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A word meaning

to perceive, understand, realize, come to know;

knowledge that has an inception,

a progress, an attainment.

The recognition of truth from experience.

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INTERVIEWER: Some critics have commented on this prison motif in your work.

MALAMUD: Perhaps I use it as a metaphor for the dilemma of all men: necessity, whose bars we look through and try not to see. Social injustice, apathy, ignorance. The personal prison of entrapment in past experience, guilt, obsession—the somewhat blind or blinded self, in other words. A man has to construct, invent, his freedom. Imagination helps. A truly great man or woman extends it for others in the process of creating his/her own. ... I conceive this as the major battle in life, to transcend the self—extend one's realm of freedom.

by Gabor G Gyukics

whose face it is

the mirror shows a different picture every day

the flame shooting out from the fireplace
is counting the new arrivals
the flame of the candle says good bye
to those who are going away

anticipation gathers inside
a butterfly with spread wings
lies on the burning rocky floor

paint rolls off of the wall
the house rises up
the fresh faced wind
to fly it
to another place

it cares not what you'll become

a cigarette smolders with you together
the wind comes in to fetch the smoke
looks around
what else there is to take
but rather it sniffs
shows a grimace
tears a piece off a paper bag
tips over a plastic cup
hits you in the face
pushes the curtain to the side
and
slams the window
after leaving you behind

that is your own

during tail-wind
the headwind
pushes you back
only the motion remains

your body is searching for the gap
your eyes are already behind the wind

the weight of Nothing in your head
is a pawn pressed in the corner
you won't meet him ever
but what's waiting

The Solution

The itching took hold of them
they didn't know
what caused it.

Did the sun become an enormous
anthill?

Because the itching has disappeared with the dark,
but returned with the sunrise.

They couldn't work, eat, copulate
they were busy scratching their bodies.

Finally they decided, that
one of them
would go up
to the sun.

Your Hands Are Thick As Dreams

Bobbi Lurie

He was walking home through urban dirt.

“You’re not supposed to be sick,” he said to himself as he passed a row of roses outside the hospital.

He had just visited the clinic where they found credible evidence of respiratory congestion which was too much to mess with. They suspected another recurrence of cancer. He knew he would have to keep the treatments secret from his wife. They shared a strict ritual of not sharing secrets and the secret of disease was too much to mess with especially since she almost left him. She insisted he not talk about cancer. And so he didn’t.

He’d have to ration his passion and be pleasing in spite of the depth of the drop he experienced through this newly spewed bit of information, dumbfounding at first, but already accepted as inevitable.

He pulled his cell phone out of his pocket as he walked through a pack of skateboarders hoarding the sidewalk. In spite of them, he managed to check for messages. There was only one message. It was from his daughter.

He decided to walk to his daughter’s studio apartment which was close to the skateboard park he was passing. He thought of the crowded interior of her lair. She had hung so many mirrors there was no room for paintings or posters

“We are feeling beings,” he thought to himself. He thought of his daughter and how, once, he, too, had been vain, “We all suffer the surface life,” he used to say. But no longer believed it.

When he arrived at his daughter’s apartment, after mounting the stairs, being received by Debby, still breathing heavily, the familiar, erratic map of the mess she lives in made him feel a need for hand sanitizer. He felt the rate of his aging accelerate as he spotted a new tattoo on her skinny body.

1.

“I can’t understand why you keep defiling yourself,” Jack raised his voice, pointing at the new tattoo.

“Oh, this, “ Debby was dabbing some make-up on her face. “I neglected to mention this,” she said nonchalantly as she looked down into her blouse, at the tattooed image on her left breast, inscribed with her current lover’s name. “Debby loves Doug,” it said.

Jack stared for some moments at her skin, thinking how delicate it had been when she was a baby.

Jack always thought that Debby was genetically blessed, inheriting his first wife’s surface life of beauty. Now Debby seemed to be nothing but an odd, besotted creature.

