a spear. Up ahead is a wallaby. She turns to the pink man behind her and whispers something. The pink man awkwardly throws his spear; it wobbles through the air. Surprisingly, it hits the wallaby, just above its tail. The beast lets out a terrible screech, echoed by a pink woman in the line. The wallaby tries to jump away and the brown woman hurls her spear, killing it on the spot.

The pink woman cries.

The pink man takes a picture.

The brown woman moves towards the dead wallaby.

Sniveling now, the pink woman wipes her nose, and I hear her husband say, "But you *wanted* the Hunting and Gathering Tour, Love."

The trip home is quicker. I don't stop. I fly right over the red center, over deserts and mines. When I get home, my mountains look like mountains again. I am tired but the tiredness feels different, light.

Floating up Mount Stuart Road, a voice startles me. "Truganinni."

I turn to see the not-so-newly-dead man and his bald

translucent head.

"You," I say. His blue eyes look gray.

"I'm homesick."

"I know."

"I want to go back."

"You can't."

Returning to my favorite pink man's house, I curl up on his sofa and listen to the tick tick tick of his Ikea clock. For the first time in 130 years, I fall asleep and dream of pink children rising in the morning, coming out of their bedrooms, climbing with their sock feet onto the couch, on top of me. I am invisible; I am always here.

## AFTER THE ELECTION

Sean Thomas Dougherty

*your house was bread*

*Larry Levis*

what book is opened what hand-drawn pictures of saints what  
humble shrouds ruby'd in the earth's flooded grief there in dog-  
hearted exile let the roses sweep exhausted on the ground at the  
feet of the strikers crying for bread in the poor drizzle against  
factory windows someone is sewing the map of the world of  
what should be human with sound in the rooms of bare bulbs  
in the unkempt child's hair in the mother's gold comb in the  
music of trucks in the calling and the kiss like little trumpets  
there is a love that is thick as the breath from loaves cooking in  
a crowded kitchen where the amputees bow their heads to read  
the map that stops us from lying a new life will enter like a long  
walk through the state of ruin to love this city will celebrate 6:32  
P.M. a boy raises his bicycle in the city of what could be what  
should be he unrolls a map a red bicycle with silver rims and he  
rides past cathedrals Italian restaurants bodegas wheelchair races  
greenhouses cookie shops Tai Chi ballets in the parks where the  
jails have been turned into print shops beauty parlors bakeries  
breathe the warm bread on the kitchen table we have spread the  
map run our fingers over the avenues of lentils the boulevards of  
sangria eggplant *arroz* chutney couscous la conga in a bakery box  
in a blueberry muffin in the breaking in the bowing in a bottle  
of milk in the newspaper where the pages are blank and we lift  
our crayons with our new bodies where we draw like umbilical  
chords like kite strings the lines that lead into the never known  
mispronouncing the new words no one has yet to define this  
new gospel crossing the last eclipse this cartography we claim  
toward a new refuge this new passage rising into these houses  
of bread inside you.

## F[X] ≠ LOVE

Renée E. D'Aoust

When Rick was little, he organized the food on his plate, screaming if his grandmother served him a medley of vegetables, the colors all mixed together, orange carrots with green peas and yellow corn. Yellow was his favorite color, so he would start with the corn, painstakingly using his fork to separate out each kernel. Then he would work on the carrots, and last on the green peas, ending up with three separate and distinct circles of yellow, orange, and green. He counted each vegetable, they were from the freezer—his family never ate fresh vegetables—numbering each one as he ate, again starting with the yellow (corn), then the orange (carrots), then the green (peas). The color took precedence to the vegetable. If the final sum of each separate grouping of vegetable was even, he went to bed happy; if the number was odd, he didn't know what to feel and so felt nothing.

Later in his life, the nothing feeling turned into numbness, which Rick understood was not a feeling but a way of operating in the world that prevented disappointment. Numbness prevented chaotic medleys of emotion, most particularly with regard to women, particularly women who were not engineers.

Rick existed in a world of equations, some beautiful and complicated. Rick was an engineer. He had always wanted to be an engineer. His father had just retired; he had been a civil engineer. His grandfather had been an engineer before the distinctions were so sharp between electrical, civil, mechanical. Back then, they hadn't even thought of computer engineers. Rick remembered his first computer at Long Island City Community College. The computer filled an entire room.

His ex-wife had not been an engineer: his first mistake in judgment. She was a failed accountant: his second mistake in judgment. Before buying the rings, he had not properly calculated the probable failure of their marriage. He did not think the outcome would have been different had they stood at

an altar instead of in front of a judge. He was not superstitious. His ex-wife Gail had failed at accounting in the early nineties, long before fuzzy numbers became a viable legal defense. He realized too late Gail was too much like his mother, so he divorced her and moved her into a larger two-room house next door with a yard. He prided himself that he did the right thing. He took Gail to dinner every Sunday night with his mother and father. He called his mother, Mommy; his father, Daddy. He maintained his parents' plumbing, which was often nonsensically stressed, fixed their cars, mowed their lawn, and paid his mother's credit card bills.

He did not like a disorganized, unpredictable world, yet his small house was a mess. Now at the age of thirty-nine, he had somehow lost the ability to order things completely. Perhaps that was why he brought home this woman named Catherine, who laughed as he told her about those childhood vegetables. He looked at his house with a start.

Rick saw grime on the windows, piles of clothes on the floor, dirty dishes scattered around the computer console. He was mortified. He did not know that Catherine saw only him—that she loved him immediately, instinctively, when they were introduced by two mutual friends.

On their first date, Catherine had described her life as a dancer. "I try to use all parts of my body to create a whole," she said.

Rick had said, "Two sides of an equation make a whole."

He was 6'5", blond, muscular, and he had a good straight nose. Because of his reserve, or perhaps because of his height, he looked like a marble statue—not exactly a god but not exactly available, either. Except, unbelievably to Catherine, he was single. Available.

They completed each other.

Neither stood on formality or pretense, so they had come home together to Rick's tiny house in Medford, Long Island. He told Catherine right away that he lived uncomfortably next door to his ex-wife Gail but not too far from his job at Brookhaven

National Labs. Ten years into their marriage, he had walked in on Gail with her lover Tracy in their bed. That was the other reason he moved Gail next door. Other than that she had become his mother. Gail still needed Rick to change the oil in her car and fix her broken appliances.

Rick explained all this to Catherine. She listened. "I did the right thing," he said.

"Are you doing it now?" Catherine asked.

She looked intently at him, directly, never letting her eyes move from his gaze. It made her seem strangely other-worldly yet completely engaged with the present. Her body leaned forward to hear his words. Catherine did not have Rick's quality of standing away from life, of being reserved.

Rick was kind, and he was very good at self-rationalization. He was not good at self-reflection. Eventually, Gail's affair ended, but Rick and Gail divorced anyway. He had already bought the house next door and moved her there. From time to time, she entertained other women in her bed, but it was of no concern to Rick.

Gail still worked with numbers even though she had failed her M.B.A. She counted numbers of teddy bears sold from a business called Bears for the Soul. The bears came with a personal note handwritten by Gail. Her boss hired her because she liked the cursive quality of Gail's penmanship. Gail was not allowed to write the content of the notes. She had always wanted to run her own crafts gallery where people could come and make art—not any great art, but accessible art like magazine collages using pictures of things one wants to buy or stamp art using bought rubber stamps with hearts and stars and kitties. Like a lot of people on Long Island, Gail thought money and big cars were more important than dreams. She found the job at the teddy bear factory, which she had for twenty years before the business owner sold her bears to a man in Hong Kong who took the factory to China. Then Gail became their rep in America, and counted the numbers of bears sold per day. She entered the numbers in data fields on the computer and no longer copied

out cursive notes.

