



ginosko

#5

The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope, or else despair Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove. We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.

T.S. Elliot, *LITTLE GIDDING, IV*

ginosko (ghin-*oce*-koe)

To perceive,
understand, recognize,
come to know;
the knowledge
that has an inception,
a progress,
an attainment.
The recognition of truth
by experience.

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The Explanations

Donna Hilbert

They each had one
about the genesis
of the great unhappiness.
Hers, how her mother
had trained her to drink
to stifle the jitters
before auditions

and his, how he'd been sent
away to camp, returning to find
his mother not just sick,
but dead.

She was seventy-one
when she let her secret go
over lunch at the Deauville
(club sandwiches and beer).
After the meal, she fell
walking down the ramp
toward the car.
It was as if she'd bled away
her ballast then, that secret
with its balancing weight,
that shame that kept her upright,
not happy, but intact.

WAKING
Barry Ballard

*. . . step back,
Heave, and a light, a little light, will nimbus your
going forth.*

- Charles Wright
Apologia Pro Vita Sua

You're seeing the world with its sharp-angled shadows, colorless, speaking in your sleep like an inward prophet with the window-sill's ashes in his hands. Only cold light weeps, but the heart tries to swallow it, the stark refractions, scrambled landscapes, the gleaming beads of violet transcendence. What part wakes in the actor's mask of your blinking

shutter? What part breathes the sky's resuscitating breath leaking through the blinds? The day itself, a sacrament: the mundane as sacred bread; and the opposite of fear pulsating, moving you through the truth - that is held like light in the center of your deep sleep.

THE ESCAPE
Barry Ballard

When I fell through the ice and my coat drank up the cold water, I panicked and knew that I'd drown under the cockeyed view of a few sparrows. After reaching the bank, my mind still fed on the fear and measured the desperate terms of my experiment. I faced my father and still don't know why I didn't tell the story. Fears are treasures

of sorts; over the years we polish the shackles. In my room I guessed he'd heard the irony. I wondered about the power of "what was given back", how my elbows demolished my means of escape, and how my new words might sound from the current that was spilling over.

MAD SONG

Edward Butscher

I nightmare cream walls
in breasts
 female
hemispheres at their lull
at rest, milked
 of small skulls.

A scream in the background
always
 female
as the boneless sapling
shedding faces
 in a sudden Fall.

Now it has sifted inside
harder
 female
as urgent lily bulbs
cracking
 icebox ribs

hearts of lovers and dead aunts
blossoming
 out loud
from the aria I scale
when Spring
 gives commands:

*stand straight
shut the light
open wide.*

DREAM IN THE AFTERNOON
Edward Butscher

A small ball of auburn dog
on a shelf that does not exist
in the bedroom no longer mine
too near the ocean's tolling din
like a porcupine pup but fluffy
luminous as an illustration
recollected from childhood

I gently cradle and carry
into the restored farm kitchen
where furious women and girls
materialize out of air and mind:

Amy alive among them, doll in
hand and desperate to be saved
Aunt Olga glaring in a teenager's
glossy red and green raincoat
the crowd of them multiplying
around us as they condemn me
without ceasing their chores

Amy's panicky hold on my arm
knocked loose by their bony
bodies' pinball batterings.

The dog could be that papillon
the old widow loved to parade
when I walked luncheonette
planks after school and football

or a fabulous bestiary notion
imported from medieval France
except for those round brown
disturbingly familiar eyes and
flick of a quiver as I lift her
free of the raging female torrent

like the baby rabbit the cats
chased inside for me to rescue
and release in a nearby wood
the summer both my parents died

only noticing the dried blood
on my hands at the dinner table
after the enormous seashore sky
had swooped down with darkness
to sweep away the huge fir trees
hugging this house to earth.

her lovely green eyes iv

Joan Payne Kincaid

she thought wow moving morphed lips
died of rare heat-swept romance other-
wise tepid toot lying prone and smoking
in the Daily News: sometimes a wink, a
wok, a meal or wish list in wilding wind
of unfamiliarity...her hands warmed in
an earlier famine; what leans is the muff
of a yelling retro toy, eyes understood
but no speak buttering pate nodding yes
that he would what no one wants...eek!
was a door-slammer without a key, a
retrograde piece with father dying off
to fragments of assisted living; a voice
of lapsed potato steam buttered and
bottled when he fell off the stage and
lawsuits back at Stonehenge he imposed
a pillow on her marriage murder in jail
a mirage of roast beef and gravy in a cave
of days voted waves and toasts waiting
for the world; still her willed fridge
works and she's in Purgatory's no
smoking rule-standing here, a green-eyed
gaze returning over and over.

Candlelight dinner

Fraida Liba Levine

evening crumples around him
all wrinkled and distracted,
like the sandwich folded in dull foil paper
at the end of a day.

hungry, like that
for all of it.

the last of the sunlight gleams in the paint of his pickup
it smells mortal,
like the hair singed by his blowtorch.

ARROWS OF DESIRE

Fred Ferraris

“I wore down my teeth on worn-out stalks, on a wall full of holes where no one walks,” I sang to myself with innocuous aplomb. In the deep twilight of his auspicious ascent Jesaru Durango fiddled with his coffee mill carbine, oblivious to frantic calls from ground control. I pulled on my boots and kicked off a few flame retardant course corrections for Emperor Arbusto to consider. Flea words and rumors, psychotic masterminds, late night insurrections, inexplicable crimes. There is more prophetic malarkey in mid-flight fog than imagined in the Emperor’s phylactery. Now please, just a moment, let’s get something straight...and if we succeed, we’ll celebrate by making some meaningful tooth contact with a soup bone or two. Because even a legend like Durango can’t help us find our way through this mazy sea of virtual bracken. And yet he’s the only one I can trust with my collection of contraband Euclidean patterns. Fevers brew as Arbusto stews and I have the wig and dentures to prove it. That’s Jesaru’s idea, anyway. He has big bright things inside him. The bigger and brighter they get, the more he has to drive himself crazy. That’s the way he sees it. He says there’s nothing for us to do but pay attention to the sound of the voices wafting up from beneath the fireproof deck, the voices that suggest we might have had it all wrong, we were missing something basic, thinking too much about fuddled goose eggs, drifting into a muzzy gulf. Durango himself, oddly uncoupled, has become a sort of motherless payload. Without even a lucky charm he touches down unbuckled on the roof of the Mazuma Café. “I want to go,” he buzzes, “where fog horns don’t blow.”

DISAPPOINTMENT

Fred Ferraris

Jesaru Durango was late to arrive at Señor Arbusto’s door, and when no one answered his knock, he walked right in on a bunch of Imperial toadies spitting on the floor. The Señor’s trained seal, Senator Lickspittle, cleaned up their spit while the Señor stepped into the garden. In actual fact, before Jesaru let himself in, Señor Arbusto had already stepped into the garden, but not before Lickspittle had started licking. Señor Arbusto didn’t tell any of his flunkies where he was going or how long he would be gone. He didn’t say anything except, “My heaven is a steel cage surrounded by spaniels.” When he couldn’t find the Señor, Jesaru wiped his feet on one of the house’s many doormats and walked back to the Mazuma Cafe. While Jesaru was gone, Arbusto came back into the house, but when Jesaru didn’t return in time to keep their appointment, the Señor sent his minions to look for him in the Cafe. Jesaru left the Cafe without being seen, and while the Señor’s trained seal entertained the scullions, Jesaru walked back to the house.

Now Arbusto claims that Jesaru failed to keep their appointment, and Jesaru admits that he failed to keep their appointment, but says he failed to keep their appointment only after Arbusto failed. Arbusto admits that he missed their appointment, but that he missed it only because Jesaru said something rude about Senator Lickspittle. Jesaru admits he said something rude, but explains that his rudeness was a reaction to Arbusto’s obtuseness, and if Jesaru is big enough to admit that he failed to keep their appointment, Señor Arbusto should be big enough to admit that his own obtuseness incited Jesaru to speak so rudely. But Arbusto won’t admit that, unless he can do so obtusely.

DURANGO IN LOVE

Fred Ferraris

Jesaru Durango is by nature an angry man, but he is loving, though he tends to be loving in an angry sort of way. One morning he was lying in his bed on the second floor of the Lonesome Lizard Saloon listening to the sound of casual sniper fire coming from the roof of a collapsed building. For some reason this made him think of Sylvie St. Cyr, an African woman with a French name, who happened to be sleeping beside him. Behind the sound of machine-gun fire he heard the ersatz Cuban bandleader Ricky Ricardo yelling imperiously at his *femme de nuit*, an inflatable party doll named Lucy. Jesaru couldn't hear very well but it seemed Ricky was upset about Lucy's theory of space-time as a tapestry of interwoven lovers. This made Jesaru smile. Barnumville was burning and Ricky seemed to be working himself into a red hot hissy fit over a romantic notion while Jesaru was slipping back into the dream in which he demands of Senor Arbusto, "You're disinfecting Barnumville—why?" Then came a knock at the door. No one answered.

Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet, Heloise and Abelard, Ricky and Lucy—some of these are possibly people who have had at one time or another anything to do with Barnumville. Jesaru wants to walk into the desert on a dark night, to leave all those lovers hanging, Chagall-like, in the sky, but he is too caught up in examining the decay of his senses to be bothered with other people's dreams. For that to happen he would have to be asleep and already on his way to Triangle Land. On such a journey he would be certain to hear many ambivalent statements being made, such as, "Silence means everything," or "I want to taste your impeccable smoothness." In a funny way Jesaru likes this kind of banter, but he wishes the lovers would shut up for awhile, as the closeness of them conflicts with his desire to hold things apart so that history can unfold in an easy-to-visualize manner. To be girt around the loins with hides. To shop for fruit in a Mid-Eastern bazaar. To dump opium into the ocean and start an opium war.

Most dogs don't hunt, but the white hunter is always looking for ways to acquire kennel space, and he also has ideas about the best ways to kill time, but not very good ones. That's one reason Jesaru doesn't take to him, but by the same token he enjoys watching from a distance when the white hunter goes into action, because almost everything the white hunter does involves lighting up the sky with testosterone. The problem is knowing where the white hunter will show up next, seeing how secretive and nocturnal he is. Jesaru used to be convinced that space and time could be considered as separate issues, but lately he's discovered the need to be less complex. In a tentative manner he lays his hand on Sylvie's tummy. He's trying to find the best position to define a close embrace.

INVASIVE PROCEDURES

Fred Ferraris

She crossed the border with fear and trembling, a person without a passport, and entered a rapidly mutating realm of indefinite music, dangerous songs. You invited this fatherless symmetry into your home, and you understand, with a sympathy almost like anguish, the complacent distance that separates the man from the woman. She packed up her hopes, put a rose in her hair, and offered herself to the future, but she may have misread the future's intentions. Warning: metaphors are like unto sand. Homemade rockets, a world view in shambles, a world view skewed by funky geography. The white hunter's house is built out of wind. But he doesn't know wind from stone. His faith stands firm. I study him behind his iron gate that delineates his eternal imprisonment. At the same time the woman has begun, not without ostentation, the methodical study of Farsi. In her world, vowels will balance out. I don't mean there isn't a suicidal beauty in her. Or a cobra-infested labyrinth. Any day now, uninvited guests will commandeer her home. In a few years she will be attending tedious lectures delivered in dialect. Then she will be convicted of having a gap in her memory. Even so, her posture and manner will remain the same, that is to say, habitual. History, that string of bloodied pearls, will be honored to say, It's a beautiful morning, get out your guns. I myself have fallen into a slot machine, and I am expecting guests.

Imagine for a moment that you are a platform-sweeper in an abandoned railway station. Robot skulls leer in rocket's red glare. Tracer bullets shower down like meteorites, light fixtures shatter, and it occurs to you that this might be a good time to get out of town for a century or two. A train pulls into the station, the roof collapses, the station departs without you. You'd like to turn your proto-romantic vision into a platform you can stand on, but a small oscillation in perception could signal a quick goodbye.

A gangster chieftain, his anomalous mistress, their faces painted lurid with moral cosmetics. He claims that peace is coming soon, darkness hides inside her smile. But the bamboozler's spiel is a peripheral indignity. His narrow back alley rhetoric makes you want to slap him silly, but wait a moment, I'm expecting a guest. Her invitation was delivered in a legal-size coffin. I hope she brings some reading matter in her tote bag of hopes to remind me of how I got here. These days anyone can be his own third-rate online travel agent, but remembering where we used to be takes more serious effort. Night tears through the station. Up on the platform the white hunter is speaking in a dialect that comes with an army and a navy. I wonder if my guest carries a weapon of her own? The doorbell rings. A cobra dances, the surge of life, then a moan. Tomorrow is buried in yesterday's grave. Dead skin, old bones. The doorbell rings. I fix my smile. Here she is, with a rose in her hair.

LOW COHERENCES

Fred Ferraris

“A white hunter is nearly crazy.”

—Gertrude Stein,

Tender Buttons

The blue-violet flame in the white hunter's eye braises the brisket of his obsolescence, stirs advantage into his tea, his posey philosophy like a Gyro Gearloose contraption, its pale blue light bathing the busted ferris wheel at the edge of a drowning city. A tingling in his prick tells him that his voice is being broadcast into back alleys where his thoughts aren't worth a hill of beans. Jesaru Durango reviews the Oracle's prognosis, lays the page aside. The white hunter studies his disconnected head, amazed at the snakes nested under its tongue.

Jesaru makes a courtesy call, throws questions of justice into a blender, unleashes a fusillade of gunpowder teas. He likes to work back alleys. He has visions of tragicomic futures, but he doesn't know what they mean. A young girl dressed in blue suede brocade stirs her tea with a bloody knuckle, a small boy armed with boar tusks and gourd saws searches for saviors among the spear men.

Jesaru Durango sleeps with snake fangs under his pillow. He makes his bed with awe. He suspects the Oracle knows something, but the Oracle isn't talking. Jesaru has received a message from his short term memory and who knows what that means? A body is not a book, a mounted head yields no small profit, her position is well known, his position is mismanaged-why a man without a head must wait until the cobras are fed.

The white hunter is a professional whose intellectual methods are clothed in Teutonic regalia, a pugnacious profiteer, a man of pervasive jerky habits, a lollapaloosa in lamasery drag. Only you know what that means. A small girl betrayed by arthritic hands, a poem pried from a listing wheel, a fleshy calyx swollen with badge-men. At times it's difficult to tell a white hunter's tongue from a speak-your-weight machine.

The indigo flame in Jesaru's eye toasts the riddle of the maladroitness hunter. He tossed a burial plot and tumbled onto a rosy larynx. That was before the tongue repressors crashed the Garden of Bodiless Noggins.

A pale blue flame bathes Jesaru Durango in nitroglycerine light. The white hunter raises a hill of beans. The citizens distract themselves with flashing colored neon, or a small boy stumbles into the path of an oncoming Sputnik.

The present situation would like to entrance you, but you've already eyeballed the exit. People are saying the white hunter had an audience with the Oracle and shot holes through her falcon's hood. By the time you sense the presence of someone and awake, the spear men are on you like fleas. People are saying Jesaru Durango has cornered the market on blue suede brocade. He claims he survived the hard times on a stew of boar spew and silage. He likes his prochronic visions seasoned with tectonic legato.

And aboard the Sputnik a riddled hawk, snakes without fangs, defoliated trees. “Do I know what I know?” Jesaru asked. “Not ahead of your time,” the Oracle answered.

We had no choice but to banish the bitch. The Empire no longer tolerates troublesome or quarrelsome persons. Jesaru Durango keeps to himself, polishes his tusk with honking nitro. Even

here at the edge of the drowned city we can hear the hunter clearing his throat. But in these back alleys no one listens. We've already heard what the man has to say. He is, after all, our white hunter. He is, after all, one of us.

IN THE FLOWER-BED, RAZED BY COLD, HE RESISTED
Luis Benítez

We were discussing you and I
about things of our huge world,
made of windows
behind which we have kept sufferings and joy,
like in an aquarium
that we deem isolated from what is
boiling, when its magma
explodes in everything we say:
man and woman
are two races which mingle
amidst their perpetual battle.
Farther away, do you remember? We were in the balcony
his unusual melody was bursting in april.
The old cricket, from a faraway flower-bed roared his music score,
in the already cold April
of the Southern hemisphere, his existing was unusual, unexpected:
his sexual symphony, a summer disturbance,
had nothing to do in the middle of a freezing evening
which abandoned in his eagle
that furious child who will always express desire.
In the flower-bed, razed by cold, he resisted,
like an obstinate bulb,
like a seed insisting on procreation,
becoming a father late in years
of minute larvae which had flooded the air
some months before,
when frost did not blur the windshield
of the tired man driving the bus
along a sleepy street.
Farther down, on the street,
someone shouts his rage, hunger and cold;
among the sounds of blowing horns
another one frantically crosses the street in his car
and a salesman recites
his mercenary palinode. In front of the cricket,
we silence our shame
for being almost old and not parents.
His unfortunate violin will never reach
a female: in the dampness of the flower-bed
entities more powerful than his ridiculous singing
will cut off the strings:
the mist of may,
the street wind that will sow another June
will demolish the untimely sound
of the enlarged scraping of his sides

worn-out by an unceasing desire.
When a momentary silence intercedes
for his hardly minute gracefulness, the stupid animal
will allow his humble splendor to be heard all along the street,
that very insistence
of another time simultaneous that we do not see,
we do not hear,
except for a cricket or other eternal thing
forever out of this well known,
calculated and daily world we inhabit.
Certainly time
is a river
pausing
at the banks of his singing.

WE, THE ANCIENT PERFUMERS

Luis Benítez

If anyone in a previous century had worked
on the combination of essences as light as the air
and thought of obtaining from his barely predicted combination
an essence capable of returning
to whoever passed by, through reading or a slight aspiration,
the simulation of beauty
condensed in words or exhalations,
just a glimpse but so powerful, forever opening
his nostrils to a new reality,
so ancient and persistent, for so many and so few,
it is true, hardly contained
in the cipher of a few verses, or poison.
If it were true then that the majority -scarce- hardly breathed,
by chance or grace, the very first notes,
those that are called words, those that fade away first
leaving nothing in the nose which is the mind, are soon forgotten,
its sense lost forever, those which afterwards
return in a casual phrase without knowing,
in the mirage of a vision deemed their own but is somebody else's.
If others, less numerous, succeed in tasting or believe they do,
the centre where the sense "resides", hardly
the first one of an army of meanings
contained in a condemnatory mouthful of understanding in the world,
and don't know that all their further mistakes
will be engendered by that reading and a glimpse of something deeper
that will forever confine them in a false jail
where their lives will start to liquefy,
no less cheated by the appearance
of perfume, of the attractive second deceit
as alert as a spider, as reliable as a rifle.
And deeper, in the notes which are said to come from the heart,
a profound epiphany in ambush, launching its nets
beyond what perfume may capture,
and gather the sense or the words in the night.
Who can go any farther without returning
with a transformed member, with a new organ,
forever changed by the peeping into what exists
outside, so lacking colour and word as well?
The problem then is walking without being seen by the world
with that living prosthesis, that new portion of oneself.
Poetry is a perfume where limbo, hell and heaven
every day contend for something new
that fortune displays over the world.
(Believing what these three latter verses say
is opening your eyes with the fatal flask, unclosed).

Fine

Karen Neuberg

It wasn't my river, broody
with traffic to and from the vast
Manhattan Island I so love;

not my river of light
maneuvering on a white mirror that from a distance looks
like it will lead one

into or out of themselves.
No, I found myself on a riverbank
where I'd never been before

and had no thoughts, just ease
of being
water meandering in what I would have termed dream

if I'd broken from its spell
so strong
that when I was pulled out

by voices summoning me,
on leaving it seemed I'd come upon
a wild and rude and too-bright dream:

Masked faces bending over, calling,
calling my name, telling me
everything went okay, I was going to be fine.

TO BE
Yvette A Schnoeker-Shorb

I am light on the wind
wailing over water. I am
an original daughter cell
of some primitive form
related to you. I am
explosive
like seeds bursting
from the pod of a weed,
like hidden potential
of misplaced genes
on a chromosome. I am
these words compelled
to write themselves real
so you will notice

I am.

Their hands reaching and joining are the most powerful prayer I can imagine, the most eloquent, the most graceful. It is everything that we are capable of against horror and loss and death. It is what makes me believe that we are not craven fools and charlatans to believe in God, to believe that human beings have greatness and holiness within them like seeds that open only under great fires, to believe that some unimaginable essence of who we are persists past the dissolution of what we were, to believe against such evil hourly evidence that love is why we are here.

Their passing away was thought an affliction, and their going forth from us utter destruction, says the Book of Wisdom, but they are in peace. They shall shine, and shall dart about as sparks through stubble.

No one knows who they were: husband and wife, lovers, dear friends, colleagues, strangers thrown together at the window there at the lip of hell. Maybe they didn't even reach for each other consciously, maybe it was instinctive, a reflex, as they both decided at the same time to take two running steps and jump out the shattered window, but they did reach for each other, and they held on tight, and leaped, and fell endlessly into the smoking canyon, at two hundred miles an hour, falling so far and so fast that they would have blacked out before they hit the pavement near Liberty Street so hard that there was a pink mist in the air.

From "Leap", by Brian Doyle

Fragments

Tree Riesener

No longer scrutineer nor even explainer, through the long hot mornings of summer I read old Japanese paperbacks, the paper so yellow and brittle I have to turn the pages with great care, comforted by the moral struggle, endured through seasons of heroic silence, as to whether a woman should wear one more or less under-kimono, with death the penalty for the wrong choice.

People do die for trivia. I have always known this.

From the Latin. Trivium. A place where three roads meet—the perfect opportunity to exchange stories, gossip, information. Where you learn methods for things to do and things not to do.

So small, the things we die for. Kill for. Fragments.

If you talk to murderers, the motive is not usually anything grand, like “We could not agree on the filioque clause in the Nicene Creed—does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father and the Son, or do both the Son and the Spirit proceed from the Father?”

No, it’s usually for something like the way, twenty times a day, she says “A penny for your thoughts” or the way he wipes his mouth after eating a fried egg.

Like old colonial explorers in Africa who put on formal dress each evening in their huts, I know how easy it would be for me to slide into lassitude, so I keep working hours, get up on time, drink coffee and dress before beginning my reading.

On Saturday mornings, I wear my bathrobe, leave my novels and watch samurai movies on cable, walking off into the sunset with that lonely blind figure who lazes around for days and then, finally one day, galvanized into action by some cue obviously unexplainable by sub-titles, kills forty people in batches of ten at a time, seemingly for looking too directly at the delicate daughter of the impoverished landowner as she drifts through the frames with downcast eyes, occasionally kneeling to serve tea.

But since he is blind, how does he know about this? Does someone tell him at the crossroads?

When you do not see, how do you know there is danger?

Sunday after lunch is the Bollywood festival, reminding me that the *danse macabre* goes on. I have a favorite, obviously popular since it is repeated often, of terrorists bursting into song and dance as they go through the aisle of the airplane, with a soulful solo by the handsome head terrorist singing of his regret at never seeing his sweetheart again, until the camera zooms in on a closeup of the girl, who has disguised herself with horn-rimmed glasses and hair pulled back into a librarian’s bun, to die with her sweetheart as the plane goes down in flames.

Once she whips her glasses off and slips a burqa over her head, he recognizes her and their swan song begins.

Is it worth noting that the passengers, after initial apprehension, are so won over by this Romeo and Juliet spectacle that they join in the chorus?

After the crash, the head terrorist and his sweetheart are seen in the sky surrounded by the benevolent, beaming passengers. Everything has been forgiven. The terrorists and the terrorized have arrived at some sort of *rapprochement*, formed a blended family, and are living happily in a heavenly afterlife. No wonder it is a popular movie.

On Sunday afternoons, I sit on the sunny terrace in my bathrobe with limey gin and work on my summer’s goal-- devising, with twenty-six letters, inspired by the monkey with a typewriter legend, a second complete poem by Sappho, to add to the one that survives. I keep my pen in a pocket so I can write with ink my body’s heat has warmed.

