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GINOSKO (ghin-océ-koe)

To perceive, understand, realize, come to know;
knowledge that has an inception, a progress,
an attainment.

The recognition of truth by experience.

My earthly deeds flow away in the stream of time,
perceptions and feelings change,
and not one can I hold on to.

The scene I set up so easily for myself vanishes,
and the stream always bears me on its steady wave
toward new things.

As often as I turn my gaze back into my inner self,
though, I am immediately in the kingdom of eternity;
I look upon the work of the Spirit,
which no world can change and no time destroy,
which itself creates world and time first of all.

—Friedrich Schleiermacher

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Everything comes in light tonight

Maureen Shay

Like rain falling through trees,
through shadow, shadow and light

upon light: there are fireflies.
Mating is involved, and feeding.

I've seen a spider wrestle one
for an hour, the beetle not fazed

by the brightness of its own dying –
and dying. Old tales of changelings

say that when we do not sleep
breath becomes fireflies, while

Navaho say they channel
sun into night. This night

I feel the rain beneath my skin.
My friend has not been well

for some time. We take it slow,
sit among ferns on the porch

and talk in the dusk. His light
is more steady there, and when

the candle flies rise, we move
out and stand in a scattered

cloud of stars, two forms silent
and still on the soft wet lawn.

The trees drip but the sparks remain.
We take breath upon breath

under the oak canopy
and everything comes in light,

even the rain. We listen
to them glow. They say the same

thing dark as when they are bright.

Let the Wind Have It

Randall Brown

I discover her in the basement, uncovered, her lips stained green. When the house ran dry, she drank mouthwash, then cough syrup, finally anti-freeze. I imagine her in the grave, still warm. Instead, they burn her, give her back to me in a vase, handing me the responsibility for the gesture that will define her death for me—the scattering of my mother.

A week after the funeral, my father calls. He wants the ashes. He will do lines of my mother until his synapses can no longer fire. She stopped loving him a year after the marriage—and told him so. He didn't believe her, waited forty years for her to be proven wrong, forty years of asceticism and celibacy and silent waiting. He deserves the ashes, he really does, except my mother did not want to be with him, not in life, surely not in death.

He shows up anyway. I'm sitting by the pool, the vase next to me. It's the end of spring. The pink laurel ends its bloom with drooping leaves that make me think of skin peeling off I'm high on Xanax, two joints, Celexa, trazadone, some oval pill whose name I can't remember.

"That her?" he says, sitting down, the vase between us.

"Oh Dad. It's endless, the sickness of our family, isn't it?"

"You on drugs?"

"Yes, Dad. I'm on drugs."

"Nice. In front—" God, he stops himself In front of your mother, he almost said. They don't make enough drugs to fix this world.

The silence between us might be endless, might be only momentary. When I notice my father again, he's wiping his eyes. Looking at the sky. Staring into the pool. Blaming himself and will say sorry so I can say it's not his fault.

"Sorry," he says.

"Yes."

He uses silence like a "screw you," only no one else knows it's that, only him. He can't understand why no one gets it, the deep terrible symbolism of his silence, all it says. I'm full of drugs and insight today.

I miss my mother. I do. I miss the briefest moments of clarity when she called with a newfound word—*recherché*. She'd brim over with excitement. "And it means 'rare'—yes that's what the word means. Rare. And the word itself is rare. Exquisite."

"Pretentious," I'd say.

She'd giggle, really giggle. "It means that too. Isn't that uncommon?"

My Dad clears his throat, reminds me of his existence. "Dad I know what your silence means," I tell him. "Isn't that something? That I know."

“You’re talking gibberish,” he says.

He wants to say I gave my mother nothing but unlove, never forgiveness. That I had to have her remember; that I held onto her history as if it were the Holocaust. He would like to get angry, but he’s unmade for outrage. He doesn’t have the words to say all that. He’s deluded, crazy, thinks she’s in heaven and happy now.

The nice thing about the drugs is how temporary each moment feels. This won’t last, what will the next wave of drug bring, that water sure looks cool.

When I come up from the pool bottom into the air, the vase and my father are gone. They’re shuffling up the steps, his legs stiff from the Parkinson’s, his tongue stuck out as if to taste what might fall out.

Oh the stupid thing I do. It’s easy overtaking him. I more crash into his back than tackle him. He tumbles forward, his head barely misses the driveway, the vase and ashes leave his hand and, blame the drugs maybe, but the vase and ashes do not find the macadam or the boulders lining the driveway; instead the two continue their upward flight, unheeding gravity and my father’s desire to hold on forever.

He sobs. What’s become of everything! I only add to the meaninglessness he’s found at the end of his own life. I’ve been terrible and selfish. I know! But who cares anymore—we are free, Dad, free, can’t you feel it—but he can only bend like the plastic figures of my childhood.

Oh, so poor and broken. So stuck and twisted.

The world pulses—a day-glo heart. My father has become tangled in my legs, as if we were roots. I know that it’s not that he cannot move; he doesn’t want to. So I hold him, cradle his head as if he were a newborn with new limbs and a new heart and an entire life in which to fall in love.

COLD SKY
(A Ghazal)

Cathy Capozzoli

Sunburnt weeds, last summer's crop, cling to frozen clumps of earth.
Swatches of thin light pull dirty pastels across winter farm fields.

Clapboard withstands harsh winters and blinding suns.
In the smell of dry breath, even the ditches have names.

Elks stand in the wind that sings above the clouds.
But who would call the ravens graceful?

A death march of sunflowers shoulders the wind.
Just when I thought the geese were gone, the sky filled.

On a beach

(vignette from a dream)

Joneve McCormick

Shadowy trees wrap around one another, undulate in twilight. Ferns and succulent leaves emerge and fade. A pre-rhinoceros creature with low hanging skin munches lacey grass and indifferently looks my way. Leaving my body on a large rock I view my pose from above. Hills breathe, contract and expand. The beast quizzes himself then walks toward my body on the rock, stops, drops his head and vanishes. Long, biomorphic shapes take his place. A young boy forms from them whose body grows transparent toward his toes.

My focus shifts to light flowing into my space from an unseen source -- and I am in a new, spell-bound land. An ocean shimmers blue, green, gold; the sky is pale rose. The rock I sit on now is bleached skeleton white. I climb down and draw a circle, section it into north, south, east and west. The north represents strength, and here fades in a fragile shell growing large and solid.

There is a test of strength to pass before the Master of Games will let me move on.

I close my eyes, feel a hand on my shoulder and open them. A young man is standing at my side, the same that formed earlier but now he's older.

'Snuck-up-on doesn't bode well,' I say out loud, but like the power I feel from him. Determination lines edge his mouth. His eyes are like blue ice in summer.

'I've come as required by the Quest,' he says. 'My name is Adam - I'm from the West. You are my partner in strength?'

'Strength is power well-used. Take your hand from my shoulder.'

'If you're going to resist, I cannot be your knight.'

'I'm used to the absence of chivalry.' Perversely, I recall the line from Satre's No Exit: 'Hell is other people.'

'What test do we have with the shell?' he asks, dropping his hand.

'The Master of Games left instructions inside the tip, and we're to get them out without cracking it,' I reply. 'The instructions tell us what to do next. They will disappear if the shell cracks.'

The shell is about three feet high and four feet from mouth to tip. 'It's too delicate for anything ordinary to have lived in it,' I comment, drawn drowsily into its iridescence.

Salmon, ivory, purple, green and blue lights burst forth from its mouth and with them the distant voices of ancient tribes. Its crust, ridged with points, spirals like a ram's horn.

'Only the beauty of a thing can trap a man. That's why it's important to see it whole,' he says, not looking at me.

The voices become louder, speaking in rhythms and ancient tongues. The shell glitters in the sun. I feel his heightened energy and interest.

'It's up to you to be faithful to our mission,' he says.

Barely awake, I feel the beating of my heart before he vanishes.

RIVER
Patricia Cumming

This river is too quiet but not quiet enough.
The water, murky, opaque, reflects
dimly. My outline trembles.
Small eddies trouble my face.

The river is too quiet. A waxy oak leaf
hesitates, wavers, stops
(whereas, contained,
blood in its circuit moves steadily).

The river is not quiet enough.
The stiff leaf moves on
past the shadows of trees,
to estuary grasses, shallows, salt

eddies: dissolving, joining
the rippling strands of ocean growths
shifting in the tides
of the open sea.

Apocalyptic Godiva

Walter Bargaen

The weather leaves a depression in the bed,
a storm of sheets and blankets.
The bruised tower of pillows,
cumulus at one end of the stained mattress
Headboard stretches to the horizon. That won't
go away and can't be reached Walls of fog
press in. She lies there forecasting faces.
In this new life they do whatever she wants
except call for help. From this angle,
staring over the bed's edge, the floor is her ceiling.
She can't raise her hand to wave hello
or move her head to look up.
One foot free and with her big toe, she reaches
the night table and punches automatic redial.
The police break the chain latch, unlock
the bedroom door. The paramedics find her
in bed, stroke victim who woke
twisted as a bolt of lightning. They hear
the hungry dog curled in the debris
of the kitchen. The steel moons of stethoscopes
swing from their necks. They can't lift
her universe or roll her easily. With scissors
they cut away her gown, then she's free to panic,
to stand, to walk the hall. No stroke of luck,
weathering the sweet tooth of loneliness: Mars,
Butterfingers, Mounds, unwrapped, half-eaten,
rolled thickly in the sheets, melted against her body,
and hardened in the morning of an unheated room.
No downpour, tornado, Force Ten gale needed
to shake her, but scissored free of this sweet apocalypse.

As I began to realize the true nature of the task
I had set
for myself, the image of the river
began to haunt my mind.

I actually felt that I had a great river thrusting for
release inside of me and that I had to find a channel
into which its floodlike power could pour.
I knew I had to find it or I would be destroyed
in the flood of my own creation;
and I am sure that every artist who ever lived
has had the same experience.

—Thomas Wolfe

This

Daniel Coshnear

She thinks, I spend more time on these roads around home than I do at home. She thinks, *this* is probably not so, but it feels so. “The windshield is my front porch,” she says to the spaced out toddler in the backseat. “This” with an open handed gesture left to right like reading, “this” loosely indicating the vineyard descending to dusty shoulder and graying black yellow-dashed two lane, dropping down again to more vineyard, champagne grapes, broad leaves in a late summer pale color wheel “this” above, a wide swath of powder blue, a single power line perpendicular right poorly framing a copse of laurels beyond the edge of the zippering fields, and the riparian tangle below with the darker green leaves and vines of blackberry, “this” where a thin shelf of fog hangs over the buried river, persists against the emerging morning sun. At fifty-eight miles per hour the view soon changes, trees closing in, some relief for the tired eyes, shadows across the road, a slight rise and dip and curve, she reads a toppling wood-pile, a dry brown lawn offset by the gangly, almost electric patches of pink ladies lining the gravel drive, now the house coming fully into view, “this” unfinished white aluminum over brown shingle, not rustic but dirty-looking, “this” not her home, someone's home perhaps, but yes, her home, her view, a part of her inner circle when you consider the paths she beats day in day out.

Home is the view through the window above her kitchen sink. And the view into the sink, a leaf of lettuce floating, still water, soap bubbles retreating.

Home is the bright light of the refrigerator in the otherwise dark kitchen, the shelves overstuffed with condiments, culinary ambitions poorly sealed, crusted, and the sound the door makes on its tired hinges, and the smell of a withering cabbage.

Home is her fish-eye reflection at the ATM machine, and the face behind the cash register at Safeway, and her toddler's tongue that won't stand aside for the battery powered toothbrush, and the back of her husband's head and the way his shirt puffs above his belt line, and the blinking circle she remembers as her daughter made her wait for the newest hottest thing on You Tube to finish loading, and the way her daughter stood in the bathroom doorway combing out her bangs, and the way her daughter whined, and the way she laughed with her fists pumping the air like a skier about to spring off a slope, and the jangle of her bracelets, and all the memories of her daughter, all of them, and all the photos she can't bear to look at. It happened nine months ago, gestation in reverse, giving birth to death and relentless questions, fruitless how and why and how. Now she asks where am I going and when will I get there. Home is the sight of her own toes beneath the curve of her belly in the shower.

Home is the front walk she sweeps, what had been one of her daughter's chores, and the tuft of dandelion poking through a crack, the ants, the sound of the neighbor's compressor, nails shooting into fence posts, the metallic taste of her tap water, the rancid taste of her ice cubes, the flies circling their circles above her compost bowl.

“Home,” she tells her backseat companion, “is a composite of memories, an approximate feeling,” but home these days, well, maybe she's too close to see it, like stray marks on a page, incoherent, non-suggestive, a parallax error.

Home is a reach, conceptually. What is it she's really wanting to describe? Consciousness? Unconsciousness? The phantoms that play upon her empty tablet? “Orbits. Habits.”

She comes abruptly to a full stop at the second of two intersections heading west through the town of Guerneville. This is where she'd chosen to live. This is where she'd stopped choosing where to live. This is where she'd say she landed, if she'd been flying, which wasn't really so. Home is the ever thicker clumps of hair in the drain and the dried skin and the dust on the tops of the baseboards. She'd been drifting. The wind pushed her here like leaves against a wire fence. No, that wasn't so either, but sometimes lately it seems so. She'd gotten pregnant. The choices leading up to that event were real enough, cogitated plenty, but so long ago she can't remember. She'd liked him. She remembers. He smelled like sandalwood. He was funny. His moods were easy to understand. They still are. Yes, even now. He was reliable. He still is. They'd wanted to live closer to the city, but no way could they afford it. They'd both been raised in suburbs – they didn't want that. If they couldn't have urban, they'd choose rural. They'd raise her here. She was only a swelling then, eleven years ago, nearly twelve. These pixellated skies? These landscapes without her?

“Look at this,” she says. She tilts her rear view mirror and finds her little boy examining crumbs in his lap. “Look,” she says. “Indulge me for once.” He looks up. There is a family in the crosswalk. One more block and they will come to the river beach. Water flowing. A place to play. A place to rest. “Do you see?” Dad is pushing a stroller, a towel draped around his neck, a floating toy under his arm. Baby's bare feet lead the way, one pointed and the other swinging. She says, “See the baby?” Several steps behind mom is holding hands with daughter. The gentle slope of the brow, upturn of the nose, resemblances are strong in profile. Mom wears a white top, almost blinding in the sun, tied in a bow in back. Her neck and shoulders shine with lotion. But it's the pink and lime strings of the girl's two piece dangling, bouncing now as she skips and pulls, pointing in the direction they are walking. “Do you see her?” Her name could be May or June or Joy. “Are you looking? Get *this*. Hold it tight,” she says. “Now give it back to me.”

So much held in a heart in a life.
So much held in a heart in a day, an hour, a moment.
We are utterly open with no one, in the end —
not mother and father, not wife or husband,
not lover, not child, not friend.
We open windows to each, but we live alone in the house of the heart.
Perhaps we must.
Perhaps we could not bear to be so naked,
for fear of a constantly harrowed heart.
When young we think there will come
one person who will savor and sustain us always;
when we are older we know this is the dream of a child,
that all hearts finally are bruised and scarred, scored and torn,
repaired by time and will, patched by force of character,
yet fragile and rickety forevermore,
no matter how ferocious the defense
and how many bricks you bring to the wall.
You can brick up your heart as stout and tight and hard and cold
and impregnable as you possibly can and down it comes in an instant,
felled by a woman's second glance, a child's apple breath,
the shatter of glass in the road, the words *I have something to tell you*,
a cat with a broken spine dragging itself into the forest to die,
the brush of your mother's papery ancient hand in the thicket of your hair,
the memory of your father's voice early in the morning echoing from the
kitchen where he is making pancakes for his children.

—from *Joyas Voladoras*, by Brian Doyle

Fragile, Perishable

Donna D. Vitucci

After three days of hard rain the sky broke open blue and Felicity headed out to her garden. There was squishing around her bare feet because she wore rubber flip flops, and the mud juiced between and across her toes, making the whole enterprise slimy. All around her she could hear sluicing in the earth, the water table restoring, the sun inducing shrinkage. The soil sucked up the good stuff while it could, like one day it would be sucking her. Felicity felt a bit tilted, off-kilter. She took Paxil to level off.

With a baby in your arms you couldn't do *anything*, she reminded herself, and that's why she was glad one of her eggs hadn't yet stuck. She had her garden and plenty of things were blooming, or would be, because of all this rain they were having. The earth was fecund. She loved how that word lolled heavy in her mouth, full of portent, a whole world lifted by her tongue. The garden would occupy her this season, and when autumn blew in she'd return to the nesting idea.

The dream of family that had occupied Felicity and Robert in the haziest of manners when they'd first begun trying to conceive, it folded into nightmare because everything Robert did had to be at full-tilt. When plain old fucking didn't produce results, they registered Felicity's basal temperature religiously and played by-the-book. As was his way, Robert read up on the subject, then choreographed their nights like he'd been awarded the directorial mantle of an Oscar hopeful. She allowed him to order her, to pose her, to poke and lift her.

In her mind, the pregnancies wouldn't stick because the babies, poor lost souls, peeked into their future with her and they bailed quick and early, nobody's fools. She'd miscarried twice, was afraid to try again, but her aunts, standing in for Felicity's own dead mother, said, *Third time's a charm*. Three, mystical number. A holy family of three would emerge from all that agenda-fucking, fucking like following a recipe. Tedium and resentment would flush free from Felicity the same way she'd heard the worst of labor fades.

They'd be another suburban family, Gatlinburg-bound in summers, fresh-faced, hale and hearty, eager for hike, strong in muscle and bone. No worries, be happy. Slip Paxil past the tongue. "You're no one special," Robert said. Then he corrected. "Of course you're special. That's not what I meant, honey. But you're not the only woman struggling. Infertility affects a good ten percent of the population. Of those, forty percent are due to *a female factor* and forty percent are due to *a male factor*. So I'll accept half the blame right off the bat, okay? Let's just try to fix this on our own."

Robert, her stalwart statistician. Count on him to know the latest numbers, x chances in whatever. She was sick of the odds. She wanted a loophole, some cheat-ing scheme that would offer a leg up. No surrogate or invitro or fertility drugs, not yet. Felicity let herself be shanghied, instead, by what she'd heard her mother and her aunts whisper bits of in their kitchens back on Gunpowder Creek before they all came north to work in the Delta airport expansion. A mix of prayers, the stars, and the earth's power to grow was her heritage and she was right laying claim to it, just as she'd had to suffer Robert's mockery. "Your hillbilly roots," he called them, dismissing the potential for mythmaking that was in her.

"You're Kentucky same as I am," she said.

"Florence is a city, not quite as primitive as creek living."

He had the idea he'd lifted her from some ignorant hollow, though when they met, Felicity and her mom were renting a unit in the complex behind Showcase Cinemas. If Erlanger was what *city* had to offer, she'd take creek-side any day.

She'd been with Robert three years and then moved back in to that two-bedroom apartment to help her mother whip the disease they found eating at her inside, female parts. From the start, cancer had the upper hand, and though her mother put on a good face for when the world looked in, Felicity watched the woman who'd birthed her and beat her bottom red and bathed her as a little girl in an outside tub summers in their front yard whittled down to bones. With the I-75 traffic outside rattling louder than the air conditioner in the window, her mother begged for a last taste of their creek. Morphine already had her out of her head by then. Felicity brought tap water to the bed and lied about where it came from, but it didn't matter, her mother's lips couldn't manage to kiss around the straw.

Felicity shook her head, if only it was that easy to erase. "So what fertility advances do the great city of Florence and its doctors have to offer?"

Robert wiggled his thick dark eyebrows in what she guessed he thought was an attractive come-on. She did find his eyebrows sexy, and his eyelashes too, the way they framed his blue eyes. He said, "Honey, we haven't yet exhausted our homegrown methods. In fact," and here he depressed the button that lit his digital watch so he could verify the date, "now's prime operating time."

He managed to short circuit romance without even trying. *Trying* -- their operative word. From the back patio she'd lugged the large clay pot filled with myrtle and placed it hearthside earlier in the day. Masquerading as home décor, the scent of the frowsy white blossoms would wind its way through the house and into their bedroom. The magic would find them, and bless her.

In the morning she ran to the garden. Her feet splashed through wet grass, she dropped to her knees, hands curled to catch the globes of tomatoes, then fingers pinch-poised to squash grub worms. She felt the dirt on her skin as a cousin.

By then Robert had departed for the office. Felicity reveled in the room to breathe, to run half crazy around the yard, to divide the early summer air with her slim, not-pregnant body. She wondered, did she really even want a baby? And the aunts seated on the judgement bench inside her head immediately scolded, "Selfish girl!" Aunt Mary, Aunt Alice, Aunt Patty, Aunt Clare were all she had left of her mother. The aunts still sprayed their loose blond locks with setting lotion, lay heads down with pin-curved hair on pillow slips stiff from bluing, the way they'd been taught to bleach the bedclothes as girls growing up.

Felicity waffled on the baby: wanted one, didn't want, and then doubled fierce back to wanting. She sometimes felt tacked like a butterfly in a collection of Robert's, under his examination for any pregnant indicator. A baby would trump his to-do lists, loosen up his iron grip, might even smooth his pointed expectations. By accident and inno-cently, she knew, he was capable of grounding her, his fingers smudging her, erasing her casual manner and that easy suspension of disbelief that had first captivated him. Now he called it gullibility, he put it down as dreaminess. If she gave in to all his logic, pretty soon she wouldn't even be able to lift and dance across the grass.

Her heart was growing heavy. Or maybe that was her belly. Maybe the last time they did it something took.

"Wouldn't be surprised," Robert said when he called to check on her at lunch and she let comment about this inert feeling slip. "Everything's working in our favor. Your temperature spiked, we slid the pillows under to raise your rump and kept the goods from running out."

Felicity cringed when he said, "the goods," when he said, "rump."

"I kept my hands off myself," and here he chuckled, "so you got my best stuff. Law of averages, we had to hit jackpot sooner or later." He sounded like that odds man in Vegas who predicted numbers for the Super Bowl.

Sperm health and motility, such were the subjects of their intimate discussions. With that pillow under her ass, and the slippery trail on the inside of her thigh when Robert finally pulled out of her, she'd lain there in bed, giving an insulting, silent pep talk to those sperm tilted, hopefully, towards the bowl of her uterus. *Who wants it bad enough, huh? Let's see a little competition among you fellas, for Chrissakes.* Like a coach whipping up his players at half-time, or a sergeant toughening his recruits. How could sacrifice not be involved?

Saints and spells had held equal sway on Gunpowder Creek. They were equally practiced and prayed to. Felicity might appeal to St. Anthony but she felt her ask would be drowned out by pleas from shipwreck victims, the starving, the oppressed and the poor, fishermen, travelers, and yes, even swineherds, not to mention the mindless who misplaced their valuables. She'd been able to recite that silly prayer since she was young. "St. Anthony, St. Anthony, Take a look around. Something is lost and must be found." It held about as much magic as Dorothy clicking her ruby slippers' heels three times while chanting. "There's no place like home." St. Anthony never helped her find one damned lost thing. The voodoo was all in your head.

That's what Robert said when she started on the Paxil, that it was a placebo, she only had to rein in her mind and take her phobias to task. She could beat them if she tried. She didn't need help outside herself. But that's just it, she wanted to whine, she most certainly, definitely did. Two hands to take in the trembling world were not enough.

With pencil on a brown egg she wrote her initials and four fertility symbols. In a shallow garden grave, she placed the egg and ten vanilla beans by light of the waxing moon, planted them the same as seeds. She mounded dirt over it, as if she'd set in an innocent row of beans, patted the ground three times and recited verse. It was officially summer and the moon, with its horns pointing east, had risen late. Robert wandered out the kitchen door, after the ten o'clock news, she guessed, and stood at the patio edge trying to locate her at the back of their property. So loudly the neighbors could hear, he said, "What possible good can you accomplish in the dark out there?"

Felicity tilted the sprinkler spout above the buried egg and as both water and mud splashed her feet, said, "I'm pouring salt on slugs. I'll be in soon."