None of this was supposed to matter anymore to Rick, but he told it all to Catherine. She said, "I don't think that explains why your ex-wife still lives next door. Are you sure you're divorced?"

Rick bent over, all six feet five of his lean, muscled frame, and began rapidly picking up dirty clothes and throwing them in the corner behind one of his speakers. There was a feeling in his groin; it was definitely not numb. Something inside him was changing—rapidly and unpredictably. Catherine watched him, quietly. Rick wanted to touch her neck.

This woman was not a thing he could put into an equation. Catherine had long flowing hair and wore long flowing skirts. She knew how to listen. Even if she didn't understand the mathematical concepts that he couldn't stop telling her, she listened intently, her head tilted to the side like a bird listening to the wind. Even though he knew she didn't understand his work, Rick felt he had never been heard before—or seen—in the way he felt Catherine heard him and saw him.

His movement toward her would equal love, he thought, but there was no way to factor out love. There was no equation he knew of for love. No proof he could make except the feeling in the center of his chest. It was almost painful. The feeling, suddenly so real, so potent, could not be reduced to a number. It connected physical parts of him he had not thought previously connected: his heart and his tongue. The feeling could not be squared. It could not be made mathematical in any way. He knew this intuitively and stopped trying to explain it to himself.

Catherine had moved to New York City from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, at the age of eighteen to follow a dream of being a ballerina. She had auditioned for ballet companies but never made it. Then she discovered Isadora Duncan and dancing freely with scarves and in bare feet. She put her pointe shoes in a box in the closet. For the past twelve years, she had studied and staged Isadora Duncan's works, and taught to younger dancers the gentle, free-flowing movement, which required incredible

strength in the abdomen. She became an Isadorable. One of the few.

Sometimes, in the evening, after dancing all day, her abdomen cramped and she doubled over, unable to finish eating dinner. Catherine had learned to get down on all fours and slowly let her stomach hang out. As the cramp lessened, she lay down on the floor in a little ball, exhausted. She often woke in the same position in the morning, her body stiff and tired.

Rick watched her perform in all sorts of places—bars, galleries, theatres, city parks. “I’ll dance anywhere,” she said.

One night, she performed at the Baby Doll Bar on the Lower East Side. The walls were lined with the heads of plastic dolls. On a cement floor, in her bare feet with ten people watching, Catherine became the wind. She was so ethereal she almost seemed not to be there, but Rick felt her movement on his skin the way one feels the wind at twilight when the bright of day ends and the veil of night begins. Afterward, they walked the New York City streets for hours, talking and not talking, before riding the Long Island Rail Road for two hours to Medford and his tiny house.

That night, Catherine’s abdomen cramped again, but this time Rick plugged in a heating pad and placed it on her lower back. He covered her abdomen with the palms of his hands and spooned her body. She fell asleep in his arms. He didn’t sleep all night.

Rick wanted to dance, but the thought of letting his body go, letting his body move to some sound or sensation with Catherine in his arms struck terror into his breast. She soothed him and said, “Let me lead,” so he did. They swayed back and forth to B.B. King, the music coming out of speakers he had put together from a kit when he was eighteen. When she looked into his eyes, he felt that he found himself—his real self—inside her gaze.

They dreamed about moving to Idaho together. He would open an engineering design business. She would start a dance school. If he couldn’t open a business, he would repair electric wiring in houses. If she couldn’t teach dance, she would have

a baby.

For Rick, very gradually what had seemed intriguing about Catherine, magical, mystical, superstitious, began to be slightly irritating. He could not separate her out like vegetables on a plate. Her parts spilled over, the layers of her psyche were complicated, woven with wool and many colors and lots of pink. He started to feel that his layers were synthetic yarn at best and at worst that he might not have any layers at all. He felt a numbness returning, not in his groin, but a grey quality settling over his chest.

When Catherine started defining their union in terms of marriage and said she wanted a three-tiered wedding cake and a daughter named Isadora, Rick's breath caught. She was dreaming. He was still learning the ways of dreams—that some enter and leave without realization, that others have parts articulated but not all, that still others only remain in shapeless form, traveling with a body like hope travels through the air.

Rick didn't start to sweat, not quite. He had read about men sweating when the marriage topic came up; he thought he'd heard it called the "m" word. One try didn't stop lesser men, more hopeful men, from a second try, but he realized it would stop him.

Catherine said, "In a way, you're still married to her." She placed her hands on her hips, forming little sideways triangles interrupted by a stomach. Rick froze a little and yet still felt that numbness in his big toes.

Catherine said, "Why not follow love? Why fight your heart's desire?"

He stared at her. "What are you talking about?"

Usually then Rick would run out of the little house, escaping for a moment into fresh air, and then into the familiarity of Gail's house next door.

Catherine was left in his home. "Us," she said to herself. "I'm talking about us."

Gail had black hair, dyed, and wore red lipstick with matching red nails. She had her nails painted at the nail salon every

Saturday morning. Gail never changed the color of her red polish, and the color never looked fresh or glossy. She wasn't a glossy person.

To her ex-husband, Gail pretended about everything except his girlfriend. Gail pretended she loved his ability to write down long equations from memory, his ability to show the proof of any theorem, when really she just wanted him to change the oil in her car.

"My ex-husband does something important for the defense of our homeland," Gail told Catherine the first time they met. "What do you do?" The "ex" was formally supposed to suggest that a relationship had ended, but Gail used it as a form of ownership to suggest that a relationship continued.

If Catherine was visiting and met Gail outside, Gail turned on her heel and walked away without saying a word. If Catherine answered Rick's phone when Gail called, Gail hung up. Once Catherine waited for Rick for two hours on his front porch. Gail brought her a glass of water and said, "Are you sure he knows you're coming. He's very busy today." Catherine said, "I'm not thirsty." When Catherine did not take the proffered water, Gail set it on the stoop beside Catherine.

Catherine asked Rick, "Does your ex-wife have no love in her heart?"

He said, "What do you mean?"

Catherine said, "What is hate but an aversion to love?"

Rick loved the steamed medley of fresh vegetables Catherine made for dinner when she slept over. He no longer felt the need to separate the vegetables on his plate. Catherine's abdominal cramps subsided. When they made love, she felt her insides were being massaged. Rick entered her deeply enough that she could feel him touch part of her iliopsoas muscle. He felt it, too. Her cramps stopped entirely.

Rick started taking Catherine to his parents' house for the weekly Sunday night dinner. Gail, Rick, and Catherine drove to the parents together. Rick drove Gail's car, and Catherine sat in the backseat. The family used a different paper tablecloth

every week with matching paper cups and plates and napkins. Catherine's setting never matched because Rick had to set her place; his mother set the table for four—never five.

At dinner, Gail talked the entire time. Gail inclined her head, so that it looked as if she were including Catherine; however, Gail never actively looked at her. When Gail moved her head, she didn't look like a little chickadee listening to the wind. She looked like a turkey trying to find his hen.

"Ricky Dickey," Gail would say, "remember you said you'd check my car next Saturday? Take me to get my nails done, and then do the car."

Another time, Gail said, "Ricky, remember your girlfriend Patti? I really liked her." Catherine knew about Patti. Patti had written her name on Rick's hot water heater in black permanent marker. At least, thought Catherine, Rick had a girlfriend between me and Gail.

The mother saw her daughter-in-law's misbehavior, but said nothing. The family was of an exclusive sort where harsh words to outsiders were allowed, even encouraged. Those words kept the family walls raised and impenetrable. Gail was part of the family. Rick's mother had decided that Rick and Gail had never divorced, that Catherine was a temporary irregularity.