During spring, I had taken the single surviving line out of the legendary four volumes by Cornelius Gallus, friend of Vergil, and remembered one of his lost elegies to love. When it was too casually received, I burned it, and used the ashes to trace a heart on my forehead on Valentine's Day.

I am a mender of sweaters, riveter of old china, saver of the broken. There is nothing that cannot be mended except when it is smashed into bits.

Even then it can be mosaic. Each phoenix that rises from the ashes is a different bird. I consider fragments.

The radio tells me that abortion was responsible for the crime rate dropping in half, the first generation culled by legalized abortion grew up to be more lawful teenagers than the last generation.

Before or after they were told?

The water supply is so full of Zoloft, Prozac and Xanax that our bloodstreams have become biological hazards from satisfying our thirst. Can we take Rappacini's daughter as our model?

Princess Diana, descended from the Merovingians and so from Jesus and Mary Magdalene, was murdered in the Pont l'Alma tunnel, which in pre-Christian times was a sacrificial site, to send a signal that Saint Diana, a new form of the triple moon goddess Diana, would imminently return to dethrone the usurping Windsors.

"Where is her jewelry?" the queen asked.

You may say these fragments will not make a satisfying mosaic.

Anything will make a mosaic. Come with me.

The abortion survivors, eager not to become murder victims, keep themselves well hydrated and are thus able to cope, even though the water is lobotomizing. In time, they organize package trips to the lonely island tomb of Diana, in her role as the triple moon goddess.

Or

Diana, in her role as the triple moon goddess, baptizes. with the magical water of tranquility and forgetfulness. all the traumatized abortion survivors who come to her lonely island tomb. They grow halos that look like crowns and the tomb site becomes known as the Island of Light.

Or

The abortion survivors learn of their destroyed cohort, and even as the dead of World War I came back as the lost of James Dean's generation, undergo surgery to become Dianas, although not triple moon goddesses, and devise colorful cocktails of the lethal water of forgetfulness.

You see?

We all have our reasons. Most seem trivial to others. A throne, traces of egg yolk.

I wish I had waited for a grander reason.

Use these to make a mosaic.

According to Herodotus, the Scythians of the fifth century B.C. threw hemp on heated stones and then inhaled, becoming more and more intoxicated until finally they jumped up and started dancing and singing. The Old Testament recipe for Jesus' anointing oil required twelve pounds of cannabis.

This is what I think. Considering what was waiting for him, I am happy to think of Jesus high.

Would you choose the prophet Jeremiah or Hosea to make a music video of your life?

This is what I think. If the song was about aching unrequited love, I'd choose Hosea, who sacrificed all to marry a temple hooker. But for apocalypse and total damn-all of every kind, you can hardly do better than Jeremiah.

Only three knights were allowed to see the Grail—Bors, Perceval and Galahad, because they were pure at heart.

This what I think. All the women saw it. Handled it. Used it.

After it appeared in my friend Helen's kitchen, she kept it on the counter for a long time. It got filled up with rubber bands, recipe cards, snapshots of her kids when they were babies—the kind of stuff any non-utilitarian object in a kitchen tends to accumulate.

She gave it to me the first year I was alone, when she saw me through the window at twilight, lighting the candles on my cake.

I use it for my gin and tonic as I read Japanese novels on the sunny terrace.

For all of recorded history, we have looked for a few hours of respite. Even God sometimes needs sweet dreams and music, soft through the night, from neither the tormented nor the psychotic. The Holy Grail is different things to different people. A gin and tonic, plus music, plus the sweet incense of forgetfulness will always help you make it through the night.

Use them, these fragments.

Can you sin in a dream? What if you dream sin all the time and you confess until the priest grows distant and says you can't come any more?

Hail, Mary, I am very tired. Pray for me, now and at the hour of my death.

When the novels are finished and the last movie watched, make my coffin of boards at which the poor have eaten.

Fragments.

My Affair With the Early Morning

Mary Duquette



My affair with the early morning
Began slowly at first, my mouth Open with
sleep and drowsing in pillow and gray shadows from the slats in the
blind

the frogs garumphing in their soft shoes
I stumble from the shallow dreams between the
alarm clock rings to a quiet wakefulness and thoughtful peace

My feet on the ground outside, I look up, mystified
by the sweet strength of birdsong and witness to the
curling leaves, like arced wings, turning and ruffling as

the breeze sings no song, just silence and soft hums
No sound, just a sort of whispering into the day
telling no secrets, but promising beauty and graciousness

For dear life I hold onto the moment
to reflect back on as day bustles by
the affair becoming a marriage, the promise becoming a song,
which no one else seems to know

untitled



Mary Duquett

The subconscious is stirred
and a weight is lifted
that was heavy on my back
as ten thousand angels ride
with me on this trip to incertitude.
So many directions
and I really like
this feeling of relief; but
manic behavior flows out of me
and onto the page
out of the mouth
from the chair where I sit.
I could see past the bridge of my nose
if I wanted to –
but the essence of myself
is not yet discovered
and I am very shy.

WINTER SUNRISE

can you winter sunrise
even vaguely perceive your own beauty
behind the silhouetted screen of forest
whose naked, graceful limbs
spread across your distant
brilliantly glowing horizon
your vast yellow chamber
of new morning
framed by a golden ribbon of light?

can you winter sunrise
even vaguely perceive
your own far flung red, pulsating
Transparent curtain
that breathes like a gentle diaphragm
over waves of awakening purple hues
cast upon ancient mountains
rising above layers
of open barren meadows
and a white frozen lake?

and do you loved one
lightly comprehend
in your morning rising
from the soft, warm, layered covers
of rest and sleep
the breathtaking grace and strength
of your beautifully sculpted form
and my affection for you
and for the peace and pleasure
which your spirit
brings to this new day?

SONNENAUFGANG IM WINTER

kannst du Sonnenaufgang im Winter
etwa ahnen deine eigene Schönheit
hinter der Silhouette des Waldes
dessen nackte, anmutige Zweige
sich über den entfernten, glänzenden
Horizont ausbreiten
dein riesiger gelber Raum
von dem neuen Morgen
mit einem goldenen Band umrahmt ?

kannst du Sonnenaufgang im Winter
etwa ahnen deine eigene rot
pulsierende weit verstreute Kulisse
die wie eine zarte Membrane atmet
über Wellen der aufweckenden
purpurenen Schattierungen
der uralten Gebirge
die sich auch in Schichten erhöhen
über leeren Wiesen
und einem weiss gefrorenen See ?

oder kannst du, meine Liebe, vernehmen
in deinem eigenen Aufstehen
am Morgen von den sanften, warmen
Schichten der Decken
der Ruhe und des Schlafs
die atemraubende Anmut und Kraft
deiner schön gemeisselten Form
und meine Zuneigung für dich
und für den Frieden und Freude
die dein Geist
zu diesem neuen Tag bringt ?

–Vic Compher

LATE SNOW

Peter S Lee

Ilene ran her hands through hair as thick and black as coal dust. It fell around her shoulders in the white linen moon. The frost-covered trees were like so many strong, young men, standing there to court her. They were standing in a wonderland of newly fallen snow.

The silence was the silence that descends upon strangers who have traveled all night in the pouring rain. It was the silence that converges with darkness in prayer. The houses strung along the hills were like the lights on a Christmas tree. Ilene lay down and spread her wings to make an angel in the snow.

She watched the sky for angels, softly ringing, to appear. She waited for a sign. But all she saw was a shooting star, illuminated by the moon. The bright white gown of taffeta, blowing in the wind, swept the contours of a face cloaked in frozen tears.

She had tried to bridge the gap between love and money. But there is no accounting for the customs of the rich. In his own way, in his dedication to his work, Martin had transcended the money. But even his intelligence could not trump the pull of blood.

The wedding had been a contrast between the haves and the have-nots. Her attempts to unite the families had been a disaster. She was Pittsburgh Lutheran and he was Eastern European snob. But none of this compared to Leo having come.

When he touched her on the arm to dance, she fainted. She came to looking up into his eyes. She realized as she danced with him that he was whom she should have married. She realized that Martin was just a child.

It was a quiet, quiet house. Martin slept before the fire. Ilene sat in her wedding dress and drank a cup of tea. As she stared into the fire, she heard chimes, ringing loudly. There was no explanation for the mystery.

When the ringing stopped, all that she could hear was Martin. He seemed to fill the house with noise. His kind were loud, even while sleeping. It was a bleating kind of snore.

As God was her witness, she had tried. But they spoke a language all their own. From under half-closed eyelids, they viewed the world with disapprobation. The patterns of their lives were marked by deep self-interest.

Ilene took off her wedding dress and hung it on a beam. It hung like a ghost in the firelight. She danced with the fairies in faded blue jeans. She combed her long, dark hair.

Our lives are spent traveling from the darkness to the light, compressed and bound in a world of cares. We stop at intervals to rest, or to hide, in places that no one knows, until we are too tangled to take flight or too unraveled to dare.

Ilene looked down at his sleeping face. It was the face of a man with no secrets to reveal. Ilene was the light of his life. But she felt just like a chair. She was something for him to sit on, a depository, an ending to his day. This was why she had to leave.

The light through the trees was golden yellow brown and the sky was filled with sparrows. Ilene followed the flight of a chimney swift, swooping near to the ground. The snow gave off a crunching sound when rolled over by the tires. It was a frozen esplanade, which she drove through down the mountain.

SHORE

Larissa Shmailo

It will continue, he said,
even when the water breaks white,
even when the surface currents seem
to be going the wrong way.

The river, I tell him, is grey, and the ocean is for others.

I have crossed the river on stones and planks,
while others swam, inviting me in
and I dove just to please them, pretending
I could swim too.

My path is broken; the white caps are hard
there are too many gaps, always

I must find the connector: I use wire and wood
and rusty nails, these broken rafts,
whatever it takes to cross.

I don't know tides or currents,
I have never understood how the river flowed;
perhaps it does not.

There is only the leap, and my heart in my mouth:
I can't walk this hard water or swim,
and I will never see land.

I will be your dolphin, he says,
and you will not drown.

How can I explain that
I am not afraid of drowning:
I have drowned many times, come up,
gasping for air, and dead, many times
what it is that
I can't swim
and the water is hard.

Mapping

Larissa Shmailo

The pigeons fly in cursive flocks, graceful arcs
Except this one, gone ahead or left behind, in urgent solo flight.
Below a willow leans, thin and sparse, looking for sparks,
Like an addict in the morning's trafficked street.
A manlike you hands me a urine cup, and sleeps.

I have told you before, here at the doorway
Of a thousand unhappy homes: there is something more
Of place than time or space in loneliness. Come,
Reluctantly spend the day. Look at the unconnected stars,
The uncollected lights without name or home or
Constellation of their own, and imagine a use with me
For all that doesn't fit.

Red Dog
Roy Scheele

(Brian Kershisnik, oil on panel, 1999)

The still life and landscape coalesce here in a delicate balance.

The dog stands on grass beside the boles of two young birches or aspens, facing its master. The rest of the foreground is taken up by the young man who kneels while pouring water from a pitcher into a bowl with a figured rim. He leans to his left, away from the dog, his cautionary left hand lifted as if to ward off the animal. His features register a mild panic or fear.

The water is clear and cold and seems to issue from some fathomless source. The light sparkles and tumbles, then trembles in the bowl.

It is this the young man seeks to honor and keep inviolate: his own small homage to the whole.

A Glass of Water
Roy Scheele

It is cold out, bitter cold, and the water rises to the tap with a new coldness, a fresh edge to it, almost a liquid clairvoyance.

See it sway now to gain balance in the glass, adding the light's clearness to its own. See it string out the air in small bubbles.

I raise to my lips the thirsting of eons, the hurtle of ancient molecules into the here and now, and my own thirst is humbled before it.

Like a star, you tilt and flash as I claim my part in you, water, and I drain the glass.

A Want of Sound
Roy Scheele

Like a globule of dew in its skin of water, the stillness impends. It is a focused prism, in play in the ripples of a woman's dark silk blouse, now blue, now green, like the coming and going of the sea. It expands in the cricket's hoarding of its quicksilver song and in the fall of the full moon, layer after layer of snowy shadow and light, and holds its breath with expectancy, like the dark at the bottom of a well.

Slate

Craig Saunders

Even the snow flouts the rules this morning. It is supposed to float and swirl. It doesn't. It falls flat and dead, landing heavily on the veranda.

Icicles hang from the guttering above me. The house looks like it has teeth. I blow smoke hard into the still air and the house is a dragon snoring.

I pull up my collar and cup my second Marlboro of the morning between pink hands. I never got the hang of smoking with gloves on.

The veranda creaks, but only for me. It wouldn't wake her. It is subdued, a forlorn farewell. The snow holds the sound down, gently restraining the sounds from within. The snow, my ally.

Tomas Moran comes to his window in the house opposite, pulling the curtains apart to see outside. He waves, and shrugs, then closes the curtains on the outside again. I can barely see him through the growing, silent, storm. It is a wonder he is able to see me. I wear grey today, and there is a full hundred yards between us. But perhaps, as is fitting, the snow allows us one final wave, no closer than we ever had been, from across the chasm that separates our two houses. It could have been a gulf, or an ocean. It does not matter to me that he sees me. Soon, I will be gone. Who cares for goodbyes?

Had it been raining, it would have thundered on the veranda roof. Even then it wouldn't wake her.

The coffee is already going cold. The third cup bubbles noisily behind me. Snow muffle obviously isn't omni-directional.

What a time to leave. January blizzards cutting off the main drag, cars still slewed, now abandoned, cluttering Matherson Avenue. A proud old tree had already fallen to the blight.

Ice cracked somewhere overhead.

Snow looks after its own.

I am cold, but not on the outside. I think it will let me pass.

No one is out on the street today. Cars are piled so high with fluff that they look more like random hills, peppering the streets. Ancient barrows of blighted England, wights hiding in the darkness underneath, their wails covered by the silent doorman. Yesterday's old snowmen sit in front gardens, bouncing for porches. The snow lets the children out, just not the adults. Children's souls aren't generally tainted.

Here I am, all alone, looking at the icy slate covering the road, the hard cold death awaiting the unsuspecting as the snow comes in to cover it.

I am cold.

I am one of its own.

Smoke swirls for an instant and an unheard hiss I know is there signals its death. I stand for a moment.

I try to keep quiet as I shut the door gently behind me. My third cup is in my hand, with my third cigarette. Her face comes to me. The coffee percolator gives a dry steam rasp and goes quiet.

I rub some life into my hands and run my fingers through my hair. I smoke another cigarette. The flame sputters in the cold.

Yesterday I had given up smoking. I didn't know it was to be our last day together. Early that morning we had eaten waffles together. We spent the day inside, knowing that outside was for children and children alone. It had been the perfect day. A Saturday spent snug and warm with gentle trickles of sludgy pre-snow beginning to turn into real snow, huge, almost warm, flakes, settling in the street, on people's front lawns, in the road. The cars that came down the street crept, as if trying not to wake the street from its winter slumber.

We had lain in bed for the rest of the morning, both with heads propped on pillows, staring out at the gathering storm. The wind was strong and silent then, the children coming out to play, their cries of delight

muffled in mufflers. Mittens on their hands were caked in snow. They rolled and tumbled and made angels. As the storm grew stronger, whiter, the snowmen evolved from the earth, little balls into big, one atop the other. Carrots for noses pilfered from warm and cosy kitchens.

I got up at midday and made us a lunch of chicken soup and hot fresh bread from the oven. She had stayed in bed, waiting for my return. While the soup bubbled gently behind me I stood at the kitchen door, looking out. The snow gathered strength as the soup cooked. The smell of roasting bread came from the oven. I got a tray down from the top cupboard.

Back in bed, we watched the snow again.

She never left the house. That perfect Saturday I was happy to stay in, too. Most days I left her alone in the house. I don't know what she did all day, except to say I know she never left. There was nothing for me to worry about while I left. She would stay safe indoors.

The icicles above my head crackled and brought me from my reverie. I lit another cigarette and drank some still steaming coffee from the mug. I held the coffee one handed and took a long drag on the cigarette. It was cold out here. I should put a coat on. My sweater kept out the worst though. At least the cold that was outside.

I don't know why I'm dallying. I am cold. It will let me in. I know it.

I stare into the softly falling snowflakes and a sudden breeze swirls the snow around me. The snow falls onto my hands and into my coffee. Its death is sudden. The snow changes and leaves watery freckles on my skin.

That Saturday afternoon had been wonderful. We had made love. It was our first time. She was strange about closeness. In all the time we had known each other she had never given her body up to me. Under the covers, the heat from the radiator insufficient to warm her cold skin, we had embraced.

It was the first time and the last. It was wonderful. I savoured it now. The remembrance of the touch. The cool, sheer feel of her skin. The creamy smoothness. I had been good. She had been better. Together it had been perfect. The perfect prelude to the perfect Sunday.

Today should have been perfect.

I should have let her sleep.

I let her sleep now and finished my coffee. I should go soon. She would wake if I made a sound. If I broke the silence of the snow the spell would be broken. I would lose all that I'd had that day. The remembered day. I would remember it forever. That first day. That last day.

Upstairs, she waits to be woken up. But she's cold, too. I'm not the only one. Sometimes you have to bring people into your world. Sometimes it's lonely being cold all on your own.

I close the door behind me and flip the latch. I laugh at myself – how considerate I am now of her agoraphobia. I unflip the latch.

I put the mug down and my cigarettes into my pocket.

I leave the door a little open and the wind bangs the shutter door behind me as I leave. I wrap my arms around myself and walk out into the cold. I am cold and we are all alone.

THE SALMON CHILD

Graham Hardie

there is one more desperate than me
he sits by the oak tree of the solitude sea
there is one more desperate than me
he ladles his vice amongst the willow of winter's morn
from where the seeds of his sapling sin are born

there is one more desperate than me

he carries the cradle of the salmon child
from where he tethers the augments of a spirit

set in rock yet free and so wild
there is one more desperate than me
his eyes the colour of the jaguar sun
and his mould unfolds what sweet destiny has begun
there is one more desperate than me

a man of violets bereft of chastity

and a man of jackals jealous of the voices of celestial majesty
there is one more desperate than me

his lineage the satin bed of man's history
and whose corrupt trail is bound by the horses of antiquity
and who is cursed by the red blood of the fox;

a moment mourning the dead

in the cracked jaws of the hound
where they place his body

with the Lady of the Snow covering the anointed and hallowed ground
of Cain's iniquity

The Heron's Lament

Graham Hardie

From the arms of her Grace
Sing the lowly trumpets of the human race.

From the arms of her Flight
Sing the archetypal aeons of night.

From the arms of her Death
Sings the callous mistress of crystal meth.

From the arms of her Bedouin
Sings the White Goddess of heroin.

From the arms of her Shebah
Sing the honest words of the unbeliever.

From the arms of her Majesty
Sing the broken vines of a Luna tragedy.

From the arms of her Son
Sings the everlasting carnage of the loaded gun.

From the arms of her Dove
Sing the collateral losses of love

From the arms of her Creator
Sing the forebodings of our Maker.

From the arms of her Lace
Sing the dreams of her God-like face.

From the arms of her Shore
Sing the castigated shells of evermore.

From the arms of her Wreath
Sings the blanched angel of Ophelia's grief.
From the arms of her Platitude
Sings the heron's lament of mercy and solitude.

From the arms of her Prayer
Sings the scarlet nymph admired and so fair,
And from the arms of her Bodice
Sings the love of the lily of the velvet coppice.

The Lips of Eros

Graham Hardie

I hear the words written on your page
For once the heart was gold
But now in coins of silver you trade.

I hear the laughter in your voice
For once the heart was steel
And the consequences of Tybalt's blade,
For the love you tethered was heaven made.

I hear the elegies of your belligerent melancholy
For once the heart was bereft of joy
And the solace he gave
Lies in the auspice of the bells of holly.

I hear the vision of your muse
For once the heart was filled with folly
And the love of Romeo you did conquer
But in heroic death did lose.

I hear the steps of your sinew
For once the heart was an ocean of pathos
And on the lips of Eros
You painted the firmament of lovers true.

I hear the beloved horn of your brethren calling
For once the heart was set in stone
And the stars of your grief kept falling

For we are but alone
In this graveyard of Verona's dawn.

But love laughs at the end of the world because love is the door to eternity and he who loves God is playing on the doorstep of eternity, and before anything can happen love will have drawn him over the sill and closed the door and he won't bother about the world burning because he will know nothing but love.

—Thomas Merton, Journal Entry, October 10, 1948

The cities, abandoned
John Sweet

Approaching easter in the cold sunlight,
down empty highways & past dead lawns.
Past trailer parks filled with garbage,
the black water of birdbaths,
of drainage ditches.

Plastic bags caught in branches,
caught in barbed wire and the barbed wire
rusting.
The sky faded.

Almost blue, almost white, and if you're
not willing to pay for your beliefs
than you will be made to pay
for something else.
You will be left with blades, with spoons,
with the frightened bones of all your
unborn children.

You will stand in the shadow of Icarus
and wait to be counted.

Will wait to be told that you're home.

Waves

John Sweet

This small act of naming
the baby born dead

This pointless hatred that I refuse to let go of,
frozen in the early July heat,
solidified along the river's edge in the days
where the flood begins to recede, spoken
of quietly in the company of lovers, in
rooms without windows where the cameras
film ordinary atrocities, the rapes, the beheadings,
the brutal beatings that pass for commerce in
these first tentative days of the golden age,
and when I'm too tired to write something that
feels like an ending, I find the right pill in
the medicine cabinet, I speak the right name
into the mouthpiece, and all pain is
washed away.

All sorrow is burnt into
the powdery residue of fear.

The name is forgotten,
but the story leaves a stain.

Minotaur

John Sweet

in the end
i say nothing

walk down this empty street instead
into the face of pale broken sunlight with
the lesser bones of priests ground
into fine powder beneath my feet

with the mother of my children
begging god for forgiveness

empty sounds from a bleeding mouth
empty hands cut off at the wrists
because the idea of war cannot be
considered w/out the idea of pain

the forest is where you run
only after all of
the cities have burned

being lost is what comes
after being alive

in the field of broken crosses

John Sweet

Had a baby born of rape, had a
gun, and she said she loved him,
and he said nothing at all.

Told the story until it
became a myth.

Cursed the walls, cursed the water,
stood naked at its edge until
it ran red with blood.

Held him close, and he wept.

Held him closer, and he screamed.

Sounded like a child waking up
in a room on fire.

meditation on a folder full of poems by leonard cirino
John Sweet

I found this house in the
wilderness, found this church or
at least the remains of one, rocks
overgrown with weeds and vines,
a doorway leading nowhere in
either direction, and I think I
thought I was maybe Christ.

I think there were birds taking
flight from my open hands.

The laughter of children buried
like bones beneath the
terrible blue sky.

John the Baptist Fords My Midnight River
Ronda Broatch

I dreamt a man
with a honeyed tongue
his eyes darker than truth.

He cinched the desert around
the thin tree of his bones
feet rooted in river
hands branched wide
under a changing sky.

Later awake
I wandered
into the arms of a surrogate

church, found myself
standing in the midst
of a babbling homily.
I waded through fish
to the front row pew
into a current of blessings

and dove in.
I was gasping for breath—
the face on the plate looked
so very like bread.
It seemed

no one noticed, save the priest
who fished me
with her gaze
and thumbed a cross
above my temple
with a cool wet hand.

Hand Reaching for Glass at 3 a. m.
Ronda Broatch

The child clamors for drink,
cracks the vessel of sleep.

The rain wants in,
while the window, indifferent,

knows no thirst.
A shell, upturned, cups

ocean to its ear. Empty
it speaks of rejection.

One face of glass beads sweat,
the other denies water's existence.

The tongue speaks for the parched body.
(Breath cleaves to breath.)

The hand divines water in darkness,
opens dreams.

Sleep rubs against itself
and anxiety is born.

How sleep cleaves to sleep,
then peels away.

Mother and child,
skin of bark. These too,

(if woven tightly)
hold water.

Her Garment Becomes a Luminous Body
Ronda Broatch

It hangs in the universe
of her wardrobe, bone white
Tencel edged in nebulous
midnight. It is

a body awaiting the pressing
voyage of the *Rowenta*
Powerglide. Slide inside,

map the steaming terrain
for snaps and pockets. Traveler, follow the valley midland,
dividing mountains,

study the time-lapse
strip of moons eclipsed
by a wrinkle—

see two already slip
through black holes, vanish
to the dark side
of the room.