He waited for her and when she reached the edge of the patio he set his broad hands on her shoulders to stop her from going on into the house.

"What?" she said, trying to turn and face him.

He held her in place. His voice behind her, in her hair, said, "Shhhh."

A slow breeze set the trees shivering. That waterfall sound of leaves swept all across the yard, and also something more, an out of tune xylophone. Felicity saw the patio light glint off

silver hovering in the air by the sliding glass doors. There spoons had been hung with fishing line through drilled holes in their handles so they created wind chimes that would greet her whenever she brushed past on her way to the garden. She could imagine sometimes just sitting outside to listen to those spoons play music—the baby spoon from which every aunt and she and her mother had been fed their first solid foods; the sugar spoon that set in Gran's crystal bowl so neatly that the lid fit snug around the stem and kept the sugar fine and sifted, no clumps. Robert had staggered the four demitasse spoons from Mammoth Cave so the emblematic scenes engraved on the handles swirled and gave Felicity that dizzy on-vacation feeling she loved. Encouraged to see her husband could still pull a rabbit out of his hat, Felicity turned, and now he allowed her to. She kissed him and he kissed her back, and the kiss was no part of a schedule.

She clearly remembered sitting, as a toddler, beside her mother on the front porch with the day dying down around them. The aunts, young again, two of them still in high school, sat staggered on the steps, a-gossiping, their backs up against the railing as they lounged, everybody with a cigarette going to and from their mouths. The dusk air turned grey with their blowing. Felicity was listless and her ear hurt and she'd been leaning her feverish little body into her mother, with her head and her arms and the whole top half of her draped across her mother's knees. Her mother said to the aunts, "Look at my-little-girl-lap-blanket." She sucked on the unfiltered tobacco, then bent and blew the smoky exhale into Felicity's sore ear. Felicity treasured the tickle of it, the soothing of her mother's breath inside those whorly parts of her ear, into her hair, and down the neck of her dress. It was her mother she thought of and yearned for when Robert spoke in her ear, when he breathed on her neck, when he unbuttoned her and tasted down the neck of her summer pajamas. They established a comfortable rhythm, to which she was not at all averse. She and Robert shifted and rolled, tearing part of the top sheet free from the mattress. When they finished, Felicity lay mostly immobile as she was supposed to, except for her foot at the very bottom of the bed. She nudged her toe as best she could within that protected space between top and fitted sheet, without alerting Robert, to locate the sprigs of yarrow, lavender and rosemary ribboned up in a square of cheesecloth. They were still there, close and potent.

Along with the rest of the week's groceries Felicity bought a honeydew melon. At home, she tore a piece from one of the brown paper bags and scribbled, "Give me a baby." Then she added, "...strong enough to survive." She'd already been allotted two that proved too tender, and she didn't want this plea making her out as greedy. She cut a slit in the melon and wedged the folded paper into it, then wrapped the fruit in a yellow bandana. Honeydew juice began soaking through immediately. In the utility drawer sat plenty of white candles for when storms knocked out electricity, and Felicity stood one in a coffee mug and then poured dry pinto beans around it until she was sure it would stay upright. Then she lit it on the kitchen counter next to the melon, thinking on her wishes as she struck the match, loving that sulfur smell. Her mother had called her *my little pyromaniac* when she found her girl Felicity had set fire to a whole book of matches and dropped them flaming in the ash tray, their heat so intense the dish broke in two. It left a burn mark on the kitchen table's oilcloth.

“A baby does nothing but tie you down”—her mother’s one bit of advice in the church sacristy where she adjusted Felicity’s wedding veil. Caution, and probably well-meant, but the confession and regret, unexpected from her own mother on that day of all days, pinged around inside Felicity’s ears. She’d felt erased ten minutes before she had to walk up the aisle. Robert said, later, her skin was as pale as the ivory satin she wore.

She didn’t know how long to let the candle burn, so she let it flicker on the counter all morning, next to the wrapped melon while she did laundry. Every once in a while she peeked around the kitchen doorway and checked to make sure nothing caught fire and that the flame still flickered. She guessed a baby would require this same kind of attending, this same kind of vigilance. Maybe this ritual was meant to make you consider that. In five days she should bring the melon to the river with twenty-seven cents. And when she stood at the riverbank, what then?

The leaking honeydew would draw ants. Felicity set it, wrapped in its yellow kerchief like the lopped off head of some peasant woman, in the plastic bucket she used for household scrubbing. Once the laundry had finished tumbling in the dryer, she blew out the candle and carried the bucket to the vegetable garden. Behind the large watering can it was less likely to be seen and questioned by Robert, though he never made the rounds out there.

Each night Robert rubbed her belly before they turned their faces opposite for sleep. Felicity began thinking of herself as Aladdin’s lamp. She carried inside her the power to grant wishes.

After she watched his Jetta disappear from their street, Felicity traipsed in her pajamas to the garden and watered the egg. “Until you are pregnant,” the magic had read. Felicity thought she could well be watering all summer long.

Each morning more of the soil seemed to have run off, and by Day Five of the Honeydew she discovered an empty gully in the garden where her “beans” should have been sprouting. During the night, a raccoon must have scooped out her egg for his midnight snack. Suddenly, what she wouldn’t give, herself, for a hardboiled egg with plenty of salt. Her belly growled and she put her hand to it, half expecting to see at the end of her arm black skinny fingers and gloved palm like the night thief of her imagination. At the garden’s edge, all kinds of gnats, fruit flies, ants, and bees collected in the honeydew’s juice. Some had drowned there. She lugged up to the patio, with her very human hands, the bucket of rotting fruit. Robert had said she shouldn’t even lift a soup pot of water until they saw how the end of the month turned out.

Upstairs she stripped out of her sweaty pajamas, pulled a sundress over her head, brushed her hair and snapped it into a short ponytail, and slid her feet into her all-purpose flip flops. Felicity’s pulse had turned fluttery. It zinged through her arms and legs, with a skid up her spine that lit her like electricity. Before Paxil, this was how she scattered around, unbalanced, the very balls of her feet giving up on her. The idea of going to the river, whatever she did once she got there, gave her a buzz that rose above the flat, sun-stroked morning. She found she was holding her breath and she sat still behind the steering wheel, gripping her keys, willing herself to inhale and exhale the way she’d learned in yoga class. Her front seat passenger waited in its bucket.

Bypassing the closer-to-home and more secluded Miami River, Felicity drove the expressway into the heart of the city and all the way down to the Ohio. She parked at the

Public Landing, then walked along the Serpentine Wall, stepping down towards the water now and again, swinging the honeydew in its bucket so it didn't bang against her knee. Felicity assumed a vacant stare for the three women who didn't have the thighs for the short shorts they wore as they and their half dozen kids sprawled a picnic over several levels of the Serpentine's steps.

She nodded at the two uniformed police officers astride their stopped bicycles, helmets temporarily unstrapped as they guzzled from their water bottles. She noted the young men of indeterminate age in dreadlocks and do-rags, either head gear too hot for the weather, their dark skins made darker with sweat. She scuttled out of the way of businessmen on early lunch who came up on her quick, the collars of their suit coats hooked on their fingers at their shoulders, their ties flapping. Because they'd surprised her, she glanced over her shoulder, determined not to be caught in someone else's way. She wore a vague smile for the homeless guy twenty paces behind her, who couldn't even see her face but might detect her mood from the spring in her step. The calm and balance in her feet slapping the pavement camouflaged her pinball pulse. To the homeless guy she might as well have been strolling lackadaisical along the beach with a sand pail, but it felt like the couple pounds of reeking fruit she carried were driving the metal bucket handle past the skin of her palm.

She was desperate to be seen, and so she had been. Felicity sat on the step nearest the river with the bucket beside her. The Serpentine Wall curved and wound as it followed the natural line of the riverbank and its steps did a shimmery dance of reduction in the hot sunlight, a stone escalator disappearing finally into the Ohio. No one came close, no one bothered her. The barge restaurants docked across the way in Kentucky bobbed slightly in the slow-moving river as she rolled the honeydew from its bucket and down the slope into the dirty water, where it sank.

She mouthed a prayer to any unnamed saint who would listen. "Please let it be, let it be." She'd make the petition no more definite than that. The saint would decide what "it" was, and if Felicity merited an answer. The bright sun made her eyes burn and she closed them to squeeze out some tears. A relief, the water her own body made. At least she could produce something.

When she saw the world again, the homeless man stood near her and said, "Why'd you trash that bowling ball?"

"It was a melon," she said, looking across at the floating restaurants. "And the river's already full of trash. One more piece won't hurt."

He smelled like eucalyptus. He wore Air Jordans that had seen better days on others' feet. His voice was inexplicably tender, like a girl's.

The bum collapsed beside her and Felicity reflexively cuddled her purse in her lap, as if she was protecting a child and already practicing: *Don't talk to strangers.*

There was something about the set of his mouth, pursed as it might be after a taste of vinegar or lemon, two things her mother always spring-cleaned with--Felicity could again smell the sharp aroma, could envision the window panes her mother swiped at with newspaper, so clean that birds flew into them full flight, stunning themselves, sometimes breaking their necks.

The bum might have lost home, hearth, health and even dignity, but elocution rose firmly in his throat. "And you tossed the melon, why?"

His eyes seemed kind, even wise. They were blue, Felicity's favorite color, bright like the haint blue she'd begged Robert to paint their front door. She remembered St. Anthony, patron saint of travelers. The bum's shoes appeared to have walked countless miles. She confessed to him about the spell, about the miscarriages, about the Paxil and the galloping in her veins, about the egg stolen from her garden. Then she opened her purse, took out her wallet and gave him a quarter and two pennies. The twenty-seven cents sat in his rough palm, magic complete.

He gave her an almost feral look. "Lady, I'm going to need a lot more than that."

After all, nothing but a panhandler. She could hear Robert scolding her: "You don't even have the sense to be scared."

She looked in her wallet and withdrew a twenty. "That's all I have."

He plucked it from her. "It's a start."

Felicity thought she could hear grains of dirt on his fingers rasp against the bill as he made it totally his. He had given her no wisdom or charms to face the rest of the trembling day, so what had she paid him for?

He rose from his crouch and began walking away from her and she looked off to her right, where she'd parked the car, stood, gathering the energy to walk to it.

The homeless man turned to face her and said loudly, distinctly, "You have to want it so bad you can taste it."

She thought about when Robert called out to her in the dark from the patio for all the neighborhood to hear, but she wasn't embarrassed here on the Serpentine Wall as she'd been in her own backyard. The three women with the white flabby thighs, who knew little about fashion but had managed to help populate the earth with their own flesh and blood, they turned their heads back and forth between Felicity and the homeless man as their chattering increased. Their gossip flapped like crows' wings.

He came back to stand before her and bowed ever so politely, sweeping his ball cap from his head, facing the steps, "Can I take you to lunch, madam?"

Without the cap to restrain it, the bum's hair fell to his shoulders, and Felicity thought she saw his features rearrange into her mother's. Absurd, but he gave her a look reminiscent of one she'd caught so many times, a *Watch your step, missy*, look. Two years ago now, she and the aunts had taken her mother home and buried her in the family plot that sloped down to the creek. Of course this bum was not Felicity's mother, but she was a woman.

Felicity begged off on the lunch offer. The twenty was the bum's now. The money, once given, could not cross back to her in any way but that bad luck would be at its heels.

While she drove home with the air conditioning blasting her and the empty bucket, Felicity mulled what the bum had said. She had a way of ruining things with her longing. This she knew about herself, but was helpless to stop it. Two traffic lights ahead loomed the Golden Arches. She felt capable right then of gobbling down a double cheeseburger without even chewing. Her insides were full of teeth. They'd do all the gnashing required. Though earlier she had eaten that hardboiled egg she'd craved, she now wanted something else in her mouth, substantial meat and bread followed by a sweet taste, maybe some orange juice or granola.

But she stopped nowhere for food, pulled at last into her driveway, took up her purse and the bucket's metal handle, so weightless it was almost obscene. The hot white of mid-day reflected off the concrete, made her eyes ache, gave her good reason to faint, but she bucked up enough to work her stuttering key in the lock of the blue door. The cool air from inside swept across her temples, where it was so very welcome.

She came home to find the familiar smear of blood in her underwear. The heaviness, the jittery feeling of the morning, it all made sense. She didn't know how much longer she could go on doing this.

"You'll do it until you get it right," she could hear her mother say. Words that accompanied any of a dozen lessons from her childhood – how you're to make a well in a bowl of cornmeal for stirring in the eggs and buttermilk, and breading and frying tomatoes so their slices didn't fall apart in the skillet. One thing for sure, her mother never let her quit an endeavor, even if she made fun of Felicity, even when she said, "You'd never catch me doing that."

She recalled, suddenly, another of her mother's caveats from that brief pre-bridal intimacy in the church they'd shared: "Whatever you choose, you choose for the long-haul."

The ringing telephone roused her from the bathroom. The caller ID posted Robert's work number. Past lunchtime and so he maybe worried a little that he hadn't been able to reach her, to tell her, as he usually did, to take it easy, to nap if necessary, to do whatever her body asked of her. She couldn't summon words in her mouth to speak so she just stared at the phone, let him think she was unavailable.

Felicity lay on her back atop the summer bedspread, kicked off her flip flops, and saw the city grime mixed with sweat that marked the tops of her feet. She wouldn't stop trying. There were plenty of other spells and prayers, and even medical science if they chose to delve there. In a day or two her energy would start rebounding. But she could also hear her mother: *A baby's no solution, just another arm on the octopus*. It was becoming habit, her mother's ghost weighing in with her two cents worth.

Might take many times before you get it right. Then the stridency in her mother's voice weakened. *There's no shame in practice*.

Felicity was prepared to open her legs to her husband, a stall tactic, as a baby and even sex was, but they'd need to find new ways to be good to one another or they'd find themselves with less hope than the woman begging strangers at the river for lunch money. Felicity went down to the kitchen and took from the pantry the canister of rock candy Robert bought her on their last trip to the Smokies. Commercialism might have transformed those streets into tacky shops for tourists, but they still sold some good homemade sweets. Felicity wrapped a big piece in a towel and cracked it with a hammer a couple times, put the candy in a glass as if it was ice. Then she poured gin just to cover. When Felicity was horrified by the pain and blood of her first period, her mother introduced her to this "sweet shine" for cramps. They would soon be coming on strong, she knew, and she hoped to head them off. Robert said such foolishness just gave a hillbilly one more reason to drink. *Here's mud in your eye*, she thought, toasting the sliding glass doors, her backyard garden, and those musical spoons. She sipped and swallowed big.

And When the Woman
Kosrof Chantikian

And when the woman
very beautiful
came home

came home from the moon
from the stars
the lost holy places

what could I say?
O! your face of love

your hand wrapped in the wind
the tree of water began to cry

the crows were dressed
the rivers stopped to greet you

the sky came down to
meet the singing branches

the trees
where the birds sat talking

full of fire
full of hunger

& love
arrived

at home
here
with me

Dream of a Conversation with Time

Kosrof Chantikian

I have come alone
have nothing in my hands
to destroy you

only my eyes to see you
I want to learn
to know

how you exist
the old woman in the square
near the fountain

said you talk only
about the past & the future
that you believe the present

is an illusion, a dream we have
when our eyes fall asleep
she said the present died years ago —

that you had killed her
after an argument
I want to know if this is true

& then Time spoke:

*sometime ago
What you call the past & the future
decided that the present
was no longer needed*

*not wanted by anyone
no longer of proper use
and so had to be abolished
disassembled annihilated forbidden
erased from our memory*

I answered:

Time, how can you exist then
with only the past & future?
you would be incomplete

whatever happens to us
must happen in the world, not outside of it
therefore, an event such as death

must also happen
in some age, a century, say,
a year, a season, a month, a day, even a moment

how can we live or die except on a certain day
a particular hour?
how can I die except in the present?

the death of the present, then
is your illusion, Time
— you need the present

it is part of your existence
without it nothing
is possible

without it even you are dead
futile inadequate
you are the impostor

then Time spoke:

*you believe I am made of three indivisible threads
but you have been misled*

*the present is a phantom thread
to attempt to touch it is to make it disappear*

*even to imagine it exists
is to prove it cannot*

to speak it

is to cause it to vanish

*the old woman was wrong
I did not kill the present*

*I killed only this phantom —
A false notion of myself*

*or rather — I abolished it
prohibited its existence*

*I, therefore, did not kill the present —
as you call it —
as much as the idea of it*

*the idea — which others insist on seeing
when there's nothing actually there —*

*like looking at the sea
pretending to understand its motions*

*why it moves the way it does
why it exists*

*why the waves tear away from the sea
only to return to the sea
to itself*

*so you know now
that if others insist on*

*seeing or speaking of—
not what's there*

*but of what they imagine is there —
what they want to be there —
then I am not to blame*

*do you think
believing in something passionately*

*is reason enough
for it to exist in the world?*

I shook my head
on hearing what Time had said

but before I could say anything more
I awoke from my dream.

in the late autumn afternoon of September
I looked at the trees outside my window

the sky was mostly a cool pastel
with thin patches
of clouds

a light wind moved the thin green
and brown clumps of needles
hanging from the pine

a squirrel ran across the branches of the oak
not to play
but looking for food

it was a good time
to be alive
as good a time as I could

remember
to be
alive

now

here

with you

On Death

Kosrof Chantikian

a few days ago
at dinner
you confessed your uncertainties

your fear
the doubts you still have
the feeling that erodes your face

that look you get when your eyes tremble
as if someone
has tried to murder the air

by stepping on it
by spitting at the sun
as if to put it out

you wonder if poets know anything
about dying
you would like to know

what it's like
how to approach it
carefully you think

because you want this event
this transaction
(that you believe proves
the contingency of the world)

you want it to be like
a slow brushing of your teeth
something you are accustomed to doing

something you can finish with easily
like dinner

that will have a definitive end
so you can get up from the table
or leave the restaurant
something you can renounce
or nullify at will

something definable
under your control

like a poem
because you believe

poems are made like houses
where each word is not any more miraculous
than a brick or a piece of plywood

& that all it takes
is to put the stones & wood together

& is a poem
you wonder —
the building of it —
any different

or anyone's life
any different than
stones or wood or glue

isn't it,
what you call life,
a putting together of winters & spring

this is what you believe

you want death to be the same
you want to be able to spit at it
to compress it
to lock it inside your baggy pants

to crush it
with your heavy wallet

you think now
that death
ought to be asking

you for permission
making at least
an appointment to see you

on a Saturday morning
you will be ready
you will have all the arguments
typed memorized
ready to shout them if need be

you'll begin with mountains
& then move on to literature

pretend to philosophize
as professors still do

demonstrate that death could not exist
because it is only the bad dreams we have

still it might be well
just in case
To see what poets know—

“what is death really like
have you any information for me?

a booklet perhaps
a sketch of what to expect
anything will do—

but I must have something
something that tells me
what to expect

you see—
I have an important appointment
soon

& I must be prepared
I must show
what I know”

TO EXALT

Dianna Henning

You'd heard that pneumonia's called dry drowning,
and wished that you could spring your lungs free
from their bone-basket, hang them like two silk slips
on the clothesline, wooden clothes-pins minding their truancy.

Instead, you dreamily sucked Swiss *Ricola Drops*,
while outside your bedroom window ponderosa trees swayed;
sun-slants glittering off blackbirds. *It's clearly a matter of motion,
this tide of the lungs, the way it keeps you afloat.*

You rode your next breath out as though it were a surfboard,
cresting above watery depths which smelled like before life,
and quite possibly of afterlife, its promised view. Then you
sighed with each exhalation as though it were exaltation.

JETTATURA
Cheryl Hicks

If I could watch you with my eyes closed,
I would know more how you move. But I am
blinded by your sweep of arm, my good
intentions falter, and I forget
the words. As though balanced on toe
on a rickety chair,
I posture and prance, then
dive,
knowing this
is my last possible chance
to keep
from
falling.

Behind this desperation in my eyes,
I am learning to fly

Legacy of Surging Seas

Jonathan Greenhouse

Forget her nimble fingers grazing on your skin,
upon your legs, the quick slip of her hips
upon your sweetened lips that muttered songs
to sweep her skin as sunrays tumbled from
soft half-turned blinds of windows opening
to brightened streets of strangers floors below.

Bestow your breath upon bared flesh, and lightly blow
a cool and concentrated touch upon her breasts,
the convex contour of her fallen flesh to rest
upon the faintest bulge of ribs. Two heaving hearts
exalt within their cage of lovers' hopeful arts,
engaged in secret symphonies of doubled beats.

Now time has turned away from its generic days,
and hours are solely measured by your lover's face:
Slight wrinkles 'round her sparkling eyes, a field of years
is marked in moments' memories of graying hairs
hastening to fill grooved gaps that lives have breached
within bared skin of searching lovers out of reach.

No words remain to rain upon her waiting whims;
No breaths will break the walls you've built to bring
a sense of solitude and sacred space to think
about sweet days that were to come, yet now have passed.
So now, your years are nothing more than memories cast
upon rough surging seas that swallow skin.

Parade Upon the Resting Boy

Jonathan Greenhouse

The boy's dry palm is poised, placed perfectly
beneath eternity, his form expecting pieces of the sky
to crack, then tumble, with a feverish groan
and carry darkened cumulous cast.
His eyes pierce heaven's carbon shell
through blinking sentinels of stars
unfettered by the clouds' ripe condensation.

His emerald eyes are fixed upon the celestial stage:
A waiting woodwork's made a visible parade
of sawdust, dirt and darkness laid
where the boy's bare feet sink, seep, and press
into the breast of pebbles, grass, tough clay and soil.
His skin is seized, divided, sheathed
by laboring insects in their toil:
Ants' colonies entranced by ten pale toes;
Snails' slime securing humid trails past porous clothes.
His legs shine phosphorescent in this festival
of fireflies tied to his thinning thighs;
Their silent symphony of flashing lights
draws candent circles in the sable night.
The boy's dried lips are neatly lined
with dappled ladybugs' unfolded wings
and ghostly moths that measure absences of flight...

Now all of them are joined within a stillness of the boy
who holds his palms upright, awaits a shift
or sudden downturn of the dusky sky.
A breath is building towards a breeze;
A chill wind's lips embrace earth's figures in decay,
adorned in cloths and quilts comprised
of a myriad of living things all poised
to swim within this boy's stalled blood
and flesh's loosened skin.

Unsound
Kelley Jean White

I took you
from the shadow of the mountain
dust caking
your milky skin

between two lakes
and the rock's high anger
to green, I thought,
and a village peace

but you saw hurt
where I saw beauty
in the great gee ox
and his knobbled knees

you lived with horses
before they broke you
showed the withered haunch
the crippled calf

the empty barn
dust on hay moldering
the yoke too heavy
choked by burning steel

Not everything has a name.
Some things lead us into a realm beyond words.
Art warms even an icy and depressed heart,
opening it to lofty spiritual experience.
By means of art we are sometimes sent—dimly,
briefly—revelations unattainable by reason.

—Alexander Solzhenitsyn

in a beautiful way
Livio Farallo

a bathroom light unburdened
with anyone
to shine on and
A sky.

an
ocean of
krill sucked
through baleen
and madagascar
stupid and alone.

a kiss, from
one mouth to
another, that won't
free you but
only stencils
a memory of all mouths
that are dead after
whispering "hush."

and if your hands
are free forever, if sheep
and stuttering make you
sleep well; if
every woman gives
milk borne of random
desirability; there
are some patient things
religion can't obliterate.

to the woman who regretted tasting anything sour
Livio Farallo

there are bright grey
 cities
 popping.
the kind of light
 that melts
 windows and
frowns to unblinking
 sugar.
 and then you
trip in a crowded cornfield
 and smile in apnea
 from all the oxygen
 pulled from
air.

 that is not a
 deathwish. that
is a
luxury some moon tickles
 out of you
on
a blubberingly cloudless
noon.

 those ears harmonized
 to deafness
 and
 tongues panting:
a little innocence can go a
long way if it never ends, and
once,
 a-
n honest
 american bureaucrat
 with english teeth. a

shawl
pulled
over
mother's shoulder. a
girl
wide-awakedly slim-hipped
who squirms
into
motherhood some day.

suddenly, well-being becomes
a noise e-
mpty and un-
dying.