The father believed in family. But he didn't know that family meant letting your children go to create their own lives and their own families. He mentioned once that his sister had stopped talking to him when he married his wife. He did not know that he needed to say to his son, "You love Catherine. Go be with her. We won't stop talking to you."

Catherine had taught Rick that Isadora Duncan dancers create lyrical, beautiful, and continuous movement. Even in sharp motions there is no disconnection in the phrasing; all parts of the body pull together, all motions look seamless. Only intense strength and a will of the spine and body can create such flow.

Rick understood the family enclave would destruct if he married a woman who danced anywhere she could with scarves and in bare feet.

"I'm trying to do the right thing," he said to Catherine.

In the beginning of Rick and Catherine's time of fighting, Catherine lost control and beat on his chest. She was familiar with passion, and it didn't scare her. It didn't excuse pounding on her boyfriend's heart, but he was a statue, some Greek figure that Isadora Duncan would have used for inspiration. For Catherine, he was no longer a god-like statue, but had become immovable marble. His heart looked all sticky and full of glue, and she wanted to make it beat again, to make him feel. But she scared Rick. He called her loss of control hysteria—not passion.

Rick decided that such deep feelings were highly overrated. In the middle of their fighting, Rick knew his lines, the whole story of their problems, so he responded on cue but without care. He had memorized what to say: "Yes, I made a mistake. I'm sorry. It's just that Gail is a very needy person."

In the end, they both forgot that love without listening is not love at all: Rick became unable to hear because of the numbness inside him—the numbness had filled his groin. Catherine stopped dancing spontaneously in the center of his little house. To Rick, she began to resemble a popsicle-stick scarecrow, not a bird. He was repelled.

Finally, Catherine lifted her arm. Pointed at the center of Rick's heart.

The motion reminded Rick of a leaf falling and catching on the wind, then falling again.

"F[x] ≠ Love," she said.

"You don't make any sense," Rick said.

Catherine packed a tote bag of her weekend clothes that had collected at his house.

Rick put his hands in his jean pockets. He followed Catherine and stood in the middle of the doorframe.

Once on the brick lined walkway, Catherine turned around.

"Our love still equals love," Rick said.

Catherine could no longer hear him. She turned and saw Gail standing in a window of her house, watching them. Catherine

walked away.

Rick saw Gail standing at her window, too. He went back inside his little house.

Rick took his yellow, plastic mechanical pencil, and wrote at the top of a piece of graph paper:

$$F[x] \neq \text{Love}$$

He stared at the equation. It didn't make any sense to him.

Rick's house got messy again. He spent almost every evening with his ex-wife. Gail made dinner for him. She never served fresh vegetables. The frozen vegetables came one at a time, each on their own plate: yellow (corn), orange (carrots), green (peas). One night, a carrot was out of place in the corn. Rick ate the colors together and said nothing. Rick and Gail went to Rick's parents' house every Sunday for dinner. Rick no longer set an extra place for Catherine. No one mentioned Catherine or asked about her.

Catherine moved back to Idaho to Coeur d'Alene, a quiet town on the edge of a lake. The Bank of the Mountain States funded a dance school where young children could dance with scarves. The bank's president had done his M.B.A. at City College in New York and understood the power of movement. He'd seen Catherine perform once in a park in Upper Manhattan and remembered her long, blond hair. He'd never seen a woman move like the wind. He'd never thought it possible before or even imagined wind could be seen.

"No," Catherine said to the bank president when he tried to kiss her. But she said it gently, a ripple of a breeze. He understood that she had loved too hard and that she would not love again.

Rick's forty-first birthday came. There were four places set at the table at his parents' house. The paper tablecloth and the paper napkins said "Happy Birthday." The plates had nothing written on them. They were blue. Gail had put a plastic figurine on the table, made in China, which she bought at Wal-Mart. An army soldier, a foot soldier. Gail had written a little sign and placed

it in his hand: "For the defense of our homeland."

It was a sign, Rick thought, that Catherine would never make, and he felt sickened. He couldn't eat his birthday cake. He couldn't look at his mother. I am forty-one, he thought, and I have given over my life to fixing the cars of women who describe where we live as a homeland. Rick didn't even feel home in his body. He had felt home inside Catherine. Two parts of an equation make a whole.

Inside, somewhere inside, Rick realized he had given his soul to the negative female animus and that it wasn't supposed to happen this way. He hadn't even known the word animus until Catherine taught him.

Rick gave two weeks notice at work. He had to be responsible. He needed references. He still had to tread carefully. He called the U-Haul and made a reservation. He called the realtor.

The last night in his home, he cooked a medley of fresh vegetables. He separated the yellow (corn) and the orange (carrots) and the green (peas) into three distinct circles. He thought maybe he shouldn't separate the vegetables, but he couldn't help himself. He counted. The sum was even. She loves me, he thought. Then he mixed all the vegetables together and ate them.

Rick pulled up in front of Catherine's house in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. At first, Rick didn't notice the little blond-haired girl wearing a pink sundress and running barefoot around the yard trailing a huge silk, purple scarf in the air behind her. Then he saw Catherine standing in the doorway. He wanted to be inside her, to be fully part of two sides of an equation with an equal sign in between.

## A REGULAR PARADISE

Matthew A. Ricke

I pass by a teenage girl wrapped tightly in a white sarong. She sits at the water's edge and gathers clumps of wet sand in her hands, sifting it to grain. Her vertebrae extend out through her browned skin like a gothic arch, and her feet are brushed clean by the small waves of the slowly approaching tide. The water is still too cold to swim, but a few children splash around her in the surf and the lifeguards up the beach pretend to pay attention.

Behind me, bikers cruise loudly along the narrow strip of flattened sand between the hotels and the boardwalk. At the Main Street ramp, they roll up and onto Atlantic Avenue, which runs the length of Daytona Beach. I follow them and am instantly a part of the seething Bike Week crowd, large and determined to get somewhere fast, but where I don't know. My old college roommate Joe and I parked in a vacant lot just down the street last night. We slept in the bed of his truck under piles of T-shirts and jeans to keep warm. At dawn, a passing man tapped me on the foot and said, "Time to get up." I groaned and sat, but he was gone. Yawning, I tasted the tar in the freshly paved road as it settled on my tongue. It was thick and almost tangible; black, oily bubbles emerged from the asphalt and when I hopped down to stretch, I popped them open with my bare feet.



Last summer, I showed the kids at the juvenile home how to pop these bubbles if they wanted. The girls shrieked at first, worried about burning or permanent discoloration; the boys were tough and unfazed. It was morning, our break from school time, fresh air before round two. In a minute, we'd file back inside, and, because it was Friday, I'd give them the option to read from *The Odyssey* with me, or attend a Bible study with Mr.

Jim, the poorly dressed man who owned the facility.

"Bible or *Odyssey*?" I asked once back inside, slipping on my hairnet to enter the kitchen. "Because Mr. Jim is here."

Samantha Byrd, the new girl, colorless in the cheeks and with the palest blue eyes, asked, "What's *The Odyssey*?" Her head was visibly dented, planed like the roof of a house at forty-five degrees; no doubt she was hit or dropped repeatedly as an infant. I wasn't allowed to read their case files, but quickly enough I'd learned that if I really wanted answers, the body is always legible enough.

"What's *The Odyssey*?" I asked. "*The Odyssey* is the story of an old man named Odysseus who's been trying to get home to his family for like twenty years. He's lost at sea, everyone's trying to kill him, all that stuff. I like it, but *it is* thousands of years old, so you might find it boring."

She'd arrived the night before in the back of a police car, six months pregnant but hardly showing.

"It's cool," said Walter, my current favorite. A fat boy with wild ADD, he sat in the corner and read disintegrating issues of *National Geographic* with religious intensity. "Lots of fighting," he said.