BALD EAGLE VALLEY

Lisa Harris

People knew stars first, before they knew planets. Then they knew words. Finally, they knew the music the words made. They knew that when all three collided they found God. In pieces. And many of them believed if they could assemble the pieces correctly, they would be able to place themselves closer to God and grace.

Abbey had kept God tied up in her scarves in one of her dresser drawers for her entire life. Other people thought God resided under the tombstones in darkness. Abbey's ancestors tried to build God into their violins, making it so others could let God loose when they drew the bow across the strings.

Ezra, like Saint Thomas believed God could be found under a stone. He'd say to Eliza, "Split a stick and you'll find Jesus; lift a stone and you'll find God." At first Eliza believed him. Then she saw an eagle soaring above the Susquehanna in Bald Eagle Valley and in that instant, she knew God was in the air, holding the eagle aloft. She felt God in the fireplace when the coals glowed blue, and she heard God in the breaking branches of the pines during high winds. And at night she knew God watched her through the stars, that the millions of stars were God's eyes.

* * * * *

The Yarnell Road twisted in front of the farmhouse where the Schnables lived in the shadows of the Allegheny Mountains. It led away from the hilltop, down into the hollows, and ended at the cemetery. For several hundred years, the Schnables had been walking that road with each other, with the Delaware, and alone. Season to season. Day and night.

Sometimes Abbey took her niece Eliza with her for walks during the daylight hours. Other times Abbey went to sit on a rock near the oldest graves where she wrote in her notebook about her ancestors. She wrote about her great-grandparents who made violins in Germany, marking each completed one with the first three letters of their name "'-S-H-C'" - Schnable. In America, they dropped the "C" for a while and began marking the violins they made in the new country with "S-H"' - as if the violin's true purpose was to calm those who played it and those who listened. She went to the graveyard for other reasons, too, but she didn't talk about those and she didn't write these secrets down.

Abbey had one of the violins marked with "S-H"—the one that belonged to her grandfather and Eliza's great-grandfather. He was the first and only family member to play one. He called it a fiddle and played it boldly after he returned from his day in the potato fields. He played it on his wrap-around porch where he sat swigging hard cider. He kept his jug hidden under the bench where it waited for him to return after he had spent his day hoeing potatoes beating back the with jewel weed and burdock. His wife, Nan, didn't allow secrets. She watched the world that closely, and when the air became filled with his fiddle music, she knew his gut was full of cider. So she bolted the door on him, vexed by his wild spirit, and left him to sleep in the hay. "You ain't nothing but an old worn out tomcat." Nan yelled at him from behind the closed door.

The Schnables are not Eliza and Abbey's only ancestors, but Schnable is the name most people remember in the valley and on the mountaintop. They remember Scottish Joneses, too, and running deep in both these families, is a vein of willfulness, the kind that has helped them survive famine, guns, births, and the politics of life. This particular ancestry has been reduced to the acronym WASP, which trivializes it even as it suggests the ability within this group to sting.

The Jones family left Scotland where it touches northern England in 1642, and they sailed to Massachusetts carrying their clothes and two spinning wheels. It was a good time for Protestants to depart because of their persecution by the Crown, and especially good for the Joneses, who were hopelessly in debt and were as hungry as they had ever been, but they had hidden pieces of gold away so they could afford the passage. They and their seven children left on a foggy morning in March of that year: the sun, a thin slippery rim of tired yellow, and the shore, a zigzag of gray.

The Schnables walked away from their cottage in the German forest with their heads bowed, after burying three of their four children, all dead from a pox. They packed their violin making tools with care. They did not look back. Each parent took a turn holding their oldest and only surviving son's hand, putting one foot down and then the other, one foot down and then the other, as they moved into the future. The boat that brought them arrived in Philadelphia on September 17, 1862. The date is recorded in their frayed Bible, along with all their children's names, birthdates and deaths. They arrived during the Civil War and settled in Yarnell, about two hours north of Harrisburg where Robert E. Lee and his army were headed when they got sidetracked to Gettysburg.

* * * * *

Eliza's preoccupation with the Civil War grew directly out of her father's interest in it. He read her facts about the events leading up to the Battle of Gettysburg and what happened as a result. "It's an honor that we live in the state where the tide of that war got turned, Eliza," he'd say. He also read her Russian fairy tales with Baba Yaga stirring her cauldron. When she simply would not leave her dad alone, he'd read her articles about strip mining and its effect upon the land and water, until she fell asleep on the couch. Eliza would listen to anything just to be close to him, just as long as she could sit on his lap or beside him on the couch. That's how much she loved him. Another time when she was older, he told her about the Battle of Gettysburg. "You know, Robert E. Lee wanted Harrisburg because of its railroads. He had to plot and plan to get the cornfields between him and Harrisburg in order to secure a central railroad location, but he failed. Gettysburg was not planned, Eliza, but now everyone remembers it."

"Being remembered is important, isn't it, Daddy?"

"Oh yes, Eliza—it's important for people and places. You have to remember the facts and the feelings. You have to use your memory the same way you use your muscles. There were other important battles, too—like Antietam in Maryland. That one happened on the same day your ancestors landed in this country from Germany."

"Is this the story about—"

"Yes, it's the story. Antietam is seventeen miles from Harper's Ferry and the battle happened on September 17, 1862. It was the bloodiest one-day battle of the War—24,000 dead men. The battlefield was seventeen acres. Seventeen acres, seventeen miles, September 17—the day the Schnables arrived in Philadelphia. If they had known of the battle, they might have rushed to join it, or they might have gotten back on the boat—knowing what they knew about signs—they would not have been able to ignore all those seventeens!"

At this point, Ezra got out one of his Civil War books and found an old photo, "See all these dead men, Eliza—killing each other because of the differences in what they believed. You don't see any of their faces—but, look, six hands, a raised knee, entangled bodies—seventeen bodies."

And Ezra took hold of Eliza's pointer finger and held it to the photo while they counted the seventeen bodies—one by one.

Eliza saw a split rail fence, four rails high, and a road off the left.

"Where's that road go, Daddy?"

“Off to Harrisburg if traveled north. That’s the direction the Schnables went, until they reached the Bald Eagle Valley at the very center of Pennsylvania setting their future and ours on this path.”

* * * * *

Julia Margery Jones was born in a one-room house with a sleeping loft set right beside Beech Creek. Her mother, Margery, married James Jones in the summer of 1884, when the Civil War that had torn at the country the way a crow rips at a deer carcass had been over for twenty years. Margery and James, fair skinned, red haired, and blue eyed, were descended from German and Scotch Irish immigrants. James’ grandparents are the same Joneses who left the highlands of Scotland because by religion, they were starving Protestants, and by nature, they were stubborn people whose pride and hard work had sustained them on land that now mostly yielded rocks and heather.

Although large parts of the story are lost, it is clear that the Joneses came to America in 1642, landing in Massachusetts and then working their way south through New York’s Herkimer County, through Potter County, Pennsylvania until they settled in 1740 in Yarnell, part of the Delaware Indians’ hunting grounds.

Margery and James built a plank house in a beautiful place—Hawk Holler in the Township of Yarnell on Beech Creek—what the Delaware had called something else a long time ago. Their daughter, Julia, grew up with the Delaware who taught her about herbs and healing.

Some fraction of all these ancestors exists in Abbey and Ezra, the twins, and also in Eliza. None of them weave or spin as their ancestors did, but they know how to cut and sew; they cannot make or repair instruments, but they can play several and their voices are instruments, too, when they talk and sing and laugh. Their blood cares how they sound, and they dare not offend it because their ancestors are in their blood, listening. They do cut wood and catch trout, butcher a pig and can green beans. They know how to survive and how to live.

Abbey and Eliza love cemeteries. They like the old cedar trees, the trailing myrtle, the cornerstones with the family’s initial cut in. They love the stone angels in the Catholics’ section, the Stars of David in the Jewish, and the well-chosen granite in the Protestants’ area. The rose, flint, cream and pale gray stones soothe them.

Abbey took Eliza to the Yarnell Cemetery for picnics from the time she was a little girl. Sometimes it was just the two of them. Other times Dan or Bill or John or Jake would join them. On those days, Eliza learned to predict that one of Abbey’s men was meeting them there because of the perfume Abbey wore.

Abbey, Eliza’s father’s twin, is a Schnable through and through. That is what Trudy, Eliza’s mother says, as she shakes her head, her face registering something between amusement and disapproval. When Eliza heard this for about the hundredth time, she asked her, “Mother, what on earth does that mean?”

Eliza as a curious and willful twelve year old challenged almost everything and everyone—her mother most of all.

It takes Trudy a long time to answer her.

“Well, Eliza, it means she is like your father in good ways and bad. She will give you the shirt off her back, buy you a cup of coffee with her last dime, and ask for nothing in return. She’ll also evaporate into thin air when she just can’t stand things one more second. And she doesn’t know what true blue means when it comes to her heart. Not like your daddy, Eliza, who has a heart of gold. You may want to be like your aunt, but best hope when it comes to your heart, that you’re like your daddy instead.”

Trudy is baking pies as she speaks, rolling out the dough, wiping her hands on her apron,

slicing the peaches and tossing them with flour and cornstarch, butter and brown sugar.

“And,” Trudy says even though Eliza thought she was finished, “she loves you as if you were her own. Always has. Always will.”

“I like that she loves me, Mom. I like it, too, when she takes me with her to the cemetery for picnics and out with her at night to watch the stars. We use her binoculars to look for Mars, what she calls the bloodstar. But I love it most of all when she tells me stories.”

“Yes, well, there’s some other things that make her a Schnable—stargazing, horoscopes, divination and stories. You can’t eat them, and you can’t wear them. Where I come from that makes them not count for much. Anyone who believes you can read the world, or your future, or the past in the stars spends too much time...”

And here she pauses, uncertain about how to finish her thought.

“Well, she spends too much time in cemeteries.”

* * * * *

Trudy has the instincts of a wolf. She protects and feeds Eliza and oversees the path she walks. She has pale green, almost yellow eyes that are bright and watchful. She has a dramatic flair for eyeliner, making her eyes appear wolf-like. Abbey often told the story of Romulus and Remus’ rescue by the she-wolf to Eliza, and Eliza especially like the part when their mother, Sylvia, who was condemned to be buried alive, saved her sons by setting them adrift on the Tiber River. Infants in baskets. The mother forced to give them up so they might live. Eliza also felt relieved that Trudy, her mother, didn’t have to give her up.

When Eliza was a little girl, the Schnables added the “c” back into the spelling of their name. A sign that Eliza would become a storyteller, a sign that the silence was going to end. Abbey read many Greek and Roman myths to Eliza until she could read them on her own. From the tattered books, she learned a lot about the gods, and she learned a lot about the planets, because Abbey loved science the way Eliza loved stories. Facts made Abbey feel in control and gave her power. She liked them straight up, the way she drank her bourbon. Eliza preferred her facts mixed with fantasy and poetry. She wanted many ways to look at the same things.

The planet, Mars, is named Jupiter and Juno’s son and the God of War. Mars, the fourth planet from the sun and the first beyond the Earth’s orbit, glows red. Mars, the bloodstar. Look in any encyclopedia and you will find the facts; volcanoes, sand seas, empty riverbeds, and canyons so deep they appear infinite.

Mars is solid, not gaseous, and follows an eccentric orbit. And Mars of all the planets is most similar to Earth, another fact that fed Abbey’s and Eliza’s imaginations, led them to believe in a different type of life there, perhaps legless and winged—one that flew above the dry, dry ground of Mars, and when it could fly no more, landed in the sand, sliding on its belly, leaving a remnant of blood. And there it rested until it took flight again. Mars, a planet of extreme heat and extreme cold. If water were flown in by rockets to fill the empty riverbeds, the water would freeze or evaporate while it was still being dispensed. That’s how extreme the temperatures are.

Abbey announced, “The closest thing to Mars we have here is Nevada. Want to go there, Eliza?”

“Did you already talk to Mom and Dad?” Eliza asked. It is several weeks before Eliza’s fifteenth birthday and Abbey has the wanderlust and a plan: she has chosen the trip to fill Eliza with red heat and thirst.

Abbey laughed before she muttered, “Of course!” So off they went to Red Rock Canyon on August 1, Eliza’s birthday and the Roman Holy Day for Mars. The air seemed to singe their nose hairs, and the water they carried only temporarily relieved their thirst. When they returned to the

hotel, they drank and drank and drank.

Worlds within worlds. That is how most people live. They lie inside themselves the way nesting Matriochka dolls do—a tiny one, inside a small one, inside a bigger one, inside the largest one of all. A dream within a dream. Like its own world. Like Nevada.

Shortly after their return from Nevada, shortly before Abbey turned forty, the minister was at the table, eating fried chicken and mashed potatoes when Abbey decided to talk. “I’ll show you my world.” Outsiders wouldn’t know what she meant by that. But those who know her understand she is talking dirty. She rambles on, talking about the topography of Mars and photographs sent by satellites for her analysis.

The minister stayed and listened to her. “The rocket shoots stars into a woman’s world and makes a new universe,” Abbey said.

The people at the table were accustomed to the mixed metaphors and Abbey’s humor, but Minister Wells choked on his soup and excused himself to the bathroom. While he was away from the table, Ezra said, “Really, Abbey, do you have to scare the Reverend?”

“Scare him, hell,” Abbey said. “I just got his blood boiling. What do you think he’s doing in the bathroom, Ezra, after all this time?”

No one answered, but everyone became more mindful of how long Minister Wells was gone and just how quiet he had become, not one sound coming from the bathroom at the end of the hallway.

Abbey winked at Eliza, and Eliza fled the house to roam the garden while she recovered from her laughter.

* * * * *

“Abbey’s dying. You better decide how you are going to tell her,” old Doc Schmidt said to Eliza in his weary voice. Eliza now thirty-eight, about the age Abbey was when she took them to Nevada, cannot tell Abbey anything about her disease that Abbey doesn’t already know. Eliza imagines writing Abbey’s obituary:

Abigail Ruth Schnable, b 1929-astronomer, reader, renegade, trained about life and death in the hills and hollows, around Yarnell, in love with the world, the stars, and her family, living and gone, diviner.

If Eliza were asked to write the obituary that is how it would read. Not like the actual one written by Dr. Gillis Peters, Abbey’s mentor and colleague, which is kept in her fireproof box and reads:

Abigail Ruth Schnable, b 1929-astronomer, and lecturer. Trained at Pennsylvania State University, B.S., M.S., Ph.D. Dissertation: Mars, The Bloodstar. President of American Association of University Women, 1967-75.

Abbey went to Penn State when very few women went to college. The few who did go went to study Home Economics or Education, and they went to find a husband and get their MRS Degree. Very few women went to study the planets and the stars.

Ezra Schnable graduated at the same time as his sister in Science Education, and began teaching immediately at the local high school. He joked, “A Bachelor’s is good enough for a married man.” He felt overshadowed by Abbey sometimes, but mostly he loved her deeply, the way love is at its best, mysterious as one of the canals on Mars.

Abbey refused to teach at the high school. “Showing up every day and telling people how to behave when what I really want to do is study the heavens? I don’t think so!” And then, off she’d drive to the library the only place, she contended, other than cemeteries, where a person can think.

* * * * *

The morphine is not working.

Abbey appears older than she is. She is wearing flannel even though it is summertime. Her hair, what remains of it after the chemo, is white. Her voice is cracked like paint on the east side of a house. Her withered hand grips her sheet. She looks seventy, not fifty-eight.

“I gave an old planet a new name, Eliza. That’s no secret. My greatest secret is I have a child.”

There is a long time with silence, except for the rattle of Abbey’s breath.

“Can you forgive me, Eliza?”

And the realization comes to Eliza like cold water on her face in the Nevada desert, like a shooting star landing at her feet, like being set adrift on the Tiber before she is found by the she-wolf.

She is Abbey’s child, not Trudy’s, and Abbey loves her as if she is her own, because she is. Eliza’s heart is pumping very fast and she does not know what to say or what to do, so she goes outside, and in the early morning light, she feels the world and herself being reborn. The stars are fast fading in the morning sky, and high above her, small as a swallow, is an eagle searching for light, and beyond the eagle is the bloodstar, Mars.

Taxi

Joanne Lowery

I've always been enamored with yellow
and liked to drive at night
when stars burst from the lampposts
and the rest of the world struggles against black.
I understand parrots and squawky boxes
that tell me where to go, who to allow
into my cab with baggage and stories.
The poet who moonlights for Checker
will have so much to say
about bad manners and dark alleys,
about how far we go is exactly the same
as how much we are worth.
Tip in hand, I will deliver readers
to their final destinations, then search
under the seats for whatever quirks
fell from their pockets. A plastic comb, perhaps,
to add to my collection. The scent
of a distinguished man ready for love.

In Silence

Jane Ormerod

“Yes.”

My hands are bleached by the westerning sun. I sink and my answer reaches here to there, along your face and through the whitened wall to the garden. As you smile, the room is filled and we breathe a world to one another.

“Yes.”

Handfuls of hair web our shoulders. My hand is held. I dream of snow that overwhelms my deepening body. I am rootless and I warm the echoes of you in my arms.

“Yes.”

Circles of light hover, slowly spread across the covers, then disappear. I touch glazed skin, your lips slipping pebbles between my spine. Our blowsy limbs swell shadows, we flag our collar bones, raise our necks. We are peacocks, strong and showy. Our blue bright feathers mesmerize. See our clawing feet, our rapid tails and threaded eyelids broken open. Focus changing, our faces shine.

“Yes.”

Leaves wrap the square of sky, veins twisting askew. I clutch at apple scents from the open window whilst the jet stream rumbles. We are oil and water, we slide on sheets of glistening mercury, shake and hold together like blossom.

Together

Jane Ormerod

Come, let me tell you
Together we form cat cradles, harlequins
The Eiffel Tower
A row of marigolds in sunshine

We are magnolia petals, rambling vineyards, strawberries
Barking spaniels, teenage gangs sprinting for buses
We are canoes in rapids, mountainside trains, hovercraft
Ocean liners built from matchsticks
We are legs and arms, ankles, angles, feet, knuckles, bones and lips
Clavicles, clarinets, classical, raucous, raw and heated
We are everything, everybody, and no one but ourselves

Leaning, metallic, hinged
We draw pins on one another
Shimmy shimmy focusing
We coop, wrap, holler and hollow
Push our boats offshore
Touch sides to float and spin

Transgression

Jane Ormerod

I had written on the board, you know
In bed and class
What's urgent inside all of us?

Loneliness, good and bad
Like God himself must feel

Thirty years ago I realized, even talk, can
(And not) can mix,
Feeling un or non or not at all
Remaking shame for other people in this room
Beginning speak again, once more
To join alive, against, to talk and say
Again to leave. I felt and he again removed
The suffering, transformed a sense into a scene

I wished to be two vehicles
Desiring, studious in our stomachs
Becoming better, might, to say or question fears
To step aside. An eye a complication, posture
Version of a wound

Once more we came with our abortions, teachers
Exactly shapes, width size of souls
To find the loneliness without the music, model
Sight, nor mine

Dying animals have weights
Of shame removed and shyness, yes
Is small, I heard. A smallness
Small thing
Smaller than a swede

"and in her wake"

Jayne Lyn Stahl

for Philomene Long

a legend
passed
and
in her
wake
rubies
dance
above
the flame.

Renegade Void

G Thomas Hedlund

The candles always dance. There doesn't have to be any music playing or a breeze slipping through the slit in the windows. They dance. Whether I'm happy or sad, stressed or laughing without abandon, angry or elated. They move in their own rhythm and their own time. They ignore me but how is that any different than everything else?

I have power over them, though. The power of life and death and when it all comes down to it in the end, isn't that what we all long for? That ultimate power over another thing. A little flame may not be much, but it's alive. It breathes, it eats, and it multiplies. If I'm not careful, that is. These three flames are alive because I wanted them to be and they are contained because I wish it so. When it's time for me to go to sleep, their lives will end with a simple pinch of my fingers, like a gnat crawling along the wrong part of my skin. It's as simple as that.

For now, though, they dance, completely unaware of the fate that awaits them. I watch them and wonder what they're thinking. Are they rejoicing in the wonder of life and existence? Are they in the throws of some kind of mating ritual? Or are they simply dancing because they are not me?

I can't stand this place. I can't stand this life. It's dark here, it's always dark in here. And damp. A dampness that seeps in through the fabric clinging stubbornly to my skin. A dampness that chills to the core.

I wish I had something, something more than this brittle paper and graphite stick. My words mean nothing; they're not even tokens of a life worth living. I had no home on the outside, no one who cared for me, no one who missed me when I moved on. Outside I was a vagrant, a wanderer, a bum. I was a nuisance and a menace to society. My words meant nothing out there and in here, they mean little more. I suppose I could relish in the knowledge that I can still do things, if only on a transient scale. My thoughts and memories had always been the only things that were truly mine. I wonder in the flickering light whether I should, or can, put them to paper. Will it make any difference once I'm gone or will the reams of pages be scanned with a scowl and tossed into a sack, carried to the stream I hear babbling by, tossed in and carried to sea a million miles away?

It doesn't really matter what happens to them when I'm gone, I guess. They'll be like my body, a useless shell, a waste of time. No one will take a second look and they might as well toss them in the box with me when they tip the flame to turn me to ash.

This is not remorse you're reading. This is not penance or a search for understanding. I don't give a shit what you think of me. I am what I am. I have taken and I have given, both one in the same but people have an odd way of conveniently dividing the two. Give and take, quid pro quo, scratch my back and oh, hell. There's no such thing as giving without taking. There's no taking without giving. It's an illusion, trust me. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out.

You give to the church because you expect heaven in return. You take advice because you've given grief. You volunteer to take away a good feeling. No matter where you turn, the truth always hides in the most obvious places. You choose not to look.

I don't blame you. I wouldn't look either, except for the plain fact that I have no other choice. My mother was a drunk who rarely found time to come home at night. I have no idea who my father is and I wouldn't speak to him if he visited. I raised myself. School? No, I don't think so. I mean, how is the table of elements or knowledge of Ferdinand's assassination going to help me find my next meal? How is that information going to conjure up a place to stay, to hide from the rain? It doesn't. Another example of give and take. The schools want the kids in attendance, but they don't really care about them. They're a bottom line, the numbers that feed the funding. How else can you explain school's complete and utter failure? I'm twice the age of these kids stumbling through graduation and I can

write more cohesive sentences than they ever could. Online lingo and the hip gangsta pontifications of the dimwits in Hollywood, that's where these kids learn to talk. Schools pump them through. Give and take, remember?

No, I never had time for school. I had enough to deal with just trying to survive another day. I started working when I was twelve. I lied about my age to get a job pumping gas. I'd sift through the trash at the local supermarket for my meals. I'd cash my paychecks, stuff the bills in my shoe, and wait until I had enough to hop a train and get the hell out of town. I didn't drink. Not then, anyway. My goal was escape. I'm kind of laughing now because I still have the same goal. It's as daunting and hopeless now as it was then. I did it once, though. I think I can do it again.

Circumstances have changed; my surroundings more formidable. A set of steel bars and three solid walls keep me locked up. One guard on each end of the row never flinch, they never talk to me, and they never fall asleep. I think I'm alone for now, though. They took Dale down the hall a few days ago and that's been it. No new recruits, no lingering prospects. I'm the last one in here. They passed some kind of law on the outside, some kind of tease just to irk me some more, but it doesn't matter. I don't care that they're doing away with it. Once I'm gone, they can feed all the murderers and rapist and molesters they want. I never did understand it much, the debate. So many people crying about how the schools are running out of money, that people are starving in the streets, that the environment's going to hell, and yet they spend millions to keep these men like me alive. No, I don't believe that execution is a deterrent, but I do believe it's a fiscally responsible act. Come on, if you spend a hundred thousand dollars a year to lock up a man for life with no chance of parole and a child starves in the city, what does that make you?