Jack and his first wife were private about their child. He never spoke to MaryAnne about Debby even though he often phoned Monica, in spite of the fact that she had remarried and had asked him to leave her life and not speak about their daughter to her or her new husband. She had shunned both her daughter and her ex-husband, just as Jack’s new wife shunned his life before they married and shunned the life he lived within himself.

He realized he could speak to neither of his wives about the cancer recurrence. He was tempted to berate Debby’s decisions but instead confided his news to her instead.

“Oh, Daddy!” Debby dropped the powder puff she was using on her face. She came over to Jack and hugged him hard. The smell of marijuana overwhelmed him. He felt singled out for loss.

“Daddy,” she said, “you must stop eating meat. You must be more like me and eat textured vegetable protein.”

Jack surveyed what was meant to be Debby’s kitchen. The counters were covered with papers, make-up, magazines, dirty dishes, a basket of unwashed laundry...His eye focused on a bottle of Jack Daniels. He peeked into the trash, seeing two empty bottles of booze. Debby had, obviously, been drinking frequently.

2.

“You need more fiber in your diet,” continued Debby, “I read it in the paper. Cancer is caused by low fiber intake.”

The room filled with stillness.

Jack surveyed the massive mess in the room. Nevertheless, he didn't want to leave her to go home to his vicious, second wife.

“Your hands are thick as dreams,” Jack said to Debby, not having the slightest idea what these words meant.

Love and Coffee

Reagan K Reynolds

It was a Tuesday morning after a sleepless night, and the two stood together outside a sidewalk cafe.

The air was cold and crisp. Her coffee made a perfect bold circle around her tongue and finished with a warm pinch in the back of her throat. When he offered her a cigarette her *no thank you* sounded like *oh, yes please*. She held her fingers close to his face as he struck a match. It was an actual red-tipped match from a cardboard slide box. He held the box up so she could see. It had a Wordsworth poem etched on the side. She breathed a full breath of smoke over her shoulder. He was a phony and that was good, because she was only an amateur, but he couldn't know the difference. She was certain that he loved her and so she wasted minutes with him. He smiled. His smile stretched across his face, like it was being pulled from one side to another. When he smiled she liked him.

He was short. Well, shorter than she was at 5'8. At first, she was tempted to twist her ankles down and roll her shoulders to make up the difference, but he commented about her shoes calling them "eclectic," and so she stood tall, overlooking his premature bald spot.

"I like Cummings, personally," he said. "So many American poets think they got it nailed, think they've cursed the world, but E didn't care about that. He didn't care about that at all."

Why is he rambling around and around with such words, she thought. She looked out at the highway squinting her eyes to blur the cars that passed into horizontal stripes.

"I have written, you know," he said, "I've written about lots of things. I've written about you, you know." She tried to act disinterested, but grew suddenly sad and anxious.

"What do you mean, Simon? You haven't written about me," she smirked, examining with sudden interest the blush rose lipstick on her cigarette.

"I have, but it's nonsense. It's all false really. It is just an inspiration of you, a hopeful of you, is all."

His hand was shaking. He pushed his cigarette into the lid of his coffee cup. She was quiet. She wanted to know, but she didn't want to know. He wouldn't be the first to tell her how she looked when she was sad. Why are men so moved by a sad woman? It is never her laughter that snags a romantic prose from a desperate writer.

She looked at the street and down at her shoes, and she felt him move. Simon laughed a nervous laugh.

"That's just the problem with women like you. You think you move me."

She looked into his eyes. They were wet and she liked her reflection. She liked the fear she caused in him.

"God, look at that. It's 7:30 already. You know how mad the boss-woman gets," he

said.

She tied her coat tighter around her waist. "I'll see you later, Simon." She stepped up on the curb and hailed a cab. Simon pretended to be nonchalant as he lit another cigarette. He watched the cab move farther down the street before he pivoted in the opposite direction and left for work.

The Disposal

Daniel Connelly

Kiss the stomach of your raw child,
wrap him three times in the heat of birth,
feed him, bathe him, drown him carefully.

By now your nails are weightless daggers
scraping in the ice of my back
the overturned 8 of eternity.