"It's your typical sad old man story, Samantha. Lots of magic and lots of gods, you know." I said, "It's pretty much exactly like the Bible, only it has a more exciting cover." I held it up and pointed to the crude watercolor; a broken warship struggling to outrun flying thunderbolts. "So," I asked, "Bible or *Odyssey*?"

"*Odyssey*," said Walter. "That's what I'm talking about."

"Yeah," I said. "I know that's what you're talking about, but you ain't supposed to be talking at all without raising your hand."

"Sorry, Mr. M."

"Don't say sorry, just raise your hand." He raised his hand and I said, "Yes, Walter. What do you want?"

"Can I write a letter to my mom?"

"Is it letter-writing time?"

"Well then can I read *The Odyssey* with you?"

“Can you give me a moment of peace?”

“Can we stop asking questions, Mr. M?”

“You can stop,” I said. “But I’m still waiting for an answer to mine.”

Samantha was the only one to join Mr. Jim for Bible study. They sat at a table in my office where Jim nervously read and explained passages from the New Testament. Jesus hung on a cross, spoke to his father, wondered where his friends were.

I read Book Five and to the delight of the kids that sat around me in the dayroom, the gods were angry yet again. “Hey Mr. M?” said Walter, “How come these gods are always so upset about everything? I mean, they know they’re gonna live forever, don’t they?”

“Walter,” I said. “I think it’s some sort of ancient gods inside joke or something.”

Jim’s pathetically monotonous tone carried into the dayroom and distracted me. Wishing I could slap some color into his cheeks and still retain my job, I passed the book on to Walter, who read it with his usual dramatic flair—Poseidon had a deep, bloodthirsty voice. Homer, oddly enough, had a bad British accent. I went back into the kitchen to check on lunch.

Samantha stared blankly at the wall of my office. Her eyes were vacant and ballish, even bewildered. Her hands kneaded the pale blue shirt I’d given her during Intake. Knotting it tightly only to untie it, she used the surface of her thigh like an ironing board, smoothing away the shirt’s wrinkles with her palms. Her sweatpants bore a faint rust-colored smudge, the residue of another girl’s menstrual blood that never came out in the wash. Unaware, I gave her the stained pants with the blue T-shirt after she’d eaten the night before—peanut butter and jelly, macaroni and cheese, milk and an apple—I served her at the table in the dayroom, the food smelled natural but oddly sterile, like a dollar bill that had lived through the wash cycle, or the cinder block walls of the dayroom after they’d been scrubbed spotless during chore time.

Samantha sat mute in my office, being unnaturally absorbed

by the hard wooden chair on which she sat. Christ breathed his last and gave up his body; Jim asked, what can we learn from this? I'd just learned that parents in Indiana could have their children arrested for being pregnant and under eighteen; apparently, it is an act of incorrigibility. Simple, efficient, transcending: that God is good I had always taken as a given. Jim muttered nervously about eternal life, but I wanted to ask: do we really have that kind of time? I mean, *Lunch is on the way*. Odysseus struggled on his splintered raft and behind him, Calypso faded away. "Things happen for a reason," Jim said. "God's reasons. Cause and effect, you see?" Samantha smoothed down the hair along the top of her head. She tucked her arms inside her shirt and looked out at Walter as he read. Which reasons are God's reasons? Causality: I cooked hamburger casserole; heat from the stove filled the kitchen.



I follow the bikers down Atlantic Avenue and meet with Joe at Stella's Beach Café. I order a salad and breadsticks without comment, having lived through enough abuse searching for vegetarian options the night before. I'd asked around for a while, finally settling on a slice of shit cheese pizza after one too many vendors had asked if I was some type of faggot.

"If by faggot," I said, 'you mean vegetarian—then yes, I am.' He stared at me and laughed, sucking on the end of his black, wet cigar.

"I thought so," he said, staring at Joe. "Hey man, as long as you love the one you're with." He handed me my slice along with a paper napkin that didn't look up to the job.

"Hey," I asked, pointing to the sign above his booth, "do you really sell something called the Giant Biker Sausage?"

"Hell yes," he said with a nod. "We are carnivores."

Joe elbowed me in the kidney and said, "You're going to get us killed."

"Five bucks altogether," the vendor said. "Now that's what

I'm talking about."

"Yeah, yeah," I said as I paid.

Joe and I sat down on the curb and he said, "Just try to play it safe."

"Jesus, Nancy," I said. "Just relax already. We're fighting a system here, can't you see that? A dangerous one. It's a dangerous system, and you just want to let them walk all over us, totally reifying my position as the patsy vegetarian and his as the violent, bearded, I don't know, sausage-eating biker."

"But you're wearing a sweater and Converse," he said. "And you are a patsy vegetarian."

"Don't try to sucker me into some absurd semantic argument," I said. "Just give me a minute of quiet, that's all I ask."

"What's semantic about this argument?"

"What's not?" I asked, but the drone of a thousand passing motorcycles swallowed my words. I tried to make a few more points, yelling, but unable to hear, Joe waved me off. When I finished the slice, I leaned back against a telephone pole and closed my eyes.



The edges of Atlantic Avenue begin to fill with parked bikes and cars, their owners trudging toward Main Street, its booze and cover bands. They pass by Stella's, where I stab at my salad with a plastic fork. A group of bikers step, oblivious, over a stain on the dotted yellow line, where Molly White's blood had pooled that morning into a spot no larger than a dinner plate. Seagulls hover over our table, vulture-like but more polite. In the evening heat, the air above Atlantic Avenue undulates as it rises.



I heard it before I saw it.

I brushed my teeth by the side of Joe's truck, rinsing my mouth out with stale water from a bottle I'd opened the night

before. Too foul to drink, I poured what was left into the grass. Joe was refusing to participate in any hygienic act, citing the spirit of Bike Week as his inspiration. When he spoke, his teeth were dull and flat, a permanent whitish moss growing slowly outward from the gaps. It happened while I was pouring out the water.

Losing the oncoming traffic in the glare of the morning sun, a woman backed her truck into the road. Sheet metal is forgiving but loud, and we heard it clearly enough. What happened happened with a pop; Molly White, thirty years old, was thrown from her motorcycle. The bike slid safely between the truck's wheels, coming to a rest in a bed of hydrangeas that surrounded a picnic area. I saw the sliding bike and the sparks as it skidded to a stop. I saw the truck, yellow and domestic. I saw the shocks compress as the wheels rolled over her body. We were eight blocks away.

A man screamed and I knew she would die.

I read about it later in the newspaper, a hundred times in a row, until I wondered if I'd actually seen anything at all.

The man I heard scream was her fiancé, David. He was riding behind her on his own bike. He hit the truck too, but wasn't injured. Molly's lungs collapsed, and David pulled the driver of the truck out by her hair and knocked her down with blows to the face.

Joe ran toward the scene to help but couldn't find the courage by the time he arrived.

I stayed behind and watched as the paramedics and police arrived; shrill sirens cut through the damp air, and absentmindedly, I made the sign of the cross on my chest.

I heard later that she was the sixth biker to die during Bike Week, although the man who told me this mentioned that last year was much worse. Emergency workers collected evidence and questioned survivors, constructing the story of what happened and why. Hotel crowds gathered on the sidewalk, the sirens having called them from their rooms.

The driver of the truck sat on the curb with the police

chaplain. Blood dripped from the gash on her face to the legs of her jeans. The body of Molly White was covered with a blanket and David sat alone over her corpse.

They'd been high school sweethearts who went separate ways after graduation, finding new lovers, getting married, getting divorced. They met again last year and he'd recently proposed.

Sixty stitches later, the woman driving the truck chose not to press assault charges.