Poem #1, George Couch

She was a lonely pained woman
Wandering further and further away
Eyes closed grasping her breasts.
Pretending, preying, fantasizing.
Arching her hard nipples against the fabric.
Wanting someone there.
The moment escaped.
Opening her eyes
To the Street
Bumping and dodging people,
That might have loved her
Had she known how to let them

Poem #2, George Couch

Life is a beautiful laser liquid

Poured on a mirror

Following a course of chance. One micron, three low

An unsure course of randomness that pulls us along.

While we paddle like hell

To understand.

My hand on her chest, feeling that old stubborn heart,

The last of her.

Too stubborn to leave the job.

My job is to beat, that's all to beat to transfer,

Blood and other things, from there to there that's all I know

Push and prey, push and prey.

I've not been told to stop.

All these years pumping blood through a desert

The off switch died years ago.

Grinding it's self grinding.

Push and grind, push and grind and grind and grind,

Not knowing it had been pumping blood through a desert all these years

Finally it stopped.

RED-HEADED WOMEN

Robert Wexelblatt

She burst through the door of the diner, shouldering aside the waitress whose tray fluttered three times then clattered on to the linoleum. He was conscious of a trench coat, a pale face, hands. Marching past the men swiveling around at the counter she halted next to his booth. Glaring through terrible tears, the woman seemed on the point of accusing him; she even raised a finger and pointed at his nose. The silence in the diner grew more ponderous; not a fork scraped a plate. Everybody waited for the coming denunciation, for the sudden drama to reach an entertaining climax. But there was no such thing. Instead, the woman sobbed and staggered against the side of his booth. She was almost hovering over him now, her face no more than a foot from his; had he wanted to he could have breathed her breath. He had no memory of this face, could not recall her red hair. Her tan coat fell open and he noticed how badly it needed cleaning; he saw that she was wearing a denim jumper, a light blue blouse. No, this woman looked only as familiar as any stranger in whom one might recognize many others but no one in particular. Like anyone in such a fix, he tried to read her expression, to gauge his danger. The woman's eyebrows formed two sideways s's and her mouth was drawn down, giving her an air of being both crushed and ferocious. If she had a weapon she looked as if she would use it.

His mind was racing now. She might grab his knife and plunge it in his chest. He put his hand over it. She was strong, he could see that. There had been a sort of desperate force even in that pointing finger.

Suddenly, the woman pounced and, reflexively, he threw his hands up to protect his face. She grabbed not his knife but his ears and swung his head toward hers, easily pushed away his hands, and kissed him full on the mouth. His hands flailed helplessly. She pulled away and, with a cry of triumph or distress, fled through the diner and out the door.

Everybody stared at him and, so it seemed to him, with the same accusing look as the woman's. Had he been found out, then? But if so, what was found out? The woman's kiss stuck to his lips. He rubbed it away with a paper napkin and turned his eyes down to his bowl of vegetable soup. Reluctantly, as if they had been cheated, people resumed their conversations. They were all talking about him. How could they not? His skin tingled with embarrassment. He smarted under their lingering suspicion but worse was that he suspected himself.

Harnett's was not one of those offices that resemble living rooms, commodious and well appointed, nor was it an exiguous cubicle with unconvincing walls and no leg-room. Harnett's office was something in between haven and oubliette, a simple work space he had personalized with a colorful modern print and the old-fashioned leather desk set his mother had given him after his father died.

Little was wanted from him that afternoon, only that he do the worst of his weekly paperwork, the thing that no one else could bear. On Fridays he was left alone. Nobody telephoned. No e-mail awaited him, no faxes. People passed by outside. He imagined that they slowed down, as if expecting to overhear something scandalous through his closed door. Would the story of what happened with the red-headed woman in the diner have made the rounds so soon? The people in Harnett's company adored gossip; he did not. Once, when he had objected to the spreading of some nasty and obviously untrue rumor, McCarthy, who set himself up as an aesthete and a wit, replied that in his opinion gossip was a "reward for the division of labor." He had laughed fatuously at his own bon mot, to prompt the others. Harnett had felt like a prig. He found working difficult. It would have been better to leave the office, go to the park, walk on the grass. Maybe then he might have been able to think things through. He wanted to be alone with his inchoate thoughts, as if his mind were a treasure chest that only needed sorting out. Instead he dutifully started in on the pile of customer correspondence.

This was work that he put off as long as he could, until Friday afternoons. Almost all the letters were complaints, many crude and misspelled, some stilted, fastidious, crammed with crypto-legal phrases; there were always a few threats. He had to watch for the ones from lawyers. Nasty work. Every once in a while, though, a letter of appreciation would turn up, usually written by a woman for whom the company had resolved some problem. Harnett always answered these personally and warmly. In these cases he would never use a form letter. Instead, he took pleasure in dreaming up phrases with which to express mutual gratification. This was the part of the job he relished and, in fact, what made dealing with customer correspondence tolerable. But such letters were "rare as hen's teeth," which was one his mother's expressions. *"This is to let you morons know that I'm telling all my friends about your miserable service and asking them to tell their friends and so on until you won't be able to do any business at all with anybody."* *"I have written to the Better Business Bureau and the Attorney General's Office. I just hope they give you as bad a time as you've given me."* *"You bastards! It's companies like yours that make the Japs lick their lips. You should all rot in hell."* *"My poor old mother, she's eighty-five years old, is beside herself with worry because you idiots sent her the enclosed bill for \$85.95 which is obviously a mistake. If you don't cancel it at once I'm going to come down there and, trust me, you don't want that."* *"Enclosed please find my letter of the 29th of last month, your letter of the 16th of this month, mine of the 24th of this month, and the last letter I had from you, dated the 30th. Notice that I have highlighted each of your misstatements of fact. Enclosed also is a copy of my warranty, with relevant passages also highlighted. Send me a new item immediately or in the future you will be dealing with my well-paid and highly aggressive attorney."*

Many of these people's screeds were addressed to him by name, because his supervisor, a big ex-Marine named Joe MacLaughlin, insisted that all customer

correspondence go out over his signature. "Can't I use a pseudonym?" Harnett fruitlessly begged. He found it unnerving to see so much fury directed his way, and yet, compared to what had happened at lunch, the physicality of that red-haired woman and her pointing finger, these words now seemed lightweight and distant, a commotion that would never really touch him. He could deal with disgruntled customers through the formulas and argot of bureaucratic palliation. There was no denying, though, that the letters took a toll. No wonder he wrote with such gratitude to those few who took the time to thank him or the company. He imagined these women to be housewives who didn't work and had time on their hands. He visualized them writing on kitchen tables after sending the kids off to school, still in their nightdresses, sipping a second cup of coffee. He found their decency and boredom touching.

Harnett came on an envelope that had been addressed by hand to the company's president and forwarded to him. Inside was a letter on lined paper.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to express my appreciation of your employee, Richard Harnett. I think you are very lucky to have somebody like Mr. Harnett working for you. Some time ago, when I was having trouble with what I'd bought from you (and, to tell the truth, a few other things in my life) I wrote to your company. Mr. Harnett answered me very politely and promptly. He took care of everything (almost). Anyway, I was so pleased I wrote him a personal letter of thanks. Unfortunately, he didn't reply, which I regret, though really there was no need for him to do so and I suppose you keep him mighty busy.

Thanking you for your attention, I am,

Your satisfied customer,

Betty Farincello

Harnett ransacked his memory but could not recall any Betty Farincello. He got up and went to the filing cabinet where he kept the previous year's correspondence but could locate no letter telling of her woes from any Farincello. The files went from Faber to Fahey to Farley to Feinberg. Might her original letter have been sent more than a year back? She said only "some time ago." And what did she mean by those almost suggestive phrases, *a few other things in my life* and *he took care of everything (almost)*? Almost?

Harnett examined the envelope more carefully to see if it might have been opened. Of course the president's secretary had not opened it, but had merely sent it along to him. This was hardly unusual. Mrs. Rothman, a stickler for protocol, would have judged any letter addressed by hand to fall far below the standard of correspondence deserving her chief's attention. Nearly half of all customer complaints were addressed to the man at the top and Mrs. Rothman had stopped opening them long ago. Did the letter delight him? No, not really. To send it back to the president's office would look self-serving and, anyway, the letter would only be bounced back for him to file with

a cross note from Mrs. Rothman clipped to the envelope. But was he pleased by the praise itself? He ought to have been, given the scarcity of it. Perhaps on another day he might have taken some satisfaction in hearing he had done his job well; however, the business at lunch had somehow spoiled this day. The incident made the world seem if not treacherous then at least less intelligible. If a threat could be a kiss, praise might not be praise.

For a moment Harnett entertained the notion that the distraught red-headed woman at the Omega diner might be Mrs. Farincello. But this was absurd or worse, it was literary. Books ought to be extracted from life, not vice versa. Harnett pulled himself together. What had happened was just some mix-up. He recalled a Latin tag, *qui pro quo*, and this made him feel better, the world substantial again. An implosion of the extraordinary was thus explained away and so ceased to be extraordinary. Of course. He had a common face. How often had he been told by people that he reminded them of somebody else? *Qui pro quo*.

The door opened. No knocking. It was his supervisor.

"I heard about what happened to you," MacLaughlin said, "at lunch." A former sergeant, a Judo instructor, he never wasted time in coming to the point. Harnett was gratified that his boss was concerned but also it bothered him that he shouldn't be asked for his own account, that MacLaughlin should think this superfluous. Didn't people know that gossip is hardly ever accurate?

"What did you hear?" Harnett asked.

"That some crazy woman burst into the Omega and practically assaulted you and then ran out."

"Assaulted me?"

"She didn't?"

"Well, I suppose she did. I hadn't thought of it exactly as an *assault*. She was crying. Did you hear that?"

"No."

"And that she kissed me?"

This pulled MacLaughlin up. It put things in a new light. "She kissed you? You *know* her then?"

Harnett shrugged nonchalantly, as Fred Astaire would. "Never saw her before."

"And you say she kissed you?"

"What did you hear? What made you say *assault*?"

MacLaughlin shrugged too, but not like Fred Astaire. "It's what I heard."

"Who from?"

"But you said it *was* an assault."

"I guess so. Of a kind."

"So then she kissed you but you don't know her?"

"Now you've got it."

"Could be serious. A lunatic. A stalker."

"Think so?"

"Hell, who knows? People pack guns these days, all kinds of people." MacLaughlin rubbed his chin then pointed at the pile of customer letters. "You think it might be one of them?" Maybe he was remembering how he had forbidden Harnett to use a pseudonym. Maybe he saw Harnett riddled with bullets and already felt responsible. "I've no idea. I suppose it's possible." Harnett looked up from the letters and paused. "I was thinking it could have been a *qui pro quo*."

"A what?"

Harnett blushed. The phrase and the idea both sounded ridiculous when he said them out loud. "Mistaken identity," he mumbled.

"Look. You think you need, you know, protection?"

Fred Astaire never forced himself to do so, but Harnett made himself laugh.

The afternoon finally ended. Harnett worked right up to the last minute, answering customer mail.

"Please, please try to get it right this time." "What part of the damned thing doesn't work can't you people understand?" "According to my boyfriend, who is a bailiff in the Superior Court, you are obliged to give me a complete refund, no questions asked." "I've called three times with no results, now I'm writing this so that I can have a complete record, a fat file to show the judge how you people do business. The judge can decide if it's fraud or incompetence. I don't know."

He soothed, pacified, mitigated; he palliated, propitiated, euphemized; he explained, empathized, apologized. He attached memos to letters and put them in manila envelopes to send out to the right departments on Monday. He worked like a demon. The laborer should be worthy of his hire.

At 5:30, when he was getting ready to go home, Benson and Thorwaldson showed up.

"Dick," said Benson amiably, touching his shoulder, "Len and I are going out. How about coming along?"

Since it was unprecedented and he disliked being called Dick, this invitation aroused Harnett's suspicions.

"Yeah. Come on, Dick. Make it a threesome," said Thorwaldson encouragingly with his big Minnesota grin. "Then I won't have to listen to Georgie all night."

"We'll grab a little dinner, go to a club. Don't worry, you'll be home before witching hour."

Harnett looked from one to the other. He was tempted, today especially. He wasn't eager to be alone. In fact, he had been thinking lately he was alone too much. But there would probably be office gossip. He wondered if MacLaughlin might have put them up to it. He had seemed so concerned. Anyway, Benson wasn't a bad sort and neither was Thorwaldson. They were just a little crude. Benson had been through a pretty rough divorce and avenged himself by telling nasty jokes about women.

Thorwaldson, the

taller but more recessive of the pair, was Benson's sidekick, the announcer to the talk-show host. No doubt they had also heard some version of his lunch at the Omega. Maybe they thought he could use some cheering up, some male company.

Despite his misgivings he said okay.

They took a taxi downtown to a good Italian restaurant. The waiter, who had an accent, was almost courtly; the lasagna toothsome and not at all heavy. To Harnett's surprise, the dinner proved better than tolerable. Benson and Thorwaldson asked him only a few questions about himself, questions that seemed more polite than prying, chiefly about his past. They offered him their sympathy for being stuck with the customer correspondence. "When I see that pile go in every week I always think, there but for the grace of God," said George. "I wonder how you stand it," Len agreed. Neither referred even indirectly to the Omega affair. Harnett began to think he might have been wrong; maybe they didn't know about the red-headed woman and the assault or whatever it was.

Benson insisted they split a bottle of Chianti with the meal. Harnett enjoyed the wine; it made him feel a good deal better about things, put matters into perspective. Two glasses, he found, were just about right for making the unpleasant look smaller and the agreeable larger.

Over little cups of espresso George and Len discussed which club to take him to.

"What do you think?" said Len. "The Persian Kitty or The Grand Tetons?"

"Let's see now. I think . . ." George drew out his words as though turning the matter over like a connoisseur examining an old vase. "Hm. I think the Kitty, don't you?"

Len smiled at Harnett. "You'll like it, Dick," he said reassuringly.

Harnett did not really want to go to a club. He had had enough to drink already, but he didn't want to disappoint his colleagues, who had been so nice. They seemed to like his company. He had even laughed with Len over one of George's jokes. Besides, he wasn't eager to go home, not yet. Midnight had been fixed in his mind, "witching hour." It was just 8:30.

"All right, then. The Persian Kitty," he said with what he believed was cheerful dubiousness.

They called for the bill, split it equally and got up to leave.

A couple had just come through the door and was being led to a table. Though they tried to keep their voices low, Harnett could tell they were arguing. He looked after them and was a little unnerved to see that the woman had red hair. He took a step to the side to see her face, but the couple vanished into the rear of the restaurant and Len was pulling his arm.

"Come on, Dick."

As Harnett expected, The Persian Kitty was a strip club. He bought the obligatory overpriced drink and listened to his companions appraise the women over the racket of bad music.

There were two platforms, one over the bar, the other on the left side, a sort of stage with shiny metal poles. These areas were brilliantly lit but the rest of the place was dark. The object seemed to be to look at the women while not being seen to do so.

"That one's barely legal," said Benson.

"Which one?"

"The brunette with the yellow stilettos."

"Barely legal, that's funny. Wouldn't you like . . ."

Harnett said little. He didn't feel like talking, but he did watch. Everything about the place was depressing. It struck him as odd that a club devoted to titillation should somehow be so sexless, or rather that the sexuality was so denatured and public as to appear shrink-wrapped. In his opinion the dancers lacked the allure of a bored housewife writing a letter over a second cup of coffee.

Benson and Thorwaldson were intently watching the runway over the bar, goading each other on with color commentary. Occasionally they would ask his opinion and, to be companionable, he would say something of which he expected to be ashamed later. He even went so far as to tell a joke he had heard in college about a hooker and a taxi driver. After they had ordered a second round of drinks, he excused himself and headed for the men's room.

He had to pass near the little stage on the left. There was a changing of the guard, so to speak. Two women were emerging from the doorway at the rear of the stage, all sparkle, legs, stomachs, hips, while the two who had finished their act waited to go in. One of these women had red hair hanging halfway down her back. Harnett couldn't make out her face, but she was the right height. Her skin looked as smooth and white as moonstone under the spotlights.

As he was rubbernecking, someone tapped him on the shoulder.

"Come here often?" she asked without seeming keenly interested in his reply. Her hair was straight and blond, with short bangs cut bluntly. She was heavily made up. Though her eyes were bright she looked tired. Her perfume made Harnett's head swim. He couldn't say for sure but behind the paint and scent she looked familiar.

He asked if she worked there.

The woman laughed and said, "Not really, but I'll take that as a compliment."

"That redhead?"

She nodded toward the stage. "Oh, you mean Leda?"

"I don't know. The woman who just went off."

"That's Leda."

"Oh."

She fluttered her eyelashes and teased him. "You liked her, huh? Rather talk to her

than me, then?"

Harnett was flustered. What had she meant by *not really*? "What do you know about Leda?"

The woman shrugged and looked over his shoulder. "Leda's been unhappy lately. Maybe it's her grades."

"Grades?"

"She's working her way through law school. Half the girls here are in school. Dropped out myself. I was an English major, very well read. Hey, want to buy me a drink?"

"I was just going to the men's room."

"All right," she said with a frown. "So go then."

When he got back to the table the blond woman was sitting with George and Len, their heads close together. They all looked up at him and chuckled.

"So," said George triumphantly, "she's a stripper."

"Leda," added Len, "the law student with the knockers."

"Who?"

"That redhead at the Omega."

"The one who *assaulted* you."

They all laughed.

"You mean kissed him," said the blonde. "That's the way we heard it in billing."

As if a spotlight had been focused on him, another pointing finger, Harnett felt exposed and furious. He turned on his heel and left the Persian Kitty.

Harnett walked two blocks to the subway. The streets were damp and empty. Rushing through a tunnel underneath the city he began to indulge in self-pity. His life was not working out as he'd envisioned it on that brilliant night in his sophomore year when, alone on the roof of his aunt's apartment house, he had looked at the Milky Way and thought he glimpsed the years stretching out before him as a magnificent stairway with golden, spangled steps of struggle, accomplishment, love, adulation, wealth, children, philanthropy, adventure. It had been that glorious, but effortless, puerile, abstract. He smiled bitterly at the child he had been then yet felt regret and also shame, as if he had disappointed a judge worthy of respect.

He felt unclean and dissipated. What a day.

Harnett opened the door on his dark apartment and, as usual, the first thing he looked at was the red light on his answering machine. It was almost always still, a little beacon of disappointment and loneliness. But tonight it was blinking: four short blinks, four messages.

He did not listen to them at once. He turned on a lamp and walked around the living room as though stalking some prey. The day had left him jazzed, caffeinated. He talked to his mother on Sunday mornings. If she had phoned it would have been an

emergency. But this seemed improbable. Her health was impeccable and she loved Florida.

The alcohol had made him thirsty. He went to the refrigerator, poured himself a glass of orange juice, and drank it down greedily. Normally he had orange juice only for breakfast. It felt thick on his tongue and tasted different now, acidic and sour. Finally he pressed the button and the machine rewound its tape. There was a short electronic beep.

A woman's voice, not his mother's, inveigled and invited. "If you're there, please pick up." Then there was a pause as she waited. "All right. I'll try again later." Then a click. Another beep. This time she pleaded. "Pick up. Please, pick *up*!" An even longer wait this time, silent, as if with held breath, then the click. After the third beep the woman whined pathetically, tearfully. "Are you there? Oh, why aren't you *there*? Why don't you pick up? I really, *really* need to talk." This time there was a drawn-out pause with audible sobbing. She meant to give him every chance. Then the click.

In the final message the woman's voice splintered with fury. "Pick up, damn you! You can't treat me this way. I don't deserve it. Do you hear me?" There was a brief pause weighed down with exhausted breathing. "Pick up, you bastard!" Click.

Harnett sleepless, forcing his eyes shut. Harnett insomniac, still tasting wine. Harnett tossing, trying to read about people in whose fates he could not interest himself. Harnett's mind straying to red-haired women declaiming denunciations and passionate surrenders, grateful homemakers, student-strippers, discontented wives. Harnett dancing on the ceiling like Fred Astaire. Harnett recalling Betty Farincello's handwriting, Leda's ivory back. Harnett attending to the city's deep breathing after a week of toil, commerce, routine, hearing only late taxis and the trucks lumbering into the city with all that was required for another week.

Can anyone know on Monday how Friday will end? Are all our acts blinded by their consequences? Once in a while it might point its finger at you, but did life ever hold out its whole hand?

What seems to me the highest and the most difficult achievement of Art is not to make us laugh or cry, or to rouse our lust or our anger, but to do as nature does—that is, fill us with wonderment. The most beautiful works have indeed this quality. They are serene in aspect, incomprehensible. The means by which they act on us are various: they are as unmoving as cliffs, stormy as the ocean, leafy, green, and murmuring as forests, sad as the desert, blue as the sky. Homer, Rabelais, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, and Goethe seem to me *pitiless*. They are bottomless, infinite, multiple. Through small openings we glimpse abysses whose dark depths make us giddy. And yet over the whole there hovers an extraordinary gentleness. It is like the brilliance of light, the smile of the sun, and it is calm, calm, and strong...

—Gustave Flaubert

ROSE OF SORROWS

Judith Cody

Her thin arm beckoned from a threadworn coat of no distinct colour, while the soft rain fell as a blessing over all, blurring the torn and whole together into a gentle bath of tender hues tinged with a sort of silveriness whenever the sun briefly glowed. Her blue-veined hand offered every passerby the stump of a garish pink bouquet of rose buds: "Please, please buy a rose!" she called against the damp breeze. Thus was the Rose of Sorrows bought then hurried home to a warm bright room; there under the brilliant bulb an unforgiving truth was exposed both bitter and harsh. On inspection, each pink bud revealed itself as not a bud at all, but merely an old, almost withered flower. Someone, the sad rose seller or perhaps a pandering lover, had carefully coiled a fine wire tightly around attempting to shape it into a new rose; to prevent the bruised petals from falling to their natural end on the earth. Each of the flowers tested not really pink but were a crispy-edged brown that had been dyed the gaudiest pink, not out of bad taste but merely to better conceal the death of petals. O yes, the heavy odour had been a deliberate squirt of fulsome drugstore concoction. Great history of beauty, romance, even the extended exacting arts of horticulturists brought down to this pathetic masquerade! Expectations of youth and beauty end with senility and dust. The wonder is: who has the deepest pain, the seller, the buyer, or the rose? Destinies intermingle for those who consort within the World of the Rose.

BROKEN BEADS

Judith Cody

New Orleans

Hinges rattled
you entered my
teeth caught your
wrist bone my

arm bent
against yours

beads skipped across
floorboards
like hundreds
of harsh beetles
like your

words whispered
against my throat.

MÖBIUS NIGHTS
Judith Cody

We take turns lurching
upon a fulcrum
weight of a phrase
raises one of us
above the other

momentarily
dizzying
righteousness
rides high,
fades as the other
heaves against
imbalance
with the Past,

this so ponderous that
sound explodes
hurling both of us
into mute insignificance.

TOPICS OVER TEA
a pot of tea?
Judith Cody

A white cup rim softly sinks against your mauve, creased
lower lip,
Amber tea arches in a narrow band from the bottom of the glazed
cup bowl
(Flecks of sun are caught in bone china, pink roses, and flying
painted birds.)
Where steeped from dense oriental plants liquid flows to your
parted mouth
I have bitten, rubbed with tongue, kissed, sucked and drawn into my
open mouth
You have entered, licked, almost eaten, stroked and filled with
mysterious organs
(Flecks of sun caught in your wide eyes, wet teeth and moist
nipple tips.)
I know the flesh, weight, direction of, as well as I know my own
first finger
Curled around a cool and delicate teacup handle striped with
real gold.

You will
hold
the cup
this way
forever
I know
knowing this
I will
watch
this way
forever.