Give and take. You never get something for nothing. I'm not here because I'm a nice guy and that I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I'm here because of what I did. I killed a man. A cop. I didn't know he was a cop and I doubt that would've changed my action if I did. He got in the way and I didn't hesitate. I told you before, I didn't get any real education so I wasn't too slick on the getaway. I don't care anymore. It was somewhat of a relief to stop running, to stop hiding and hoping that tomorrow might find better moments for me. They never came. They never would.

I sit alone with these words spilling from me. I've come circle, I guess. I started out in a kind of cell as my own best friend. I'm still here.

I have to admit though, that the emptiness can draw out like a long winter night. The snows pile up all around and all I've got to listen to is the hollow howl of the wind coming for me, seeking a way in. It always found me, too, so I'd move on.

I guess I'm a renegade. Always trying to fill the void. To seal to hole.

Some nights, though, the wind is just too cold.

Poems by devin wayne davis

“luz”

the light,
my heart,
is perfect.

i hate your husband
—and yet, admire the man too.

i imagine he's richer
or that he is big—suffering,
as i am,
every time i try relating you to a friend;

you were a prayer,
carrying water
—a tiny mercy

when humanity was thirsting
for the reservoir of your breasts;

perhaps he's a very worthy man—who
treats you like a virgin; surely you are

immaculate and holy,
each day the sun rises;

and still,
he celebrates

your slim young body; he carries
you, effortlessly, to a firm mattress;

clean white sheets,
fresh and crisp, which are
softly sweetened with roses
and orange marigolds, magnolia ...

why would you let that man hold you close,
with all the intensity of his embrace; and gently
inhale you...

look in your eyes—as he is
kissing a th'
off that spanish lisp.

heaven..
it's immense, & lasts forever

then again,
and again ...

the belly develops,
so full of seed, of love,

what
do you know?

“wrought”
devin wayne davis

an anvil
flattened
her head
into a grin;

his face was
liquid, red,

on the hot sheet
metal pounded
out upon it.

they held hands,
and were perfect
together.

“shadowdown”
devin wayne davis

clouds flew in
spring—spirit of leaves,
returning to summer here.

blue, white, gray—scrub jay,
liaison between tree green
and the sky, is gone.

“five”

devin wayne davis

thought i'd just push her
in the swing; through

these first few difficult things (at least
until she had a dependable car);

to wear a back pack,
toward the large body
of stagnant water which bore her

scottish name ...
& rhymed with mine;

a boy, about
twice again its length,
drowned ...

and where he nearly died;
to put her head under, maybe by
next year.

but she swam,
anyway, in the bath--
splashing peppermint lather,

everywhere.
she kicked &
tucked;

then jumped--
said she didn't need me, anymore.

“radius”

devin wayne davis

watching her
& him, you have beautiful—
if disillusioned—blue-green

eyes;
i want to see
your silver tears

catch them.

Autumn Song

Terri Glass

As the light falls
and the cool autumn air
caresses my arms,
the sleepy crickets begin to awake.
I ask this question over and over:
Why does magic wax and wane
like the moon
while the beauty of red umbrellas
and marble floors line my memory
like contact paper in a drawer?

Your voice so lilting
asking me what I was wearing
as I sat engulfed
in my green velvet couch
speaking with you on the phone.

Today I will tell you what I am wearing.
I am wearing autumn air
and a hairnet of cricket song.
I am wearing Miwok markings
engraved in my heart.
I am wearing your indelible smile
that cannot be erased.

Bring Me

Terri Glass

Bring on the bullhorns.
Throw me up against the fence
in your wildest pasture.
Bring on your lightening bolt
that splits open the indigo sky.
Bring on your end of summer fire
that rages through old growth forest.
Bring on your molten lava
that steams into the turquoise sea.

Fire Watch

Karen K Ford

The day of the hike, Marie had awakened with heartburn, the tiniest ember of it glowing quietly just below the notch of her collarbone. Unusual to wake with it; most often it hit her at the end of the day as she was cooking or folding laundry or just talking to Phillip over dinner. If Phillip had been with her that morning he would have sighed and shaken his head and said, "I told you not to eat those peppers last night." But he wasn't there and Marie knew it had nothing to do with the peppers, had nothing at all to do with what she had eaten.

The night before, as often happened this time of year, she had been awakened from a sound sleep by the pull of an autumn moon a dark sliver shy of full. It had drawn her from her bed to stand at the window with a pounding heart and the undeniable feeling that there was something waiting for her to discover it. Although she knew it was the season when everything was dying, the wild changes of autumn had always felt to her like the world saying yes. Yes to endings, yes to entropy, yes even to death, saying emphatically, *This is happening*, and embracing it completely. It was a time rife with possibility and danger, when she would wake and rise and stare, night after night, sensing some impending change. But that was as far as it ever went; in the mornings she always awakened to the same life, and the significance of her midnight agitation eluded her. This morning her only reminder had been the sensation in her throat – a mentholated blue like the moon, diffuse but insistent. She had lain in bed for a long moment, thinking about calling everything off, but of course she did not have Nick's number at home and so it had been decided for her.

She felt the slow, steady burn now as she walked through the quiet forest, her body's comment on what she was doing out in the woods with a man who was not Phillip, was, in fact, married to somebody else. It could be innocent, she told herself. It could be just a hike to the fire tower to see the view with someone who knows the way.

She cast little sideways glances at Nick as he marched along the trail and compared what she was seeing to what she saw at the office every day. Gone were the button-down shirts and rayon ties and pressed khakis. Here were shorts showing strong, bare legs with tanned, muscular calves, and hiking boots, and a baseball cap to cover the bald spot. Gone were the careful conversations about current events and polite inquiries about weekend plans. Here was discourse on recognizing poison oak or the hiding places most favored by snakes.

It was hot for late October, hot and unseasonably dry. Brush snapped underfoot and dust rose from the trail in spurts, agitated by capricious gusts of wind that seemed to come from nowhere and just as quickly disappear. The usual thunderstorms of August and September hadn't come this year, and though their season was officially over, there was something in the air that made the hairs on Marie's arms stand up and her clothing crackle with static.

"Feels like dry lightning weather," she said.

Nick squinted at the sky. "You think?"

"Feels like something's coming."

"Late for it," Nick said doubtfully.

"Still."

Weather could be a reason not to go on. A lightning strike out here, in the open wilderness, was a reasonable concern. She formed the argument in her mind but swallowed it at the last minute, feeling it stick and then gradually disperse as they walked on, until there was nothing left of protest or reason but the feeling that there was something she'd forgotten to say.

"Are you excited?" Nick asked.

"Excited?"

“About the tower —you’ve been bugging me for weeks.”

Marie’s face colored and she ducked her head, wiping at her brow with the tip of a bandana. “Not bugging,” she said, almost to herself.

“Really?” she said aloud. She remembered when he had first mentioned it, an offhand comment while they were waiting for the elevator. “The view is spectacular,” he’d said. “You have got to see it.” Marie had recognized the invitation in his tone, even if he had not, and had seized upon the tower as a topic of conversation to prolong those moments when they found themselves together at the coffeepot or the fax machine. One day he said to her slyly, “If I didn’t know better, I’d think you were trying to get me alone somewhere.” The next day he had proposed this hike. Of course, she’d been forced to accept. How could she refuse after what must have seemed a display of inexhaustible curiosity?

Marie looked ahead to where the trail began its climb into forested hills. Nick had described the route they’d take when he met her at the trailhead early that morning: over a wooded expanse of valley floor, across a creek, less than ankle deep this time of year, to the base of the hills, and up a winding trail to the top of the mountain and the fire watch tower. The authority in his tone and the sureness of his step told Marie that he knew exactly where he was going and she wondered, fleetingly, if he had taken other women on this same journey. Marie felt as though she herself had walked this trail before, but it was only the sensations that were familiar: a quickening that raised gooseflesh on the small of her back, and the occasional quixotic thump in her solar plexus.

“Do you come here often?” she asked and instantly regretted her choice of words.

Nick smiled, acknowledging the joke. At the office he would have countered with something a bit more piquant, and Marie would have upped the ante again, their conversation coiling through a treacherous landscape of meaning, until it had escalated as far as they felt they could safely go. Out here there was no safety; when Nick answered without irony Marie noted that he was as aware of this as she.

“I try to come up with my boys a few times a year,” he said. “But usually later, when it’s pretty cold. Rugged. You know...man stuff.”

In the heat of today it was hard to imagine the cold would ever come, but Marie knew that in less than a month the surrounding hills would be covered in snow. Phillip would take his children skiing then, to Bend or maybe all the way to Mount Hood, while she stayed at home and pretended she didn’t exist. She’d never grown used to the days of isolation or his furtive, late night calls, whispered in tones that would not disturb his sleeping children. While he had still been married to Claire, Marie had accepted it as a condition of their circumstances, but now, long after that marriage had reached its inevitable demise, nothing had changed.

“The kids tell her everything,” was the only explanation he would offer, until at last her demands had provoked him sufficiently to say: “Look, she hates you! Can you blame her?”

It had stopped Marie’s next protestation in her throat. She found, to her surprise, that she could not blame Claire, in fact found her attitude completely justified. After that she had never again complained about being excluded from Phillip’s “custody weekends.” In truth she found she was bothered more by the implications of his indifference, what it said about what their relationship had become. And while she complied with Phillip’s wishes to keep herself a secret from his children, she harbored a secret of her own: that she had begun to look forward, with increasing anticipation, to the times he would go away, leaving her alone. In those moments she knew that the ultimate leaving was not far in the future, and she regarded it from her present position with an interest that was intense but detached, the calm acquiescence of a terminal case.

Marie looked down just in time to see a raised and gnarled tree root bisecting the path, threatening to trip her. She took a stutter step to keep her balance, reaching out reflexively for Nick’s shoulder.

“Watch out,” he said, steadying her. “Don’t go hurting yourself, now.”

The trail began to climb, switching back on itself and narrowing, forcing them to walk single file. Scrub oak and Madrone gave way to pines and cedar. The ground was carpeted with dry, brown needles and the air took on the sharp, evergreen scent of the mountains. She walked close behind Nick, watching the shift and bunch of muscles beneath his shirt and waiting for those moments when he would turn to check on her, favoring her with a little smile that she recognized as equal parts delight and apprehension.

At Nick’s suggestion they stopped at a switchback to sit on a fallen log and drink from canteens. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and beamed at her. “How you holding up?”

Marie smiled back. “Great.”

“Not too steep?”

“Nothing I can’t handle.”

They didn’t talk at all then. Marie did not look at Nick and could feel him not looking at her. She concentrated instead on the view: the broad flat expanse of valley floor below, now just a patchwork of rust and brown pulled together by a winding silver thread of water. Except for a short stretch of trail below and another above to the next switchback, there was nothing nearby to look at but trees and more trees but Marie regarded them as though there were something more there to discover. An errant gust, hot and resin-scented, seemed to rise from their feet. It curled around Marie’s legs under her shorts and sneaked in through the armholes of her tee shirt before rising to stir the long hair around her shoulders.

Nick was digging in his pack. “Hungry?” he asked.

Marie shook her head, becoming aware of the flame burning, more insistently now, in her throat.

“Didn’t have breakfast this morning,” Nick said, tearing into the wrapper of a granola bar.

“Why not?”

He shrugged. “Left before the boys got up. Saturday mornings we usually make a big breakfast together, you know, the works. We completely trash the kitchen and make enough noise to wake the neighborhood but, man, is it a blast.”

Marie heard regret in his tone and imagined him leaving home early that morning, tiptoeing past the boys’ room in the predawn dark, fighting the urge to stop and wake them with a suggestion of pancakes. She wondered what he had told his wife about today. She knew it would not have been the truth. There would be some hiking buddy, or a friend in the countryside who needed help clearing brush. Perhaps he had made a show of leaving the house in his khakis and loafers, inventing some office task that couldn’t wait the weekend, stopping at a gas station along the way to change into the shorts and hiking boots he’d stashed in the trunk the night before. Nick had never mentioned his wife by name, but Marie knew by way of his careful omissions that she did exist. The source of their unhappiness was unknown; it could be so many things, as Marie had learned, and yet ultimately the reasons wouldn’t matter. The outcome would be the same. It was always the same.

“Where’s Phillip this weekend?” Nick asked.

“Medical conference.”

“Oh. Where?”

“Sun Valley.”

“Too early for skiing.”

“Golf.”

Nick nodded. “Why doesn’t he take you with him?” he said after a moment.

“He has, a few times. It’s a bore. He’s in lectures all day and I’m left hanging out with a bunch of doctors’ wives.” She stuck out her tongue.

“But you’re not a doctor’s wife.”

“Thank God.”

She felt Nick's eyes on her.

"He really should make an honest woman of you."

"That's a very last-century kind of thing to say," Marie said. "Besides, even if I wanted to – which I don't – marriage didn't work out so great for him the first time around."

Marie thought again of Claire, trying to conjure her face from the pictures she'd seen. Her image remained hazy in Marie's mind, no more distinctive than a motif in patterned wallpaper. Before Phillip there had been Mike, with a wife named Angela. And before that, Harrison, whose wife was.... Denise? She couldn't quite remember. The men remained vivid in her memory but the wives were indistinct, their images made up entirely of details their husbands had chosen to relate and glossed over with a veneer of pity that Marie herself had supplied, adding to it year by year, like layering varnish on a tabletop, until it clouded over into hardened contempt. Though there had been only three, she often pictured a faceless battalion of wives, standing shoulder to shoulder in rank and file, arms crossed in solidarity, forming a barrier that was at once forbidding and frail: resolute but so easily breached. The image came to her now and for the first time Marie wondered with alarm whether it was not, as she had always believed, an aberrant reflection of her past, but a specter of her future.

She looked at Nick. Beneath her breastbone the tiny flame asserted itself, licking upward. *It will be someone*, she thought, *but it doesn't have to be me.*

Nick held her gaze a second too long.

It wasn't too late to turn back. If they were not yet halfway there she could plead weariness, or remember an early engagement with a friend, and ask to turn around. If they were more than halfway, she would have to go on or risk looking foolish.

"How much farther?" she asked.

"We're very close."

"More than halfway?"

"Way more. Why? In a hurry to get back?"

Marie knew there was no going back – once again the decision had been made for her. She stood and made a show of slapping dust from her clothing. "Of course not," she said brightly. "Just anxious to get to the top."

Nick stood and shrugged himself into his backpack. They smiled at one another and, simultaneously, gestured for the other to go first. There was nervous laughter and then, quite unexpectedly, Nick reached toward her face and for a moment Marie caught her breath. Her eyes widened and her mind formed words of protest that never reached her lips; Nick plucked a dry leaf from her hair and showed it to her.

"Leaf," he said.

"Thanks."

They started up the trail, Nick in the lead again. Marie followed on legs heavy with the aftereffects of adrenalin unspent. Of course he had not been about to kiss her, she thought. He was married, and if he was no longer a man in love with his wife, he was certainly a man in love with his children, and probably far too cautious to place that at risk. This feeling she'd had, that there was something more between them, was most likely nothing more than a restless hope.

The air was cooler high in the pines and the wind more persistent. It made a sighing sound in the treetops, a constant movement high above them that Marie could sense rather than see. The forest seemed more alive now than it ever had from on the valley floor, and as they walked through it Marie began to feel like a part of some larger organism, a single cell propelled in heedless motion towards some specific purpose she didn't comprehend.

"I love the fall," Nick said over his shoulder.

"Me too."

"There's this feeling..." She had started to say, "...of inevitability," thinking it the perfect word to describe the feeling she'd had gazing out her window the night before, but thought better of it. Surely that wasn't something to say aloud.

"Moondoggin' weather," Nick said.

"What's that?"

"This thing Nolan and Nicky and I do. Autumn nights we go up to this spot by the lake and build a bonfire."

"To cook out?"

Nick shook his head. "We just...sit there. Watch the fire. Watch the moon. Don't even talk much." He shrugged. "Moondoggin'."

That's three, she thought. Three times he had mentioned his children. As if to remind her, or himself, of all that was at stake. "That sounds nice," she said.

"Better than nice. It's..." Marie followed in silence as she waited for him to find the words. "I can't describe how it is," he said at last.

Around the next bend Nick pointed out the peaked roof of the fire watchtower above the treetops. One more switchback brought them to the top of the mountain and into a clearing. Foothills fell away in every direction from where they stood. Trees and vegetation had been stripped from the ground around them, forming a wide, jagged patch of red earth. Despite the warmth of the sun, Marie hugged herself against the wind. She felt exposed in the sparseness of vegetation here, a desert spot surrounded on all sides by an undulating sea of trees.

The watchtower stood at the edge of the clearing overlooking the valley, a log cabin on slender stilts two stories high, delicate and precarious as a giraffe. Just outside the shadow it cast, squatting on a bare floor of rock, stood a burly assortment of satellite dishes and weather instruments. Sunlight glinted off naked metal surfaces and gleaming white whirligigs turned in the wind.

"What's all that?" she asked.

"Weather instruments. Satellite dishes: TV, cell phones."

Marie walked to the instruments, drawn to their heft, sensing the watchtower looming at her back. She ran a hand along the white-painted surface of a metal stanchion, feeling it anchor her to the mountaintop, and looked up at a spinning propeller.

"This looks so high-tech next to that tower," she said. "Like it doesn't belong here."

"It doesn't, far as I'm concerned," Nick said. "The fire tower's been here since forever. This junk just spoils the view." He tugged gently at her pack and she turned to see him smiling at her. "Come on," he said softly. "Let's go up."

A steep, narrow wooden staircase led up from ground level, switching back twice before disappearing into the belly of the cabin above. Marie stood at the foot of the stairs looking up through the shadows to the rectangle of light at the top. She put a foot on the first step and it creaked under her weight.

"Are you sure it's alright?" she asked.

"Absolutely," Nick said. "Fire season's over. No one's even up there." He squinted at her. "You're not afraid of heights or anything, are you?"

A bad joke came to her: *I'm not afraid of heights, I'm afraid of depths*. She shook her head.

"Up you go, then."

She started up the stairs, silently berating herself for going first as she felt Nick's eyes on her backside. She wondered if he could see up the legs of her shorts. The thought made her climb faster; she nearly jogged up the last five steps, alighting in the middle of the cabin floor. The cabin itself was little more than a peaked canopy of rough-hewn logs. The walls were just waist-high with open space to the ceiling. Wind blew freely through the open spaces and forced its way through the chinks between logs, carrying with it the scents of pine and desiccation, moaning soft choruses in a roller-

coaster rhythm. She stood in the middle of the cabin watching the top of Nick's head as it rose through the floor.

"View's out there," he said and pointed.

Marie walked to the front of the cabin and looked out.

"Oh my God."

Nick joined her, leaning his elbows on the windowsill, and Marie felt the hair of his forearms lightly brushing hers. "Gorgeous," he said.

"It is."

"Told you."

Marie regarded the vast expanse of forest rolling in surging waves towards an unseen sea. On and on it went, farther and wider than she had ever imagined from the sheltered vantage of the valley floor. She wondered how the people who came up here to watch for fires could ever spot one with so much forest to watch. Like trying to watch the ocean – not waves on the shore constantly in motion, changing shape as they broke and reformed, but the flat expanse of open water. Impossible to fix on one point. *How would you spot the beginnings?* Marie wondered. The first wisp of smoke rising from the trees, so tiny, so insignificant in its surroundings. Once it soared high enough to claim your attention it would be too late. But that was your job if you volunteered for this – to watch for the little fires, call out to the world if you saw one starting, send someone to put it out before the destruction began. Before anyone could get hurt.

"How do they do it?" she wondered aloud.

"They just look," Nick said. "You can see everything from up here."

"It's almost too much to take in."

"Most forest fires are started by lightning. They watch for the strike, see if anything catches."

Marie felt him watching her, his gaze warming her left cheek. She looked harder into the distance.

"I can't get a fix on anything," she said. "It's like things keep moving. You know?"

Nick shook his head. "I'm not sure."

"OK, pick a tree, any tree..." She waited. "Got one?"

"Yeah, OK. Got it."

"Now just watch it."

They watched in silence. Marie concentrated, unblinking, blocking out for the moment the presence beside her, seeing only the tree, hearing only the wind through the open canopy of the fire tower. The tree began to swim and blur. Which one had she been watching? Was it that one? Or that one? Soon her gaze, unfocused, widened, and the expanse of trees became an enveloping, wriggling carpet of green. She closed her eyes and swayed.

Nick was there, his arm at her waist.

"Are you OK?"

"I just got dizzy."

He led her away from the railing, her eyes closed and fingers pressed to the inside corners.

"Sit down. Put your head between your knees."

Marie laughed but allowed him to help her sit cross-legged on the dusty wooden floor.

"I'm OK," she said. "Really. I don't need to put my head down." The thought of herself with her head hanging between her knees, Nick kneeling there beside her, shocked her into alertness. Already he was so close she could feel the heat he gave off and smell the scent of his sun-warmed skin.

Nick removed the bandana from around his neck, then unslung his canteen and tipped water into the bandana to moisten it. "Here," he said, offering it to her. "Put this on the back of your neck."

She laughed again, embarrassed, and shook her head. But when he did not withdraw the

bandana she took it and pressed it to the nape of her neck. "I'm OK," she said. "Really."

"Well, do me a favor and just sit there for a few minutes anyway, okay? Humor me?"

Marie nodded. "Okay."

She wanted to ask for the canteen, a sip of cool water to soothe the burning in her throat, but before she could speak, Nick raised it to his own lips. Something about the gesture, the way his eyes never left hers as he drank, was so intimate that Marie felt as if she should turn away and yet she could not. She watched the mouth of the canteen coming to rest against his mouth, his lips closing around it softly but insistently, his cheeks drawing in as he drank. Spellbound by the sight of his throat contracting with the motion of his swallowing, the droplets of sweat trembling in rough-textured stubble there, and fixed by the burning gaze that held her, she saw, in an instant, everything that would follow.

That by the time he leaned in to kiss her, her own conflicting desires would seem beside the point. There would be nothing more to say. Nothing to see but a ragged blue patch of sky. Nothing to hear but the relentless murmur of wind through the walls and the unmistakable rumble of distant thunder.

PARVENU

Robert Joe Stout

Just a small snake, she thought,
A dream she'd soon forget.
But it was real. Wiggled
Out her nostrils over
Breakfast at the Club.
Out her ear at Macy's.
Through the corners of her eyes
While guests met on the stairs.
Too quick for her
To grab or bite, it shimmied
Down each smile she plied,
Curled around the words
She tried to tongue.
And threaded the bright scarves
She tied to veil
Her fear of people's stares
And coughs behind white gloves.

Five Days Later

Beth Dugan

Three days later, she changed the sheets. She had slept on them for two nights trying to catch the slightest hint of his scent lingering on the pillowcase but, after severely breaking out on her chin from the oil and dirt, she decided she was being pathetic and stripped the bed. As she lounged on her clean sheets she remembered the delicate skin at the corners of his eyes, the blonde stubble glinting in the morning light and his pale eyelashes that fell halfway down his cheeks.

His skin was perfect. His scent, however, was synthetic, as in cologne, as in a lot of it. She realized it the last time she buried her face in the pillowcase and inhaled. Sharp acid perfume greeted her behind the sour smell of unwashed flesh. The smell still caused an immediate and vivid panty-moistening response, but she realized it was less appealing now that she had to imagine him putting on cologne or aftershave. She liked the idea that he just smelled like that, naturally. Now it seemed a little seedy.

A day and a half later she called her least judgmental single friend Caroline, and confessed. *Married man. No. Yes. A friend of mine. Really drunk. Not that drunk. I'm fine. Yeah. Really. Yeah, it was. Really good. I know.* Caroline, practical and reassuring said in her comforting raspy voice, *Well, at least you got off.*

Two months ago, when she had first passed on getting involved with him, (he had slowly reached for her, sitting in the passenger seat of her car, eyes dark, and she had, just as slowly, pulled back against the icy window, shaking her head, looking away) she had told her best friend, about it. Her friend, Elizabeth, was married, and thanked her, on behalf of all married women everywhere for not doing it, not sleeping with him, for having some dignity, self-respect (unlike their mutual friend Shannon who recently had a threesome with a married woman and some random guy, and was wallowing in self-loathing over it). Elizabeth said the position of slutty, promiscuous friend was already filled, thanks anyway.