The police blamed no one: she lost the oncoming traffic in the morning sun, and backed her truck into the road. I opened a new bottle of water and took a sip. Thirsty, spiritless, tired: I take it as a given that God can do what He likes, but I always forget that He does. It took four policemen and a paramedic to restrain David when his fiancée was finally loaded into the ambulance.



I gave Samantha her own clothes to wear at her hearing. She smiled and left with my co-worker Katie, a round woman with curly hair and a yellow convertible. The top would be up on the way to the courthouse, but Samantha said it looked cool anyway.

Walter asked me why that girl was here. "She doesn't look criminal," he said.

"Oh, but you look exactly like Al Capone, right?"

"Well, at least I'm a dude," he said. "That sort of automatically makes me suspect."

"Oh man, you're gonna fit right in at college," I said. "Honestly buddy; I don't know why Samantha is here. I'm not supposed to know and it's not my business. Which means it is definitely not your business, and finally—you need to raise your hand before you talk."

When Samantha returned from court, I heated up what was left: baked chicken, green beans, and orange slices. I slipped some extra onto her plastic plate because the other kids were

already playing cards and board games.

"Thanks," she said, picking at the chicken. "I'm pregnant, you know."

"Really?" I asked, acting surprised. "Congratulations."

"Judge says the only reason I'm here is 'cause I'm pregnant. I can go home as soon as I have my baby."

"Well, congratulations again. Make sure you write us a letter," I said. "Just give me your dishes when you're done and you can have game time." She pushed her food around the partitions for a few minutes, mostly for show, and then she drank her milk. She dumped her dinner in the trash and brought me her plate.

"I'm not really hungry," she said, sitting down on the couch and staring blankly out the window.

As I washed her blue plastic plate, I wondered where the baby's father was on a Friday night. He might have gone to her hearing, although they wouldn't have been allowed to talk. He could have been older and legal, but he probably didn't know Samantha was here, wearing sweatpants and eating waxy chicken with a disposable fork. Absent, a relative, maybe even unknown; the only thing I felt for sure was that he was not locked up. At nine o'clock the kids went to bed, climbing onto the waterproof mattresses that exhaled each time their bodies shifted. I made a habit of saying good night to everyone individually, although I was often ignored and occasionally instructed, in a mumbled whisper, to go fuck myself. But this was a good group. Walter, drumming on his chest with his fingers, asked if he could read ahead in *The Odyssey*.

"Sure thing," I said.

"I want to read about the Cyclops."

"But we already read that."

"Yeah," he said. "But I liked it."

"Okay, but you're technically reading back then, not reading ahead."

"Words, words, words," he said, dismissively. "Good night, Mr. M."

I turned off the hallway lights and paused outside Samantha's

room, where she sat on the bed with her hands in her lap, smiling. In the dayroom, the spotless tables reflected the few bars of fluorescent lights we left shining after lights out. The kitchen sink was filled with sticky bowls of half-eaten chocolate ice cream, half-eaten because it tasted like the industrial plastic bucket that it came in. I clicked on the motion detectors that hung above the hallway of bedrooms and called out a final goodnight. The day ended like this: Samantha said she'd see me tomorrow and I wandered back to my office, where I opened the window and sat in the cooling breeze that trickled through the screen.



On Main Street, we're stuck in a line of pedestrians, all of us sucking down the exhaust fumes that waft over the police blockade that separates the sidewalk from the bike-filled street. My legs are exhausted from walking all day, being tapped awake in the cold morning sunrise by a disappearing stranger; my body sunken, confused, and baffled. I struggle to push my way through the crowd and suddenly, there's a hollow, a space between two buildings, a cell, twelve feet square; I withdraw my body from the snaking mass with a pop and sit on an empty barrel.

Somehow, this space has gone unused, has not been sold. The silence is all the more overwhelming because here, there ought to be and probably was earlier, a Ted Nugent tribute band. Or women selling beer, with flowers taped on their nipples, a river of ogling men rubbing shoulders as they lurched forward in perfect time to the flash of their cameras. I name this place a sanctuary.

A man appears next to me with a stack of novelty hundred dollar bills. His vest sports a picture of Jesus, and a patch that says, *Riding for the Son*. The bills are gigantic and folded in half. He hands them out to passersby, explaining that it's a free gift that will last for eternity and a whole lot more.

"Christian bikers," I whisper to Joe. "Riding for the Son. Where do you think they're riding to?"

"I dunno," he says.

"Does Jesus tell him where to ride?" I ask, rubbing my chin.

"I mean, specifically. Does Jesus give directions?"

"Why don't you ask him?"

"Okay, well who's more reliable," I start. "Rand McNally? Or the Christ?" I light a cigarette and rub my chin again. "How long do they have to ride?"

"Eternity."

"And a whole lot more, I guess." I approach the man and ask for a piece of the fake money. Next to Franklin's portrait, in the tiniest print, is a pared gospel story. Christ is born of a virgin, crucified, and rises again. Best to leave out all his loser friends, I suppose. But his mother made the cut. She sat at the foot of his cross, after all, bathed his body with scented water and placed him in the tomb. And it was her body that carried the boy, pushed him out, and expelled the slick and bloody creature into a manger somewhere and once upon a time. The man distributes the evangelistic cash, and the street begins to fill with the crumpled bills. I wonder who, if anyone, will clean up the mess.

When it's late enough to drink, we stand up and aim our bodies toward the one bar that seemed as if it wasn't entirely dependent upon the angry, racist bikers to stay in business. The crowds on Main Street have thinned and shifted; pedestrians have found their bikes and have joined the cruise line, which grows louder and denser as the sky darkens. Salty moisture gathers at the peak of street lamps, obscuring the yellow beams; standing on crates above the crowds, half-naked women sell cheap beer at five dollars a can; college boys on Japanese sport bikes offer rides to every girl they pass, and the police gather at intersections to complain about the noise. Joe, because he doesn't know how else to say what's on his heart, pats the Christian biker on the shoulder as we pass.

At Piggy's Saloon, we stand apart from the crowd to observe. The bar is more like a fenced-in outdoor pavilion, the size of a gymnasium, and there's barely room to walk between the bodies

that crowd the floor. By my count, there are ten cages in which lingerie-clad women struggle to look sexy as they move to songs that were never meant to accompany dancing.

"Is this Black Sabbath?" I ask.

"Nope," he says, cracking open a Busch N/A, the remnant of an adolescent pact he'd made with God stipulating abstinence in all things—"It's the Nuge," he says. "Stranglehold.' Again."

The closest dancer, brunette and wearing pink, has a system in place. She does the same move over and over again. The man holds a dollar in his mouth, and she beats his face to hell with her enormous breasts, snagging the cash in her cleavage.

"That girl looks like Heather," Joe says. "She looks just like Heather."

"You want me to buy you a dance?" I ask. "You know, get your ears boxed by a gigantic pair of tits that remind you of your fiancée's? It's only Bike Week once a year."

"No, I can't do that. It's not right," he says. "I'm just going to watch her dance for a while." He wanders off to the closest barstool, where he sits down and pretends to scan the crowd. At the front of the pavilion, a spotlight shines on the DJ booth.

"We do this every night," the DJ says. "It's tradition, so please sing along." He waves an American flag back and forth, and one of the cage girls, momentarily freed of her cage duties, wraps herself in a sea-green sheet and holds up a fake torch. Someone presses play.