Reflection upon the Hardness of Glass

Nancy Esposito

John Singer Sargent knew how to paint
a woman, ash black satin dress—
uncompromised as my mother's eye—
and the implacable geometry of jaw, only
the under-painting giving onto a fault line.
I push away the ruled edge of the winter my mother,
silenced, moved a pencil across scraps of paper,
added and subtracted years of canceled checks
pooling like mulberry leaves on the twilit lake
back of the house where mute swans described patterns
like erasures through her calculations until I
could hear only her wrinkled stare.
Ransacked, her mind hunted in every secondhand shop
for a petite-sized memory or the names of the loved,
finally draping on the handy plus sizes of an imagination
gone zigzag mad and tracking wildly.

Ceramic
Jeremi Handrinos

Sharon took the earth
And kicked out love and shit...
Dynamic, glossy, mother of pearl
She is dead, Sharon
Sharon is dead
Swallowed by the clay
The breath of God
And I am her son's son
I am consumed also
By this spill
Sharon is up the mountain
Some of her art is here at home
But most of it is blasted
away now, with the plastic bags
and organic maggot rot of the field
And yet, Sharon, is through
my eyes, water, salt, powdered rock
Ancestor, set those lights in the sky
And I will light the tower down here.

CHLOE

Marguerite Bouvard

I passed a young girl in the street
yesterday. Her black hair brushed her face
like wings. Her jeans sat low
on her hips as she walked with her friends.

Is that what tore you away from us,
the empty space where there should have been
friends?

I passed a young boy and his father on the street
yesterday. The father was white.
The boy had café-au-lait skin
and unsure eyes.

Is that what tore you away from us, the mirror
that didn't show your face?

Did the streets diminish you, streets without
women in rebozos or stalls of fresh fruit?

Is that what tore you away from us?

Everyone so sure of themselves, the corridors
at school, the neat houses and lawns, the everydayness
of chatter swirling around you.

Did it silence the tremulous whispering
inside your heart?

You who already considered the plain facts
of absence fell headlong into its gorge
too soon

not knowing that we too would drown
in our own eyes night after night.

Composition in Grey and White

Alan Catlin

The naked man is seen composing
musical notes with a quill pen
though the score is mostly complete
he inscribes new movements, charts
mystical imbalances no one can play.
His sacred space studio, is invaded
by his paramour carrying a single red
rose she lays on the pages where unused
spaces are waiting to be filled.
What the lover wants only he can provide,
offering her body as proof that nothing
will contain them; not the mirror their
bodies are reflected in or the shadows
cast by candles burning near the bases of
their tarnished silver holders.
Their skin glistens, a patina of the flesh
flushed with a love that becomes a fierce
moment of lust compromised by creation.
The imagined score lies forgotten, gradually
coated with a sealing wax and a molting flame;
a lost Adagio for Strings, odd arrangements
that cannot be realigned.

The woman with the green print

Alan Catlin

dress bearing the design of roulette tables, kneels down on the king sized bed, pulls back her long, dark hair streaked with blonde dye, slides her shift over her shoulders, revealing a diorama world tattooed on her skin, each interactive scene, a Chinese scroll painting, a miniature world a lover could be lost in, climbing steadily uphill against a hard driving rain or snow blind on the edge of a precipice, a thousand cranes in flight for companions or on the verge of a frozen falling water scene halted in mid-cascade undulating as she flexes her muscles, moving in half-light shadows candles cast inside a closed-for-the-season-room.

twelve shades of blue

Morrie Warshawski

1.

when the sweat froze under
his arm and the zinnias began
their curtsies to the sun

2.

then he shuttered the two eyes
with coins of the realm like
lemon meringue pies

3.

flan floating in carmelized sugar
clouds drifting between his ears
the four corners of his heart

4.

fans and hula skirts and
everything in fours including
his flat feet and fat hands

5.

fundamentally defunct like
the season we once called autumn
the color we once called puce

6.

hunted to the end of the page
and banished like the head
hunters of Borneo and their smoked heels

7.

halfway home staring into the
forest fire dreaming of the famous
rubber vine jumping from tree to tree

8.
far into the future looping like
the famous lemure's tail abruptly
upending the delicate perfume bottles

9.
forlorn and tinted in the shade I
breathe it all in deeply like
the lithe gyre of your sighs

10.
lofted at me like cotton balls soaked
in tears with just a hint of cinnamon
served on porcelain saucers

11.
like a wakeup call in the middle
of a horse race where my cheeks
are flushed and puffed

12.
and the wind is my bride
she loves me so she rips
my hide from stirrup to eye

LYCRA

Morrie Warshawski

The cool cornet disassembled
itself like iron filings
against a pure white
background so light it
twirled like a domino until
he spoke upside down about
touching the finger of God about
being underwater with
his lover about a
bit of his torn lip and an
elevator of high muted
notes so surreal he
had to phone long distance
and beg a bit.

And the ceiling, he said,
was really in the shape of
his brain, he said, so the meaning
was quite clear to anyone
who could really see,
he said and I looked
up to the charged mix
of colors and shapes and saw
there the faint outline
of my own brain in profile it
looked so very faint it
beckoned all below
to shelter themselves
or to hide.

The third thing punched
its way deep into his abdomen
up to the last row in the
balcony where the
indifferent ones sit
anonymous and clustered
just below his heart
positioned casually and
carefully just close
enough to cause pain
so he put on the stylish
wool jacket from the 50's
and straightened the retro flower
cravat watched the stars
below peered at the propellers
above signaled for
his last drink and rocked
like a baby tethered
between both coasts
into sleep.

Beige Black Green

Geer Austin

Sometimes I think about the beach,
how the sand with its soothing
bland color and soft texture
flows up from blue and warm water.

Nighttime lets light into black.
I had a black dream.
Black film without any white.

The memory of childhood summers
is green—meadows and lawns
and those endless rows of privet
clipped flat like an empty tabletop.

THE RELIGION OF COLOR

Corinne Robins

The body floats on canvas

aswim in purple haze

Skin deep tan blushed with green.

Spirit of the dead watching

The body light and dark by turn,

reflects the darkening forest.

A lamp is always lit at night.

What does she know?

Asleep on yellow sheet above yellow stars,

Do not travel alone.

Gods of alien colors move through trees.

The small figure in the corner, death, watches over her

whose face is turned away.

Spirit of the dead watching.

Sleep follows him, follows her

GAUGUIN' S DESTINATION

Corinne Robins

He went on for six more years of dying
painting and dreaming
of phosphorescent flowers
united by yellows and purples,
went on painting
a mural with two upper corners of
chrome yellow; like gold.
I will never do anything better, he writes
than this girl stretching up
to pick fruit, the statue with outstretched arms
the song of blue a baby asleep, three women squatting on the ground,
never better, this record of beginnings,
of pieces of life
of color speaking in tongues.
Wild man become a scholar
recording colors of a strange bird
holding a lizard in his claw
recording language, without words,
movement of green undergrowth.
Sea and mountains
where are we going—
blue and Veronese green,
a philosophical work flooded with
violent harmonies of animal figures
rigid as statues, an unfathomable enigma
crossing and recrossing the ocean
an unfathomable enigma
his best, his last sent on boat mail,
from the other side of the world.
And meanwhile, six more years of dying,
with answers united by yellows and purples,
glowing like electric sparks.

A Gift of any kind is a considerable responsibility.
It is a mystery in itself,
something gratuitous and wholly undeserved,
something whose real uses will probably always be
hidden from us.

Usually the artist has to suffer certain deprivations
in order to use his gift with integrity.

Art is a virtue of the practical intellect,
and the practice of any virtue demands a certain
asceticism and a very definite leaving-behind
of the niggardly part of the ego.

The writer has to judge himself with a stranger's eye
and a stranger's severity.

The prophet in him has to see the freak.

No art is sunk in the self, but rather, in art the self
becomes self-forgetful in order to meet the demands
of the thing seen and the thing being made.

—Flannery O'Connor

Sleeping With God

Dane Myers

Cynthia lifted her head from *Dubliners* and stared at the pale north wall, opposite their bed. Albuquerque's April evenings were growing long and the fading light created a shadow that made the ironwood cross above her dresser appear crooked. A rare drizzle filled the air with a smell other than dust and muted the yaps of the neighbor's three schnauzers. Cynthia tried to think how she could get out of sex, at least for the night. Wednesday had become the worst day of the week: Bible study and sex. That night's discussion had been on Isaiah—her favorite prophet, until Jim had nicknamed his penis Isaiah. At least on Sundays there was a twelve-hour break between church and sex. Cynthia thought of talking to her husband about altering their routine but she didn't want to ruin the silence with his, "But Cynthia, we've been through this. If we wait too long I get grumpy, nervous, and I don't last." Jim had even presented her with an article that explained how men who have frequent intercourse are often better fathers. "Twice a week isn't too much to ask," he'd said, "sticking to a schedule just makes things easier." At first Cynthia liked the idea: she could plan ahead and be free to plunge into her books the other five nights. In actual practice, regular sex meant more of the same and lasting longer had become a disadvantage. Cynthia wanted more erratic in their erotic.

"Hey Cyn," said Jim. "What does prevarication mean?"

"I'm reading. Try a dictionary."

Jim's grin suggested he was less interested in the word and more intent on shifting the evening's agenda away from books. "C'mon, you're the English geek."

"It's like equivocation, with a 'p.'" Craving a dose of failed love, Cynthia had spent the afternoon listening to *Tristan and Isolde*. She thought it would cheer her up but Wagner's heavy chords made her irritable. Cynthia wished that, rather than laying beside her, waiting, Jim had stayed in the living room and watched Sportscenter. She considered telling Jim she'd started her period. He'd probably rather read Oscar "marriage is a bad habit" Wilde, she thought, than have sex during her time of the month. It wouldn't work: her period wasn't due till next week, which Jim had probably noted in his Palm Pilot.

Cynthia had read *Dubliners* three times but she often returned to her favorite stories. She used to do that with the Bible; the last few months, she found more comfort with Joyce. Cynthia still felt the hand of God but it was as if returning to college at thirty-nine had overtaken a life of Sunday school and prayer. She wanted to read *A Painful Case*, a story that directly applied to her own situation, yet found herself stuck on *Araby*. As Joyce's lines trickled across her eyes she imagined herself as Mangan's unnamed sister... The night air was stinging and wet, as if the Liffey had extended into the sky; fog, fish, and burning gas made the world smell metallic yet alluring. She nervously turned her silver bracelet and nearly dropped her florin. Drunken singers thickened the air with slurred ballads. She waved. Beyond a distant

lamp's amber glow the world was bathed in gray. She skipped toward the train station but, worried the jostling might disturb her make-up and hair, she...

"Doesn't it mean to put things off?" asked Jim.

"Doesn't what?"

"Prevarication."

"That's procrastination," said Cynthia. "Something I'm trying to do because I'm in the middle of my story."

"I'm thirsty. Think I'll get some water, want anything?"

Cynthia followed a fly as it buzzed around the folds of cream silk she'd draped from the tops of their six-foot bedposts. Jim once said a man and a woman couldn't get too near without it becoming a problem, "it's human nature." Cynthia craved a close relationship, but mostly she needed real characters to fill the imaginary world that allowed her to wade through the monotony of her current life. Much of the time, as her eyes rhythmically floated across the words, she'd picture herself inside the story, or as one of the characters in a story of her own. The Bible had grown too old for her imagination, and Jim would want to discuss the parables, prophets, and saints. Now that she'd mastered the art of turning the pages at regular intervals, and knowing Jim wouldn't be reading Joyce, he usually left her alone.

How could she have been so naïve she'd nearly plunged into an affair? It's one thing to have sex, but she and David were falling in love. Cynthia knew it had been dangerous for them to become friends, but they'd agreed things would never get physical. Why had David tried to break his promise? An affair would destroy both worlds. Jim wouldn't do anything civilized, like divorce her—he'd make her go to confession and retreats, they'd meet with priests, and worse, he'd feed her passages of *Revelations* like gruel to an orphaned child.

Jim returned and squirmed toward Cynthia's side of the bed. David was partly her fault, she thought. She liked to flirt, she liked thought-provoking men (twice-fold if they were funny), and she liked the idea of guys being interested in her—as long as they didn't get too close. Cynthia wanted her own last name again. She knew she should divorce Jim, but how would she live? And Jim, being the sort of man who couldn't live two months without a woman in the house, would quickly remarry. The thought of subjecting twelve-year-old Jimmy and nine-year-old Rachel to a stepmother, particularly the kind of wife Jim would choose now, caused Cynthia to dig her maroon, false fingernails into her left palm. Being married to Jim wouldn't have been such a trial without the sex. David had said, "The spouse with the bigger income usually acquires greater influence over the sexual and reproductive decisions." There wasn't much Cynthia didn't like about David, but it annoyed her that she couldn't always tell when he was joking—and he seemed to like it that way. Joking or not, in this instance his absurd theory proved true, which irritated Cynthia most of all. She'd wanted a third child, Jim did not; they'd stopped at Rachel. Jim had even scheduled his vasectomy before consulting Cynthia. At the time they were Baptists, not Catholics, and it wasn't

prohibited. Five years earlier Cynthia had been the enthusiastic Christian, teaching Bible classes and belonging to three church committees. Jim, who hadn't entered a church until he'd met Cynthia, suddenly decided they should convert to Catholicism. Jim had said he fell in love with the Catholic Church for its beauty, but the reasons he stayed in love appeared more sublime—like their marriage. Now Jim was the religious zealot, only he was ten times worse than she ever was—and hornier.

As for sex, Cynthia would have liked two or three times close together, but with several weeks between clusters. Shouldn't that be enough to keep a husband happy? Mostly it wouldn't be regimented and predictable. On Wednesdays and Sundays Jim buried his face in Merton until he was "thirsty." Next, he'd stroke his scratchy foot against her calf and act as if his wife should be instantly aroused. Cynthia had tried altering their routine with role-playing and different positions but sex, like which church they belonged to and where they vacationed, gravitated back to Jim's wants: an evening of *Genesis*, a few coarse rubs, then getting right down to the old Adam and Eve.

Cynthia considered falling back upon the traditional headache ploy but it felt transparent and cliché. Instead of speaking out she drifted back into *Araby*... She descended from the train onto an improvised wooden platform and followed the crowds through a turnstile that led into an enormous hall. The eastern bazaar sounded like a cathedral during the Lord's Prayer, where so many combined whispers converged into a boggy roar. She heard the tinkling of coins. From the way Tristan always passed her on the street, she knew he was fond of her. She wanted to buy him a unique gift and entered a stall filled with seemingly exotic vases and porcelain tea sets. As two men flirted with the attendant, she discovered the goods were ordinary and cheap. When the lighted dial of the clock read nine-forty, and most of the visitors had departed, she turned...

"Hey Cyn, listen to this. 'We imprison ourselves in falsity by our love for the feeble, flickering light of illusion and desire.'"

"I like illusion and desire," she replied, "so long as they're not confused with delusion and ire."

Jim smiled as one who recognized a joke but didn't understand its meaning.

"Prevarication aside," Cynthia said, "I'm just not saint material."

"Merton says you can't have order without saints."

"Well, I like a little disorder. And I want to return to Joyce." After reading the last page of *Araby*, Cynthia looked beneath the cross at her dresser's immense gold-framed mirror and the lengthy rows of make-up, polishes, and potions, all veiled in a thin film of dust. Jim joked that she was the only person vainer than he, and that vanity was their greatest bond. She was still vain, but it was getting old. What did vanity get her but hours sacrificed to a mirror—and attention from people who never really cared to know her? There was something utterly vain about vanity. Cynthia looked at a grinning photo of Jim. He complained about his graying hair but she said it made him

look dignified. At forty Jim was still handsome with a firm, well-proportioned body. It was just her size and they fit well together. If anything, he was better looking than the day they'd met—and more vain.

Jim had told Cynthia vanity was his biggest sin but, in the same breath, he'd absolved himself: "It's just the way I am. It doesn't hurt a soul. It's not so bad." Cynthia spotted a small dark image moving across the mirror. Watching the fly migrate toward the sconce-shaped lamp above her dresser, she wondered why some sins were placed in the permissible (with moderation) pile, while others were banished to the wicked (absolutely never) pile—and who decided which sins went into which heap. What was supposed to be free-will seemed like something half-priced.

Cynthia read from *Eveline*, the story of a woman having to choose between running away with her lover and caring for a disagreeable father. She imagined herself sitting at the window, listening to heavy footsteps coming from what used to be a garden overflowing with playing children... A muddy weariness filled her arms as she gazed upon the dusty objects around the room, including the yellowing photograph of an unknown priest... Cynthia had never noticed that photograph before. Her wrists tensed nearly to spasms and the book felt like slate. It was as if Joyce and David had formed a conspiracy against the Church... Was it wise to leave home? She envisioned a life in Argentina: Ireland's brown sea and charcoal air would be displaced by an ocean and sky of lustrous blues. Rather than dust and cretonne the scents of pineapple and hibiscus would fill the streets, and instead of footsteps there'd be laughter. Most of all she'd be married, respected, and free of her father's oppressive disapproval and drunken hand.

Cynthia's own father had been controlling, but never violent. When she was a kid he'd say, "You're starting to look a touch fat, and fat to the touch." In high school Cynthia started to run; she wouldn't get fat, and she wouldn't have to remain at home. Her father prohibited her from going out after dinner unless it was to jog. Each night he waited for her by the door and made certain she was sweaty, out of breath, and red. When Cynthia didn't look sufficiently exhausted or flushed he'd accuse her of meeting friends. Occasionally he was right, most of the time she'd just walked alone by the river.

David had once told her, "You've got too many fathers." During college Cynthia stumbled into Jim—in running from one dad, she'd crashed straight into another. After eight years of marriage Cynthia had become so disgusted by her role as housekeeper/nanny she'd nearly run away; once she even packed the car and wrote cards to the children. Cynthia figured Jim could hire someone to replace her, and she could find people who thought of her as something other than a pretty statuette that, conveniently enough, wasn't obligated to remain a virgin. She wouldn't have gone far, she couldn't forsake her kids, but she'd wanted to give Jim a good scare. The following sermon, as if by grace, had been about fixing rather than fleeing problems. She instructed Jim to ask about her days and take her out every other Friday. Cynthia was still afraid of food,

still became irritable if she didn't run three times a week and, whenever she felt trapped, still liked to drive. It's odd, she thought, that Jim never chose Friday as one of their sex nights. Maybe if they went to mass instead of a movie he'd change his mind.

Returning to *Eveline*, Cynthia saw herself staring into the brown, salty air... The hard work and harder father had rewarded her with an endless exhaustion that eroded her bones. She listened for her father's bang at the door, followed by his shouting words that smelled like whiskey. Even so, now that she was about to meet David at the pier she didn't find it a wholly undesirable life... When Jim was home Cynthia often drifted into a half-sleep, but he was like a sturdy anchor: he made her feel safe, took care of his family, and Jim was the most dutiful, conscientious person she knew. Although Jim tended to perceive Cynthia's existence in terms of usefulness, he saw everyone that way. Most of Cynthia's friends didn't have husbands who'd spend hours helping the kids with homework, take them for hikes in the Sandias, or leave "Daddy loves you" notes in their lunch boxes. Beside Jim, Cynthia felt closer to God. They owned a nice home, Jimmy and Rachel were good kids, and Jim provided a strong income as a bond trader. She wanted her children to be raised in a normal house with good choices. A decade ago Cynthia's solution to a floundering marriage might have been divorce; once there were children, however, love became strangely secondary. Who wouldn't exchange safety and stability for a little tedium and tepid love?

A life with David, who was witty and open-hearted, would have been anything but tedious or hard. Cynthia had met him nine months earlier in a Modern Drama as Literature class. She'd been initially repelled by David's indifference toward his own appearance; his hair and clothes were often disheveled, and he wasn't particularly handsome. But through his smile David talked about Camus and Beckett, Josephine Baker and Poulenc, Rodin and Picasso. Some of his ideas were funny, some harsh, and some were just plain scary. Once he'd said, "Since few artists or philosophers care to become politicians or preachers, most of the rules are turned from a lathe of dogma and domination, and not intuition, aesthetic, or love." She remembered it because it sounded true, made her angry, and had triggered a headache. Those without faith were always comparing government and religion, and people who only experienced the Church through newspapers believed its leaders were nothing but tyrants and pedophiles.

Cynthia compared David to Jim. David's nose wasn't enormous, but it was too big for his face. His shaggy brown hair couldn't decide whether to part to the right or left, which was fitting since David couldn't seem to decide who he was. A week earlier, sitting at a table bordered by red impatiens, David had explained his theory that the only way to become lasting and real was to become a character, and that every good character was composed of numerous very different individuals. The air smelled of lilacs and moist bark. Cynthia combed her hair with her fingernails and liked how the sun made her scalp hot. Somehow the conversation drifted from Pirandello to Ibsen, and Ibsen to Joyce and *The Dead*. David said, "Gabriel awakens from death by falling

in love with Molly Ivors.”

“That’s not possible,” she said. “Gabriel loves his wife.”

David laughed. “There are many who can’t love anyone, some are married. Who the hell says there aren’t others who can love more than one person?”

“So, how are your kids?” Cynthia had replied. On that spring morning David glowed with ideas and humor, but he’d started to change. It was as if David was becoming too many individuals at once, and while his more dominant character used to shift from day to day, it abruptly changed from minute to minute. When they’d first met David’s smile and wit pulled her like a charged magnet—then he often became serious or morose. Why couldn’t they have stayed like two children, without wanting to ruin their closeness with words? With Jim there were no layers, no surprises—just Jim. It was great for the kids, and sometimes for Cynthia, but why was it, she wondered, that aspects which most attracted one person to another crept their way into becoming the very thing one couldn’t stand about them?

Cynthia focused her attention back toward *Eveline*. It was getting late and Ireland’s January sun had started to fade... She continued to sit by the window, comforted by the familiar smell of dust. A street organ played below... Cynthia envisioned herself with Jim at Rachel’s high school graduation—not particularly happy, but intact... Dublin’s dense air reminded Cynthia of her vow to keep the home together, a promise that, with each year, was becoming harder to keep. Why did adhering to her vows make her feel strangely dirty? The first eight years had been easy; Jim and Cynthia shared the same determination to create a family unlike the cold or chaotic homes they’d been raised in. Sex hadn’t been spontaneous, but it hadn’t felt strained, either. Then Cynthia met one of Jim’s co-workers, a handsome broker named Rod. When Rod tried to kiss her on a hike, Cynthia turned him away. Every June Rod sent a birthday e-mail that ended, “Love, HotRod.” Sometimes during sex she imagined Jim to be Rod—it didn’t hurt a soul and improved her chance for an orgasm, which made it better for Jim. There couldn’t be much sin in imagination, could there?

Cynthia had returned to school so that, should it become necessary, she’d have a career of her own. Like drugs for assisted suicide, a degree would be something she’d probably never use but might want beside her bed. She also needed to be around other adults, especially adults who loved books. Several years after Rod, Cynthia met Ian in Shakespeare. He wrote her a sonnet but methinks, she’d concluded, he wanteth to get thee cock beneath her frock. Ian was still writing her poems when she met David, a man searching for a close friend, closer than the world likes married people to have. That was far more complicated than someone who just wanted to screw.

Cynthia read, “*Deveraun Seraun! Deveraun Seraun!*” and wondered what it meant. She couldn’t even tell whether it was Latin or Gaelic. Although she knew the ending, that Eveline would leave her lover at the dock and remain with her father, Cynthia sprinted across the words with a child’s hope that this time would be magically different—that Eveline would escape her dismal life. She pictured herself standing in

the swaying crowd near the boat, holding David's hand... Everything felt cold and dark. She prayed for direction, to be shown her duty. A long mournful whistle blew into the mist. As much as she and David enjoyed being together the gap between her religious beliefs and his skepticism couldn't be bridged. She let go of his hand. All the seas of the world tumbled upon her heart. He reached for her but, knowing she'd drown, she wouldn't let go of the iron railing. "Come Cynthia!" he cried...

Jim mechanically rubbed his toes against Cynthia's calf; he might as well have requested sex during childbirth. She instinctively kicked his foot away.

"What's wrong?"