While the flirtation went on, weeks, months before, Sherry soberly assessed her options after she realized his moral flexibility, her loneliness, their inexplicable attraction. The conversation with Elizabeth made her reexamine the nature of adultery. Technically, both people involved would be “adulterers”, though in this case, only one had taken a vow of monogamy.

She felt a heavy weight while talking to Elizabeth; accountability for his fidelity, his marriage, his vows, as well as the vows of every married man, Elizabeth’s marriage, all marriage. All those men who came on to her, slipping their rings in their pocket or wearing them brazenly, who flattered and charmed, saying literally all the right things, were somehow suddenly her responsibility. She was married to their fidelity and got nothing out of it, not even nice dishes and a waffle maker. She got a lonely bed and unavoidable self-pity at the holidays. Not that they were the only men out there. Hardly. They were, however, interested, easy, and exciting. You knew what their baggage was up front. You knew what mess you were getting into.

There had been half a dozen of these incidents, being propositioned by married men, a question put out there quietly, *would you like to, can we go, how about...* accompanied by a hand on the inside of the wrist, on the back of her neck, or a calloused finger on her bare knee. She had always turned them down.

Two days later he left her a voice mail saying that he was sorry for acting badly the other night and thanked her for being a good friend. He wanted to meet and talk. She called Caroline right away and they decided that even though he was married and obviously a total mess, he was better than every other guy either of them had slept with in recent memory because he did call, did want to talk. Married men must be well trained, she and Caroline mused. They know there should be

conversation; apparently they even seek it out. But she didn't really want to talk about it. It was done. *It's in the vault, Caroline rasped, tell him to relax.*

Three days later, the day she changed the sheets, the night she slathered her face with acne cream and dreamed of sex, waking acutely aroused and unfulfilled, he emailed her: If you have a moment during the week that we can talk, I would love for the two of us to go out maybe, have lunch or dinner or whatever. There is no excuse for my bad behavior Saturday evening and I would like to make up for it. You were a good friend to me when I needed it.

Bad behavior. A good friend when he needed it. Are these euphemisms? He had made her come so hard she cried, briefly undone, tears oozing down her cheeks as she gasped. He had skillfully tapped onto her tangle with pain and pleasure. Did he want to talk about that? About how her nipples still ached? Did he want to be reassured that she wouldn't tell his wife, their friends? Did he, more likely, want to be reassured he wasn't as much of an asshole as he felt? How was he going to "make up for it"? With a burrito and a hug?

Five days later they met at a quiet Chinese restaurant near her house. He sat at a table for two by the window and gave her a hug when she arrived, hanging on past the point of comfort. The other diners took note, feeling the patina of emotion surrounding them. He kept running his hand through his short red hair nervously, making it stick up at odd angles, then smoothing it down again. He smelled good to her again. Really good. They sat, ordered, were served tea, and then he took her hand, smiled at her and started to make himself feel better. *Worried about you. Deserve better. Made a mess of things. Want to be friends. Very important to me. Special special person.*

She looked at his handsome expressive face, and realized that he meant it all. There was no artifice in him, just sadness in his red-rimmed eyes at the disorder he believed he created, and regret that he didn't want to be with her enough.

He rubbed her knuckles with the rough pad of his thumb over and over. He kept asking if she was ok. She was, she realized. She had never even remotely expected him to be with her, leave his wife. She unfairly didn't want to be with a philanderer, even if she was the one that philandered with him. Gently, she removed her hand from his. She picked up her little teacup bringing the steaming tea close to her face, inhaling, feeling the heat on her skin. She turned towards the restaurant window, gazing out onto the street, and tried to look available.

Poems by Sheila E Murphy

swan moves across

the pond the mirror full of sky
the eye beholds
the white move and
some silver too is wilderness

en live n

chaste break with
all this meadow
charms even silver
in a tainted row
remarkable how
milk warms eventide
to dream equals
to dream of you
and furniture beside
windows that shape
the seen to match
unseen

SALT (THIS)

swallow settlement
one granule at a time
mixed with
a shallow water
owning depth
perhaps
and now

serene is (I am breathing)

in the silence
is the silence
of the silence
thought astride
this feeling
now equals
Infinity

ORIGINAL PERFECTION

winnow from
the seven
twelve or mist
enough to go away
a way of living in
original perfection
although not
although again
loaned peach
not that
peach only

think (of no) thing

yes to weather
as a wrap
around all summer
morning when the dew
is this

encomium

she says foresight
I say braid
the liturgy's unstable
thus I am forgiven
gift certificate wears rungs
I lift self
auction
(veritable sandstone)
he is brothering (again)
my options are to leap or
to invigorate (my options are)
the center of intention
(indentation)
listen to the fuel stir
look at sunlight seeming
again early
see some time
(elapse)
allow
and then
allow (again)

And if all pure beauty comes from love, where does love come from? From what matter does its matter derive, from what nature its supernaturalness? Beauty comes from love. Love comes from attention. Simple attention to the simple; humble attention to humble things; living attention to all lives....

—Christian Bobin, from *The Very Lowly*

Bracelet

Gunta Krasts Voutyras

The piece of jewelry was filigree, made of copper and dipped in gold. Very fine work, precise and delicate. This bracelet wrapped in brown paper had traveled in the pocket of a man who had walked many months. His feet wrapped in rags. Boots without soles. Only tops. Walking hundreds of miles. Looking for his family.

He was coming from a labor camp deep in the Italian Alps.' From digging trenches. At times digging graves for those who were no longer alive in the morning at the yell of "Aufsteigen". Same unfortunates he shared the barracks with.

It was soul wrenching. The brutality. The horrible food. Hot water with rotten potatoes. If a guard did not like a laborer he got no potato. Just hot water with no salt. No one could exist on this. Many men died.

The man held on. He occupied his mind with thoughts of his two little girls. Of his wife. Of his flower garden. The pear trees planted just the year before. The colorful dahlias growing along a tall fence. Rows and rows of potatoes planted last spring. All planted with care. Nurtured with love. All for the future and his family. Thoughts of educating his girls at the university. Remembrances of conducting dinner at his dining room table surrounded by friends and family.

All that is gone now. The large comfortable house destroyed. The gardens neglected. Destruction from bombs falling all night, every night. His children most likely spending their nights in an underground shelter he himself had dug in the middle of his potato field. Work of two generations destroyed. All life altered into the unknown seemingly hopeless future.

During the many inhuman hours spent digging trenches he understood that a human being without hope is as good as dead. One must never give up. One must fight on with one's last breath. The greatest tool against tyranny, mind control, brutality and all other forms of terror we humans are so good at inflicting on each other is the ability to not lose faith and sustain one's spirit.

One early spring morning the gate to the labor camp was found to be wide open without a Nazi in sight. All those who could walk, crawl or hobble left the camp. Some to the surrounding villages. Looking for food. Some looking for work. Others just putting distance between the camp and themselves.

My father, feet wrapped in rags made his way to the nearest village. He helped a local farmer resurrect his vineyard. As payment the man asked him to choose a piece of jewelry out of a hand carved box. Dad chose a delicate, narrow bracelet. Next morning he took the only road out of town. In his pocket, wrapped in brown paper, rested the bracelet. In his heart, hope and faith he will find his family.

Pancakes

Gunta Krasts Voutyras

Confusion reigned in the Displaced Person Camps in the early days after the war. There were thousands of us. All walks of life. All ages. in the DP Camp in Esslingen am/Neckar, block houses were provided to house us, the homeless, starved, unwanted leftovers of WWII. We were placed so many per room, in each apartment. It happened distant cousins who hardly knew each other became well acquainted and sister-laws who hated each other from a previous life, shared the same and the only cooking stove.

Since the American Military were in charge of our lives and our food supply there began to appear rations of powdered eggs, powdered milk, cans of juice and sometimes flour.

On a sunny winter afternoon grandmother announced to us all she was making pancakes for the evening meal.

In those days such luxury items as butter, coffee and sugar could only be had on the black market. Since of course we had no money, we had none of these.

Grandmother, a country midwife in the old days, with knowledge of things I still hold in awe, got out the little box of burned down candle ends.

Mesmerized we kids watched as she melted down the candle wax. poured a small portion of it in a tin pan. Keeping the wax hot and with a tin can pinched so as to have a pouring spout, deposited small amounts of her pancake mix into the candle wax.

We had a great meal that night. Pale globs of dough, somewhat cooked, tasted better to us than anything we have eaten since.

Starvation does that to kids.

Poems by Rita Dahl

In Finnish & English

tähtisissä silmissäsi
hullut juopuneet
käyvät käsi
kädess sekä kyyneleet

kaikki nuo lempeää sydäntäsi
ohimennessään sivelleet
torilla käydessäsi
rintojasi omenaisia hipaisseet

kuinka julma
tempelin kaarikulma
keskelle toria jään

kuinka lohdutonta
näkyä huoletonta monta
kaupungissa nään

in your starstruck eyes
crazy drunken people
walk hand
in hand and tears

all those people
who touched
your applelike breasts
while you walked in the market-place

how cruel
the arched bridge of the temple
I stay in the middle of the market-place

to avoid the many hopeless
and uncaring sights
in the city

Hän kysyi, mihin tämä tie vie meidät. Olimme ylittämässä ruohon vihreää keidasta: tavallisesti kuljimme toista tietä. Hän oli halukkaasti eksymässä korkeiden, itseään toistavien rakennusten keskelle, yksitoikkoisen ikkunarivistön alle. Minä olin eksynyt aikoja sitten hänen silmistään Päiviä ei voi kuluttaa kolmasti, eikä postinkantaja kolkuta kuin kahdesti. Ensimmäiseen on syytä vastata närkeäkirjeellä, jossa valitellaan postilaitoksen hitautta maan modernisaatioon huomioon ottaen. Kerrostalot eivät suosi nuottitelinettä jokaisessa huoneistossa. Johonkin sopii jakoavain. Kahvinkeitin keittää hullunkurista teetä haluamiinne aikoihin. Vesi on halpa hyödyke, josta käydään kiivasta taistelua monikansallisten uutisyhtiöiden kesken. Lähetys alkoi kuvavirta marssi varoittamatta olohuoneeseen. Olitte mennyt kun vähiten pyydettiin tuhka savuna veteen kylpyhuoneeseen suihkuun. Uutiset eivät sitä tienneet koputusta oli vauhdikasta jatkaa. Moderneja toimenpiteitä haluamiinne aikoihin kaikenlaisin verukkein valmistautuneita postinkantajia. Vesi juoksee luontevasti vesihanan suusta, mutta kaupunkia se ei tunne. Kallioon on itse piru haudattu. Se ei pääse omin avuin pois edes kovasti toivomalla. Monimuotoisessa ympäristössä vaatteet täytyy pestä vuorokaudenaikoihin jolloin veden ääni on hiljaisiin. Laulajille toinen varoitus on viimeinen.

Days cannot be spent three times, and the postman only knocks twice. The first call should be answered with an annoyed letter, with complaints at the slowness of the postal service in our country considering the state of our modernization. Blocks of flats do not favour a music stand in every apartment. To some of them belongs adjustable wrench. The coffee machine makes funny tea whenever you want it to. Water is a cheap commodity, which is fiercely fought over by multinational companies. Broadcast started a flood of pictures marching into the living room. You were gone when it was least asked like ashes to the water to the bathroom shower. News did not know that it was fast to continue knocking. Modern measures at the times of the days that you want to postmen equipped with all kinds of excuses. Water runs naturally from the water tap, but it does not know the city. Devil is buried in the rock. It can not get out himself even if it wished hard. In a manifold environment all kinds of clothes have to be washed during the times of the day when the sound of the water is the most silent. Second warning is the last for the singers.

Muistan vain miten auto suistui ja joutui veden varaan. Sisarukset ovat merkillisiä. "Haluatko oluen?". "Eiköhän ole liian aikaista?". Aina kun tyhjennän yhden, hän tuo eteeni uuden. "Älä väitä, ettei se ole käynyt mielessäsi?". Ihan kuin tämä olisi jotain leikkiä. Hän avaa kylpytakkinsa – niitä muotoja ei arvaisi takki päällä. "En halua sinua enää kotiin." Nukkuisit kunnolla. Ehkä se ajaja on tullut tunnontuskiin. Se hullu soittelee koko ajan. Kalat vaan ui ja paskantaa. Lähdittekö pois sateen takia? Virtuaalitodellisuus on siis totaalisesti totta. Ei kai hän soittale sinulle? Tuntisitko äänen? Hän halusi inestipuhelun 4-vuotiaan kanssa. Tuollainen voi pilata elämäsi. Niistä puheluista saa rahaa. Löysimme sieltä alastoman ruumiin. Ei siinä ollut paljon tekemistä. Alkoi tulla pimeä. Menimme sinne kalastamaan. Hän myy enemmän kuin luuletkaan. Olin tänään alastonmallina. Mahtavaa jos Alex Trebek ostaisi kuviani. En kestä loputtomia hyväilyjä. Rakastan rankaisevaa suudelmaa. Pidemmälle meneminen tietää vaikeuksia. Se raha olisi ollut tosiaan tarpeen. Jätinkö tänne marisätkän? Vihaan Losia. Kaikki vaan vetävät kokaa ja lässäyttävät.

I remember only how the car bounced off the road and ended up in the water. Sisters are strange. "Do you want a beer?" "Is it not too early?". Then, soon as I empty one, she brings another. "Don't say you haven't thought it." Is this some kind of game? She opens her bathrobe - you would never have imagined she had a figure like that with the robe on. "I don't want you to come home anymore." You should sleep properly. Maybe that driver has qualms. That lunatic keeps on calling all the time. Fish just swim and shit. Did you go away for the sake of the rain? Virtual reality is then completely true. He doesn't call you? Would you recognize the voice? He wanted to have an incest call with a 4-year old. That can ruin your life. I get money from those phone calls. We found a naked body there. There was not much to do. It started to become dark. We went there fishing. He sold more than you think. I was a nude model today. Triffic if Alex Trebek would buy my pictures. I cannot stand being endlessly caressed. I love a punishing kiss. Getting further means difficulties. That money would really be necessary. Did I leave a joint here? I hate L.A. Everyone does coke and keeps on babbling.

puhkeaviin lumpeisiin, joita hajamielisesti poimin maasta sieltä täältä hänen jäljiltään. Tuskin hän sitä huomasi. Aurinko kuumotti huikaisevana pallona, sai hänet nostamaan hameen lievettä kuin viuhkaa kasvojen edessä. Puut muuttuivat täysi-ikäisiksi hetkessä, joet laskivat vahingossa mereen. Olimme palatsissa, jossa hän oli kuningatar divaanillaan, minä uskollinen kamaripalvelija muiden joukossa. Kunpa olisin vain päässyt nuuhkaisemaan pientä siivua paratiisista, jota hän kätki hiuksiinsa.

She asked where this road would take us. We were crossing a meadow. Usually we chose another route. She preferred to be lost among the tall buildings that repeated themselves, reflected in the monotonous rows of windows. I had long since become lost. Water lilies fell from her eyes. I absent-mindedly picked them up from the earth behind her. She didn't notice. The sun burned and made her lift the hem of her skirt to fan her face. Trees grew in a moment, rivers ran accidentally into the sea. We were in a palace where she was the queen on her divan, I but one loyal chamber maid. I wanted only to sniff a small slice of the paradise hiding in her hair.

Pyhän Antoniuksen kiusaukset

Boschin hieroessa silmälasejaan salama halkaisi ne kahtia. Näön sumetessa maanpäälliset ja vedenalaiset nisäkkäät käyttivät tilaisuutta hyväkseen. Leijonat ahtautuivat hattuihin, kalat kenkiin, sammakot sukkiin ja rikottuihin ruukkuihin. Eläinten ruhot kävelivät seivästettyinä etsien humaaneja vastakappaleita. Kurkien karavelit lipuivat taivaalla kohti tuntematonta päämäärää, vastarantaa. Kalan selässä talonpoika ja hänen puolisonsa olivat suojassa heitä keihäällä tavoittelevalta paholaiselta. Köyryselkäinen rampa oli astumassa kirkon raunioiden suojiin kaviolla kävelevän kalan ohi päästäkseen pöydän ääreen, pikaria kädessään pitävän pyhimyksen luo. Perustusten alla on kaari-ikkunainen luola. Mitään perustuksia ei ole, kaikki on jatkuvassa muutoksessa ja maailma astelee lentohiekalla horjuen kuin vastasyntynyt kurjenpoikanen liian pitkillä ja vaikeasti hallittavilla jaloillaan. Ratsujoukot ylittävät siltaa, mutta taakse jäävän kylän asumusten olkikatot ovat jo liekeissä ja palavina pysyvätkin, vielä vuosisatoja, vuosisatoja, kenties ikuisesti?

While Saint Anthony was rubbing his eyeglasses, a thunderbolt split them in two. When everything went black for him, other creatures made use of the situation. Lions packed into the hats, frogs walked into socks and broken vases. Pierced animal bodies walked upright trying to be their human counterparts. Caravels of cranes sailed upon the sky to unknown destinies on the opposite shore. On the back of the fish, peasant and his spouse were safe from the devil who reached for them with his spear. A stooped cripple was about to step into the church ruins, past a fish who was walking with hoofs to get to the table, next to the saint holding a goblet. Under the foundations there is a cave with curved windows. There are no foundations, everything is in constant change and the world is staggering on like a fledgling crane with legs too long and difficult to control. Mounted troops are crossing the bridge, and the thatched roofs of the village behind are already in flames. And burn they will, for centuries and centuries, maybe forever?

The Aerialist

William Jablonsky

(For Phillip Petit)

*Office of the Curator for Local History
Milwaukee Public Museum
May 6, 2005*

You are younger than I expected. One would think the custodian of this city's culture and history would be old enough to remember more of it, but I will speak to you anyway. These boxes contain something you will want, and when we are finished here you will be glad I came to you.

Surely you have seen the mural on the courthouse wall, overlooking the freeway: the shadowed figure of a man silhouetted against an orange sky, precariously balanced on a taut cable no thicker than twine. It is a reminder that once, this city was home to a most remarkable being—a man with skills far surpassing those of the average citizen, who selflessly used his unique gifts to help strangers, asking neither recognition nor thanks.

The painting itself was inspired by a series of photographs, taken by a *Sentinel* photographer the night of the Wells Street fires—particularly this one, in which he is walking a line across the street to save a man trapped on the eighth floor of an office building. It truly captures the moment, don't you think? Do excuse the finger-smudges and crinkled edges; this photograph has been well-loved.

Of course, soon after, such heroism became all the rage, and he was supplanted in the public imagination by colorful angels who never seemed to make their way here. He did not tear steel with his bare hands, nor change the course of mighty rivers, but his feats were no less miraculous, and he belonged to this city as much as any clock or bridge or building.

You have heard of him, of course, but I see the doubt in your eyes—the stories must be wild exaggerations, tales old women tell to amuse their grandchildren. Soon, he will have passed from memory altogether, and your children will one day drive past that mural without recognition or pride. I find this impossibly sad, and I am here to set it right.

You must think my reverence misplaced, the wistful musings of an old woman in love with a myth. But I saw him, felt his strong, wiry arms around my waist as he swung me to safety. You see, I was the first person he rescued, when I was but a girl of fifteen.

My father had brought me from Waukesha to watch him argue a case at the county courthouse; he was liberal-minded, and hoped I would be inspired to become a lawyer myself. We were staying at the Pfister Hotel, which, as you know, caught fire on the evening of November 14, 1936, its third and fourth floors completely lost due to faulty wiring. My father had gone downstairs for some ice, leaving me alone in our room, and the policemen on scene would not allow him to come up after me. The fire spread quickly, and it seemed the firemen would not be able to save us all in time. I could feel the heat of the flame through the floor, and was certain it would soon find me. I stepped out on the balcony to shout for help; my father reached up to me from the sidewalk in a futile gesture, watching helplessly. Then, above the sirens and the crackle of flames, I heard a deep voice calling for me to duck. I crouched low under the guardrail as a heavy steel arrow flew from the window of a warehouse across the street, sailing over my head and lodging fast in the wall, trailing a length of cable behind it. Despite the noise, I could hear the hum as it pulled taut above me. Then, illuminated

by the hot orange light, a man clad in a black bomber jacket and pilot's goggles leaned out of the warehouse window and, clutching a thin pole, began to walk the wire toward the balcony. I thought he was a hallucination brought on by the smoke and heat, but in no more than thirty seconds he stood before me, and I felt his hand grasp mine. "It's going to be all right," he said, his voice thick with an accent I could not identify. "I'll save you."

At first I thought he meant for me to walk the rope with him back to the warehouse, which would have been the end of me. But instead he clutched me to his chest, hoisting his legs over the railing. "Hold on tight," he said, and, reaching up with a pair of wire-cutters, he cut the cable and stepped us into empty air. The crowd fell silent as we dropped into space, our fall seemingly uncontrolled and fatal. I screamed. But the line held, and we swung safely to the ground, his feet breaking into a run as they made contact with the concrete. He set me down gently, and the crowd cheered, moving in for a closer look at this heroic stranger. Before they were upon him he ran, disappearing into the shadows of an alley.

I believe I fell in love with him in that instant. And what was not to love? He was brave, handsome as far as I could tell, Errol Flynn without the stuntmen and careful choreography. That night I lay awake, replaying the incident in my thoughts; I wrapped my arms around my body, pretending they were his, imagined his low, gentle voice until I could almost feel his breath against my ear. The next day I carefully clipped the article and its accompanying photograph and pressed it between the pages of a book for safekeeping. Later, I would pull it out and touch it to my cheek until the newsprint bled into my skin.

You laugh, but I tell you it was love, and I am old enough to know.

But rescuing me was only the beginning. Not a week later, a man was spotted standing on a bridge over the Menominee River. He remained there for perhaps an hour, staring at the freezing water below, while police gathered behind him. Their presence was not an aid, and seemed to increase his determination to jump—he had only to find the nerve. Suddenly, from a tree near the riverbank, another cable-trailing arrow flew, lodging itself in the old concrete of the bridge, right between the man's feet. The black-clad, goggled figure stepped out onto the line and tiptoed gingerly over the wire to the bridge. The jumper was frightened, and huddled against the guardrail; for several minutes the two men talked quietly, the mysterious rescuer still suspended on his line above the cold gray water. Then, the jumper closed his eyes and steeled himself for his fall, but the stranger leapt from his line as if sprung from a slingshot and tackled him, sending them both tumbling over the guardrail. While the police piled on the jumper, his rescuer stepped back over the rail, cut his line, and swung down, landing near the riverbank and disappearing into the trees. I kept the news clip, of course, and it is in this very collection. Even now it pains me to part with it, but people should remember him; I have no right to be so selfish.

Over the next two years this odd Samaritan performed many other miracles: saving women and children trapped on their rooftops by flood waters during the ice jam in the winter of 1938; rescuing a kidnapped child from a rooftop while her abductors were distracted by police; foiling an armed bank robbery by crossing to the roof and dropping bricks on the heads of the thieves as they tried to escape.

I kept every clip and photo of him I could find, taping it next to the last on my bedroom mirror. At night I would imagine him leading me across the wire, walking backwards in front of me, his hands on my hips to steady me, then drawing me to him for a kiss above the world. I am not ashamed to admit he made me a woman long before a lover ever touched my skin.

He had other admirers, of course—legions of them. Huge crowds erupted in cheers when they saw the arrows trail cables to their destinations. He was a hero, after all, a spectacle, and he

was *ours*. Had I met him on the street I would have offered myself to him freely in gratitude and love, some small reward for his selflessness. I'm sure I was not alone.

The *Sentinel* massed all the talent of its reporting staff to try to discover his identity; it was the great mystery of its time. One reporter even claimed to have narrowed his identity down to three men, whose pasts were marred by tragedies which might move them to use their skills to gain redemption: the gymnastics teacher at a local high school whose star pupil had fallen from a balance beam and broken her neck; a young Jewish performer in the Berlin Circus, who had recently emigrated from Germany; and the favored candidate, a retired tightrope-walker who had lost his wife in a tent-fire five years earlier. But none would claim to be our hero, and the mystery deepened. That failure inspired me to study journalism when I went to college, instead of pre-law as my father had hoped, that I might gain the skills to track him down.