"God Bless the U.S.A." Lee Greenwood, I think, although for all I know, it could be the Nuge again. A few people sing along, raising their beers high above their heads. The girls don't stop dancing and if anything, they seem to be making more money. I spot a guy trying to pass one of those fake hundred dollar bills as a tip, and I think truly, deeply—God Bless the U.S.A. The anthem fades out and another power ballad about love gone awry begins to scream from the speakers. I epiphanize: this song and the DJ are one in the same: he's wearing vintage Nikes, long hair, tight jeans, and a Steelers windbreaker—the song sports a bitchin' guitar solo, a double bass drum, and a

section in the middle that seems to be a conversation between the lead singer and the devil—they're both so tremendously behind the times that they've inadvertently fallen right back into being hip. After a few more songs, I find Joe and tell him I'm heading back to the truck.

In the dim light of the streetlamps, I can't tell the difference between the shine of the fresh asphalt and the darker tint left on the road by Molly White's body. Or maybe I'm just in the wrong spot and I'm watching the traffic drive over an altogether different, meaningless stain, because gasoline will discolor pavement, too. But no, this one's the size of a plate, and it doesn't seem to have spread. Bikers have the thickest blood, I've heard; they live in the wind and they drink the rain.

I walk clumsily, my legs trembling and weak. I know Molly White walked this morning, too, if only to her bike, but how different were our bodies then? The sun rose and we both stumbled, sojourners, from sleep into the crescendo of the morning light. Her body lies broken somewhere, the sixth biker to die this week. Half a million more cruise round Daytona Beach, and David, the ex-fiancé, sits somewhere and waits for something. To go home? To collect her body? To get the joke?

In the newspaper, he said he lost it. He watched Molly die and he lost it. He punched that woman in the truck until his hand broke and then he fell on the ground and cried. The chaplain offered his services. Someone else offered a cell phone. He didn't think that any of it was real. Until four police officers pulled him away, he sat on the ground and moaned.

This is what *I* know to be real: Molly White is lying on sheet metal; her skin is ice. I will get on a plane in the morning and go back to Indiana. Joe will never tell his fiancée about the dancer that looked like her, the one he watched for hours. There was a girl this afternoon, no older than sixteen, sitting at the edge of the water, sifting handfuls of wet sand through her hands. Didn't a stranger touch my foot this morning, while I slept in the truck? I try to map out these moments in my head, a constellation to chart the positions of one to another, casual

or causal connect-the-dots, I can't decide. Giant, fake hundred dollar bills are swept up by the breeze and are carried into corners and doorways, under cars. I reach the truck and lay on the hood, smoking cigarettes and watching moths bat themselves to death against the glass shell of the streetlights. They fall slowly.



At the airport in Daytona, I sit at a bar to wait for my flight. I order a club soda and drink it slowly, smoking, trying to calm my wrecked and throbbing stomach. The actual flight won't bother me, it's just the waiting. The waitress, plump and bored, looks like a girl I once knew from the juvenile center. I can't recall her name, and I remember her face only because she shared a room with Samantha Byrd, the pregnant girl with the sloped head.

The ice melts in my glass.

After she attended court and I served her baked chicken, Samantha went to bed. In the morning, she writhed on the floor in pain and bled through her sweatpants. Katie took her to the hospital where the baby was expelled from Samantha's young womb, collected and cataloged by the nurse standing at her side. She spent the night in recovery and was scheduled for release to her parents the following evening.

What part, if any, she played in the miscarriage, I don't know. From what I've heard, it's not an act impossible to the determined mind. While she waited in the dayroom for her father to collect her, I gave her back her clothes. I offered her a bowl of ice cream or a glass of juice, more for my sake than hers, because I couldn't stand to watch her sit there looking empty and unoccupied for another second. A lifeless body, a crooked head, a broken hand; for that punch line, we will wait forever. She thanked me but accepted neither.

I wake up, dozing, at the bar in Daytona. The bored waitress is standing in front of me, smiling politely. There's something beautifully familiar about her face, but her make-up looks like frosting on a cake.

"Sorry," she says. "I'm heading out, so I need to settle up."

"Sure," I say as I hand her the cash.

"So, what are you doing here?"

I ask, "I'm sorry?"

"I mean, are you from Daytona or are you leaving Daytona?"

"Oh," I say. "I'm leaving."

"What are you leaving for? This ain't such a terrible place, is it?" She collects my cup and ashtray and says, "We got sunny skies, lots of young people, beaches, nothing's too expensive—you know, a regular paradise."

"Hell," I say, winking. "Maybe I should stay."

"Oh, I'm just teasing," she says, tapping out the ashtray in the trash and tucking her apron into a cubby under the bar. "I'm sure you got people back home."

Waiting is what I'm doing here.

It isn't until I'm on a plane again, looking down on snow-covered fields, that I begin to feel, in any real sense, like I am going home. The farmland below is divided neatly into square miles; county roads intersect at right angles, and the odd clusters of mature trees look more like deserted islands than salvific oases; they are afterthoughts painstakingly arranged into the barren landscape that stretches between cities. I'm eating a bag of pretzels, which surprisingly enough to the flight attendant I choose to confront, doesn't satisfy my hunger. I've been trying to read, but the motion of this discount airliner is unforgiving and unrelenting. I can't stay focused and my attention wanders. Like the night Samantha Byrd went home, and I lost a game of Jenga to Walter, a boy so easily distracted that he couldn't write with an ink pen without ruining his paper.

Does it matter that Molly White once had a daughter? A picture of the two ran next to an interview with David I read this morning in a Daytona Beach newspaper. A tomboyish girl, smiling at her mother, brown hair cut close to her head; she had large ears and was in love with horses. Once, the girl slipped through her mother's legs and took a breath. Six years later, she

died of an unexpected blood infection. One year after that, to the day, her mother's body was crushed into the pavement a thousand miles from home.

I read the article closely, but I don't remember the daughter's name. I wrote three letters to Samantha Byrd but she never responded. Joe and his fiancée indefinitely postponed their marriage, and David rode his bike back to Pennsylvania, where he lives alone.

For me, time will treat this like a dream that I'm piecing back together, certain that I'll find meaning, moments after waking. Like a cube of ice wrapped in a clear glass of water, it will stretch and pop; crevices will appear and shift; it will disappear completely but be cooler to the touch. It will be saving, illuminating, anecdotal; something to tell my friends or not: I saw a woman die. Give me a minute, and I'll tease the meaning out. If any god has marked me out again, my tough heart can undergo it. Crucifixion is easy when you're in on the joke. My stomach thumps and flops, rolling through my gut like a misshapen apple. I am going down, that's sure. The plane hits the tarmac and I stand to stretch my legs.

E. S. L.

Pablo Miguel Martínez

During the class of last night  
Miss Luna she asked  
*Where are you from?* This I hear  
her ask clear and loud.  
And right then I knew  
what she was up to  
she was making a room of proud.

The pretty Korean girl who has more pretty  
than that skinny Jane in our books  
she answered *Pusan*  
then sat down the color of sweet roses blooming  
in her all over skin.  
And the soft Filipina grandmother  
she says *Cebu* and I think  
she's just making a scary sound  
but it's a part of proud too.

And then it's my turn and I stand  
straight and tall tall like the girl  
at the winter carnival in the mountains  
studying carefully the target so she can walk away  
with the big prize the prize  
that everyone wants so she hugs it tight  
when she leaves the booth  
with its halo of twinkle lights.

That's how I am as I get ready  
to say my answer  
*My from is Colombia.*  
And now the girl at the carnival  
is lost. She screams for her mother

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for something true but no sound comes.  
She can't move. She stands there  
lights staring bells laughing  
carousels turning in her stomach  
until someone rescues her.