Suppressing a howl, Cynthia said, "Shh... I think I hear Jimmy." Lying was one of the more tolerated sins she committed with increased frequency.

"Jimmy Junior's asleep, I already checked."

"Maybe he's having a nightmare." Was the fate of Eve and Eveline the fate of all women? To be stuck on a gray island, caring for fathers, while those who loved them as someone other than a useful or pretty object sailed west? The fly's shadow buzzed across the page as it darted from the sconce toward her bedside lamp. In the lowered yet glowing light Cynthia saw that it wasn't an ordinary housefly, but a small, emerald dragonfly—which was odd since they lived three miles from the Rio Grande. Just as Eveline would have drowned with her lover, David might have pulled her under. And was he just another dad?

Jim mischievously tugged at Cynthia's book. "Jimmy's not having a nightmare. Merton's good, but I know something better."

"Well, I want to read, and you need to trim your toenails."

Jim's cock-eyed glance made Cynthia feel as if he were trying to undress her face. "Don't read too much, I think it's starting to affect you. What're you reading?"

"James Joyce."

"Again? What's so special about him?"

"Some stories make more sense if you've read your Joyce, like the Bible."

"Wasn't he Irish? Must've been Catholic."

"He was, then he crossed a bridge and became an artist."

Jim shook his head and half-smiled with a look of simultaneous superiority and pity. "I don't know about all these so-called artists. They give up so much, for what? Take your friend David..."

Inspired by the idea that conflict might prevent sex, Cynthia tried to instigate an argument: "You're right. Joyce must've been a flake, I'm a flake for reading him, and David must be the biggest flake of all."

"That's not what I meant, Cyn. I don't want to quarrel. I just wonder how often that type gives up what matters most for something that can't be found. God's everywhere. God, and especially Christ, can be found."

Cynthia resisted the urge to say, "I didn't know he was lost," but that was David's joke. When she giggled Jim gave her a sideways, mistrusting glance. "You laugh at the

weirdest things these days.”

“Maybe you should read some Joyce. Start with *Araby*. Just let me read one more story.” Cynthia quickly flipped through *Dubliners* until she came to *A Painful Case*. Each of Joyce’s names seemed to possess new meaning: she thought it ironic that the main character, James Duffy, had the same first name as both Joyce and her husband. David also liked to play with names. When he sent cards he’d write her name as “Syn-thea” or “Sin-thea.” Duffy lived in “Chapelizod” and had on his shelves the *Maynooth Catechism*—another James who’d buried himself in scripture, perhaps the King James version. Was Chapelizod a real place? Duffy liked Mozart, which made her think of *Don Giovanni*. Opera-goers were instinctively drawn toward the master womanizer, a character who preferred eternal damnation over becoming unfaithful to himself; at the same time, people loved to dislike the moral and pious Don Ottavio. It was human nature to sin, but was it also man’s nature to mock the codes they’d chosen to live by?

Cynthia imagined she and Rachel were sitting in a dismal Dublin rotunda, listening to singers... A man about her age, wearing a face drenched in loneliness, sat on the neighboring bench. She said to him, “What a pity there is such a poor house tonight.”

His dark blue, steady eyes brightened. After he introduced himself as James Duffy she said, “I’m Emily Sinico...” Cynthia laughed out loud. How could she not have noticed how the character’s name also contained “sin”?

“What’s so funny?” asked Jim.

“Nothing, dear. At least nothing Merton would find amusing.” Jim’s brows angled with annoyance. She’d never considered Joyce witty but, like David, he unveiled new and surprising characteristics.

Cynthia immediately returned to Dublin... She and James arranged to have coffee after the theater. He alluded to a wife and several children but his tone didn’t seem like a warning; she felt safe. A cool breeze made the city’s stale July air tolerable. Between sips of bitter coffee she ran her fingers through her hair and encouraged him to talk. They’d seen *A Doll’s House* and she was feeling uncertain about her own married life... One windy, August afternoon Cynthia and David had walked from class and discussed the same play. “Did you know,” he asked, “that Ibsen nearly ended *A Doll’s House* with Nora returning to Torvald?”

“Now that would have been a sin.” On that particular day Cynthia might have slammed the door on her own current life, but she and David never seemed to feel that way at the same moment. Besides, as much as David might love her he wouldn’t run from his family. Cynthia abruptly realized that Ibsen’s Nora shared the same name as Joyce’s wife, only she wasn’t certain Joyce and Nora were ever married. Wasn’t there some other connection between Ibsen and Joyce? All the literary names, fictitious or otherwise, seemed linked by a murky web.

As if to hide behind *Dubliners*, Cynthia pulled the book closer to her face. Increasingly uncomfortable about their stealthy walks together, Cynthia had invited David and his family to dinner. Probing for a mutual interest with his wife’s new friend,

Jim sliced the chicken and asked, "So Dave, are you involved in business or church?"

David replied, "I have trouble telling the two apart"—Cynthia gave him a cross look, which made David smile. Jim appeared excited at the opportunity to feed David some light; he began with *Corinthians* and David ultimately said, "Tell you what, I'll re-visit Raymond Carver's *Cathedral*." The children played well together but David's wife, Abby, looked like she'd rather be far away. Throughout dinner Cynthia expected Jim to show at least a hint of jealousy, but it was as if he couldn't imagine anyone taking an interest in his spouse.

During dessert David told Jim, "The world's like a patient suffering from osteoporosis. The bone cells that absorb and remove, osteoclasts, are overpowering the bone cells that create, osteoblasts. Mankind's skeleton is becoming thin, brittle, and grotesque." How did David know about bone cells, Cynthia had wondered, and wasn't it osteoblasts that were responsible for destruction?

"Worry not, my friend," said Jim. "Someday you'll find Christ."

David smiled. "I didn't know he was lost."

Jim's dislike of David seemed rooted more in beliefs than jealousy; he should have been jealous. Once the guests had departed Cynthia looked up osteoblasts and found herself surprisingly irritated that David was right... She lowered her book. "Jim, are you bored with me?"

"The question is, are you bored with a man who loves to study saints?"

Cynthia's "Goodness no!" sounded insincere, at least to her. Jim's toenails abraded against her calf.

"I know of something that wouldn't be boring." Jim sounded playful yet stern.

Cynthia resisted the impulse to say, "It's the most boring thing we do." Instead, she replied, "Maybe we could do something different tonight. Instead of sex we could take a bath by candlelight."

Jim's frown reminded her of Jimmy when told no to ice cream. She said, "We could make up for it on Friday."

"I don't know why, but I'm always in the mood on Wednesdays." He grinned and said, "Remember tonight's Bible study? Well, Isaiah's calling."

When "Isaiah called" it meant he was horny and hard. Cynthia couldn't believe she once thought that cute and, though it was Joshua who'd blown down the walls of Jericho, she'd tell Isaiah to "sound his horn." Jim's gray eyes stared at Cynthia's forehead, as if trying to insinuate themselves into the folds of her brain. "What's the problem?" he asked.

Surprised by her own sharp voice, Cynthia replied, "It's Joyce, and I'm not done with him." Cynthia had started to unsettle Jim's delicate world, something she'd learned from David, and it made her giddy. She turned to conceal her smile and returned to *A Painful Case*... She and James met regularly. They exchanged books and music: she loaned him *La Bohème* and *Die Zauberflöte*, he loaned her Duke Ellington and Nina Simone. Like soft Dublin winds, James inflated her flat existence. In

return for his thoughts, she revealed facts of her own life—how she imagined herself with other men, and how she'd nearly run away. One afternoon they ordered tall glasses of ale in the dark corner of a Dublin café. The air smelled like warm soil, tobacco, and beer. Through the humidity and smoke, James—no, it had been David—said, “Of course societies need a system of rules, but most rules are arbitrary constructs. Since the poor haven't the leisure to worry about virtue and vice, and the wealthy don't need to, our laws of morality are delegated to the middle class. Rules aren't based on what's possible, but what they're most afraid of.”

“Wouldn't you agree,” she'd asked, “there are good reasons for most rules?”

David tugged at his messy hair. “I don't know. We often forget their original source and reasons. And those who make the rules permit themselves to break those that add to their power, but militantly enforce the rules against what makes them uncomfortable.”

“But, David, where would we be without some rules, and they'd be meaningless if randomly applied, or suited to our own convenience?”

David shook his head. “The problem isn't having rules so much as it's allowing ourselves to be imprisoned by what's whimsical and stale...”

While Jim's stare had eroded into her brain, David had aroused Cynthia's intellectual and emotional life; Joyce's “insisting on the soul's incurable loneliness” slithered into her heart. When Emily Sinico placed James' hand to her cheek Cynthia recalled the time when, for no apparent reason, David became inescapably sad. She'd placed her hand across the back of his neck, he put his on top of hers. Cynthia had tried to leave David at the end of *Eveline* but, like Jim's hunger for sex, thoughts of David infected each of the stories—and of all of her talks with David it was the one she most wanted to forget, that afternoon's, that kept poking its way into her consciousness. Cynthia forced her attention back to Joyce... She'd arranged to meet Duffy at a little cakeshop near Dublin's Parkgate. The autumn weather was cold yet, for three hours, they walked the gardens. She'd intended to start an argument so they could end their confusing friendship, but she found herself complaining about Jim's infatuations with job and Job. “Most careerists,” said David, “would love nothing better than to masturbate with their resumé’s.”

She laughed. “They probably say the same thing about us and books.”

“At least books involve someone else, and have character.” David's morally superior tone, rather than his words, sounded a bit like Jim.

“Their hard work lets us go to school.”

“What's the cost? They create a vast emptiness inside themselves and others, an insidious, growing crevice. The more they work, or feed their obsessions, the more they feel like they've eaten a super-sized, tasteless meal.”

“So how does a person fill these holes?” she'd asked.

“If you were a small child, what would be the most important thing to you?”

“To be fed, and loved”

“Why” asked David, “would it be any different for adults?”

“Adults aren’t children. They have responsibilities, and they’re sexual.”

David looked like he’d been struck by a hammer—Cynthia knew his bright personality was about to turn heavy. The trees hadn’t leafed-out and everything was decomposing and soggy. “No,” he said, “adults aren’t children. Adults spend their lives keeping their emotions, words, and actions in three different places.”

Why did David have to say things which, even if true, were better packed in silence? With uncharacteristic aggressiveness she responded, “Look, are you saying adults should be free to love whoever they want?”

David grinned as if he enjoyed the attack. “Can people control who or what they love, and why’s it okay to take a job or a religion as a lover, but not a human?”

“I can’t believe,” Cynthia shouted, “you’re saying it’s as okay to have an affair as it is to love work or God.”

David’s eyes appeared murky yet glistened, like the surface of an evening pond. “Of course not. It’s better. Loving inanimate abstractions doesn’t fill anything, it just fabricates thin shrouds. They inevitably crack and the individual is roused to his own voids. The trouble is most people don’t awaken until their life is beginning to set.”

Without turning or blinking, David’s gaze joined her own reaching eyes. Jim seldom looked directly at her, and never during sex. Cynthia’s voice quivered but she tried to make it sound as sturdy as David’s eyes. “You promised we’d keep things Platonic. I think you’re trying to rationalize an affair. It may sound wonderful but there are children, there are spouses, and there’s nothing more real than that.”

“I love Abby, I love my children, but it’s madness to expect marriage to carry all that it’s asked to bear.”

“Anything’s possible, if you work at it hard enough.” God, Cynthia thought, now she’d sounded like Jim.

David’s voice receded into a near-whisper. “No. People say that, but what really happens is that one person goes hungry, or he is forced into something that isn’t in his nature to do or be.”

“What other choice is there?” Cynthia was about to explode like a geyser yet couldn’t tell whether she’d spew expletives or tears.

“There are other choices, but our world’s too afraid to explore.”

“That’s because it’s too damn dangerous.”

David’s eyes were damp. She wanted to hold him but tightly crossed her arms. A gust showered crumpled leaves from the branches above. “Is it any more dangerous,” he asked, “than a waxed, withered, or capitulated life?”

“That’s called growing up.”

“If growing up means giving up what’s most essential, it sounds worse than death.”

“You need to see a marriage counselor, and we need to not see each other anymore.” Cynthia had wished David had become mad or argued, but he just stared at her eyes. She left him standing beneath a leaning oak. Alone, she walked out of the

park. “Every bond,” wrote Joyce, “is a bond to sorrow...”

Cynthia lifted her eyes from *Dubliners* and gazed at the corner where the walls met the ceiling. She wondered why they'd decided to have their entire three thousand square-foot home painted in beige, and why all of the furniture was dark brown. They lived in near-black and off-whites. Cynthia spotted the fly buzzing toward the west window. David was right—when she and Jim had converted to Catholicism it wasn't compromise, it was capitulation. It was supposed to have been a trade: Cynthia would change churches and, in exchange, she'd reclaim her own last name. When she filled out the forms, Jim had said, “I didn't think you were serious.” For the first time in their married life, he bawled; Cynthia had relented. Now she wouldn't give in. Returning to her book she noticed that, after severing his friendship with Emily, James Duffy had added Nietzsche—mister “God is dead”—to his shelves. David had mentioned Nietzsche, some quote about how what's natural can't be immoral. Cynthia had countered that man lost what was natural the moment Adam and Eve exited Eden. David's strange laugh made her worry he was sliding into the same mad, godless fate that devoured Nietzsche. The fly persistently banged itself against the screen; she knew she'd acquired her own doubting edge. Cynthia was tired of dead white men, they reminded her too much of live white men. Even God was beginning to feel a little too much like just another dad.

Jim wouldn't lie still—she said, “If you've got too much energy, why don't you swat that fly. It's driving me nuts.”

“Why bother, there's nothing for it to eat in here. It'll find that small hole in the corner of the screen, or die. You can vacuum him up in the morning. Just finish your story.”

Cynthia read slowly, both to savor every phrase and to stall. When James Duffy read of Emily Sinico's death Cynthia caught herself feeling happy at the idea that someone might commit suicide over her—the pleasure instantly converted itself to guilt. She was still too vain, Cynthia thought. Even if she and David continued on, her vanity, and his becoming too many different characters, would have destroyed them.

Duffy went to a bar where the men smoked and Cynthia craved a cigarette. There was a time in college when she'd thought she wanted to smoke but, more often than not, it disappointed her. Jim hated tobacco, which became her favorite thing about it, and she enjoyed an occasional American Spirit. If she smoked tonight, maybe it would turn Jim off of her. “I feel like a cigarette, I think I'll step outside.”

Jim's peppered brows pointed toward his nose. “You're already in your nightgown, and what would the neighbors think if they saw you? We're always pushing them to exercise and eat right. They'd say we're hypocrites.”

Sex, she thought, was a lot like smoking. Cynthia decided to make her stand over intercourse. She imagined herself in the public-house at Chapelizod Bridge, drinking hot punch... There were five or six men gulping from huge pint tumblers and spitting

upon the floor. As she sat there, living over her life with James, she realized he'd ceased to exist—he'd become a memory. They could not have continued. They had families. How could they have risked destroying the very thing they'd worked so hard to create with their indulgent, base attractions? Everything was beginning to make sense when she was struck by a wave of smothering emptiness. She pictured herself walking through Dublin's cold and gloomy night. As she strolled through the same bleak alleys and paths she'd walked with James, she sensed his presence—it seemed she could even feel his touch. Cynthia hadn't sent David away because it was right, but because she'd been paralyzed with fear. As she and Duffy felt their moral natures falling to pieces several tears dripped from her nose and onto the page. "I am an outcast," Cynthia read, "from life's feast... I am alone."

Aware that Jim might have detected her sorrow, Cynthia quickly glanced his way. His eyes continued to devour more words of piety. She flipped through the next hundred pages so she could re-read the ending to *The Dead*. As Cynthia skimmed through Gabriel's thoughts it was as if she could feel her own cells, like puny miners, digging through her inner structure. Jim rubbed Cynthia's calf with aggressive insistence and put down his book. "Your right eye's starting to cross, you're tired."

"Let me read just ten more minutes."

"It's Wednesday, remember?"

"Okay, five more minutes."

"C'mon, Cyn. Tomorrow's presentation will look great on my resumé, but I need to get some rest."

Cynthia laughed. "Why don't you sleep with your resumé?"

Jim looked stern and, like a father speaking to a disobedient child, said, "Isaiah's calling, and he's saying, 'I'm feeling Holy, Holy, Holy!'"

Hadn't Isaiah mentioned Lillith, and was she really such a threat? Cynthia wanted to tell Isaiah to find mister right hand, or suggest a piece of liver wrapped in fleece. She considered exchanging sex the following two nights for an evening off—but she wouldn't want it the next night either, or the next. Postponement wasn't enough, it had to be lasting. She'd give him his sex, she decided, but it would be the worst he'd ever had. She'd lie like a cadaver and he could do whatever the hell he wanted. Hopefully it would be bad enough to turn him off until her next period, if not longer. Cynthia closed her book after the sentence, "He watched her while she slept as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife."

"Fine," she said. "I'm yours."

"Look, if you're not into it let's just skip it."

Now that Jim had given her a way out, Cynthia didn't want it. "No, I've just been caught up in my fiction."

"That's my girl." Either he didn't notice she was angry, or didn't care. Cynthia rose to use the bathroom and turn off the lights. "Where you going?" asked Jim.

“I have to pee, or do I need a permission slip?”

“Don’t be like that. Anyways, this is the very thing to settle you down.”

Cynthia thought about making Jim take off her pajamas but she wanted to be as efficient as possible; she undressed and returned to bed. Jim ran his fingers down Cynthia’s neck in a feeble attempt at symbolic affection. She didn’t move. As Jim crawled onto her stomach Cynthia wished she’d laid face down: she’d be further from his face and he’d have to struggle to find her opening. When Cynthia remained still Jim said, “See, it didn’t take you long to relax.”

“Can we just skip the pets tonight. I’m ready.”

By the sun’s fading last rays, Cynthia spotted Jim’s smile. “That Joyce must be something else. I didn’t know he was that kind of writer.”

“You can’t imagine.” Already breathing quickly, Jim poked his hard penis at her arid crotch. It felt like a medical student who, nervous at performing his first vaginal exam, had forgotten to lubricate the glove. Cynthia considered providing a little guidance, but more than getting it over with, she wanted to make him work. After a decade of marriage shouldn’t a husband be able to find his wife’s labia without someone holding his hand?

Jim repositioned himself and moved her legs apart. He was getting warmer, which made it twice as uncomfortable. Jim rocked his pelvis in and out, except he was only out. As much as it hurt, she laid immobile, arms at her side. Jim finally managed to hit the correct orifice. Cynthia could see the silhouette of his face and wondered if she’d left a light on—the faint, smoky glow came from the moon, obliquely reflected off the mirror. Cynthia wanted to turn off the moon. Jim grinned with the same self-satisfied grin he made after a big trade. She closed her eyes. Jim quickly seesawed in and out; it felt as if he wore a sandpaper condom. Cynthia groaned—he pushed harder. She tried to imagine that Jim was David or Eveline’s lover, James Duffy, Gabriel, or anyone else. It didn’t work, they wouldn’t have been so forceful. Cynthia tried to imagine herself as Eveline, Emily Sinico, or Molly Ivors, but she remained stuck inside herself. As names sailed through her consciousness Cynthia realized they’d neither help her out nor leave her alone. She’d be like Eveline, forever trapped on a not-so-green island with a shadowing father and several dwindling memories. She wanted to cry but her eyes had stiffened like petrified wood. Cynthia lifted her eyelids apart—Jim had turned his face sideways and panted like a schnauzer. He appeared to be enjoying his sex more than usual and she could tell from the shades of his rigid, contorted face he was almost finished. Cynthia wanted to pray, but to what? As a child she’d imagined herself as Anne Frank; Cynthia recalled how Anne also had difficulty praying. She looked for the fly. One way or another David would head west, he’d even find a way to take his family with him.

Jim increased the frequency and strength of his thrusts and Cynthia experienced strange waves of fuchsia and black—light and weightlessness alternated with impermeable gravity. Flickering recollections spouted into her brain, starting with

Poulenc's *Dialogue of the Carmelites*. Cynthia cringed as the nuns, joined by Blanche de la Force, were one by one placed beneath the guillotine and decapitated. Why was it that conquering men were always finding ways to chop the spines of women and children, artists and lovers? At once she understood why Don Giovanni chose to take // *Commendatore's* hand and plunge into hell—she wanted to yell “No,” too.

Jim's movements slowed and became more forceful. He grabbed her hands and pulled them directly outward from her side. Cynthia instinctively tried to resist but, beneath his weight and hundred push-ups a day, all she could manage was to cross her legs. Jim pressed down so hard on her palms they throbbed. Like a sparrow caught in the jaws of a starved housecat, she experienced a peculiar, frantic peace. Jim's penis pulsated. “Oh God,” he moaned. “Oh God.”

When his warm, spurting fluid entered her body Cynthia felt like she'd drowned in wet plaster. She wanted to yell but had no breath to give it voice—she faintly gurgled. Cynthia listened for the fly, or some other noise that might tell her she wasn't completely alone, but any sound had been suffocated by Jim's hard breathing.

He rolled off of her. “God, Cyn, that was great.”

She sensed a loud bang and sat upright.

“What's wrong?” asked Jim.

“Didn't you hear it?”

“It's just the dogs, or you're wild imagination. Go to sleep.”

It was probably Amtrak's Southwest Limited, heading up the Rio Grande Valley before making its turn toward the Pacific Coast. Cynthia imagined it had been the clanging of her own heart. She listened for noises and sniffed at the air but the world felt empty; even the moonlight had exited the room. She considered turning on the lamp and reading from *The Dead*, but Cynthia wanted to keep the room dark—and she'd read the ending so many times she knew some of the lines by heart. Cynthia had never envisioned herself as a man before, at least not since childhood, why couldn't she be Gabriel?... It was winter. She gazed out the window at Dublin's blackened shadows. Within moments Gretta was asleep. Leaning on her elbow, she looked at his half-open mouth and listened to his deep breath. A choked, spasmodic laugh, like a hiccup, erupted from her chest... Jim, perhaps already dreaming of saints, didn't even stir... Her identity was fading, she was becoming a shade. It had started to snow again... Cynthia's own strange laughter told her she needed to stop running, and start swimming. Joyce was good, but not to Nora. Cynthia had been told to read the classics; she needed to read more women—others had mentioned *The Awakening*, *Diving into the Wreck*, and *A Room of One's Own*. She'd ride her books, operas, and imagination through the harsh moments to come, and prepare for her journey west—the instant when, rather than slam a door or run away, she'd quietly announce, “I'm leaving, now, forever.” The satin veil above the bed had to go, and she'd buy new paint and rearrange the room so their bed no longer faced the cluttered northern wall. Cynthia would point it toward the large window and watch the sun dissolve into the

black lava and grass striped hills. She'd capture occasional glimpses of the moon... Her soul swooned as she heard the snow falling faintly through the universe... Too bad, thought Cynthia, she couldn't paint people. Jim couldn't be rearranged but, until the children were older, he could be placed on a tight schedule—with an unspoken deadline.

MIDNIGHT SIDEWALKS

Stephen Kessler

I like it when the waitresses change clothes.
At the end of the shift they shed their uniforms
and step out looking like civilians newly alive,
springing up the street away from the restaurant
to meet their lovers or a group of girlfriends
with whom they'll sit for a drink in some bar
or café where they can laugh at leisure
while other young men or women serve them before
their turn to escape and move the cycle around—
these endless circles whose rhythmic movements
are mimicked by hips in rotating motion
in black slacks along the city's sidewalks
to the endless gratitude of eyes like mine
with nothing to do but watch what passes
from the cheap seats after a bargain meal
served under an umbrella by a bald waiter
on a street behind the cathedral in Seville.

Separation

Elizabeth Bernays

The window on the east wall looks into the canopy of a cottonwood tree.
Twenty-four little panes of glass each with a dark green wooden frame
Give me twenty-four views of dark green leaves against a pale gray sky.

I try to write on my computer as I sit on the sofa opposite the window,
But I am constantly distracted by the leaves, a monochrome kaleidoscope
Of little triangles fluttering and dancing, quivering, rustling, clattering.