But you believe I know something more, and perhaps you are right. I will tell you this much: he had come here to escape a hideous evil that haunted his sleep long after it had been undone, and I think using his gift to save lives helped ease his pain, for a while. That is all I can give you; I have already said too much.

You must excuse me if I still get misty-eyed speaking of him; call me sentimental, if you wish. But his heroism moved me then, and it moves me still.

All in all, he saved the lives of over fifty of our citizens—when one considers their children and grandchildren, one can only guess how many are alive today because of him. And this city was grateful, stunned by each new spectacle, casting its gaze toward the sky each time disaster struck. The courthouse mural was an expression of that gratitude, painted by an artist whose wife had been rescued from the roof of a collapsing apartment complex.

Then, in 1938, everything changed.

That June, the first garish avenger appeared in the skies above one of the great cities of the Northeast, a man who flew without wings and was strong enough to stop a locomotive at full speed. At first, I thought it a clever hoax—no earthly man could do these things. Then the pictures came through the wire services, and I had to believe. Within months there were others as well: a dark-hearted vigilante who dressed like a nocturnal creature to frighten muggers and murderers, and who could melt back into the shadows at will; a man in a winged helmet who moved faster than the eye could follow; and so many others. I see your smile; of course you know *them*. This city is obsessed with the shape of its streetlamps, the color of its bricks, the architecture of its museums, and yet so easily forgets its own hero. But I can hardly blame them. With such fantastic creatures in the world, a man who walked a tightrope to save strangers seemed pedestrian, and not unlike our city, easily overshadowed. In the national mindset ours is a town of beer and cheese and sausage, unworthy of the attention of men who can topple mountains.

But he was not deterred. He continued his artful rescues, though the crowds no longer gathered in great numbers to watch. Indeed, on that day in 1939 when I watched him save a child who had fallen out the window of a high-rise apartment and was hanging onto a flagpole for dear life, the crowd down below seemed to be looking at the sky, toward the east, hoping to glimpse the flash of a billowing cape. It never came. When he delivered the child safely to a waiting policeman's arm, the officer merely shrugged and said, "Thanks."

For its part, the newspaper relegated him to a brief mention on the fourth page. You can see it here, buried between an article on a sewage backup on the east side and a story on the library's renovations. The headlines were about other heroes in other cities, defeating clownish adversaries more like refugees from movie serials than dangerous criminals. Still, I clipped every account faithfully, taped each one in my scrapbook. My friends thought my judgment had taken a bad turn, and mocked my collection. I defended him fiercely; he was, after all, only a man, not some costumed demigod who never had to face mortality. To me, this made him special, far more so than the others.

But my friends would not be convinced; they had moved on, swooning over fuzzy pictures of square-jawed men who hid their faces behind masks. I secretly hoped he would flee to a place that would appreciate him far more than this fickle town.

And then it no longer mattered. As you know, every legend has its ending, and his was no exception. I was a witness to these events, though at the time I thought my eyes were deceiving me. On the night of June 17th, 1940, a fire broke out in the upper balcony of the Pabst Theatre due to a short in one of the lighting fixtures, during a performance by the jazz pianist Mervis Tate. My father quickly ushered me down the stairs to the floor; most of the spectators were able to make their way down the steps before the fire spread, but an elderly man became trapped on the balcony when a support beam crashed in front of him. There seemed no way to reach him—the fire trucks had yet to arrive—and we could only watch in horror as the old man stood on the steps, waiting for the flames to consume him. True to form, the line shot across the stadium from another section, as yet untouched, the cable pulled taut, and we saw the figure in black crossing to where the man was trapped. As the fire spread, spewing a thick fog of black smoke through the theatre, I lost sight of them both. Several minutes passed, and I began to cry, fearing the worst—this was a terrible death, marred by failure, and it was not worthy of him.

Suddenly the cable snapped, and swung to earth like a pendulum. I could not see beyond the smoke as the usher led us out. Two firemen carried the old man outside, then went back into the gray haze to find his rescuer. A few minutes passed, then the firemen emerged. One of them shook his head sadly.

And that, as far as anyone knew, was the end of him.

True, no body was ever found; as you can see here, the reporter who broke the story speculated that he must have been pinned beneath falling debris and burnt to ash. The elderly victim could offer no answers, either; he only remembered hearing a calming baritone above the flame and the din, saying, "Trust me. You'll be all right," then he felt the cable being tied round his waist, a foot pushing him off the ledge, and a long, terrifying swing down to the stage. A pair of firemen found him and cut him free.

Of course I secretly hoped he had escaped, and would show up the next time someone was hanging from a rooftop, or trapped in an elevator. But weeks went by without a single sighting, and I began to think he was truly lost. There was no obituary for anyone remotely matching his description, only an editorial published a few days after the fire by an anonymous columnist who suggested that he had caused those disasters himself, so he could play the hero for gawking crowds. The article went on to brand him as a misguided curiosity whose legacy was all but a sham. I cut the article out of the paper and burned it in the driveway with a kitchen match.

If that final act of self-sacrifice were truly his end, it was a good one, and I would want it remembered until the last of our buildings fell to rubble. But suppose for a moment that it was not the end of him—that his final destruction came quietly, and over time.

If you accept the possibility that he might have survived that fire, you must, of course, wonder why he never reappeared after that night. But let us assume, for argument's sake, that he did survive, with serious but non-life-threatening burns. He might have been treated anonymously in a nearby hospital; no one would have noticed a lone man among the other victims, or asked him the cause of his injuries. He would have returned home to convalesce, resting until he could stage another death-defying rescue. By then the reporters were no longer looking for him, though any man nursing such burns would be easy to find, considering the existing leads. Now, imagine that a nineteen-year-old girl, who had some brief academic preparation in investigative journalism, took it upon herself to find him—not to expose him, but merely to express her gratitude, to look upon the unconcealed face of a man who might once have saved her from certain death.

And one day, just maybe, she found him in a bungalow in one of the little neighborhoods on

the lake just south of the city—in a small backyard bordered by thick hedges, where she saw a lean man with short-cropped black hair and goatee, who at first glance seemed to be walking on the air itself, suspended a few feet above the ground. A closer look would have revealed that he was walking on a wire, almost effortlessly. I think this young woman would have been ecstatic to have finally found him, for she must have kept him in her thoughts for all that time, shunning lesser men who tried to court her.

She would have introduced herself, told him gently that she knew his secret, but desired only to know the man who had saved her years before. Their newfound friendship may have turned physical, though she would have had to take great care at first because of his injuries.

If you can believe all this, I ask you to make one more leap of imagination, and we can surmise that the his end might have come not in fire, or a fall from a great height, but in a doctor's office some months later, his hand on her belly, his face a portrait of serenity and peace. She would later come to realize that, in that instant, the man she had dreamt of vanished. In his place was a kind and decent man who would never perform his miracles again.

It seems a strange demise, I know. But is it such a leap to believe such a thing could have ended him? At first, when there was a siren in the distance or a crisis reported on the radio, he might have shot out of his chair, looking toward the attic where his bow and coils of wire lay in dust-covered boxes; she may even have watched him with a giddy joy, hoping he would save the day one more time. But perhaps hearing his baby girl jabbering in her playpen sapped his desperate need to act, and as he cradled her pudgy body he would melt back into his recliner.

Considering his past, you might even call such a life boring, especially for his young wife. Sometimes when he made love to her, perhaps she asked him to wear the goggles—just for fun, she would insist. And perhaps on rare occasions she would try to climb up on the low-hanging wire in the backyard, touching the line hesitantly with her toe, until he emerged from the house, climbed up on the other side, and guided her across, rewarding her with a brief kiss when she reached the end. Such moments must have filled her with an unbearable sense of loss, and I have no doubt she regretted every one.

Of course, I have no tangible proof of this; call it the product of an old lady's fertile imagination. I will not be offended.

But I came to you for a reason. These boxes contain all the surviving evidence of his adventures: his goggles, bow and specially-designed arrows, a rusty coil of the wire he used, his pole, every press clipping and photo of him ever taken—including many which were never published, and which I obtained at great cost. You may not ask how or where I found them, but they are yours if you wish; they have been well cared-for. It is not much, but it would be enough to place in a convenient corner, under a blown-up version of that single, telling photograph. He deserves at least that much—a small niche of his own, so we can all remember him as he was.

I give these few meager items to you in the hope that you treat them with the respect they deserve. Once I leave this room you could throw all this in the dumpster, or place these boxes in storage to be buried under an impenetrable layer of dust. I cannot stop you. But in sharing them with the world, you can correct a grave injustice, perpetrated upon this city's greatest hero by a foolish girl who did not know her love would destroy him.

Poems by Lisa Haviland

Channeling

through, like water
passes by
without pause
These strung-together
intimacies feel
so insoluble.
Today
a trap drawer
has damned off
the waves bred
by his hands, her
waist, those miles
away.

Addiction

White trash junkie
in your cuffed sleeves
and black boots:
Standard Issue.
A bird with clipped wings,
pecking
a
way
with
you.

GESTURES

ellen reich

birds sing in tune
a woman hears it so
fluted melodies
woven within her
a loom full of skylarks

a young man rinses himself
in the stream's braided water
from its soft bed
he gathers pebbles
links splashes

sky—thin among pines filters light
releases fragrant clarity
face in wet stone
the ripple of may flowers
owl's hush

draw out pink in rocks to sculpt rosebuds
catch green flecks from eyes
to form leaves
turn to the bend of one woman
dependent on such slow grace

moon's obsession
with the constant chant
of night sea's thirst
a spilling of the peach
more than the peach

COLD METAL, I TASTE A ROSE

ellen reich

*give me ashes for my death
and from ash will grow ivy*

wheat and wood
feather waterstone
a womb
a vessel
a straight hand
her own
without lungs she breathes
ivy sustains
traverses a leg
leaves old dark
dusty shiny vibrant
silk and plant merge
vines caress limbs
she is near the sea
uncovered sand adheres
her waist wet earth
diving up from primordial seaweed
she needs no hands to propel
she is a wave
her nipples drip brine milk
body hairs are moss
she draws breath from muscles
peels flesh away
egg-cell is her center
she will rebirth pull reeds from water
she will rise mystify forage multiply
rushes seduce
she slashes second growth
frees herself into saltwater
there is no courtship here
she mounts an undersea wind
sings in the darkness
such passages must be swum alone

WINTER AND TREE
ellen reich

winter keeps light
in its control
on iced boughs

tree snaps
with weight
ice-slick branches

fly frozen
into bleak air
and with it bark

dark sap
like desire's semen
bitter winter

temperature stuck
at 3 below
I am afraid of winter

BROWN AND RED EARTH

ellen reich

after reading *Black and White Stone* by Octavio Paz

A man fertilizes
 thawing dirt
the earth erupts
 bursting fins and flint
 along the scales of winter

In the music of melting
 earth's colors

 into his veins fling

He rests
 with ears open
 a melody
 on the soles of his feet

Pebbles listen
 they are eight
 eight agates
 eight waves
 eight oil drops poured
 eight silences
 on a sea of whale bones
 eight pieces of coral

The earth will bear
 yet again

Frauenkirche, 1995
Michael Ogletree

Standing among the rubble,
I force breath in and out and wait
for sense to settle in like morning dew.

I will wait all day.

Sleepy Dresden , your fallen lady
can't wake up. Her paintings
are ash, her pews mulched to pulp.
I stare at the altar that pierces the leaden air
like one of Saint Sebastian's arrows.
Prayers rise from the congregation—
six-thousand tons of stone.

The tour guide smiles; he tells of plans
to rebuild, to wipe her wounds with a salve
of mortar and diplomacy. As the others smile along,

I walk to the banks of the Elbe
and remember my grandmother in her coffin
wearing more makeup dead than alive.
I ask the river, who remembers,
if we will forget the face of our brutality
after all our scars are bandaged.
The Elbe whispers back, the whip
of wind on water, and sighs toward the sea.

Quel che se fissa, se fa

Regina O'Melveny

*Whatever she sees, she
creates.*

- A Venetian proverb regarding
an expectant mother

Which is why the paintings of masters
were often lent to the villas
of prosperous mothers-in-waiting.

*Let me look upon beauty, chiaro-
scuro rendered from egg yolk and pigments.
Let my child embody grace.*

Yet what if the mother perceives a quirk -
the bared teeth of a gold-leashed
monkey riding a dromedary?

*Ah! the exotic creatures
of Gentile da Fabriano
in the Adoration of the Magi.*

Or the quarrelsome back of the
other monkey crouching as the Magi
proffer gifts to the King of Peace?

*Let me take in the whole triptych then,
from the long shadows of procession
to the pastiglia collar of the hound.*

What of the tempera world, its fathomless
cave behind the child, the rude crib,
the mournful eyes of the ox?

*My eye must not rest on any one
thing unduly but move from lunette
to lunette in the story.*

And the men behind the kings who
grin, converse and stare upward in fear
at what we cannot see?

*I will view them at night by candle,
the gold leaf made greater by darkness,
the unseen made great by the seen.*

The handmaidens' secretive lips? The split
pomegranate, the soundless whinnies of
terrified horses? The spurs?

*Let my eyes absorb artifice and suffering.
The aged King cloaked in gold, bends to all fours
in the dirt and kisses the baby's new toes!*

What of your maid there also pregnant
who tends the living sores of her mother
and plucks rats from the granary?

*Avoiding cruelty, my eyes must be
cruel. Avoiding disease, my hands
invisibly afflicted.*

Will her child be born doltish, grotesque?
What of Herod's castle in the background,
the unnamed children slaughtered for the one?

*And who are you there, artisan poet
to question my wish for peace?
my desire for a consummate child?*

I don't exist at another's expense,
though my quarrel isn't entirely with you.
We didn't conceive this world.

*Are you so sure you don't exist at my expense,
at my servant's? Everyday we fashion
the world by what we choose to see.*

Is the painting an oval story then,
the artist servant to her art or art beholden
to its creator? Let me look again at illusion.

*Sometimes a blessing arises
from the moment of seeing
the perpetual sadness of things.*

Is this what the mother regards there
in the painting? Her child, the king,
or the child's hand upon the king's bald head?

*Look to your own wall, poet. Look to your own
prayers. I am tired and must sleep now.
The child turns within.*

it was once called
r g gregory

it comes like a convict
squeezing through bars
and is gone before
the promptest siren

it suddenly turns
in the ear or rides
the eye of a thought
before dissolving

i have it in a faint
taste or shudder
an ache like a spring
high in the mountains

it was once called love
and now a longing
for a song to be heard
that doesn't bear singing

In the Hands of Water

Shannon Joyce Prince

The Melusine in her Senescence (A Portrait of an Urban Siren)

There are other men and women like me who live above storefront restaurants where the people fry their fragrant memories of far, far, away homelands into profit, telling the history of their dishes if you smile at them, placing the coins of one nation into hands whose jewelry marks them as being heirs to another, folk who remember in one language and plan in a second. They live on a street named after an activist with a storefront church on the corner, the preacher more an oracle than a theologian enjoining all the people on their fold-out chairs to shout the fact of their redemption, and the congregation is small, but the denomination powerful, at least among those for whom sating, healing, and pleasing the body is never a series of whimsical spontaneities but a delicate monetary balance.

Else they are like me and live in a small parrot colored house with a porch and at least one beautiful ancient tree behind, in a neighborhood where the young men are universally considered menaces no matter how doe-vulnerable their eyes are. A place where verbs undergo metamorphosis before they are spoken and nouns are passed through alchemical ritual prior to inflection, which is to say, others scorn the beauty in our rarefied grammars, not that this silences us, though it does circumscribe the worlds through which we can move. A place where lack is a presence, where nothing is an entity, where poverty isn't a possible era to be prepared for but a certain reality to be reckoned with (familiar if not benign), and in these places the struggle is communal, the delights subversive, the oppression hereditary. A place where the fight means that growing old makes you not only an elder to be cared for, but an ancestor to be revered. Here, though there is no lack of the divinely eccentric, the trouble and joy that has fallen into each of the old lives is remarkably harmonious, community meaning others' splendors and aches are familiar and comprehensible, the past allows disparate seniors to lay claim to each other, leaving us often interchangeable in the eyes of the young. In such lairs, children seem to become grown early like blossoms forced open in winter, people fear for the youths vulnerable as a robin hatched too soon, attempting to soar while studded with merely the roots of feathers. And yet, yet they manage the blue, they accomplish the sky, and though this is cause for rejoicing it is not a matter of surprise.

What I mean to say, is that I live among people for whom the difficult is assimilated into living and yet the living continues on and on.

* * *

My name is Nephrolepis, which is what people give me. As well as the three Nephrolepis in my kitchen, my porch is full of them. Nephrolepis flutter star-like at the rafters, balance alert on the rails, and settle on the floor. I think, subconsciously, people give them to me in such profusion to insure my viability. They must think I need Nephrolepis to remain whole or sane, or perhaps, visible. That without the plants I would vanish, and their fear has become my own. I imagine that if my Nephrolepis died or were stolen, my flesh would turn cloud gray and cloud ephemeral, cirrus-style I would be whisked away into nothing.

Through their gifts of Nephrolepis, my neighbors construct me, elide me with the grotto-like clutter of water ferns at the front of my house, assure me an identity. I am not sure if they do this for me or for them, yet it continues. Holidays having become unnecessary now that people have gotten into the rhythm of it, some even give me Nephrolepis without any particular thought of me as the recipient, in the same way that some people drop coins into the collection plate. They learn to

associate the pointy leaves with the exotic name, see the plant and I come to mind. They bring Nephrolepis not in an attempt to earn a smile nor refreshment nor friendship, but because it has become appropriate to do so. Because they have decided that my home is where Nephrolepis belong.

I have never told anyone how wildly uncorrelated my name is with the plants I am given. The first time I was given one was by my husband, forty one years ago, and I didn't even realize he was alluding to me. So many folks have spent so many years generously assigning me this identity that not from politeness, but because I have long since partly morphed into the individual they believed me to be, I have never divulged the secret self. Now I walk with both identities. I am the old woman of brown skin ripe with plum tones and wild hair as gray as oak bark and porch full of tropical ferns. But none of that has anything to do with the actual truth of my name.

Nephrolepis for my parents conjured river waves splitting to reveal a forbidden aqueous kingdom. It meant water that churned sierra green immiscible with a sea god's turquoise. Connoting the blue and emerald marbled light in a shark's eye, the cyan thunder that drums over islands, my parents thought Nephrolepis a mermaid's name. Nephrolepis ferns can only be where there is a body of water, and water was the only part of the plant's name my parents associated with me. I cannot really explain, easily or briefly, to anyone why my parents leaned into the mythic when naming me, so I let them believe what they like about botany.

The flora explanation does not protect me.

Mermaid love is like jatropha fruit, something has gone wrong in the crafting of the beauty. I am too devout to call it a failure of God; perhaps it is the way the sun acts to mute the promise of green nectar, it might be a matter of how the lunar gold of the moon enflames the sea. Something gets lost in the desire of these beings to enjoy. Mermaids can never align though they might long. The storytellers and poets of the world have reached a consensus: the siren's song is a eulogy. Mermaids are perpetually desirous, the ever-weeping starved folk of the sea. My song is not different, my heart no less viscerally wounded. I love as tragically as an ocean crone.

I had heard the stories, yet until my womanhood began, I did not believe. My femininity, my life commenced with this home before it was mine, a house a blur of vermillion, citric orange, and spoonbill pink. People who didn't know its story might have thought that it was an odd house for a man to live in, but I thought it looked like a flower, a man's domain yet a woman's invitation. I remember the first day I saw the house, solemn silver thunderclouds crouched all around it, illuminating its bloom. Ebon, my husband-to-be, called out to me and his voiced drew me together. A second before his words were born I was nothing more than the green in the leaves of the trees that arced over our street, the laughing light of bicycle wheels from passing boys, the bowl of a blue poppy jostled about by the wind. I had no consciousness of myself as a self, I was only a spirit, a gaze, an ear for the mockingbirds, an eye for the amber cat lurking through the streets. And those senses and forces became joined together by his call, "Hello, there. What are you doing out in this rain?"

I had not noticed any rain, I had not before inhabited the body upon which rain could fall, but when he mentioned the rain I saw the silver pieces of the sky falling liquid down and saw myself among them as he must see me, my wine brown skin colored as if my mere presence on earth were a flushing exertion, the hundred black plaits blowing wet about my shoulders. And I couldn't answer him, just like later I wouldn't be able to explain my name, I never could speak on myself, I just smiled at him and he looked perhaps like he understood what it was like to feel barely bound to earth, only tentatively real.

Ebon was a tall slender man, all smooth slopes like a carving, dark enough for his name not to belie him. Thirty one years my senior at fifty three, I didn't think of him as a number. I thought how it felt we were being knit together by threads of wind blown rain, as if God were walking figure eights

about us. It was an Eden moment, and his house kindled like a bright ibis in the storm. He held out his hand and I followed him with the same trust that you follow a gentle hermit through the woods. He was no stranger to me – all of us in this neighborhood were netted together like the webbed roots of a peach tree. I'd seen his face turn honey and sea green with the light from Paul's cloak in the stained glass window at church, seen him bent over his flowers every April – everybody who lived within that mass of streets in the heart of the city knew who were the folk who sent their lovers' teeth flying from their mouths and who fed strays – kids, cats, prostitutes, and though drug dealers, gangsters, and vandals assured there was no lack of danger, none of it was covert. We all knew each other, and I knew I'd be safe walking into Ebon's house, though I didn't know one day it'd be my own.

"You got a taste for anything? I have some spaghetti on the stove."

"Mmm, did you put basil in this or sage?"

"Sage, always, with a bit of mint."

"It's good to have something warm when it rains."

"Something warm and James Baldwin."

"Else Etheridge..."

"What you think of our alderman?"

"He's not half trying, not half trying for any of those children in the schools..."

"And the preacher?"

"Good, old to be so young..."

We talked as softly as rain falls from a roof, sometimes skimming what was deeper within us, and what we grazed was attractive to us, drew us closer, revealed our cards were a match, a win, like God remembered in some game to turn both of us face up and was smiling. I kept coming back, talking over the arcane and the common, talking about the living and the ghosts, and I fell in love with him when our talk looped upwards to Heaven and caught his first wife, her name an Urdu word for Gardenia.

"Her hands started hurting her, kinking up on her by surprise, and she went to the doctor figuring she'd get some medicine for arthritis (Interlude for photos of a beauty with a bindi sparkling preternaturally on her forehead) But the doctor said it wasn't arthritis, it was Lou Gehrig's disease and there was no treatment and no cure (A moment to pretend not to weep and another to pretend not to see) One morning she'd wake up and couldn't walk (I don't see that tear) a little later she couldn't breathe on her own (Or that one either) only about a year and she was gone."

"How normal after that abnormalcy? How human after that disruption of life's pattern, like a maple tree going red in the spring?" My words broke, perhaps mirroring the pieces of his heart. They broke into colorful glass pieces on the floor and crushed together along with his despoiled love.

"We had always wondered why we couldn't have a child – her ovaries, perfect, my seeds, lovely, her blood, trustworthy, my entrances, tender, but in between loss of feeding herself and incontinence, she struck upon the secret to our curse. It was her *name*. Gardenia, the night blooming flower, she couldn't bear fruit on this earth. Gardenia, the night blooming flower, was ready, generously anticipatory in her readiness, pondering the dust sepia, mahogany, and clay colored she would give her body to, imagining the calla lilies and bright grass that might one day come to be from her form, she imagined heavenly light, lunar, and she clutched to her name, posthumous fruition. I bathed her, I combed her hair, set lilac glass bangles about her wrists as if for a sacrament, and I draped the wagtail yellow sari over her ever disappearing form like a magician trying to keep his secrets. Angels were stealing her from me bit by bit until she was less and less and finally God did his work, my eyes were closed with dreams as tightly as Adam's, yet inverting that moment He took her from me."

Ebon never stopped loving Gardenia, and I never thought it was necessary. After all, I loved

Gardenia, and I loved Ebon for loving Gardenia, and it was by his love for her that I knew he'd be a good husband to me. I was twenty-two and he was fifty-three and once I moved into the house it seemed an appropriate hue, as if a man who'd live in a home that color would do anything to make a woman happy.