*I am from Colombia*, says Miss Luna.  
*Say it with me: I am from Colombia.*  
She makes a smile. And I say it  
the new way of saying spinning  
locked safe in the car of a Ferris wheel  
the round and round memory  
making slow forever loops.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Lori Anderson Moseman is the author of two books of poetry, *Cultivating Excess* and *Persona*, and a chapbook, *Walking the Dead*. Currently, she teaches poetry for CUNY in Queens. She has an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, an MFA in Electronic Arts from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and a Doctor of Arts from University at Albany. Her poems have appeared in *Passages North*, *Colorado Review*, *Bathyspheric Review*, *8T3*, *Terra Nova*, *Phoebe*, *13th Moon*, and *The Little Magazine*. She lives along the Delaware River and is an active member of the Upper Delaware Writers' Collective.

Amanda Auchter is the editor of *Pebble Lake Review* and the author of *Light Under Skin* (Finishing Line Press, 2006). She received the 2005 James Wright Poetry Award from *Mid-American Review* and won the 2004 Howard Moss Poetry Prize. Her poetry appears in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Born Magazine*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Florida Review*, *Smartish Pace*, and elsewhere.

Otis Bardwell was raised in Africa, received a BA in Music while living near Chicago, and later lived for a year in Paris, France. He currently resides in Los Angeles with his wife and one-year-old daughter, and is working on an MFA degree in sculpture. In his art, Bardwell uses natural objects and man-made materials culled from his environment to highlight the performative and imaginative aspects of the individual creative process.

T. J. Beitelman teaches writing at the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham, where he also edits *Red Mountain Review*. His poems, stories, and reviews have appeared in *New Orleans Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Indiana Review*, and other journals.

Kate Beles is currently working toward her MFA in Poetry at Virginia Commonwealth University. She completed her MA

in English Studies at Western Washington University in Spring 2005, where she served as a poetry editor for the *Bellingham Review*. She currently interns for *Blackbird* and was awarded a first-year Creative Writing Fellowship at VCU. A few of the journals that have published her work are *Touchstone*, *Jeopardy Magazine*, and *Inside Kung-Fu Magazine*. This is her second appearance in *Harpur Palate*.

Victoria Boynton is Associate Professor of English and Professional Writing at SUNY Cortland. She has recently published her creative work in the *Mid-American Review*, *Faultline*, *Heliotrope*, and *Happy*. She has edited and written essays for *Herspace: Women, Writing, and Solitude* and *The Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography* with Jo Malin. She lives off the grid in Ithaca, NY and Truth or Consequences, NM with her husband and hound dog.

Photorealist artist Anthony Brunelli studied at Columbus College of Art and Design and earned a BFA at Binghamton University. His work is showcased at the Louis K. Meisel Gallery in New York City.

Roxana Cazan was born in communist Romania in the summer of 1980. She is working on a collection of poems inspired by reminiscences from childhood, which investigates three levels of the familiar: her close family, her childhood adventures, and her experience during the Romanian Revolution of 1989. Roxana used to write poetry in Romanian but switched to English and currently experiments with both languages.

Jaimee Wriston Colbert's novel in stories *Climbing the God Tree* (Helicon Nine Editions, 1998) won the Willa Cather Fiction Prize. Her first book, *Sex, Salvation, and the Automobile* (Zephyr, 1994), won the Zephyr Publishing Award. Her fiction has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *New Letters*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Natural Bridge*, *Connecticut Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Prairie*

*Schooner* and elsewhere, and has been broadcast on Public Radio. A story cycle, *Dream Lives of Butterflies*, is forthcoming in 2007. Originally from Hawaii, she teaches in the Creative Writing Program at Binghamton University. This is her second appearance in *Harpur Palate*.

Eric Cotts is a Professor and Chair of the Physics Department and Co-Director of the Materials Science Program at Binghamton University and is a big fan of *Harpur Palate*.

Renée E. D'Aoust's essay "Graham Crackers" was an AWP 2005 Intro to Journals winner and will be published in *Mid-American Review*. D'Aoust attends the University of Notre Dame's MFA program on a Nicholas Sparks Fellowship and is completing a book, *Body of a Dancer*, based on her years as a professional dancer in NYC. Publications include *Brevity*, *Canoe & Kayak Magazine*, *Kalliope*, *North Central Review*, *Permafrost*, *13th Moon*, and *Touchstone*.

Viet Dinh received his MFA from the University of Houston, where he served as fiction editor for *Gulf Coast*. His work has appeared in *Zoetrope: All-Story*, *Threepenny Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review* and *Fence*, to name a few. He currently teaches in Denver and tries his best not to leverage power over students for nefarious purposes.

Sean Thomas Dougherty is the author of seven books of poems and prose including the forthcoming *Broken Hallelujahs* (BOA Editions), and *Nightshift Belonging to Lorca* (2004 Mammoth Books), a finalist for the Paterson Poetry Prize. He teaches in the BFA Program for Creative Writing at Penn State Erie. His Big Time Love is the writer Erin Gay.

Linda Dove writes and ranches in Skull Valley, Arizona, following fifteen years of college teaching. She holds a PhD in Renaissance literature and taught most recently at Yavapai College in Prescott,

Arizona, where she briefly directed the creative writing program. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Antigonish Review*, *North American Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *Alligator Juniper*, *GSU Review*, and *Clackamas Literary Review*, and have won several awards, including the 2005 Stephen Dunn Award and the 2001 Alice Longan Award for a collection inspired by the American Southwest.

James Doyle's book, *Einstein Considers A Sand Dune* (2004), won the Steel Toe Books contest. Doyle is married to poet Sharon Doyle. His poetry appears in *River City*, *Eclipse*, *Illuminations*, *South Dakota Review*, *Descant*, and *The Southeast Review*.

Other works by Andrew Farkas have appeared or will appear in *New Orleans Review*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Circle*, *Spoiled Ink*, and *Nuvein*. Originally from Akron, Ohio, he currently attends the University of Alabama MFA program, where he is an instructor and fiction editor for *Black Warrior Review*. Holding an MA from the University of Tennessee, Andrew often gets asked which team he cheers for: Alabama or Tennessee? Andrew responds: Ohio State.

Farrah Field's poems have appeared in *Pool*, *Washington Square*, *Vox*, and *Four Corners* and are forthcoming in *Chelsea* and *The Massachusetts Review*. She currently teaches high school English with the generosity of a New York City Teaching Fellowship and she is a poetry reader for *Small Spiral Notebook*.

Anne Germanacos completed an MFA at Bennington in 2003. Her stories and essays have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *AGNI Online*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Florida Review*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *Salamander*, *The Diagram*, *Pindeldyboz*, and others. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and a story was the recent recipient of *Fourteen Hills'* Holmes Award for Emerging Writers.

Rachel Eliza Griffiths is a poet, novelist, and painter. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Gathering of the Tribes*, *Inkwell*, *Sable Literary Magazine*, and several anthologies. She is an MFA candidate in Fiction at Sarah Lawrence College and has a Masters Degree in English Literature from the University of Delaware. She lives in New York City.

Judith Harris is the author of two books from LSU Press, *Atonement: Poems* (2000) and *The Bad Secret: New Poems* (2006), and a critical book, *Signifying Pain: Constructing and Healing the Self through Writing* (2003). Recent poems have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Southwest Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Ontario Review*, and *The American Scholar*.

Tom Haushalter recently completed his MFA in poetry at Columbia University. He has been published in *The New Orleans Review* and contributes book reviews to the online journal *Perihelion*. Tom lives in Brooklyn, NY.

Peter B. Hyland received a BFA in Drawing & Painting from the University of North Texas. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The American Literary Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and *ArtsHouston*. Currently, he is pursuing an MFA at the University of Houston, where he also teaches composition.

Sarah Klenbort is a teacher and writer who currently lives in Sydney. She has lived in China, where she studied Chinese; Wales, where she met and married her wonderful Welsh husband; and New York, where she completed an MFA in fiction at Columbia University. Currently, Sarah is working on her first novel, based on the story of her grandparents, a German Gentile and a Polish Jew who narrowly escaped Nazi Europe together and ended up in the Cape Verde Islands.