Tens of thousands of little flat green photosynthesis machines
Are gathering up the elements and making carbohydrate and protein
To send through phloem sap to roots before they yellow, fall and die.

As they work at their biochemistry the slightest wind moves them wildly
And I must look up again and once again watch and be mesmerized
By this restless picture on a staid gray wall with a print of a red highway.

And I think of you in a big crowd at the Venetian casino in Las Vegas,
All of you laughing, talking, drinking, tossing little chattering chips.
Alone I watched. Through the glass. You didn't know I was there.

The Dark Language

Carol Graser

There is a land in me of you
where we began our dark language of miracles
We met as trees, part of a surprising ring
whose shadows shaped the grassy circle of sun
The tree frogs in my branches trilled
to the squat gray females in yours
The fat moon sat in our limbs
whispering stories of inversion
Our roots curled over each other
in secret and this is where our hearts met
For decades this was how we grew
Every spring we complimented
the others sprightly green, the same
bursting excitement. You were there each
summer day as we eased into our lush feast
of sun, lounged in leafy abundance
We let it all go together, felt the same
night chill, heard each other's sugar
cracking into color, sparks of hundreds of
small dyings. We stood with each others losses
and wanted winter, wanted ice to test us
snow to quiet our days. We gave into
the white silence side by side

There is this landscape in me of you
When I open my throat from under that sky
and speak to your morning skin
an ancient breeze presses against us. Years
and voices fall away, walls of detail and worry
We are breathing again this sylvan air
birthing the next unknown season

VISIT TO BOCA RATON IN JANUARY

Carol Graser

At eighty, his gated world is ice. He's
skittered around the edges of insane holes his
entire life and now, it seems, he's going to make it

It's blue here and hibernating freckles open
tiny brown eyes. Light infuses the brain
Black vultures circle above retirement

The normalcy of bones picked clean, digestion
We visit cement walls of the dead and throw
stones by way of inscription. Our children

are in evolutionary stages, becoming
adults. I knit them mosaic vests of artistic
validation, remember each one learning to swim

These waters are intentionally rising
and our bodies are full of salt

I'M LOOKING IN THE MIRROR, NEURON

*in celebration of studies on mirror neurons by the University
of Groningen and the University of Southern California*

Carol Graser

While he's biting the peach
I'm filled with orange
Never mind the absence of the word
succulent, my cortex
is flashing stars

What the neuroscientist said
dethrones the intellect
I say the word *peace*
and in all our dear bodies
the same calm blink

CONTINUITY

Bradley Strahan

Not even stone
But only the wind
And the water that flows
Only the breath
That passes
In and out
Only the liquid
That makes our flesh
Less than stone more

Bone and stone
Detritus of fire
The fury of flesh
The furious earth
Cores of fire
Cores of fire

Fire in the flesh
That shrivels and weeps
Fire in the rocks
That melt and flow
The fire that wakes
And sleeps wakes
And sleeps....

Water that weeps
From stones
Wears the bones
From the old land
Fills the veins
Of the old earth
And the new flesh
Repeatable flesh
That never repeats
That weeps
From the bones is
Weaker/stronger
Briefer/longer

Windblown pages
A story paper boat
In a swift stream
The last is not
The story in stone
Words that have
Forgotten meanings
The last is not
The lying bones
The last remains
In wind and flow
Water and fire
Molten suns
And the sons of man

“apodosis”
devin wayne davis

silence.
absence
of repetition.

reiteration
captures its
significance;

and meaning; the secret
in this, for us. perhaps just one

errant sound,
unaccounted—

em phasis is placed ...
unstressed accent
draws interest;

skepticism—
gets us. notice,
we cannot believe

this thing has been lost
with antiquity ... histories ...

speeches
—quotations to laymen.

the misconception comes
when coining a phrase, well,
like charles dodgson;

not some
prismatic bovid,
mutilated, crossing

—seussian paradox ... as
smiley copycats almost
suggest, successfully.

“chrysalis”
devin wayne davis

late, last summer,
the young ladybugs

became—all
through fall ...

the elm sapling leaves
only recently wasted,

as dark days approached
—withered & aphidless.

i’m reminded
we saw them, before

the change ...
like candy-coated
domestic
flies—

as lodgers,
curled softly, across
a reservation. even then,

these hardened.
children return
from autumn, unbundled

indians,
to where warmth is
escaping the living

room ...
through cracks in plaster,
or passing windows—

they don’t always fit
right in their frames.

here it's a mother,
spotted, with her

black caterpillar, sitting upon the ledge

—near our rented door.
marvelous, to wonder:

what occurred
afterward ...

hall
thermostat is set
about 72 degrees.

i walk in
and turn down the queen

sheets for sleeping ...
discovery ...

we are wintering
inside these walls.

“the oak & grapes”
devin wayne davis

presentable ...
jesus wouldn't do

i am. certainly
this many zealots,

where the harlots are dead
tired, or grown old ...

is a sign ...

so, if some care
-taker gives

the lawn a buzz-cut—
just to demonstrate poetic justice

—we'll party down;
here, in eden and hope,

there could be
a million fortunes ...
remorseless; even more
spoilors

around.
to have

shrouds
removed,

can never be
easy ...

“iraqi camera”
devin wayne davis

was there, in this
dreadful climate,

a tyrant trained
to rule you?

did the bomb
have everyone
up last night?

did you give it any
thought that your neighbor would
shoot you in the hood?

have armored transports,
and well-equipped gangs

pounded down
the door to a store
you used

to own
—your home?
do you

distrust water;
goods & services:
electricity, gas, the law ...

succession
—civilization?

could you sleep,
rocked in the cradle;
but open a lid to awake,

and wonder ...

whether
you’re iraqi, or american?

Smallpox

Jean Anderson

(Notes from a sleep-deprived, over-eager
Visiting Writer, Lower Kuskokwim School District,
Southwest Alaska, March 1995)

"*You have one!*" shouts the squinting boy. He's leaping up to peer at Anna through the thick lenses of his glasses. They're toy-size glasses held on in back by elastic, while he bobs/bounces/points/jiggles/hops/blinks/sinks in place [like her mind here] sitting again. [5? 6?] He's cross-legged on the crowded floor, far right, second row: "*A little hole. Here.*"

Each word/*again*/surges [*memory*/flare and burn of: *again/here/& again*] to cut [*clearcut*/a forest?] through Anna's perpetual stage fright. She's *shy* as ever but so *wordy*: garrulous/stiff/fiery/cold, and self-conscious too: in classroom after classroom, for days. [Inching/inching towards *revelation*/self-immolation: Self or {*mask*} then and which part?] And it's not English exactly but something else in his mouth: a Second Language [to swim in/underwater/under ice/duress/*Native Tongue*/it's not Yup'ik] while his thumb probes an invisible spot just above his left eyebrow: a *pock*-?

-*mark*. Yes. Anna is nodding/again: yes [*acne*/years of], going on and on with this tale for first graders, for students of all ages [*self* as a voice then? *VOICE*: still/small?] in English: at Nightmute, Kwigillingok, Tuntutuliak, and then again at Mekoryuk on Nunivak Island. Of snow out the window that lasts and lasts [stiff satin: *snow*]. Boardwalks like lines drawn through the village and fish drying on rickety wooden racks between the coast and the box-houses [not *igloos*: like shacks/tiny/huddled: on stilts]. Three-seater plane/her first: *bush plane*, and real *tundra*: flat, flat, flat. Japanese-car-size wood sledges pulled behind snow-gos through windchill to a school, from the airstrip and then back. Scarlet sunset on snow, and of how you might--anyone--[*treeless/sky*]-- someday become--yes/if you try--a writer.

Because you love stories. And because you live in Alaska where there are so many: stories everywhere, far too few of them ever written {*poured/pored*} onto paper [*far too-for*?]. And because you love hearing them over and over, told by people you love or maybe by people you don't know at all. [Same as? No joke: *joke*: *truth*/frozen as *paradox*?]. And because you want them to live--beyond the [not words only but *self*: too rich? pampered and yet: bony/scrawny/thick-walled/gnarled imperfection of] WORDS.

And because words play in your head like music--pictures or their tales/tails, like this wind--*WIND*--or like the wandering moose: three together/so rare--*trudging*: *foot*--on foot--cloven hooves--the backyard snowdrifts at home [in the yard/thirty years of /*suburban*: *White Alaska*] in Fairbanks: trees, *trees*//snowy woods of this pale/*light*//thin snake of highway [not board-] like a message {This--?} for Alaskan children:

snowdrifts. Words like songs or like stories, dances, like sculpture or carving, beadwork. Parkies

and fur hats: on. And the tiny hand-stitched doll-size gut raincoats hanging high//Yup'ik: a signboard: wordless//in the school hallway//display//play//life as art//words no measure of? (*LOVE//as//hours?*)

Words like snowdrifts sculpted beyond this window, strings of geese in the spring and again in fall honking the skies of our minds//ours//always and never, forever.

[Like Siberia? Not hers--five years in her mind/heart and its gifts: trinkets? A few days only/weeks/a tourist and/suburban: again: self-deluding? Souvenirs only, spread out /here/on the table: *LOVE/Siberia?*]

And of how Grandma would ride for hours across the map of St. Louis on streetcars and buses on Sundays after church to bring stories to Anna: "*Exactly your age then.*" How Grandma--[exactly Anna's own/age? 55? But so--{old}. Older than, then? 1946: like the just-fired teacher/Third Grade/plump, sweet-faced, kind-looking, from Boston/thirty years of//here//and how could they--?] How Grandma would stop at the transfer point, step into Koob's Bakery minutes before it closed, then walk boldly up to the--tall, strong, mean-faced, snippy--young woman behind the glass counter.

Grandma: petite, sweet-faced {too: like the teacher--and Anna}, bent-fingered/in Enna Jetticks-like/but a copy/shoes//*FOOT*//for work, and the dark blue flower-sprigged dress with its delicate lace collar and the matching straw hat, navy blue [from South Broadway/the sidewalk sale] with cherries among dark leaves on its brim. Dark brooch at her damp neck//*DARK*//and the pearls--bouncing across [Evening in Paris] her chest--pop pearls, pale blue, from Famous-Barr where she'd had to lie [her age], a widow already outlasting her children, to get work. Selling towels, sheets, bowls or dishes sometimes-- a saleslady--

Until they discovered her true age. [But how? And why? Who?] And what age? Surely older? And she'd loved it--hadn't she? Self-supporting [*self*] and busy. Best time of her--time. {*Babushka*, a grandmother.} Too/eons from/again and again/Alaska, Siberia, Paris//true age//eons--anyone?:

"I brought this bakery trash, I couldn't resist." Sound of voice/dialogue/poetry in it [first money-job/last/55--older?] bending to kiss Anna's cheek/forehead and squeezing of fingers. With smells of stale tea, dentures, Ivory soap, ferment of bosom: Paris. And foot powder/Blue Cross/in her handbag. While Grandma placed the white-paper package with its white-paper tape on the kitchen table: bakery trash. [But what? Anna can't, just now-- robbery/sudden--recall a/bite/no/never/not ever/tasting/a bite of it, no, and why not?]

Apricot strudel, maybe that? Seven favorite: bakery-- [Two words or one?] "Choose any..." [*choose*: Promiscuous then, because she loves all? But how could you-- anyone/ever/choose only] "...seven!" [Woman/writer/slut/whore because you love--? But men do too: *WORDS*. And yes, men: like Grandma: not a joke.]

How Anna would pat the couch beside her for Grandma ["...exactly your age," Anna says it again: *echo/againanda*] and then she'd request it (again): "Tell about when you were sick."

"Oh, that one again—you always love that one, don't you?"

How--while Anna hunted the fragrant sticks of--vagrant/lost/hidden, disappeared and crinkly in the silvery paper--*gum*--deep in the dark/many/pockets of the fat black handbag till found and tamed--chewed--

{*askimowew*: Cree: he eats it raw": Merriam-Webster}

//*chew/zhevat*: Russian: "*Mad*" because they talk and//*TALK*//endless tales??//

[*winter stories*: Athabaskan, to end: "*And now we have eaten a bit of The Winter...*" *WINTER*...snow...for weeks...a week...seven itself: seven months of winter and seven as magic in stories/because/*Time*? Lives falling as/leaves/flakes/skin in//*WINTER*//?]

How Grandma had peeled it away. *All. Skin*/her skin. How, with the fever gone she'd had to peel it away. But before that so sick, sick for weeks--forever it seemed--and in bed. Not able to eat. Asleep [*Sleep*/perchance to..."] while so many died or got sicker, but not she: a story.

Peeling it as she must, her skin, as her mother had told her she must, carefully placing the peeled and shriveled bits in a clean glass jar. Putting on the lid, twisting it down carefully, standing up from the bed [in little-girl hand-me-down/youngest of four/nightgown] and then--wobbly and weak still--digging a hole by the back steps with her mother to bury the jar so nobody else would catch it: smallpox.

"And then Grandma was well." (Seven times or fifteen?)

"Because in those days they had no medicine. Eighteen-hundred-ninety-five/one hundred years ago: *smallpox*." Anna says it once more to taste/caress/word/mother tongue: tenth time or sixteenth ("...*seven favorite/Your assignment for the rest of your/ I expect an A+ /life: choose [lose] seven/any language/change them whenever you/for the rest of your/Mother/any/Tongue: FOOT. Two feet to stand on if you speak two/or even more. Someday, some people--to write, think, translate, remember/Yup'ik and then Cup'ik/languages...*") and *pox/pock*: a little hole, yes, like/a/pocket. But:

"*You have one!*"

Sleeping on the floor/again/the last night/library floor/as the first night/gym mat, folded/ Anna hears it again, *echo*: "*You have one!*"

She gets up and frowns, thinking/thinking (again): first of this place [magical, but *real*: home: *Alaska*: {*kolyaska* in Russian: a carriage/dark and frozen/in winter/a journey} one life as a--*DARK*] new snow again/seven/*WIND*, and--yes--of her own life: her five wiggly and hopping grandsons, nearly babies. *To love that much/easy{joy}what you live/for--*

But: to *escape* family too always//*LIFE*//to search: *a search*//because, no, Grandma had none. No *pock*. No, never a one. Except for that long/huge, flat, undish/oval/Paris-in/and *pocked*/on her left/*scar*/upper arm--her vaccination--so big in those days--

And, in the red-spined many-volumed children's encyclopedia/wonderful, each bit its own small/jewel of a/story: *Smallpox/virus/cowpox/18th century/universal vaccination* by Edward Jenner, English physician, 1796. One-hundred-ninety-nine--two hundred years--

S also: *Scarlet. -fever (scarlatina)* caused by strep//...*penicillin*//treatment but no real//of course//cure.../rash and fever/days or weeks of//skin peeling away--

Of course.

Alaska: Russian contact/Smallpox/many deaths/epidemic: Yukon-Kuskokwim delta: beyond the reach of vaccine, 1838. Here.//Skin//her own face hot in the dark.

Smallpox.

The small bright faces looking up, rapt. From books only. After thirty years in--and how could she?

How--not know, not think. Scarlet//error//not LOVE. Shame of. To children.

Apology? But how? A failure//again?

But love *is*. So much/easy-as-difficult. More always than the words//*WORDS*//.

Choose: lose: jobs/lost, children/buried, loves/drifted away--

But. Never disease anyway: love. Always gift/accident/shock/no choice.

And, yes: "*You have one!*"

Scarlet fever/two words again/far more than. Though the words are. Always and always. Yes: she's been given/*againanda--*

Anna-in-love again/end as beginning. Wind/rattling the/metal, heavy/front/school doors in the dark: *Always/always/so much more/than she gave.*

Wildflowers: A Field Guide

J.D. Riso

Wildflowers can be found almost anywhere – in forests, deserts, on mountains, along the seashore, even pushing through the cracks of some city sidewalk. It's amazing how many one can see, if the effort is made.

Mother and child ran hand in hand through the meadow. Daisies swayed in their wake. The mother let go and twirled around and then fell to the ground, laughing.

“I want to show you something, Clara,” she said, pulling the child to the ground beside her. Buttercup heads side by side.

“Look. If you let go, it's like falling through the sky.” She pointed up. The fresh scars on her wrists were red from exertion.

Clara looked up at the sky, a desolate field of blue. Her head spun; heart in her chest like a captured mouse.

“Don't be afraid.”

The Jack-in-the-Pulpit is indigenous to Northern woodlands. It is a rare wildflower that favors dark, wet forests. Lucky are those who lay eyes upon one.

“Be back before dinner,” the grandmother called from the back door, resentment in her voice. “Your grandpa has too much work to do to be coming to find you.”

The knot in Clara's chest squeezed tighter. She turned and ran up the forest path. The dog-eared field guide stuck out of her pocket. Delicate white Trilliums drooped over shrinking cakes of snow. The sound of the snow-swollen river calmed her breathing.

One more flower to find. They were here, in the way of such things that decided who would find them, like morel mushrooms and foxes. The trick was finding the first one. Grandma had said that in all her years living in the North woods she'd never seen one, and so it wasn't worth it to try.

Clara looked until the gray light began to dim and her head spun with hunger. As she emerged from the deep woods, she looked once more over her shoulder. Her foot caught on a log and she tripped. She lifted her head from the ground and saw them. Under a canopy of large leaves, they stood straight and regal.

She reached out to pick one. Grandma would need proof. Then she pulled her hand away. She wouldn't make any field notes, either.

Certain wildflowers compete with cultivated flowers. They grow where they are unwanted. These are known as “weeds”. Weeds are tough plants that are able to survive under adverse conditions. Often considered insignificant and bothersome, weeds are fascinating to know.

“Yes, we know that Clara’s artwork is technically impressive. It’s her style that is substandard. She can’t seem to follow my instructions. Look at this painting. All I asked was that she copy Monet’s *Water Lilies*. And here she has them drowning in a whirlpool. I know about her mother, but that’s no excuse. The best I can do is to give her a passing grade. I think you should consider counseling for her as well, Mrs. Blackwood. She doesn’t seem to have any friends.”

One may transplant wildflowers, but unless the conditions are kept very much the same or the plant is particularly hardy, it may not survive.

Red light changed to green. She stepped off the sidewalk with the rest. A cavalcade of swinging briefcases and resignation. Her fingers still stung from the turpentine. Paint-stained fingernails were considered unsightly in this barren forest.

Her eyes caught a dot of yellow in the pavement. The dandelion held its ground amid the trampling feet, bouncing back in defiance after each oblivious footstep. A couple of heads turned as she laughed out loud. Their dead eyes lit up with curiosity and then turned away, disappointed.

Wildflowers often aren’t missed until they are gone and it’s too late for regret. Think before you pick them. One can learn more from one hour with live wildflowers than from an entire day with dead, dried ones.

He gazes down at her sleeping form. She whimpers, her mind trapped in some haunted, yet familiar dreamscape. Her hand curls around imaginary stems. He brushes the hair from her furrowed brow. He can’t help but think how lovely she would look under glass.

OF PIGS, WOLVES AND ONE DEAD WHALE

Emilio DeGrazia

It was the middle of another sleepless night, one of those damp drizzly Novembers of the soul, my mind turning as witlessly as the world. A hundred miles away my nineteen year-old daughter Emily was turning her college life into Big City dreams. Beside me, Leah, my three year-old, lay curled up close to Monica, my wife suddenly pregnant again and round as a small earth.

Quietly I slip downstairs to my favorite chair and most honored book, that wail-song Moby-Dick. My cloth-covered copy is tattered, its spine as weary as an old peasant coming home late from the fields. The Mississippi is nearby, but it's frozen, white and level as South Dakota prairie. "Water and meditation are wedded forever," Melville writes in Chapter One. But even springtime river undertows fail to satisfy. Periodically I need sea-surges, the regular rise and fall of waves, the water slapping the shore, washing it. I plunge in, open my book somewhere in the middle and wait for my eyes to adjust to the light. We're in the middle of some ocean. At long last we spot a whale "lazily undulating in the trough of the sea. And ever and anon tranquilly spouting his vapory jet, the whale looked like a portly burgher smoking his pipe of a warm afternoon." We give chase and the madness takes possession of us. Stubb, the crew's second mate and a pipe-smoker himself, casts the first spear. With what kind of luck does the harpoon find its mark so that Stubb can churn away with it in search of the vital center of the rolling beast's life? Finally, "He's dead, Mr. Stubb," said Daggoo.

'Yes, both pipes smoked out!' and withdrawing his own from his mouth, Stubb scattered the dead ashes over the water; and, for a moment, stood thoughtfully eyeing the vast corpse he had made."

The corpse he had made. Thoughts turn darker still as I see this dim-witted sailor Dr. Frankenstein presiding over his branded new death-monster. And suddenly my mind takes another curious turn, this one toward the poet William Butler Yeats, an old man standing among schoolchildren in his wonderful poem. In their bright and innocent faces whom does he see? He sees Maud Gonne, now long gone, the beautiful woman he loved all his life and failed to win with all the lovely love-songs he wrote for her. And he sees himself, subject of his creations, his songs, also now almost gone.

My thoughts wander down city streets, worried about my nineteen

year-old. Then they turn upstairs toward the three year-old curled asleep in bed, and inward toward the new creation snoozing toward birth inside a mother's womb.

Voices don't always wonder out loud: Why did you do it, especially now that you're way past middle age? Shouldn't you be thinking of retirement benefits, making sure your children are safely tucked into schools, marriages, jobs? Don't you see that your child will be your grandchild too? And can't you see the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, their manes moiling as they race toward a finish line we can't see: Proliferation, Population, Pollution, Plague? How can you bring another child into a world crowded with these terrible certainties? I know how to talk back to myself. I'm a slow learner, I say, and I had so little to do with it, really. I was beside myself at the time. Wasn't thinking, wasn't really awake. And come to think of it, neither was she. We just did what came naturally. It's what makes the world go round.

I welcome these cliches, their reassuring familiarity, smiling as they sit at my feet, waiting for me to explain what they mean. But what comes naturally isn't all that makes the earth go around these days. I check the time, looking in vain for one of those old-fashioned watches with a face and hands that go round and round like the seasons of the year. They show me their new digital look, blank to the fact that their pulses inevitably peter out.

Who are we then? Wolves ourselves, yes certainly, with cravings to consume until our own pulsings peter out. But the lovely nineteen year-old gaining her career, and the dark-eyed three year-old upstairs lost in some Alice-dream—are they living in a house made of bricks? Are we all little pigs and wolf-killers too—even the mother asleep with that new creation growing in her?

Fathers in particular are dumbstruck by the fact of new life. In the seminal act their eyes are closed; they hit and run, immediately distanced from the slow growth that often takes years to catch up with them. The growth happens so physically apart from fathers, how can they feel responsibility, connection, or the full wonder of it? And how can both Mom and Dad, so happily distanced from their child's eventual history, imagine that they, like Melville's Stubb, have created a new death?

Do it we must, eyes closed, the urge stronger, perhaps blinder, than we are, this urge the earth's strength and weakness too, at once its pigs and wolf. Every spring thaw brings new grass, small alert sprouts perking from holes in the ground, a floodplain of new life. Even in

its current pathetic middle-aged condition the earth is dizzied by the fullness of its desire, indifferent to the way the most conspicuous result of its excess, humanity, is hungry to devour its mother in its passion to propagate itself. We stand by and watch ourselves multiply and grow as we eke out our individual property right claims on a shrinking patchworked planet. Somewhere else in the world are the persistent wars and rumors of wars; we lift a finger to object as we look around for someone else like ourselves to do something about it all. But (but me no buts) all the bad things happening seem to dwarf even the governments involved, those deaf one-eyed giants with nothing much going for them but huge ugly arms and very dull business as usual hearts.

Turning away from them we curl in. Hoping to make a little decent time and place for ourselves, we draw the blinds and tell good stories on and on in the hope that these will convey and preserve some form of decent life.