* * *

Mermaids have no speech, they have song, but the lyrics contain no discourse or rhetoric, they are merely blind expressions of or invitations to desire. Mermaids are narrated, they are not heard. Does the audience or do the sea folk insist on this silence? Are we not ready for the words that would come, millennia of inherited hunger among the reflections of stars in the sea? Like we turn away from the urgency of homeless men's eyes, look down before veterans' glances? Perhaps it is the mermaids themselves who don't wish to crack open the misery they have locked away inside themselves. Or the inevitably finite joy.

It is that way with me and my ten years of wonderland.

I don't speak and folks don't ask about my happiness, because I cannot stand the horror of its ending. I say horror, and not surprise, because the longer I loved him the keener my vague sense of the consequences of mermaidhood became. Loving him was like playing under a red sun, and though preoccupied with the game, slightly aware that the light is imperiled, about to tip over the side of the earth and evade immortality. Loving him became longing for him became slightly wistful. I loved him like we love not during autumn season with sure beauty bright inseparable from winter doom, but Christmas season love tempered by the melancholy Easter, knowing as you twirl the lights up the tree is dying.

When Ebon had his heart attack at age sixty three, I couldn't stand to think of selecting a black suit or farewell Biblical poetry or coaxing the appropriate panegyrics from the minister. So I didn't. I thought of his ashes becoming soil and being decanted by sunlight. I thought of deer coming, a stag heavy with boughs of antlers, or a doe followed by a reticent fawn. I imagined them bending towards grass my husband had borne by being mortal, grass rising like spiky bits of bottle glass from the earth. It may seem macabre that I fixated on his death so deeply and skirted around the pleasure of our lives together, but I could bear the sadness that surrounded me, I couldn't stand to think of the happiness I had lost. Siren song haunting and penetrating, artful grief, lovely keening, my misery has a lexicon, my bliss rends me silent.

And just as I was imagining the red brown crown of a doe, her head bending towards vivid grass swaying under rain, something began in me. An unfolding, an interruption, a contradiction, a harbinger, a collision, an elision, and dimly I recognized before a trip to the bathroom, before comparing my blood to my calendar, before the royal confirmation of my doctor, gently I knew.

My first thought was, "Ebon will be happy to have a child in the house." My second thought was, "Gardenia will be happy to have a child in the house." But then the veracity of it struck me in a way terrible and contenting, the baby was completely mine. My thought as I phrased it however was, "I am completely this baby's." I couldn't tell who was giving life to whom, who was the other's spring.

* * *

Espantebujera... to scare the witch, statues raised on Catelano rooftops to scourge evil, but this is the inner city, row houses and chain link fences, and she has only me to espantebujera, hush, baby, hush, Mama won't let nothing get you – I gave her Sapphire as her name to tell the world, and her secret name is Sapphire of the Beautiful Sky, Sapphire of the Forest Green, everybody knows about the azure stones, dark as blueberries, powerful with lore, but I have seen them also, rare, teal crystalline green, and I named her for both worlds alluded to by the jewel, sea-colored space and

ancient wood, but at school you just tell 'em Sapphire, baby, keep your secret self safe, you just tell 'em Sapphire, baby, that's all they need to know... my wish for her, a life without prose, grand lyrical flights for all her days, seeing the wizard in every crone, look only at the world through your secret Sapphire eyes... I got me a smart one, she read everything she could get her hands on, knew all about Charles Wright and Gaudi and she had folklore brains, too, she knew 8 times 8 is 64 but also that stone soup is nothing but love... you a mess, you know that? you Mama's little mess, what do you look like old enough to be in a bra and still licking the batter out the mixing bowl? look at you in that beautiful prom dress, you're the prettiest girl in the world, you really are, I am so proud, you got that high school degree, I am so proud, Sapphire, baby, I am so proud.

* * *

I was delighted with Sapphire when she became a woman, that round number twenty was what I considered her womanhood year, watching her shine full in bloom after two decades, teaching sculpture to glorious underestimated kids at the local community center, her long hair twisted under geles, Duke Ellington intimating wondrous things throughout the classroom. I was proud of her in the arenas she inhabited, seeing her beside me with her diligent pink highlighter at church, her apartment with its replicated-Sowo masks and organic vegetables. Her style was something that hadn't existed in Ebon's time or Gardenia's, surprised me to be contemporary with it, to understand how the Harlem Renaissance rose again with coral dawn light filtering into hip hop beats, African garb and hood textiles mingled on the form as if the ancestors were walking amusedly through the city streets, gentile poverty no longer the realm of the aristocracy but now a new method of revolution, loyalty and politics aesthetic, expressed while being present in the projects, in the playgrounds, on the street corners, hands dirty and wrists full of foreign bracelets.

Sapphire was a beautiful jewel, my African violet, a young adored pharaoh – her students worshipped her, her peers made a curriculum from her library card, and she had a few boys she liked to laugh with but nobody she loved. Until Nicholas.

I can see why Sapphire loved Nicholas, he looks like the Akan gold carvings she so adores and his hair is a bouquet of black dreadlocks tied together behind his head that reach his waist. He was here in the inner city with us, but I knew by his smile he wasn't one of us – it was the smile of an explorer who had swam upon coral reef of dazzling fish. But his smile wasn't merely one of appreciation – though beautiful, it was the smile of one who sees a difference between himself and the second world he has entered and cannot let this difference simply be. He half-consciously subsumes it under a hierarchy. The being finds himself superior when he reflects on himself and decides only his gaze is privileged, only he can truthfully see himself and the objects of his vision, that those he saw had neither the scope to gaze upon themselves nor comprehend him. Perhaps it is the privilege of his mobility that allows this condescension, his ability to either leave or remain, to visit our world while we cannot join his. It was in this way that Nicholas looked at me, at the students who he had deigned to teach for two years after getting his graduate degree from an acclaimed university. It was not how he saw Sapphire. Sapphire was one of his folk to him, a recognition and not a discovery, never mind her poverty, never mind her lack of advanced schooling, something in her beauty, her wisdom, redeemed what she lacked. And what I didn't like was that he saw himself as rescuing her, taking her from a world which she was too ignorant to know she was too knowledgeable to belong to. And what surprised me was that she was wooed by this derision.

She loved the way he dazzled her with a rare Hyacinth macaw on Valentine's Day. Even loved the way he terrified her with a trip to Ghana's slave castle. He'd come around the house, always polite to me, smiling consolingly as if he'd beaten me at tennis.

I remember the day after I flew back from the wedding. Nicholas had married my daughter in

a church dedicated to the saint he was appropriately named for, and I had looked desperately to the other patrons on the walls for a miracle. I was in a beautiful shantung dress Nicholas's mother had offered me, certain nothing I had would be appropriate. The wedding had been in New York, where Nicholas lived, where he fled with his treasure, my Sapphire. Done with the proletariats, he allowed Sapphire to select for them a gorgeous brownstone in gentrified Harlem. He would begin his career as a publisher, and Sapphire would work at an antique art gallery run by a St. Nevis expatriate.

I stood shivering among my Nephrolepis. Something had felt wrong with the high cold air of the plane coming home, the gold autumn air of the city, the solicitous ventilated air of my home. I didn't trust any oxygen that hadn't been immediately manufactured by my ferns. I felt like a fish drowning above water, my life irrevocably changed.

I'd always wanted Sapphire to be loved, but to be loved in the world we shared between us. I thought I would delight in one day giving Sapphire away, I just never expected that she would be asked to do the same of me. Because that, in New York, was really what Nicholas had demanded of Sapphire. Not loyalty through sickness nor devotion through poverty, not heartfelt obedience or dusk deep trust, but renunciation of me and all that I represented.

In the time after the wedding plans, the money locked in my bank account and pinned under my mattress was comparable to the stores of an industrious child, and I didn't know when I'd have enough to see Sapphire again. Cleaning office buildings didn't get you much traveling fare, and already I was desperate for her. But when I phoned she gave me no more than a score of minutes before defecting to research an art piece or go to dinner with Nicholas. I could imagine the restaurants where they ate, places with indecipherable abstract art on the walls, the kind whose incomprehensibility would render me aesthetically illiterate. Sitar, Fulani drum, or complex jazz played live and gently in the background. Upscale soul food, gourmet Italian peasant, people like Nicholas couldn't stand food without oxymorons. I supposed they'd come home to their candle-filled house and cuddle under an antebellum blanket, kiss under the indifferent gazes of John Biggers sketches.

"I wish I could be there, baby, for Christmas. I really do. But it's just that salary they pay me's not enough for a ticket."

"I understand, Mama. We'll be thinking of you."

And I'd call around noon on Christmas, "Mama, we were just about to serve this delightful yam fou fou Nicholas's dad made. I'll call you back, okay?" Okay if she were to, but she doesn't. And she doesn't come home to me.

And she didn't call me to explain the lack of grandchildren. I asked her in jest, in passing, when she revealed to me how she allowed her mother-in-law to lie alongside her and comfort her after a tumor-induced hysterectomy. She let me hear from a neighbor about being "one to watch" in an art world magazine. I stared at the picture, at what she had morphed into, a girl with a warm small child's smile and dreadlocks tipped in cowrie shells and wooden beads. Avian in a rich green silk gown, her arms were thrown around Nicholas in a way that connoted camaraderie as much as romance. I could see why she was one to watch, why she had enraptured the realm she had entered, why they would forgive her her lack of breeding, college, and childhood wealth. And surrounded by guests at a party wearing enough pearls to empty an ocean and a pillaged tribe's worth of foreign gold, I could see why the praise that came from people who knew the difference between Akyem and Ashanti art, how various French political reigns had affected chair styles, and if Japanese or Indian incense was more soothing was be worth more to her than someone who didn't know her way around the hierarchies and loved her without qualification anyways.

* * *

When Sapphire did come to visit me, I was stunned. The doorbell rang –

“I’ll be there,” I called out. I set down my book and drifted over to the door and when I opened it there she was, elegant, seven years older, already unhappy with me. She looked at me, my long uncombed gray hair, my faded housedress, the holey socks on my feet, but she didn’t look surprised or sad, merely irritated. She looked at me and audibly sighed as if confirming what she had always known to be true of me, but it wasn’t true, she wasn’t remembering me right. She didn’t leave me because I was this haggard creature; this raggedy apparition was what I had become in her absence. Nobody to look nice for, nobody to love – I had fallen apart. The house was showing earlier azures, sunflower, plum, and seafoam green through the failing scarlet, and my Nephrolepis were tending towards copper and gray.

“Baby,” I said. I reached for her and she jolted back as if shocked, then bent towards me. “Come in, baby,” I breathed full of love and awe. My house was *not* a mess, which just meant God was being benevolent, because I let it go, usually, in my heartache and didn’t clean it until moved to exceptional agitation when I needed something to soothe me. The relative order of my house, however, did not mean that I had something in the kitchen to offer her. “Sit down, Baby. All I got is some lemonade, some cookies.”

She looked at me as if I hadn’t done my homework.

“That’s fine,” she said, as if only to calm me.

“How have you been, baby? I know you’ve been busy.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I have.”

“You like working in that art gallery?”

“Yes, Mama.”

“And you and Nicholas are happy?”

“Yes, Mama, yes.” She was annoyed with my small talk, but she had closed me out for so long, I was only looking for away back.

“Baby you should have told me you were coming. I would have had something good cooked for you. Oh my! Remind me to call work tomorrow to tell those people I won’t be coming in.”

“Mama, you don’t have to.”

I froze, raw and sad.

“I’m only staying here tonight.”

“Just tonight, baby, with that big suitcase?”

“Yes, I...” She looked around the shabby house, at the empty refrigerator, at me, dismantled before her. “I can’t stay.”

We walked to the door, and when I tried to hug her again, she wouldn’t even yield towards me. “Baby, please.”

She reached forward and combed her fingernails through my hair like I used to do her before church, and it wasn’t unkind or condemning, it was just like she wanted to get me ready and adorned for her absence.

Three years have passed since then, and I am resigned to my Nephrolepis, their devoted guardian. I water the leaves, I taste the soil for minerals, I buy plant vitamins and plant meds. They are all I have – they and my legend. Daddy, Mama, you made me a mermaid. Is this what you meant for me? To love and sing sweetly that love’s demise? To be imprisoned within the barriers of poverty and class, as surely as if I lacked the limbs to go forwards into the horizon? For every attempt towards my beloved to ache as though I trod on knives?

I am what I am, I give my love to my plants, I consult the dead about the possibility. Ebon, Gardenia, can you hear me? If you are spirits are you connoisseurs of the intangible? What has this heartache done to my soul?

I am frantic over my Nephrolepis, perpetually on the porch, I check throughout the day that my

limbs are still attached. I am, of course, retired, two years before my sixty-fifth birthday, but I was becoming incapable and incoherent, too much the stereotype some businessmen think poor black people are. When they recognized their myth in me, I knew it was time to leave.

What I am is someone who never existed until blown together by love, someone who previously was a mere figment, like a jinn, and dependent upon love like woven threads to remain whole. Without it, I was going back to being a breeze, a light, a sense, a presence, a haunting, a wonder, a waiting.

And now that I have fallen victim to the connotations of the secret of my name, I wonder if the misunderstandings of its popular assumption can save me. I am nymph to the Nephrolepis. If we could go back, if my name were different, would my life be? If I had not named my daughter for a jewel the color of two worlds would she have been able to leave one for a second? Something tells me the names of things are arbitrary – how would a different title have protected me from suffering? Would it have healed Ebon's worn out heart? But names seem awfully portent in the Bible.

It is arguments like this that I spend hours on, forgetting to eat or change clothes. I am waiting for something to succumb in me as it did in Ebon and Gardenia. That is all. I wonder if a mass in my breast would return Sapphire to me. Perhaps a stroke or a broken hip.

I wonder what people think of me sitting up on this porch floor among my plants like a gecko or bee. I think of what the neighborhood children say, at what point my eccentricities will convert into rumors of witchhood. I guess at what their parents conclude – do I look old enough to be addled by Alzheimer's? But my peers – surely they must know why I am on the decline; they have seen their children dispatched into the universities and stately homes, never mind prisons and crack houses never to return.

And they, too, are in danger of disappearance. All our lives we have been on the proximity of desperation, who knew we would ever hover on the brink of style? Better off folks come now, in pairs and families, like pilgrims, watchful and wary. They claim this is better for schools, for business, perhaps for those of us who can hold on. The family across the street from me is black, which makes it less of an affront, but gentile like no one around here is. I hear the woman is a teacher, I don't know what the man is, and they got a six year old girl. I see the woman staring at me among my Nephrolepis, a cautionary tale. Something in my frayed garb and worn house paint makes it impossible for her to extinguish the disapproval in her eyes, even when her mouth smiles beneath them. I stare back at her, too weary to be ashamed, until my gaze invades her irises, assaults her body. Whatever I am to her, decrepit, destitute, I can intimidate her, though that is not my goal; I just wish to make my regard equal to hers.

I know what she fears: not me, but how I became this, and what her daughter will be. Just like I know what she wishes, for me and mine to die or be driven out so that we are no longer a menace. She will raise her little girl but that doesn't mean my spectre, the sight of me on this ancient porch won't have an influence as well.

The woman across the street and I meet all the time, we smile and murmur but never speak. Under the pseudo-lunar light of grocery store aisles, above the broken sidewalk, across the street waiting for the mailman, we stare and suppose, create allegories of each others lives, silence being fertile for creativity. We think we know everything about each other. I am here because of a predictable plethora of social, historical, financial, and political reasons that college has taught her to analyze, she is here because of an interplay of willed and destined realities that proximity to power as a service worker has taught me to recognize. We have decided that it is not necessary to speak to be intimate, but locked in communal space diametrically across the avenue, we have bewitched each other. I am old, poor, and (she hopes) this neighborhood's past, though I look to remain its majority for awhile. She is young, educated, and part of urban destiny – its promise.

Her gaze unravels me, it seconds all of Sapphire's suspicions, I know it will send me to Ebon

and Gardenia. I feel myself dismantling under her disparagement. Ebon, all your alchemy is wearing off. There are entire hours missing from my life – I find myself drifting into a window's view in yellow light and being surprised to return to consciousness under sable sky. Not only can I not remember the light changing but also the dreams my mind shifted through in reverie. Geophagy and narcolepsy, I eat anything, a smooth pebble, saccharine grass or dirt, I sleep anywhere, at bath perilously, or it would be if I weren't a mermaid, alas, I always wake on earth.

I stumble like a buccaneer drunk on stolen love to my porch, from the Hell of my first name I struggle to enter the myth of the second. This takes all my energy and I lie down in the pearlescent light that creaks between the crimps of Nephrolepis leaves. I wonder if I'll have company. The dark Ebon, the lovely Gardenia. Would they lie next to me like kids at summer solstice lacking all faith that blissful heat will end or that they will ever age, lie beside me and claim me for the next world?

I awaken, not like when light sneaks beyond your dream-blinded eyes and the symbols of your reveries mix with the truths of the morning, not under the gaze of the sun but that of a child. I awaken and she is watching me silently, a comb in one hand, a brush in the other. I wonder what I must look like. To my former employers I was a faceless drudge, to my neighbors, a sister worn ragged, to my new neighbors, perhaps a ne'er-do-well, to Sapphire, a downfall, but to her – she looks at me so serenely I cannot gauge. It is the little girl from across the street, it is morning, and my habitually disheveled form is further distressed by sleep.

“Can I play in your hair?” she says softly. I am disoriented. I guess I expected a rebuke.

“Can I, please?” she adds, thinking my quiet is a way of scolding her.

I nod, sitting up now and solemn. She comes behind me and grabs my shoulder firmly and tenderly and begins pulling at the tangles straight from the root. “What's your name?” she asks me.

Nephrolepis. If I lied would it make any difference to the morning, to her, to fate?

“Nephrolepis,” I tell her.

“What's a Nephrolepis?” she asks me.

“It depends,” I say, my scalp alternately burned by the fine teeth of the comb and soothed by her baby-soft hands. “Grows like a plant, weeps like a woman. Sometimes it wilts; sometimes it's green and sun-warmed. Sometimes it's something terribly lonely, incomprehensible even to the community, alone and singing heartbrokenly.”

“Which one are you?” she asks me.

I cannot bear this child. I cannot bear her gentle, assaulting, earnest questions. I cannot bear what she makes me say and think.

“I don't know,” I shrug, inadvertently loosening the comb from her grip. “How come you came to do my hair?”

“'Cause I asked my mama why it was always like that, and she said you didn't have a mama to comb it.”

“No,” I agree, relieved, given all that the woman could have said. “I'm old. You hungry?” I add.

“Yes.”

In the kitchen I realize yet again that I am not really stocked. “I got ice cream,” I say. She glows.

“We can have ice cream in the morning?”

“Yeah,” I say. “Don't tell your mother.” She smiles as I pull down two ceramic bowls. Sugar at dawn, such witch-like seduction. Alluringly wild silver hair and the promise of forbidden pleasure, a young child and a house worn rainbow by its years, it is almost allegorical.

“Do your mama know where you are?” If I were younger and not addled, this would be the first thing I'd have asked.

She looks at me from under her hooked eyelashes. “I told her I was gonna play on the street.”

I look to the different hoops of kids playing jumping and clapping games along the street under the communal eye of the neighborhood adults. “I better tell her you with me. But finish your ice cream first.”

When I take her back to her mother, whom I learn is called Hera, she looks at me both gratefully and disapprovingly, reminding me I still haven’t changed from my never ironed house dress that does double duty as nightie.

“I thought she was gonna be out on the street,” she says as means of apology. “I hope she didn’t bother you.”

Surprised me, woke me, I think. But she didn’t bother me. “I like her company,” I say.

“I didn’t finish her hair yet,” says the child. I’m scared to ask her name – is it superstition if life experience validates your fear?

Hera looks at me. “It needs doing,” I point out.

“Alright,” her mama says. “But do it over here.”

It is a testament both to my irresponsibility and her discipline that spring comfort has changed to summer punishment before the knots in my silver locks are gone. And while I attribute qualities, I might as well add Hera, who, at her husband’s prompting has allowed acceptance to overshadow her (admittedly well-founded) suspicions about me. I, too, am better, now that I have a child watching. My house is clean, my pantry full, my body groomed.

I am surprised by the pictures she draws me. I weep. I love her, and I’m not sure I want to. I cannot navigate my emotions towards her, nor comprehend fully how she integrates with my past experiences of love, yet she is always present, in my hair, in my kitchen, on my floor coloring and singing. Her name, dare I utter it, is Samularia “sweet one forever.” It has a fatalistic beauty, and I hope it doesn’t prove to be ironic or tragic. Love post-apocalypse, love after Ebon’s helpless Heavenly ascent and Sapphire’s absconding is unpredictable. I approach love with sorrowful memories. Samularia, recently born, has no such wariness. She loves me as impulsively as I am reticent, and still we manage.

They ask me if I have grandchildren at the library, because I get so many picture books. I like to read to Sammy. She’s astonished by every plot line. She doesn’t know of course the dragon is mortal, the villain necessarily fallible. I don’t want to taint our love with lore. I steer clear of merfolk tales, it’s a terrifying thing for me to utter Happily Ever After. Once upon a time is potent and irascible enough.

* * *

“We read a fairy tale at school today.”

“Yes, little one. Which one?”

“*The Little Mermaid.*”

“I see.”

“Have you read *The Little Mermaid*?”

“Yes.”

“Nephrolepis, do you think it has a happy ending or a sad ending?”

“I don’t know, baby.”

“Maybe it doesn’t have an ending.”

“Maybe, Samularia.”

“What do you think it was like when the mermaid became foam on the waves?”

This I do know. This aqueous state I have lived. “When the mermaid became foam, she was neither conscious nor unconscious, she observed herself as if in a dream. She couldn’t tell if she were being born to a new state or if she was withering, if foam was cleansing or toxic, but then, even to presume she was in metamorphosis was unfounded, she thought perhaps she was in stasis. I

don't think a thousand years passed for her as slowly as they would have for the prince had his life lasted so long. Nor do I think they began and ended in the Heavenly twinkling of an eye. Perhaps they were like those distended seconds when we watch an autumn leaf float down from a tree, seemingly slower yet more ephemeral because it knows we are aware.

"When the mermaid became foam, I imagine it hurt, not like before, not like walking on sabers, but like stepping into a bath tub where the water's too hot, more like swimming through the sun than floating through water, but I imagine the way she came about her soul after those thousand years, was by a pair of genderless ageless hands sweeping her together over the blue, gently, tirelessly, rhythmically until she was whole."

She thinks on that for awhile, solemn and lovely. Then she grins at me satisfied.
"Nephrolepis, can I comb your hair?"



Holocaust Memorial
Legion of Honor, San Francisco. Artist George Segal

Can it be a dream, that in the end man will find
his joy only in deeds of light and mercy,
and not in cruel pleasures as now...?
I firmly believe that it is not
and that the time is at hand.
People laugh and ask: "When will that time
come and does it look like coming?"

—Dostoevsky, *BROTHERS KARAMAZOV*

CONTRIBUTORS

Donna Hilbert's latest poetry collection is *Traveler in Paradise: New and Selected Poems*, Pearl Editions 2004. Earlier books include *Transforming Matter*, *Deep Red* and *Women Who Make Money and the Men Who Love Them* (short stories), winner of England's Staple First Edition biennial prize. Ms. Hilbert appears in and her poetry is the text of the short film, "Grief Becomes Me," the first in a trilogy of her poems to be included in a documentary on her work and life by award-winning filmmaker Christine Fugate. Her biography is included in the Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poetry. She lives in Long Beach, California where she is working on a play and conducting a master class in poetry. Learn more at www.donnahilbert.com

Barry Ballard still has days when he feels like he's fallen through the ice, when escape keeps cracking under his elbows. And he still has evenings when that inward prophet weeps the truth of everyday transcendence into his life. Still - he wouldn't trade it, will not give it up, and will continue to write what little he can about it.