Dr. Lawrence Lehman, a microscopist with many years experience, is a Materials Scientist in the Physics Department at Binghamton

University and an officer in a solar energy company.

A New York City native, Dara Mandle graduated from Yale University with a BA in English. She worked at such magazines as *Talk* and *Mirabella* and taught in Babelsberg, Germany, where Marlene Dietrich filmed “Der Blaue Engel.” Dara earned her MFA in poetry at Columbia and is now the Assistant Director of Columbia’s Undergraduate Writing Program. She lives in Manhattan with her fiancé and their cat, Professor Boskowitz.

Pablo Miguel Martínez’s poetry has appeared in *Americas Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *San Antonio Express-News*, *Lodestar Quarterly*, and other publications. In 2003 he was a recipient of the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation literary award, and in 2005 he was the Second Place winner of the Chicano/Latino Literary Prize. He is currently in the MFA program at Texas State University-San Marcos.

Thomas Miller is a second-year MFA student at the University of Notre Dame. He is currently editing a popular edition of the life’s work of American folklorist Marvin I. Berger titled *The False Histories*. Previous publications include *Science Creative Quarterly*. On Tuesday nights he captains The Pequod, the creative writers’ co-ed intramural inner-tube water polo team.

Doug Ramspeck directs the Writing Center and teaches creative writing and composition at The Ohio State University at Lima. His essays, short stories, and poems have appeared in a wide variety of publications. This past year his poems have been accepted by journals such as *Connecticut Review*, *Rosebud*, *Lake Effect*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Roanoke Review*, *Rhino*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, and *Permafrost*. He lives in Lima with his wife, Beth, and their fifteen-year-old daughter, Lee. This is his second appearance in *Harpur Palate*.

Eric Rawson lives in Los Angeles. His work has recently appeared in *Commonweal*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Sun*, and *Iowa Review*.

Matt Ricke is an MFA candidate in prose at the University of Notre Dame. Prior to arriving in South Bend he worked in the publishing industry, managing and buying for several bookstores and working as an agent's assistant in New York. He writes a weekly column for *Whatzup*, a Great Lakes area entertainment magazine, and has previously published prose in the *The Denver Syntax*.

Richard Robbins grew up in Southern California and Montana. He studied with Richard Hugo and Madeline DeFrees at the University of Montana, where he earned his MFA. He has published two books—most recently *Famous Persons We Have Known*—and has received awards from The Loft, the Minnesota State Arts Board, the NEA, and the Poetry Society of America. He directs the creative writing program and Good Thunder Reading Series at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Margaret A. Robinson jubilates in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, where she gardens, is a teacher at Widener University, and writes poems as often as possible. "Jubilation" will appear later this year in the online journal *centrifugaleye*. This is her second appearance in *Harpur Palate*.

Neil Shepard has published two books of poetry: *Scavenging the Country for a Heartbeat* (First Book Award, Mid-List Press, 1993) and *I'm Here Because I Lost My Way* (Mid-List, 1998). Recent poems appear in *Boulevard*, *Colorado Review*, *New England Review*, *North American Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Paris Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Triquarterly*, and elsewhere. He teaches in the BFA Writing Program at Johnson State College and edits the *Green Mountains Review*. Neil Shepard's third book, *Waterfall at Journey's End*, will be published in summer 2006.

Dara-Lyn Shrager is a poet and freelance journalist living in Princeton, New Jersey. She has work appearing in *The Ontario Review* and *The Chaffin Journal*. She is currently a student in the MFA program at Bennington College.

Originally from Detroit, Amy Spade lives in San Francisco and works as a high school English teacher in Palo Alto, California. She has taught creative writing too, to both middle school and high school students, while living in New York City, Detroit, and Houston. Her poems have appeared in many journals including *North American Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *Smartish Pace*, and *New Millennium Writings*.

Michael Steinberg has written, co-written and edited five books and a stage play. In addition, his essays and memoirs have appeared in many literary journals and anthologies. Steinberg's last book, *Still Pitching*, was chosen by *ForeWord Magazine* as the 2003 Independent Press Memoir of the Year. He is also founding editor of the journal *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction*. The fourth edition of his anthology, *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction* (with Robert Root), is forthcoming in summer 2006.

Bradford Gray Telford was educated at Princeton and Columbia and has published poems, translations, and essays in journals including *AGNI*, *Lyric*, *Diner*, and *Eclipse*, with work forthcoming in *The Yale Review* and *Pleiades*. He is translating Geneviève Huttin's new book of poems, *The Story of My Voice*, and is Poetry Editor of *Gulf Coast*. Currently, he is the Ehrhardt-Cullen and Fondren Fellow at The University of Houston, where he is pursuing a doctorate in literature and creative writing.

E. R. Turner is a former faculty member at the University of Florida and a free-lance writer who lives in Gainesville, Florida.

Thom Ward is Editor at BOA Editions. His poetry collections include *Various Orbits* and *Small Boat with Oars of Different Size*, both from Carnegie Mellon University Press. He lives with his wife and children in upstate, New York.

Ed Zahniser's poems have appeared in scores of literary magazines in the U.S. and U.K. and in a chapbook, *The Ultimate Double Play*, the books *The Way to Heron Mountain* and *A Calendar of Worship*, and several anthologies, including *A Tumult for John Berryman*, *WFPM Anthology*, *Poetry from the Amicus Journal*, and *Odd Angles of Heaven*. He is a former poetry editor of *Living Wilderness* magazine, a founding editor of Some Of Us Press, and an associate poetry editor of *Antietam Review*.

Yan Xiang is a graduate student in the Materials Science Program in the Physics Department at Binghamton University.

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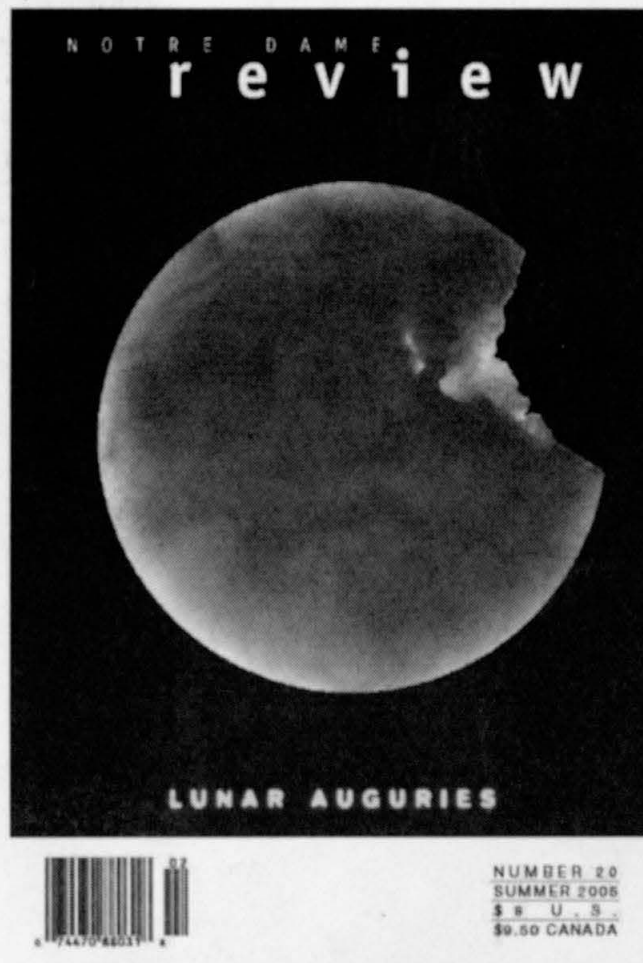


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