Here the children arrive, in their own good slow time, to consider what we have for them. I keep picking them up from some day care or school, trying to nudge them the few blocks from one door to the next, from point A to point B. They're always little fish wriggling through the holes in my nets. When I finally get one little foot in a shoe, the other is already out on its own. By the time I say, Don't go in the puddle, they're already splashing around. They dawdle, they wander, they amaze themselves all along the way with the smallest thing. They make us late for everything, require us to believe there's nothing else in the world except the twig, or dead leaf, or cigarette butt they pick up to smell or taste. We can't ever get them from here to there so we can get anything done, and most of the time we manage to get along quite well, thank you, without getting anything done. So what time is it when we finally get them in the door, their feet wet and cold? Fast time, owed to some boss, we spend but never really own. Kid time, as long as the air is still free to breathe, is too valuable to spend. In the presence of kids we always have to choose: Will we spend our time or give it away to them?

Once upon a time is always now. "Would you read me the book our family lives in?" Leah one day asks. The book we live in—imagine it. On sleepless nights mine is that whale-book, as big, dense, and round as the world. Leah's favorite is "The Three Little Pigs."

She has names for the pigs—Huey, Louie, and Dewey, the last one also Practical Pig, the smart one who wears blue pants. She looks around for blue pants, calls her own red ones blue until she wears words out

and decides she'd rather be Fifer or Fiddler Pig instead. The wolf, nameless, is always at her door. "You be the wolf, Dad," she says out of the blue, "and I'll be Fiddler pig." I huff and puff and she squeals as she comes running, terrified, into the safety of my arms, now those of Mother Pig. "Now you be Fifer pig, Dad, and I'll be the wolf."

She re-visions the story on her own. "Dad, how about if...." There is a giggle in her voice that has much to do with her half-bewildered stare into some future she is trying to understand. "...if we make it the story of the Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig?" The half-bewildered stare into some reality she is trying to understand. She gazes at the meat on her plate. "What is it?" she asks, obviously disturbed. "Is the sheep skin the wolf hides under real, Dad?" I swallow my words as I watch the categories form. "What kind of person would do something like that, Dad?"

She cares about meat and sheepskins because in kid books people are normally animals, hybrids like ourselves. On TV sitcoms humans do not have the bodies and faces of rabbits, mice, or wolves, and when humans use inhumane weapons to commit crimes against other humans we like to misname them animals. In the neighborhoods the wildlife is gone or in hiding, except for the occasional squirrel or bird. On the highway we pull over to watch the deer watch us, our hearts leaping when we see an actual fox. We must have our animals, can't live without. The bars of cages spoil our hearts rather than the view, so we avoid the zoos. But by the millions we make pilgrimages to Disneyworlds, in the vain hope that there we again will be among the once upon a time hybrids we were and are. Or like Stubb, we men go hunting when the season stirs our blood, admiring animal forms with the same eyes in love with the still photographs of naked women. Unabashed, we mount the animal's most significant body part, the head, on a wall of our house, proud to be in the presence of such a venerable ancestor. Our trophies are beautifully grotesque, offering us long looks at some fleeting form of animal life distancing itself from us in the woods. Now we have it in our full possession, static and dead, as if permanent and alive. Those heads stare in silence, waiting for us to include them in our tales. Almost always our narratives—the quality of which will determine the survivability of our race—disappoint their listeners because they are no more than action-packed, full of the latest news, concluding in the defeat, demeaning, or death of some enemy. Little wonder then that eyes so often lose interest, want out, stare blankly at the TV window, waiting in vain for a little wonder to appear. Those

TV stories don't make sense the way the re-visioned book our family lives in makes sense. In little Leah's book everything's perfectly logical. All the characters are one, and everyone lives inside everyone else.

I remember well the afternoon when the wolf was killed. We had settled into the big chair on the porch to read another book. Johnny Appleseed, eager to make a New World Garden of the frontier wilderness, plants apple trees as he wanders west with our scripted history. Along the way he saves a wolf from a trap, and together man and beast befriend others, especially children. Then one day as they approach a cabin in the woods they encounter a man with a gun. "Johnny called out. But it was too late. A shot rang out and the wolf fell dead at Johnny's feet."

In that moment Leah, barely three at the time, tasted fully the bitter apple of the Tree of Knowledge. Horrified by the violent act, she immediately burst into tears and spontaneously wailed out a WHY? her sorrow swirling down and down into a bottomless despair as it screams at the sky for explanation.

Explanations yes, these I can provide: Shit doesn't happen. It's always caused. But the wolf is senselessly, hopelessly, murdered and dead: No complete consolation for that will ever be possible.

We need a good priest to minister to that child who began dying in the pages of that little appleseed book we all live in too. My Leah suddenly becomes Margaret, and I am now Gerard Manley Hopkins, the poet-priest, whispering a song called "Spring and Fall" to a young child:

Margaret, are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leaves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! as the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sorrow's springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

Our ghosts also can guess about the source of her sorrow. Her spontaneously generated impulse to rebel against cruelty and violence is so much deeper, more original, and more alive than what the preachers call natural depravity or Original Sin or the blight man was born for. If she, kin to wolf-killers, can weep for the wolf, she is still naively, originally, bonded to the wolf and its natural world. And while she is the wolf she mourns for, she is also Leah, perfectly human. This ability to live in both worlds is extraordinary, good enough reason to have a lot of ordinary hope.

Children, of course, are also little slobs. They cost a lot of money and rebel against reasonable demands. They think the world revolves around them. The homes they live in are like old library books—edges frayed, pages ripped and scribbled in, spines wearing out. Parents never really own their children's homes. Everything in these places wriggles around, laughs and cries at the wrong times, wanders in and out of beds in the middle of the night.

And in the middle of the night as we survey the masses of humanity swept along with us on our way through history, we feel ourselves being overwhelmed by their relentless waves. We stand on tiptoes trying to get a glimpse of a familiar face, our children lost in those crowds. I look for Emily, my nineteen year-old, carrying on with dignity and poise. And I see my three year-old Leah as an eighteen year-old graduate, she simultaneously thirty-eight, my wife's age, and eighty-three, my mother's age. The thought crosses my mind: Wouldn't it be nice for us to meet once and for all in that ripe old time.

It's logical to conclude we won't, just as it's logical now to return to Stubb, the new corpse he created, and the new life growing inside my wife Monica. So why bring children into an overcrowded screwed-up world like ours? For practical reasons, yes: Because when they're young enough they know enough to lead us out of a room when the music is really noise. Because they eat when they're hungry, nap when they're tired, and want to laugh and play all the time. Because they know enough about nonsense to rebel against absurd demands. Because they have to be taught to use guns. Because they keep asking what words really mean. Because they're born with a moral sense we are morally bound to keep alive in ourselves. Because they can teach us how to become again as little children, how really to be born again.

Execution
Sankar Roy

While whispering,

everyone speaks the same language,

a soft murmur in the crowd

before stillness settles.

The night is blindfolded

with an eclipse. The wind shudders in the branches.

My son lowers his hand and feels the ground.

The earth breathes out

a summer night.

Night Vision
Sankar Roy

Long shadows disappear
through our windows
but the light never leaves
our verandas,
too dangerous
to go anywhere. A man waits
for the last bus
in the terminus.
He coughs and smokes,
his cigarette burns
like a laser pointer.
A hand
behind the bullet-proof counter
in the gas station,
enters the day's sales

in a register. Cops are dizzy

from the buzz of their radios

when the moon comes out

to count night's survivors.

THE ROUTE THE VICTIM TOOK

John Grey

Street's so dark, headlights so striking,
I can feel the blow that zapped his head.

No need to outline the body in chalk either.
I can lie down anywhere,

secure the spot for all victims.
What am I to do with all this proof

of vulnerability and evil,
of the responsibility in how alone we are.

I don't walk that sidewalk,
I ooze like blood flowing.

I'm a wound at the back of the skull,
paving the way for sirens.

Venetian Masque Blues

Rachel Halls

[[72 seconds of silence..

awaken to the dissonance
(of) collapsing cerebral workings
whom weep aurora borealis only to bathe

my venetian masque,

holding pining eyes, painted divine,
longing at reflections of
their own Jade visage *ever*
so forsakenly carved

for an exodus I have yet to fathom.

lost comprehension~

[always]

[always]

~always.

“More Venetian”

Rachel Halls

My masque,
my theatric hologram

An honest sentiment for the
smoke-and-mirrors I refuse to endure,
written in the provocative glare
of *lavish* statement lashes
and facial couture.

Yet,

The moment the lace detwines,
and the satin relief bathing away the albatross
this Carnivale Lover of mine provides
with the solitary *wisp* of a cerise kiss

has all but faded within the distant sounds of fall...

I just don't know what I'm supposed to be.

Up and away..]]

“One For Hollace”

Rachel Halls

We were on the edge of the metropolis,
passing our way towards grace
as our eyes caught a glimpse
of the
overcast evening sky,
all tinted with the amber underglow
from three-hundred & forty-five (or more)
tarnished fingers reaching away
from inner-city orchards.
And, as I recall,
 It was cold,
 way too cold
when you hushed "Their misty plumes are marvelous" [then]
swooned into my unconditional embrace.
Baby girl heavy from the
post-noir grain in the air.
It was just another of our *embrasser avec la langue* moments.

 That is,
one very-much entwined around tawdry
faux-solacements, since I
imagined for those six seconds of
deep kissing that I was an illusionist and
you were my
fool. And...all for what?
One glimpse of some surreal
moment where I finally dropped the
familiar charades of a
Charlotte Johansson uncertain 8loop and
You. Me. Us.

 We
kissed away every last fuck-up
endured kneeling on famished *concrète*,
back when we were bathed
in the vapors from acid rain,
and in the ecstasy of it all we lightly
smiled. Yes,

smiled.

As I recalled,

when we were passing our way towards grace

while our eyes caught a glimpse

of the

overcast evening sky, from tarnished fingers

reaching away.

Pet

Kirby Congdon

As a cat comes, after its millenniums
where animals began, to the end
of both our lives when any death
confines us to a has-been place,
and puts love out now
as some unknown "was,"
so an ocean spreads its deep net
with its thin thread drawn
across that single line
where earth divides what depths of sky
from the heavy source, though quick,
of any sweet life's lightning-eye?
On the beach, between the tides,
runners, endless, race
on this ragged world's thin edge
to some imagined measure
of whose fine breath?
Or to what last place
for their final finish line?
—which, we know,
a round globe's reality denies.
Even angels, brightly flying,
may, in our low world's case,
be taken, so lightly there!
yet still so base, as liars.
Even ghosts can live
in the lives our cries create.
If demons burn, they would assert
loud and long each creature's worth.
Even truth, in the height or depth
of the fiercest fire,
if silent, expires.

Tenet

Kirby Congdon

We may deign
to aid the needy
from our high ramparts'
easy towers, yet the need
to be needed
draws us there
to larger powers
beyond the known.
Dedication's care
identifies our name with theirs.
Comfort comes in chaos tamed.
Suspended stone, a far star's light
ignites our own; substance stands
on more than bone.
Sense wrestles with the fact
that the universe is not alone;
the music of the spheres is composed,
from silence, within the inspiration
of our own music's ears.

Winter Burial

Kirby Congdon

For Roseanne Ritzema

Funeral flowers from the florists
flourish in careful arrangements
on their coffin lids
as for celebrations
that life had let us know,
with blooms of tropical fires
erotic in the white dust
of indifferent snow.
Our cold bodies unbend
to wend some way back,
returning home
to shovel the bone-heaps left
from some old blizzard's gray debris
where, even so, crocuses, still,
remembering, may forgive regrets
and, even eager, struggling grow.

THE BARBER'S TALE

Richard Doke

In October the rains came early from the north bringing quick cold and a blanch to the leaves. Joe Higgins had predicted it and made comment to Charlie Farrell, who owned the barber shop across the street. Joe owned the dry goods store his father had opened the year Babe Ruth left the Yankees. He was almost prescient about the movements of weather, for change meant sales. Standing erect in the front yard of his modest, wood frame home outside town, he sensed a waning sun and the rolling timbre of cloud against a lucent sky the way a frontiersman senses the motion of wild animals through a darkened wood. It was all the same, though, to Charlie Farrell, who paid no more attention to the passage of geese than he did to the editorial page of the town paper. Rain, shine or politics, Charlie said, a fellow needs a haircut.

Ed Haskins needed a haircut the cold day that Mildred Pomeroy came to town. Ed owned Haskins Reality on the corner of Fifth and Maple, down the street. He had just told Joe Higgins because Joe always opened at eight-thirty and was good for practice. He paid attention, usually, right to the end.

"A real looker, she was," Ed said, moving his hands in the shape of an hourglass as Charlie drew the cloth around his neck. "Silky hair. Blue, saucer eyes. And this throaty way of speaking, like Lauren Bacall, you know, in those Bogart films. Say, they had *Key Largo* on cable again Saturday night. Did you watch that?"

"I missed it," Charlie said, wetting the collar of Ed's hair. Charlie didn't have cable and the television had broken six weeks before and that was just fine because he enjoyed the radio, to which he listened while working at the tying bench.

"Well, anyway," Ed went on, looking through the plate glass window at the proprietor of Higgins Dry Goods as he broomed the sidewalk, "I told Joe about it only a minute ago, but I left out the best part."

Ed Paused, winking. The click of Charlie's scissors stopped, then began again, more judiciously.

"Yes sir," Ed said, "I didn't mention it at all. I want to see Joe's face when he tells me."

There was no one else in the shop. The smell of hair dressing and the solution that Charlie used to mop the floor combined in that special scent that Ed had always loved, medicinal, clean and sweet. It reminded him of being a boy at home when his mother was alive. He closed his eyes.

Charlie scissored the nape of Ed's neck, resolved to ask no questions. All he had to do was keep his lips together and concentrate upon Joe pushing dust into the street. He saw Ed's reflection in the window glass and that the eyes were shut. He knew Ed was prepared to wait him out. He hated that kind of confidence. He curled his lips tighter, but found himself trying to remember what Lauren Bacall's voice sounded like in *Key Largo*, so he nicked the tip of one of the blades against Ed's flesh.

"Hey!" Ed declared, sitting up. "Be Careful, will you? I don't need surgery."

"Sorry," Charlie said, reaching for the styptic. "That's a tough patch of hair. Not silk, you know."

This was a compromise Ed could accept. "Yes sir, silk, all right," he continued. "Long. Down around the shoulders. Curled under. Like Elizabeth Taylor in that movie about Egypt with one of her husbands. Remember that? A real looker."

Charlie's left hand was atop Ed's squarish head, holding it steady. The scissor points were together, a thumb width away from that spot where the spinal cord meets the brain. Beads of moisture appeared upon Charlie's lip, just below the nose.

"So...?" He stopped himself, but realized that he had already lost.

"So, she's from Philadelphia. Maybe she's married. Maybe she's not. No ring. Know what I mean? Ought to be married, though. Probably was. That's my guess."

Charlie's shoulders drooped. "What do you mean?"

"What's a good looking woman from Philadelphia doing all the way out here by herself, if not for a problem? Get me? And wanting to buy a piece of property in the country so she won't be bothered."

"She wants to be alone."

"Say, that was on last week too. Remember that one?"

"Can't say as I do," Charlie said, defeated.

"Look at him over there," Ed said. "Busy as a beaver. How much money do you think Joe Higgins has socked away?" "I wouldn't know that," Charlie said, getting the lather ready for the razor cut. He looked at Joe's white arms moving the broom.

"Never goes anywhere. Never does anything. Has every dime he ever made, I'll bet. Ol' Joe's worth plenty."

Charlie said nothing. He began to lather Ed's neck with warm, puffy soap. Ed loved that smell too. He closed his eyes.

"That's what I never told Joe," he said, feeling the edge of the razor, thin and icy, against his skin. He paused.

"You never told him," Charlie said.

"Told him all about her. About Lauren Bacall and Elizabeth Taylor and all alone from Philadelphia. But not the last part. The best part. Because I want to watch his eyes when he lets me know."

Charlie's hand began to tremble. He moved it away from Ed's neck.

"What part?" he demanded. "For chrissake."

Ed grinned and opened his eyes. "That I sold her the Jessup place that's been empty since the old lady died seven months ago and it right across the road from Joe's own house. That part."

At the end of the day Charlie turned the sign on the front door and pulled the shade. He took the money from the register, counted it, made a note in the book and put everything into the safe, which was bolted to the floor in the supply closet. Then he

swept the loose hair, cleaned the wash basin, tidied the counter. The last thing he did before putting out the light and locking the door was to lay a clean neck cloth across the leather arm of the chair.

Charlie lived alone in a white stucco house on Beeker Street. He bought the house because it had a basement, where he could lay out his materials and tie trout flies without having to keep the light on upstairs so that people knew he was awake. The only person in town he had told about this habit was Joe Higgins, who sat with him often, smoking a pipe and marveling at how such large hands could fashion delicacies of fur and feather upon tiny hooks.

Charlie was known for this work among those who spend three hundred dollars a day to be oared along the banks of Western streams, who purchase graphite rods and alloy reels worth a month's rent at The Ashton Hotel that was built the year The Titanic sank. Some of Charlie's patterns appeared in glossy books printed in Oregon or Washington state, and he had regular customers who ordered dozens of flies for the start of every season. But Charlie had not fished for trout since that singular day on the Bighorn River twenty years before.

That night he was getting ready to tie a number of Pale Morning Duns for a tackle shop in Missoula, Montana, when the doorbell rang. It was Joe Higgins. They had agreed upon two quick pushes and two long, so that Charlie could be free not to bother about someone he didn't know was coming. He went up and opened the door.

"Hard at it?" Joe said

"Just started," Charlie replied. "Come on down. What you got there?"

Joe opened the paper bag he was holding. "A little refreshment," he said, showing the bottle of Chivas Regal.

Charlie grinned. "Come on," he said.

They went downstairs. Charlie sat at the desk against the basement wall. Joe pushed the only other chair in the room to Charlie's right. This enabled him to see quite clearly. The only light came from the tiny lamp directly above the tying vise. Without ever having expressed just why, they both enjoyed this arrangement very much. Everything was a tiny world of Charlie's skill, the clink of amber ice against fluted glass and the mystery of a friendship neither of them quite understood but which held them as securely as the cement Charlie applied to the thread of his delicate creations.

He had completed four duns, their small, feather-tip wings cocked perfectly upon pale, yellow-green stems, when Joe poured a second drink and placed a hand gently upon the barber's arm.

"Listen," he said. "I have something to tell you."

Charlie recalled the stuffed toad, eyes shut, lips drawn back in a triumphant grin, squatted in the leather chair, while across the way his only true friend slapped dust into the street. Charlie held both hands against the vise.

"What is it?" he asked.

"You won't laugh at me, will you, Charlie? I mean, you won't think I'm silly, even if I am?"

"You've been silly since I've known you," the barber said, watching the light above the vise bristle in the hair beneath his thumbs.

"All right," Joe replied. "What I mean is, it's not silly. It's serious. That's what makes it seem that way. You know me."

"Serious," Charlie said. "Now that is silly." He put one of his hands around the drink and sat back.

"Okay, okay," Joe laughed. "I'll just tell you about it straight out. What else can I do?"

"I don't know," the barber said.

Joe took a deep breath and swallowed a mouthful of amber fluid. "All right, then. You know the Jessup place that's across from mine?"

"Harry Jessup," Charlie said.

"Well, it's been vacant ever since Emily Jessup died half a year ago. I've gone over once in a while, pulled a weed or two, picked up a bottle or a can somebody threw from a car window. I don't want it to look run down. Know what I mean? Not good for value."

"Of the Jessup place."

"Of my place."

"I see," Charlie said.

"It's the decent thing to do, isn't it? Suppose I was to get sick or something. Who would look after my place?"

"I would," Charlie said.

Joe ducked his head. "I know you would. I meant generally."

"Generally, what does it matter? You know me."

"But that's not serious," Joe said. "We're friends, I mean."

"Well, if that isn't serious, what is, then?"

"Ed Haskins sold the Jessup property to a woman from Philadelphia."

"That's serious," Charlie said.

"No," Joe said. "Not in itself. That's where it gets silly."

"What do you mean?"

"A moving truck was unloading all these things when I got home from work. I saw this woman in and out, in and out, walking around, but no man. I thought maybe there was a problem and nobody to help, so I went on over there."

"That's serious," Charlie said.

"Not yet," said Joe. "I introduced myself. Her name is Pomeroy. Mildred Pomeroy. I said, is everything all right here? She said, yes, everything is all right. I must have looked confused, because she said, I lost my husband in an airplane crash, and I don't

want to live in the city now. You know, Charlie, like your wife Helen in that boating accident?"

The barber put one hand on the vise and with the other set the drink slowly down upon the desk.

"I did tell you about that, didn't I?" Charlie said.

"I mean, I felt silly," Joe said. "What business was it of mine? I was embarrassed. What point was there to saying something like that, and me a total stranger?"

Charlie looked off into a dark corner of the room. "Sometimes," he mused, "a stranger is the one you can tell."

"So that, right off, I felt obligated," Joe went on. "It's like I knew a secret and there was a duty or something. So I spent all afternoon moving boxes around the old Jessup place."

The barber turned his head and regarded his friend with wide eyes.

"That's serious," he said.

"That's silly," Joe Higgins declared. "I don't want to know secrets. It's not my business to know secrets."

"What is it, then?" the barber said.

"My business is minding my own business, Charlie."

"Serious, I mean."

"Tomorrow night," the proprietor said. "At the Jessup place."

Charlie pushed the vise away and faced his friend, whose eyes were cast down to the floor.

"What in hell are you talking about?" the barber asked.

"Out of some obligation or gratitude or something, she wants me to dinner tomorrow night."

Charlie sat back. "That is serious," he said.

"You're telling me. And you know me."

"I do," Charlie said.

"I don't want anything to do with that."

"That's not how it is," Charlie said.

"I don't want a thing to go one way and then come back another, back and forth, and there you go."

"Don't worry about it."

"I wouldn't know what to say. I don't want to say anything. That's the point. What would I say?"

"Eat. Say, thank you. Leave." Charlie was smiling.

Joe raised his hands. "I couldn't talk to my mother, for chrissake."

"You never told me that," the barber said.

"Well, it's true, isn't it? She was more difficult than any of them."

Charlie folded his hands. A tiny hook was clamped in the vise. When he rolled his head a bit, the steel sent a spark of light to the back of his brain. He hadn't thought of

his own mother in the longest time and was amused to realize that there was yet additional thing that Joe Higgins and he had in common.

"So that's when I told her about you," Joe said.

"You what?" said the barber.

"I said, would it be all right if you came along too, since you're my best friend. You've been married. Just to help me get past it. So she's expecting us both now. It's all right, isn't it?"

Joe placed the hand upon Charlie's arm.

"Now," the barber laughed, "that's serious."

Joe Higgins still lived in the modest, two bedroom home where he had grown up. Several large sycamore trees stood out front next to the road. There was a row of rose bushes Joe's mother had planted, a patch of grass, the white, wood frame house with a green shake roof. The grass ran around behind the house to the north and was shaped by the border of a gravel drive, which came off the road, circled past the kitchen and finished in a chicken coop, the western end of which served as a garage. Joe used the three horse Briggs and Stratton push mower his father had bought to cut the lawn.

Charlie had found all this a bit odd when he first encountered Joe. Then it became quaint and then, as the years passed and their friendship grew, somehow perfect, like a book whose pages have never been cut. The certainty, the lack of complexity of the man were a refuge for his own longing to find simplicity, continuity and withdrawal after the death of Helen. There was an arcane quality to Joe Higgins, something the barber felt when they were together, down in the basement, something innocent and a long, long time before anyone.

So they stood in the road that night looking at the Jessup place. A storm had moved through late that afternoon, and the earth was covered by a patina of sparkling light dropped from the stars. The house rose, solid, rooted, an immense block of darkness interrupted by shrubbed, incandescent rectangles of gold. Old man Jessup had started building it the day the market crashed in '29. "I wish this was over," Joe said, his hands stuffed into his pockets. "I wish I hadn't moved any boxes. Help me out now, Charlie."

"You know me," the barber said.

They went on across and Joe tapped his knuckles against the door.