Edward Butscher Books: *Sylvia Plath: Method and Madness* (Schaffner Press, 2004), *Child in the House: Poems* (Canio's Editions, 1995), *Eros Descending: A Selection* (Dusty Dog Press, 1992)

Joan Payne Kincaid Books: *Greatest Hits* (Pudding House Publications, 2004), *Skinny Dipping* (Bogg Publications, 1998), *Understanding the Water* (Kings Estate Press, 1997)

Anthologies: *Confrontation* (Long Island University Press, 2000), *Art of Haiku* (New Hope International, 2000), *The Quarterly* (Random House, 1990)

Journals: *Black River Review*, *Bogg*, *CrossCurrents*, *Georgetown Review*, *Modern Haiku*, *Oyez Review*

Fraida Liba Levine earned her B. A. in English from UCLA, with a concentration in creative writing. She served as assistant poetry editor on the staff of *Westwind*, UCLA's Literary Journal. Fraida Liba has contributed poetry to *Transformation*, *Westwind*, *Vulcan*, *The Kerf*, *Heartlodge*, Pepperdine University's *Expressionists*, *Fusion Literary Magazine*, and Hunter College's *Olivetree Review*. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and her three children.

Fred Ferraris

Books: *The Durango Chronicles, Book One* (Blue Marmot Press, 2004), *Older Than Rain* (Selva Editions, 1997), *Marpa Point* (Blackberry Books, 1976)

Anthologies: *Prayers for a Thousand Years* (Harper, 1999)

Journals: *Audience*, *Cafe Irreal*, *Caveat Lector*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Diner*, *Heaven Bone*, *Mad Blood*, *Marginalia*, *Orbis*, *Soundings East*, *Spout*, *Switched-On Gutenberg*, *thieves jargon*, *Wavelength*, *Worcester Review*, *Yalobusha Review*

Luis Benítez was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina (1956). Member of the Latin-American Academy of Poetry (USA), the International Society of Writers (USA), World Poets (Greece), the Advisory Board of Poetry Press (India) and the Argentinean Society of Writers. He has received the tittle of Compagnon de la Poésie, from La Porte des Poètes Association, France. His 9 books of poetry, 2 essays and 2 novels were published in Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Uruguay, USA and Venezuela. Between another local and international awards, he has received: La Porte des Poètes International Award (Paris, 1991); Biennial Award of the Argentinean Poetry (Buenos Aires, 1991); Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat Foundation Award of Poetry (Buenos Aires, 1996); International Award of Fiction (Uruguay, 1996); Primo Premio Tusculorum di Poesia (Italy, 1996) and 10me. Concours International

de Poésie, accesit (Paris, 2003).

Sara J Sutter is a recent graduate of the University of Scranton. She holds a B.A. in Philosophy and a minor in English. She's interested in feminist art, with a concentration in poetry.

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Karen Neuberg's poetry has appeared or is pending in Barrow Street, Columbia Poetry Review, DIAGRAM, Diner, Free Verse, Phoebe, Riverine: An Anthology of Hudson Valley Writers, Stirring, and others. She is a Pushcart nominee and lives in Brooklyn NY and West Hurley NY.

Yvette A Schnoeker-Shorb

Anthologies: *The Blueline Anthology* (Syracuse University Press, 2004), *90 Poets of the Nineties: An Anthology of American and Canadian Poets* (Seminole Press, 1998)

Journals: *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Entelechy*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Karamu*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *Poem*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Slant: A Journal of Poetry*, *Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built & Natural Environments*, *Weber Studies*, *Wild Earth*

Tree Riesener is the author of *Liminalog*, a collection of ghazals and sijo. Two new collections are forthcoming: *inscapes* from Finishing Line Press and *angel poison* from Pudding House Publications. She has published poetry and short fiction in numerous literary magazines, including 5_Trope, Evergreen Review, Ginosko, Blue Fifth Review, Loch Raven Review, Pindelyboz, Identity Theory, Blood Lotus, Belletrist Review, NEBO, Acclaim, The Source, Hinge, Schuylkill Valley Review, Diner, Mad Poets Review, Albatross/Anabiosis, Lynx, The Ghazal Page, Fine Print, Anthology of the Philadelphia Writers Conference, Hidden River and Ernest Hilbert's E-Verse Radio. Three short stories—On The C Bus, Lighted Ships, and The BVM—have been staged in the Writing Aloud productions of InterAct Theatre, Philadelphia.

A winner in the Authors in the Park Short Story Competition, she also won a double first at the Philadelphia Writers Conference for the Short-Short Story and the Literary Short Story and was a Semi-Finalist in the Pablo Neruda Poetry Competition. During summer 2002, she was a Hawthornden Writing Fellow at Hawthornden Castle, Scotland. In 2004, she was awarded the inaugural William Van Wert Memorial Fiction Award by Hidden River Arts.

Active in Philadelphia-area spoken word activities, she has been a featured reader at The Well Fed Artist, La Tazza, The Philadelphia Ethical Society (on behalf of Poets & Prophets), Kelly Writers House, Robin's Bookstore (for the Women's Writing and Spoken Word Series and the Moonstone Series), The Book Corner, Barnes and Noble, and the Monday Night Poets series at the Philadelphia Free Library. She is the Managing Editor of the Schuylkill Valley Journal.

Mary Duquette has been a writer ever since she can remember, and sent in her first submission of a short story to a publisher when she was seven years old. Although the publishing company mainly dealt in scientific journals, they were kind enough to send her a very polite, slightly incredulous rejection letter.

Vic Compher's poetry has appeared recently in *International Poetry Review* (in both English and German) and in *Mad Poet's Review*. Vic is a poet, clinical social worker, and peace activist who lives in Philadelphia.

Pete Lee's fiction has appeared in *In Tenebris Lux*, *At Play*, *An Anthology of Maine Drama*, *The Licking River Review*, *Maine Lawyers Review*, *The Connecticut Review* and will appear shortly in *Nerve Cowboy*. In the daylight hours, he is a lawyer in private practice.

Currently, he is at work on a longer piece of (as yet) undetermined length entitled *Call Him Lenny*. Pete lives in Yarmouth, Maine with his wife, Lynne, and their two sons, Spence and Travis

Larissa Shmailo has recently been published in and/ or heard on *About: Poetry*, *The Facebook Review*, *Babel*, *Big Bridge*, *Fulcrum*, *CLWN WR*, *Naropa's We* (Creative Cannabilism), *i-Outlaw*, *Nefarious Bovine Radio*, *Wordsalad*, and many other media. (please see www.myspace.com/thenoneworld for a complete listing). Her poetry CD, *The No-Net World*, has been heard on radio and Internet stations around the world. Larissa translated the Russian Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun* which was performed at theaters and museums internationally; a DVD of the original English-language production is part of the collection of the New York Museum of Modern Art. She is a director of *TWiN Poetry*, an informal collective of 7,000 audio poets, and a translator for the international poetry organization *UniVerse*. This year, she contributed translations to the anthology *New Russian Poetry* published by *Dalkey Archive Press*. She is pleased to join the masthead this year of the acclaimed annual *Fulcrum* as public coordinator.

Roy Scheele

Books: *From the Ground Up: Thirty Sonnets by Roy Scheele* (Lone Willow Press, 2000), *Keeping the Horses* (Windflower Press, 1998), *Short Suite* (Main-Traveled Roads, 1997)

Anthologies: *To the Clear Fountains* (Dolphin Press, 2002)

Journals: *American Scholar*, *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Formalist*

Craig Saunders: I am currently aged 35, although that is likely to change at some point in the near future. I like to write in the evenings, when my wife has gone to sleep and I can use dirty words. For the last few years I have been writing full time. I have had the good fortune to have several short stories published, but I still live in ignominy in a small pauper's shack in the Norfolk countryside...that's on the right hand side of England...but only if you look at it the right way up...no, turn the map the other way.

I have great plans for the future. My seventh *Magnus Opium* will soon be rejected, whereupon I can shelf it and continue writing short stories, which is much more fun, far less demanding and only costs a pound to submit, which ideal as that's all I get from my yearly crop of turnips, less turnip tax.

Graham Hardie: I am currently living in the west end of Glasgow. I have been writing poetry since I left University in 1997. I have an MA Honours Degree in Sociology and Social Policy. I spent seven years of my childhood in Nigeria and then I lived with my family in Helensburgh until I left home when I was seventeen. I attended The Glasgow Academy for six years and this is where my interest in poetry began. My poetic influences include Ted Hughes, Patti Smith, Rupert Brooke and Michael Longley. The critic Andy Manders said I wrote about "love, pain and consciousness" . My favourite book of poems is "Crow" by Ted Hughes. I have an interest in the Tarot, Astrology and the symbolism of myths, legend and nature. Also there is a sense of urban realism in some of my poetry which is indicative of the environment I have lived in. I admire the novels of Camus, Sartre, Octave Mirbeau, Thomas Hardy, Orwell, Laurie Lee and the "Outsider" by Colin Wilson and I am interested in the art of Turner, Picasso, Monet, Rembrandt, El Greco and Jacques Louis David. I remember writing some of the lyrics of a U2 song on the album *Joshua Tree* into an English essay for school and this was a time when I first became aware of the power and significance of words to express the deepest of emotions; furthermore, Led Zeppelin were to shape my early sense of the ability of language to convey the true meaning of life, love and loss. Finally my poetry has religious overtones

which represents my faith in a divine being and the spiritual awareness of the journey I have been on so far.

john sweet, b. 1968, single father of 2. believer in writing as catharsis. eater of souls. plenty of tummy-ticklin' fun to be found at blog.myspace.bleedinghorsedenied.com

Ronda Broatch is the author of *Some Other Eden*, (Finishing Line Press, 2005). Nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Web, Ronda is the recipient of the 2005 Kay Snow Poetry Award, 2006 WPA William Stafford Award, and 2007 Artist Trust GAP Grant. Her work appeared recently on Verse Daily.

Lisa Harris Born in Snow Shoe, Pennsylvania, Lisa Harris spent the first fifteen years of her life in the Allegheny Mountains, part of the Appalachian Mountain Range. Educated at Wyoming Seminary, Bard College, Armstrong Atlantic University, Avery School of the Arts and the State University of New York, she has worked as a bartender, school teacher, creative writing instructor, administrator and consultant. She lives with her family in the Southern Tier of New York.

She has received support for her writing from two Constance Saltontall Foundation Residencies, (Ithaca, NY); three Landsmen Fellowships (Avery School of the Arts, Annadale-on-Hudson, NY); and one writing residency at Hambidge Center, (Rabun Gap, Georgia).

Lisa Harris's short stories have appeared in *The Distillery*, *Ginosko*, *The MacGuffin*, *The Habersham Review*, *Nimrod International*, *Phoebe*, *Feminism 3: The Next Generation in Fiction*, *Second Word Thursday Anthology*, *Cantaraville*, *The American Aesthetic*, *Lonzi's Fried Chicken*, *Boxes*, a chapbook, winner of The Bright Hill Press Fiction Award, *Low Country Stories*, winner of The Bright Hill Fiction Award.

Allegheny Dream, *The Distillery*, Motlow State Community College, Lynchburg, Tennessee, Dawn Copeland, ed.; *Allegheny Angel*, *Ginosko*, Fairfax, California, Robert Paul Cesaretti, ed.; *Of Two Minds*, *The MacGuffin*, Schoolcraft Collee, Livonia, Michigan, Steven A. Dolgin, ed.; *Resurrecting the Quick*, *The American Aesthetic*, American Aesthetic Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Jerrold S. Freitag, ed.; *Where the River Meets the Rain*, Bright Hill Fiction Award Chapbook, *Low Country Stories*, Treadwell, NY, Bertha Rogers, ed.; and *Feminism 3*, HarperCollins/Westview, Boulder, Colorado, Irene Zahava, ed.; *Into the Current*, *The Habersham Review*, Piedmont College, Demorest, Georgia, Frank Gannon, ed.; *Painted Buntings*, *Phoebe: Gender and Cultural Critiques*, State University of New York at Oneonta, Kathleen O'Mara, ed.; and *Cantaraville*, NYC, Cantara Christopher, ed.; *Shedding*, Bright Hill Fiction Award, chapbook, *Low Country Stories*, Treadwell, New York, Bertha Rogers, ed.; *Splitting Sticks*, *Lifting Stones*, *Nimrod International*, University of Tulas, Oklahoma, Francine Ringold, ed.; and winners of the Bright Hill Press Fiction Award, chapbook *BOXES*, Bertha Rogers, ed.; *Battles are Fought and Won*, *The Second Word Thursday Anthology*, Treadwell, New York, Bertha Rogers, ed.

Joanne Lowery was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and educated at the University of Michigan and University of Wisconsin. Her poems have appeared in many literary magazines, including *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *5 AM*, *Passages North*, *Atlanta Review*, *Poetry East*, *Poet Lore*, *Parting Gifts*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *River Styx*. Her most recent collections are *Seven Misters* from Pygmy Forest Press and two chapbooks (*Poems that Work* and *Sweat*) from Snark Publishing. She lives in Michigan.

Jane Ormerod was born on the south coast of England and moved from London to New York City in 2004. Her work appears in numerous US and UK publications including *21 Stars Review*, *Arsenic Lobster*, *eratio postmodern poetry*, *failbetter*, and *Word Riot*. A spoken word CD, *Nashville Invades*

Manhattan, was released in 2007 and an anthology, *A Cautionary Tale: Peer into the Lives of Seven New York Performing Poets* (Uphook Press), will be published in early 2008.

A regular on the New York live poetry circuit, in January 2007 Jane toured the west coast - Vancouver, Canada, down to San Francisco - as part of the *Perpetual Motion Roadshow*. Recently she returned to California for more readings and an interview on KFJC Radio. Her website is www.janeormerod.com.

Jayne Lyn Stahl is a widely published poet whose work has appeared in such notable little magazines, and anthologies as *Exquisite Corpse*, *The New York Quarterly*, *PulpSmith*, *The Jacaranda Review*, *Poetry Magazine*, *Beatitude: 33*, *City Lights Review*, among other. Her essays appear regularly online at *The Huffington Post*, *Op-Ed News*, and *The Atlantic Free Press*. Her plays have had staged readings in New York and Los Angeles. Ms. Stahl is a full member of PEN USA, and a proud member of PEN American Center in New York.

Thomas Hedlund Several years following his graduation from Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan with a B.A. in Psychology. He has earned honors for his short story "Power Windows" in *The Writer's Journal*, a national publication, has published several articles, poems, and other fiction in publications and collections such as *More Sugar*, *Painted in the Forest*, and *Immortal Verses*. His story "Ripples" appeared in the spring 2006 issue of *The Storyteller*. He was a contributing member of Morningside Writers Group based in New York City, a professional network of writers and editors, for six years.

Enrolled in an MFA in Creative Writing program at National University and earning honors in the process with an emphasis on Screenwriting.

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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, and 34 chapbooks. selections can be found on-line, at these fine sites: howling dog press; del sol review; wordslingers; perihelion; pierian springs; locust magazine; kota press; octavo; lifix; jones av.; pig iron malt; great works; la petite 'zine; stirring; offcourse; rio arts; wandering dog; whimperbang; kookamonga square; eratio; split shot; poetry magazine; poetry monthly; fullosia; new verse news; penhimalaya; aurora review, muscadine lines; toe tree journal; down in the dirt; soma, tmp, and zambomba.

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 is a testicular cancer survivor. he is a leo. devin.davis@cdva.ca.gov

Terri Glass has coordinated the Poets in the School program in Marin County, CA for many years and teaches poetry workshops for educators nationally.

Her poetry has appeared in:

Anthologies: *My Song is my Light* (California Poets in the Schools, 2007), *Hope In the Form of Stripes* (California Poets in the Schools, 2006), *Volume 13* (Drumvoices Revue, 2005), *My Pencil of Dreams* (California Poets in the Schools, 2004), *Nest of Freedom* (California Poets in the Schools,

2002), *Year 2000, an anthology* (Nevada County Poetry Series, 2000), *To Honor a Teacher* (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1999), *Beside the Sleeping Maiden* (Aretos Press, 1997)
Journals: *Avocet*, *Convolvulus*
<http://www.terri@thefoxpath.net/>

Karen K. Ford was born & raised in the City of Orange, in Southern California. She began her writing career in high-school, as editor-in-chief of the Villa Park "Oracle," and later put herself through Cal State Fullerton by freelancing ad copy. She moved to Ashland, Oregon in 1989 and worked as marketing director for a small winery (some grape stomping was involved) and, later, for a manufacturer of high-end audio equipment, where she mostly kept her shoes on. After 13 years in Southern Oregon she returned to Los Angeles to pursue fiction writing full-time. She lives in Mandeville Canyon with her husband, writer S.L. Stebel, and their Welsh Corgi, Indigo. She is a contributing editor for "Launchpad" magazine, and her short stories have appeared in "Goliards" and "Man's Story 2." She is a two-time winner of the Excellence in Writing Award from the Santa Barbara Writers Conference. She recently completed her first novel, "Salvage," which is currently being offered for publication by the Congdon Agency.

Robert Joe Stout

Books: *They Still Play Baseball the Old Way* (White Eagle Coffee Store Press, 1994), *They Still Play Baseball the Old Way* (White Eagle Coffee Store Press, 1994), *The Blood of the Serpent* (Algora, 1994), *Swallowing Dust* (Red Hill Press, 1976), *Miss Sally* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1973)
Journals: *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Confluence*, *Georgetown Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *Interim*, *Interim*, *Mid-American Poetry Review*, *Mid-American Poetry Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Whetstone*

Mary Dugan: Hailing from the NW suburbs of Chicago, Beth earned her BA in Psychology at the University of Iowa.

Beth is an MFA candidate in the Fiction Writing program at Columbia College and works full time as a writer for a small financial consulting firm.

She is a contributing reviewer for Time Out Chicago, New City, Bookslut.com and UR Chicago; her writing has appeared in The Banana King, The South Loop Review and Fictionary.

Sheila E. Murphy's work has been published widely in books and magazines. A book-length collection entitled A SOUND THE MOBILE MAKES IN WIND: 50 AMERICAN HAIBUN has just been released from Mudlark, and is viewable at www.unf.edu/mudlark. Her FALLING IN LOVE FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOU SYNTAX: SELECTED AND NEW POEMS appeared from Potes & Poets Press in 1997. Sun & Moon Press will bring out LETTERS TO UNFINISHED J. as the winner of its 1996 Open Poetry Competition judged by Los Angeles poet Dennis Phillips. Murphy has been writing poetry and submitting work for publication since 1978. Her first appearance in print was in SALT LICK magazine, edited by James Haining.

Gunta Krasts Voutyras was born in Liepaja, Latvia. Am multi lingual, a writer and a fiber artist. Spent the start of WW II in underground trenches in my parents' homestead. Due to politics of the time were sent with my family, minus my father, to Nazi Germany. Traveled across the Baltic sea in the hold of a Nazi hospital ship. With the horses. Criss crossed Germany in cattle cars with the doors bolted from the outside. Periodically we were dumped off in Nazi detention camps, situated in the same way as Dachau, without the ovens. Treatment of all of us refugees was inhuman. Mass

showers, our hair washed with gasoline, cold water for the so called "shower", beatings, rotten potatoes cooked in water as our once a day meal. Once the war ended we found ourselves in the American Zone, in a Displaced Persons Camp in Esslingen am/Neckar. From there traveled to USA under a law issued by Pres. Harry Truman. With a fine tooth comb UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency) scrutinized our health, education, intellect, political affiliations of the past, our goals. In 1949 arrived in New York without a word of English. And with thirty dollars between five of us given to us by the Church World Service. Went to public schools in New York City. After graduation from High School married. Have two grown children. I started writing in the DP Camps, at age eleven. At that time wrote poems, short biographical essays. My passion was and is reading. Am published on the Internet in Helium.com, Poetry.com, in Hugh Downs last book, "My AMERICA", have essays in various other venues. Am working on a novel.

Rita Dahl (born 1971) is a Finnish writer and freelance-editor. She graduated in Political Science at the University of Helsinki and also holds a BA in Comparative Literature. Her debut poetry collection, *Kun luulet olevasi yksin*, was published in 2004 (Loki-Kirjat), and her second book, *Aforismien aika* (PoEsia), came out in the spring of 2007. Her travel book about Portugal, *Tuhansien Portaiden lumo - kulttuurikierroksia Portugalissa* (Avain) was published a month later.

She was editor-in-chief of the poetry magazine *Tuli & Savu*, in 2001 and also edited a cultural magazine, *Neliö* (www.page.to/nelio), which had a special issue on Portugal, for whose printform Dahl was responsible.

In 2007 she is publishing a portrait about the Finnish poet Jyrki Pellinen (PoEsia). Dahl is also editing an anthology of Central-Asian (and international) women writers (Like). This anthology includes speeches that will be given in the meeting of Central-Asian women writers arranged by the Finnish PEN, as well as pieces of fiction. She is editing and translating an anthology of Contemporary Portuguese Poetry into Finnish.

Dahl is a vice-chairperson of Finnish PEN.

William Jablonsky is the author of *The Indestructible Man: Stories* (Livingston Press, 2005). His work has appeared in many literary journals, including *Phoebe*, the *Beloit Fiction Journal*, the *Florida Review*, and the *Southern Humanities Review*. He lives in Waukesha, Wisconsin with his wife and three surly cats, and teaches writing and interdisciplinary humanities at Carroll College.

Lisa Haviland

Journals: *Another America*, *Dufus*, *Other*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *Poetry Superhighway*, *Wicked Alice*
hazeablaze.blogspot.com

Ellen Reich teaches creative writing for Emeritus College, a division of Santa Monica College. She has had hundreds of poems and stories published in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Artlife*, *Slant*, *Mudfish*, *Lynx Eye*, *ACM*, *Spillway*, *Coe Review*, *Oyez Review*, etc. She has won writing awards from DA Center for the Arts, *Blue Unicorn*, *Verve*, *Z Miscellaneous*, *Cape Cod Times*, and others. She was a finalist in the 2004 Pearl Poetry Prize and a semifinalist in the 2005 Flume Press Poetry Contest. Her work has been included in a number of anthologies, among them, *Blue Arc*, *Tebot Bach Press*. She served as judge for the first poetry contest held by Ventura County Writers Association. A collection of her poetry along with three other poets is entitled *4 Los Angeles Poets*. Her chapbook, *Reverse Kiss*, was editor's choice and published by *Main Street Rag* in 2005. Also in 2005 a full length book of her poetry was released by *Conflux Press* entitled *The Gynecic Papers*.

ellen is also an artist and has had her work in the Weisman Museum of Art and Ojai Valley Gallery. She recently received two first place awards from the Malibu Art Association. Her art has been published in *Red Dancefloor*, *Vernal Calibrations*, and *Isis Rising*. She was profiled in the *Los*

Angeles Times as a poet and artist in 2004.

Michael Ogletree is the poetry editor for SUB-LIT Literary Journal. He just wrapped up a ten-year stint as an undergraduate. Michael recently defected to Germany with a graduate fellowship at Johannes Gutenberg Universität in Mainz to study English literature. Weird, huh? His new work recently appeared or is forthcoming in BlazeVOX, Lily Literary Review, Right Hand Pointing, and Identity Theory, among others. His mother says his poems sound pretty, but she doesn't always know what they mean.

Regina O'Melveny is a writer, assemblage artist, and teacher at Marymount College in Rancho Palos Verdes, California. Her prize-winning work has been published in literary magazines including *The Bellingham Review*, *Rattapallax*, *The Sun*, *The LA Weekly*, and *Passages North*. Her first book *Blue Wolves*, won the Bright Hill Press poetry award in New York. Recently she was the 2007 Poetry Award Winner for Conflux Press, where her work will be published as an artist's book.

Shannon Prince is a creative writing major and junior at Dartmouth College. In addition to writing, she is an activist for indigenous and African issues, a ceramics maker, and a travel addict. She has been published in Frodo's Notebook, Falcon Wings, KUHf magazine, Imprint, Rice University's Writers in the Schools Magazine, Illogical Muse, Damn Good Writing, Lost Beat Poetry, Haggard and Halloo, Houston Literary Review, Words on Paper, Bewildering Stories, The Smoking Poet, Muscadine Lines, Ragand, Prick of the Spindle, International Zeitschrift, Conceit Magazine, Snow Monkey, Paradigm, Words Myth, and The Green Muse. She also won Dartmouth's Thomas Ralston Prize for creative writing.