It had been some years since Charlie had been inside the Jessup house. He had cut the old man's hair a number of times after the stroke. The car came into town, and he was taken to a great room where there seemed to be as many books as in the county library next to the courthouse. The old man never said a word, staring straight out the high windows that overlooked tawny, oak-studded fields. He remembered going along the carpeted hall, glimpsing the vaulted dining room with black, wooden furniture and shining crystal, and thinking there were worlds he knew nothing about and being grateful not to have known them. He anticipated the woman behind the door, then, and

was certain she was as exotic and untouchable as Jessup himself.

What appeared was something small and darkly clothed, silhouetted by an orange glow between stone cornices and burnished walls. He was immediately saddened and did not know why.

"Hello, Joseph."

The voice was whispery. It made the barber lean forward.

"This is Charlie. My best friend," Joe said, "I told you about?"

"Yes. Hello, Charles," she said. "I'm Mildred."

She put out her hand. He took it and bowed a little, embarrassed. He saw the flash of teeth, though the face was yet obscured.

"I'm glad you came too," she said. "I cooked much too many things. I wanted to. I haven't cooked really for the longest time. I hope you're both hungry. Please."

She led them down the hallway and into the room where Jessup had kept his books. The books were gone. The shelves, row above row, seemed the ribs of an enormous life dissolved millennia before. A fire burned in one corner. Some chairs huddled there and a small table, upon which sat several bottles that contained the glow of the flames.

"Yes," the woman said. "I don't know what to do. Perhaps I'll remove them. But what would I have against the emptiness? Books are so friendly, I suppose. Perhaps I'll just have books."

They were at the fire. She motioned them to sit. Charlie chose the chair on the right; Joe, the one on the left. The woman sat between them. She leaned toward the table, showing white arms, tapered fingers and polished, unlacquered nails that shone in the light.

Now that he saw her face, he would not call her beautiful. Attractive, maybe. All right, quite attractive. He'd go that far. But there was no Lauren Bacall or Elizabeth Taylor here. There were not many good looking women in town. Ed Haskins was fat and had cable television. He cut his lawn with a sit-down mower. He saw everything through the smoke of dusty cigars.

"Would you care for a glass of wine, then?" she offered. "I'm sorry I don't have anything else. Under the circumstances, I wasn't thinking. Please forgive me."

"I'll have a glass," Joe said, extending his hand quickly. Through the years Charlie and he had never shared anything but beer or hard liquor.

The barber smiled.

He watched her hands and thought of Helen. He did not want to think of Helen, who was less than attractive, homey, deliberate and secure. How had such a person made him find, among the listless paragraphs of his life, so much betrayal, jealousy and rage?

"Circumstances," Charlie said.

She turned. He was stunned. There emanated from her rays of a profound sadness. He stared at the flames, where memory burned.

"Yes," she breathed. "I imagine Joseph has told you what I told him. Haven't you, Joseph? I would expect you to."

The proprietor shrugged his shoulders, nodding at the same time.

"The circumstances of being here," she finished softly.

The two men were silent. A privacy occupied the room, filling the shelves with the literature of loneliness. He wished he had not come. He would give anything not to have come.

"Joseph tells me your wife died tragically as well, quite some time back," she whispered.

Charlie experienced a most unusual sensation. Something crawled down beneath his shirt.

"I lost my husband Phillip in a plane crash a year ago this week," she said. "A small plane. Somewhere off the coast. Nothing was found. He's at the bottom of the sea."

Charlie's heart was pounding. It had not pounded so hard since that afternoon twenty years before, when the McKenzie boat hit a snag, went over against the bank of the Bighorn River and Helen and he sank beneath thick, muddy waves.

"I was bitter and empty and sad," the woman said. "No goodbye. Just another day. Like every day. The end of days."

She stopped.

"I'm sorry," Charlie heard his friend say. He had forgotten that Joe was in the room. She lifted her head. There was shine under the eyes.

"Well," she sighed, "we were not close there, finally, were we? There was somebody else." She was talking to the flames. "Still, it's difficult not to feel guilty, isn't that so? And guilt is a terrible thing. In Philadelphia."

Joe had not sipped from his glass.

"Everybody in Philadelphia knows what I have just said, but not about the end, not about me," she went on. "I'm here to be among people I don't know, where it is acceptable to say things. That's what I decided."

Joe nodded quickly.

"If you ever should want to tell me anything, I will hold it close, against all of Philadelphia. You see?"

"Yes," Joe said.

"Secrets that way," she pleaded quietly, "make new friends. Don't you think so?"

Charlie put his glass down.

"And because I have told you, I am safe, aren't I? Not so much from guilt, because I'll always have that. But I can cook a dinner now and again for someone, and enjoy it." She smiled tentatively. "It must be a fine thing actually to have loved someone you've lost." She turned to the barber. "Isn't that so?"

She was radiant, her face composed by a beauty unknown to Lauren Bacall or Elizabeth Taylor, undreamed of by the Ed Haskins of the world. Charlie was terrified.

"Shall we go in now?" she said, standing. "You both must be starving."

She moved through the hallway. He fell into step beside his friend.

"For chrissake, Charlie," Joe said, "what was that? You heard. What's it all about?"

"Let's eat," the barber said, "and get the hell out of here."

The following night he was in the basement tying Pale Morning Duns. Joe watched the hands move beneath the cone of light. On the desk were two small glasses, but neither man had taken a drink. The barber worked easily. The hands had a life of their own. After a time Charlie realized that he was not in the room but there, all those years before, setting himself for the moment when the prow of the boat slammed against the Bighorn River.

It was five days before he spoke to Joe again, and that was in the chair late that afternoon. Standing behind him, working, Charlie did not have to see his face.

"You sure you want me to do this?" the barber said. "You were in nine days ago."

"Just a trim," the proprietor said, "Clean it up a little."

"All right, then," Charlie said, pulling the cloth a bit snugly around Joe's neck.

"What have you been up to?"

"Inventory. Work. You know me."

He said nothing. After a moment, Joe adjusted his posture in the chair.

"Helping out a bit more, as well," Joe finished.

The scissors snipped the air, paused, trapped the fibers above the comb. Faded, auburn wisps clung to the dark, wiry hair on the barber's hands.

"It's all right to help a bit, Charlie. What else can I do? Aren't I just across the road and all?"

"Yes, you are."

Joe shifted again, squaring his shoulders. "Can you believe it, Charlie?" the proprietor asked. "Can you actually believe the other night? I still can't get over that. I never heard anything like that before. How about you?"

"Not exactly," the barber said. "Not like that."

"She was going to walk out when he got back. She told me later. And then he goes and falls into the ocean. What a thing. Like leaving a door open, forever."

The barber spread his fingers, holding the head down and still, as he did that day when he found Helen beneath the waves.

"So I'm going over for dinner again tonight, can you beat it? All because of a little help. I feel silly. Like a kid. But you know me, Charlie."

"I know you," the barber said.

He stood behind his friend, the scissor points together in his broad fist, just at that spot where the spinal cord enters the brain, and stared out across the street to the light shining in the window of the dry goods store that opened the year Babe Ruth left the Yankees.

one martini
at the dark window screen
listening to crickets
day's maddening failures
given absolution

—joan payne kincaid

The great sea
Has sent me adrift
It moves me
As the weed in a great river
Earth and the great weather
Move me
Have carried me away
And move my inward parts with joy

—American Indian poem

CONTRIBUTORS

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Also, as an editor with *SmokeLong Quarterly*, he's had the pleasure of publishing short shorts by Dan Chaon, Steve Almond, Stuart Dybek, Sherrie Flick, Robert Shapard, Melanie Rae Thon, and many other exceptional writers. He's also had the privilege of working closely with some amazing teachers, including Douglas Glover, Abby Frucht, Nance Van Winckel, Tern-Brown Davidson, Ellen Lesser, Kathi Appelt, and Pamela Painter.

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Donna D Vitucci helps raise funds for local nonprofits, while her head and heart are engaged in the lives of the characters mounting a coup in her head. If her eyes appear vacant, you'll know she's in her alternate universe, following her "people" as they muck up their lives. Her stories can be found in dozens of print and online journals. Recent work appears, or is forthcoming, in *Salt River Review*, *Front Porch Journal*, *The Whitefish Review*, *Diner*, *Storyglossia*, *Cezanne's Carrot*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Insolent Rudder*, and *Another Chicago Magazine*.

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Jonathan Greenhause travels the land as a Spanish interpreter and translator, but his true love lies in the intricate architecture of poetry, with its capacity for epiphany and its concomitant potential for extraordinary failure. His poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in numerous publications throughout the country, including *The Bitter Oleander, Bryant Literary Review, Interim, Many Mountains Moving,* and *Nimrod.*

Jean Kelley White A New Hampshire native, studied at Dartmouth College and Harvard Medical School and has been a pediatrician in inner-city Philadelphia for more than twenty-five years. Mother of three, she is an active Quaker. Her poems have been widely published over the past decade, in journals including *Exquisite Corpse, Nimrod, Poet Lore, Rattle* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and in several chapbook and full-length collections. She is the recipient of a 2008 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant in poetry.

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the Best of the Decade, 1998 to 2007 Anthology; Poetry International; Leaves by Night, Flowers by Day; Seattle Review; Swink Magazine, (on-line); Blue Fifth Review, (on-line); Fugue; Asheville Poetry Review; The Spoon River Poetry Review; South Dakota Review; The Red Rock Review; Psychological Perspectives; The Louisville Review and Crazyhorse. She's a two time *Pushcart Prize* nominee in poetry, most recently nominated by the Hawai'i Pacific Review in 2006.

She and her husband Kam are the owners of a writers' retreat in Northeastern California. thompsonpeakretreat@citlink.net

Livio Farallo is co-founder and co-editor of Slipstream and a Professor of Biology at Niagara County Community College.

He has been published extensively in the small press over the past 25 years and has been nominated for 3 Pushcart Prizes for Poetry.

George Couch i'm 62 with two grown children, and the same wife for 27 years. i'm retired, so i have the the luxury of time, to think and write, and try not to get in a rut. some of my heros are brautigan, twain , and some stuff i pick up on bathroomwalls. i live on the banks of the Arkansas river in the arkansas delta, a great place to observe. it's like living at canary row

Robert Wexelblatt is professor of humanities at Boston University's College of General Studies. He has published essays, stories, and poems in a wide variety of journals, two story collections, *Life in the Temperate Zone* and *The Decline of Our Neighborhood*, a book of essays, *Professors at Play*, all from Rutgers University Press, and the recent novel *Zublinka Among Women* from Ken Arnold Books.

Judith Cody's poetry won awards from Atlantic Monthly and Amelia magazines, honorable mention from the Emily Dickinson Poetry Award 2002, was put forward for the Lyric Recovery Award, 2004. A poem with its archives is in the Smithsonian Institution's permanent Collection.

Poems are published in: Nimrod, New York Quarterly, South Carolina Poetry Review, Poet Lore, Cumberland Poetry Review, Xavier Review, Texas Review, Primavera, Phoebe, Louisville Review, Madison Review, Eureka Literary Magazine, Westview, Anthology of Monterey Bay Poets, 2004. Anthology of Contemporary Poetry 2007, PEN Anthologies: Oakland Out load 2007, and Words Upon the Water 2006. She composes music, and wrote the composer biography, Vivian Fine: A Bio-Bibliography, Greenwood Press, 2002; also, Eight Frames Eight, poems. She has finished a poetry manuscript, The Rumor (a Vietnam saga). Forthcoming: a photography book, Roses in Portraiture. www.judithcody.com

Nancy Esposito's first book of poems was *Changing Hands* (Quarterly Review of Literature Contemporary Poetry Series VI). *Mêm' Rain*, a winner of the National Looking Glass Poetry Chapbook Competition, was published in 2002 by Pudding House Publications, which also published *Greatest Hits 1978-2001* in 2003. She has completed a manuscript of poems, entitled *Lamentation with June Bug*. She received the Discovery/*The Nation* Award, Massachusetts Arts Lottery Grant, the Colladay Award, PSA Gordon Barber Memorial Award, Fulbright Grant to Egypt, and grants to Vietnam and Cambodia. Her poems and translations have appeared in APR, *The Nation*, *The Antioch Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Indiana Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*, among others. Her poems have been translated into Spanish and Vietnamese.

Jeremi Handrinos is Horus8. Poet, rare book dealer (the creator of literaturopolis <http://www.amazon.com/shops/literaturopolis>) and father of three (Micah, Cyrus, and Persephone), and husband to one (Nadine). Jeremi loves cooking, designing, and music when he's not dadding about.

He fronts the band Horus8 & The Werewolves, and tries to play around with film direction, and acting in the mean time, "tries..." Los Angeles, California, born and raised -- his influences are: Tod Browning, Mary Shelly, Jack Parsons, Dean Moriarty, and Sal Paradise.

Marguerite Guzman Bouvard is the author of 15 books including 6 books of poetry. Her first book of poems "Journeys Over Water," was a winner of the quarterly Review of Literature contest. Her poems and articles have been widely anthologized. She is a Resident Scholar with the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University. New book of poems "*The Unpredictability of Light*" is forthcoming January 29th. <http://www.brandeis.edu/centers/wsrc/scholars/profiles/Bouvard.html>

Alan Catlin recently retired from his unchosen profession as a barman to devote more time to his written work. His most recent book of poetry is *Self-Portrait as the Artist Afraid of His Self-Portrait* from March Street Press.

Morrie Warshawski lives in Napa, CA. He makes a living helping nonprofits do strategic planning. He's been writing poems on and off for forty years, has appeared in a number of the small literary magazines, published a chapbook *OUT OF NOWHERE* (Press-22) and a number of limited edition artist books, one of which (*PATTERNS OF OPPRESSION*) is in the collection of MOMA NYC.

Geer Austin's poetry and short fiction has appeared in *Big Bridge*, *Colere*, *Parting Gifts*, and *Potomac Review*, among others. He lives in northern Manhattan.

Corinne Robins, poet, art historian and widely published art critic is the author of the text *THE PLURALIST ERA, American Art 1968-80* and of five poetry collections, most recently *TODAY'S MENU* from Marsh Hawk Press. She teaches art criticism at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, N.Y. and is the coordinator of the Poets for Choice reading series at Ceres Gallery in New York City.

Dane Myers lives in Albuquerque with Melinda and their three daughters Emily, Madeleine, and Natalie. His publishing credits include *Willard and Maple, North Dakota Quarterly*, and *Fresh Boiled Peanuts*. Although he has an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of New Mexico Dane continues to work part-time as a paramedic and full-time as a Mr. Mom/ next-to-last-place trophy husband.

Stephen Kessler is the author, most recently, of *Burning Daylight* (poems, Littoral Press); his translation (with Daniela Hurezanu) of *Eyeseas*, poems by Raymond Queneau, is due this summer from Black Widow Press, and his book of essays *Moving Targets: On Poets, Poetry & Translation* will be issued in the fall by El León Literary Arts. He is a contributing editor of *Poetry Flash* and the editor of *The Redwood Coast Review*.

Elizabeth Bernays grew up in Australia then, in England, she obtained a PhD, worked for the British Government, and studied agricultural pests in developing countries. In 1983 she immigrated to the United States as a professor of entomology at the University of California Berkeley. Later, she was appointed Regents' professor at the University of Arizona. Following twenty-five years in biology, she turned to creative writing, obtaining a Master of Fine Arts also at the University of Arizona. She has published essays and poems in a variety of literary journals, and was awarded first prize in the 2007 X.J. Kennedy nonfiction contest. Website: elizabethbernays.com. yes, of course you may. please note that "Fragile, Perishable" is a reprint, and was first published in Turnrow, Summer 2004, by the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

Carol Graser lives in the Adirondacks of upstate New York. She has read her poetry at many community events including fund-raisers, anti-war rallies and as a featured reader at poetry events around NY state. She hosts a monthly poetry reading series at Saratoga's historic Caffe Lena that happens on the first Wednesday of every month. Her poetry has appeared in regional journals such as *Screeed, Salvage* and *Metroland* as well as in numerous national publications like *Lullwater Review, Berkeley Poetry Review, The Worcester Review, The MacGuffin* and *Eureka Literary Magazine*

Bradley R. Strahan is a Former Fulbright Professor of Poetry & American Culture (2002-2004). For 12 yrs. he taught poetry at Georgetown Univ.. He is the director of VISIONS INTERNATIONAL ARTS and publisher of Visions-International. Since 1976 he has developed a worldwide following for his work, which includes several books of

poetry and over 500 poems in such places as *America*, *Christian Century*, *Cross Currents*, *Rattapallax*, *Virginia*, *Apostrophe*, *The Seattle Rev.*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Poet Lore*, *Confrontation*, *First Things*, *Midstream*, *The Hollins Critic*, *Soundings East*, *Gargoyle*, *Southwestern Rev.*, *Negative Capability*, *Sundog*, etc.; in the U.K. in *Orbis*, *Tribune*, *Nottingham Rev.*, *Krax*, etc. and elsewhere: *Sources* (Belgium), *Poetry Monthly Shimunhak* (Korea), *The Salmon* (Ireland), *Poetry Australia*, etc.. He has been anthologized in many places and translated into French Spanish, Dutch, Serbian, Macedonian, Korean, etc.. He has lectured and read his work in America, Europe and Asia, For over 20 years he sponsored a series of international poetry readings at Rock Creek Gallery and other locations. He has won many awards for his poetry.

He was in Holland on a Vogelstein Foundation program from Nov., 2001 to Jan., 2002 (when he replaced John Ashbery as the American poet at the "Literaire Podia Amsterdam"). He was a Fellow during 2006 at the "Vertalershuis" in Leuven, Belgium.

devin wayne davis, once called "ink (or inc.)" in an seaside vision, has written well-over 2, 000 poems; he likes concise verse.

his work is printed in the sacramento anthology: 100 poems; sanskrit; dwan; poetry depth quarterly; dandelion; coe review; rattlesnake; taproot; and 38 chapbooks. selections can be found on-line, at these fine sites: howling dog press; del sol review; wordslingers; perihelion; pierian springs; locust magazine; ginosko; kota press; octavo; lifix; jones av.; pig iron malt; great works; la petite 'zine; stirring; offcourse; rio arts; wandering dog; poems niederngasse; whimperbang; kookamonga square; wheelhouse; chiron review; eratio; split shot; poetry magazine; poetry monthly; fullosia; new verse news; penhimalaya; wordslaw; aurora review, muscadine lines; toe tree journal; pcm; down in the dirt; soma; tmp; haiku scotland; medusa's kitchen; spam; and zambomba. thank you all.

davis has read as a feature poet at major book retailers; he has addressed citizens and lawmakers on the northern steps of the california state capitol, and has read for annual poetry events at the crocker art museum. davis reviewed movies for a best-selling paperback guide; he has written for sacramento, ca. arts & entertainment weeklies, and worked for ups and the state.

davis served in the u.s. army. he visited spain, germany, switzerland, france, and was last assigned to ft. bragg, n.c. as a photojournalist.

davis earned a bachelors degree in journalism and history. davis has hiked mt. whitney 3x. davis has three daughters, and has had testicular cancer. he's a leo.

townee_towne@hotmail.com.

Jean Anderson's first collection *In Extremis and Other Alaskan Stories* received several awards, including a PEN Syndicated Fiction selection. Anderson has lived in Alaska since 1966 and writes mostly short stories. "Smallpox" is part of a collection-in-progress, "Bird's Milk: Stories of Alaska and Siberia."

J. D. Riso's short fiction and travel writing have appeared in numerous publications, including Prick of the Spindle, Identity Theory, Eclectica, BluePrintReview, and SmokeLong Quarterly. Her first novel, Blue (Murphy's Law Press), was published in 2006. She lives with her husband in Poland.

Emilio DeGrazia, a long-time resident of Winona, Minnesota, founded Great River Review, a literary journal, in 1977. A first collection of short fiction, Enemy Country (New Rivers, 1984), was selected by Anne Tyler for a Writer's Choice Award, and a novel, Billy Brazil (New Rivers, 1991), was chosen for a Minnesota Voices award. A second collection, Seventeen Grams of Soul (Lone Oak Press), received a Minnesota Book Award, and Lone Oak published a second novel, A Canticle for Bread and Stones. He and his wife Monica also have co-edited anthologies for Nodin Press of Minneapolis, Twenty-Six Minnesota Writers (1995) and Thirty-Three Minnesota Poets (2000). Burying the Tree, published in 2006 by Plain View Press of Austin, Texas, is his first collection of creative prose.

Currently he continues to write fiction and essays, and hopes to be a poet when he grows up.

Sankar Roy, originally from India, is a poet, translator, activist and multimedia artist living near Pittsburgh, PA. He is a winner of PEN USA Emerging Voices, author of three chapbooks of poetry— *Moon Country*, *The House My Father Could Not Build* and *Mantra of the Born-free* (all from Pudding House). He is an associate editor of international poetry anthology, *Only the Sea Keeps: Poetry of the Tsunami* (Rupa Publication, India and Bayeux Arts, Canada). Sankar's poems have appeared or forthcoming in over forty-five literary journals including Bitter Oleander, Crab Orchard Review, Connecticut Review, Harpur Palate, Icon, Runes, Rhino, Tampa Review and Poetry Magazine.

John Grey Australian born poet, playwright, musician. Latest book is "What Else Is There" from Main Street Rag. Recently in The English Journal, The Pedestal, Pearl and the Journal Of The American Medical Association.

Rachel Halls is best known by her friends as a sound designer, poetic fashionista, and avid tea drinker. She is greatly inspired by the sounds of electronic music and all things haute couture, often making references to both in all of her works. Interested in learning more? Seek her out at <http://www.myspace.com/christinasdream>

Kirby Congdon was encouraged to write poetry by his third-grade teacher at the West Chester, Pa., State Teacher's College's Demonstration School, but he was brought up in rural Connecticut where he was drafted, before he had shaved, for service in Europe in World War II. After college and post-graduate years on the G. I. Bill at Columbia he worked in New York City as a typesetter for encyclopedia houses and the Brooklyn Heights Press.

Professor Emeritus of English, Long Island University, Ray C. Longtin, who has followed Congdon's work since his very first days in college, states, "Kirby has not been in the mainstream of his time, but he has been very much a part of the avant garde and a creative but independent force as poet, editor and critic. He deserves, and will some day get, the attention that he merits."

Meticulous in regard to both ideas and language, his collections cover industrial machines of city life, motorcycle fantasies, comic-strip heroes, animals, a memoir of rural America, regional subjects of Fire Island Pines and Key West, as well as miscellaneous poems on conundrums of time and space in a new century. His crank letters, one-act plays, and selected poems are published. Small-press periodicals have printed over 75 essays along with countless reviews and letters on current activities. Poems have been reprinted in high-school course books, and in anthologies of literary surveys as well as in current collections of poetry.

Richard Dokey's "The Barber's Tale" won The Hoepfner Award for the best story published in Southern Humanities Review in 2006. His stories are published widely and have won other awards. They have been nominated for The Pushcart Prize and have been cited in Best American Short Stories and Best of the West. "Pale Morning Dun," his most recent collection, was published by University of Missouri Press in 2004. It was nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award and The American Book Award. He has other collections to his credit, notably "August Heat," published by Story Press, Chicago, and the novel "The Hollow Man," published by Delta West. River's Bend Press will publish his novel "The Hollywood Cafe."

Joan Payne Kincaid I live with Rod, 3 cats, and a Russell fox terrier named Fancy who is smart enough to be a circus dog! I write and paint in Sea Cliff, Long Island. My roots are on L.I. and my family goes back to the early settling of SuffolkCounty.

In 2005 Pudding House Publications brought out a collection of my poems covering 20 years of published work. Currently have work in Big Scream, Main Street Rag, Santa Clara Review, Green Hills Literary Lantern, South Central Review, The South Carolina Review, Georgetown Review, Edgz, 88, Modern Haiku, Iconoclast, Lynx Eye, Yalobusha Review, Mother Earth Journal, Tule Review, Cairn, Unexpected Harvest, Ruth Moon Kempher's

Anthology from Kings Estate Press.

*New book of poetry, with Wayne Hogan just off the press entitled Blue Eyes Wise and Dancing.