Your hair sets the mattress aflame
and I become
- as far as I can tell -
the first individual
to be cremated
during sexual intercourse.

In a dark scarf and sunglasses
at the disposal of my astonished remains,
you lift the lid off a makeshift urn
to feed me to the goldfish in the Tiber.

You are alone again,
fingers free
to tease
the single sheet of night
into
 a hundred
 cotton children
 holding hands

Mothergate

Mai Van Phan

Mother caressing child as the moonlight
sound of passing from bough to bough, the howling
Skin and flesh of the love child spreading out deep into the
lift the layered clouds heavy with rain over the sources of rivers

dark night

A bough quivers on the water surface
where a bird suddenly perches

Only I can see that small bird so far away from the road
Far away from the garden, from the other flocks of birds
I quietly pass through the corona at the bottom of the water
And look up at the sky with open wings
rising to the top of the tree where the bird's beak
bends down to feed into the mouths of its fledglings each

sip of wind

sound of chipped grain in the chest
The bare ground and green fruit
the dense-leaved canopy of the forest

Newborn child on the ground
Swims across the river the tadpole's tail severing
Learning to flap its wings, fanning the wind into the nest's

warm bowel

Sprouts the cotyledon leaves, flies away freely

Steam rises by the river-wharf
space condenses the confusion of time
Smoke steams up high
I realize I am swimming in sea-mist.

Note of the translator:

⁽¹⁾ Mothergate - *Mother* in this poem does not mean "mother" as normal. It carries the meaning of "the Way", the "philosophy of belief". As:

"The Way that can be told of is not an unvarying way;

The names that can be named are not unvarying names.

It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang;

The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind".

(Lao-tzu).

The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind".

(Lao-tzu).

Collective Decay

Liz Axelrod

Nature has a formula that tells us when.

Everything alive will eventually die.

Every living thing is a pulse.

We quicken, then we fade.

She goes outside for a walk
and smells the scent of wood smoke.

Someone must have been burning a door.

Last year, the fireplace was just decorative.

People are destroying everything in a desperate effort to survive.

Life is short for small creatures, longer in big ones.

Elephant hearts beat slowly, hummingbird hearts beat fast.

Under a cloud of austerity, real smoke clouds as well.

This rule seems to govern all life: When the formula says *you're done*
the, birds, the bees, the daisy and the maple tree obey.

When the equation says, *it's time*

We too must call it a day.

Slit Up to Here

Liz Axelrod

A prodigal rock star can only be made
from piles of gravel found lying on the side of parking

lots with white lights and empty bottles.
No. Anything is possible but I have learned

not to think on probably anymore.
My elbow has been numb since 2001 when it got stuck

in between the #1 train and Penn Station.
Every few months it picks up static charge from subway cars.

There's a whole website devoted to snowflakes.
It doesn't taste right unless you melt it with your tongue.

The newspaper allows me to be angry
I ball up my passions in black ink and wait for

Angelina Jolie's slick back red-lipped six-pack
or at least her leg, sticking straight out of that black gown

all over the internet—
scaring honey from the bees.

Too many entranceways and exits

Liz Axelrod

Marry me a water-boarder
Couple me a hanging rope

Stretch my back to life on the rack
Standing in front of eleven centuries

Tower of London torture chamber
Open for my viewing pleasure

Me in studs and leather
Looking to be pierced

Stopped cold by a door
I could not stumble past

Shakes and sweat and some
Unconscious pain remembrance

I've got a knack for finding pain
In joints and cracks and creeping places

Splitting head is normal morning
Longing past is normal morning

Say a prayer of thanks
This century for every day

Not hung upside down by your toes
Though some of us could use
Some lengthening

Blow Humpty

Liz Axelrod

Chick-A-Fil-A draws crowds and cheers
by refusing to serve my fine gay friends

They can go suck an egg.
It came before the chicken, anyway

And what rules do you new masters of republic require
to keep me firmly in my place

I'm barefoot and wondering what became of the freedoms
I never had to fight for in my childhood

Skirt length, pirouettes and math tests
replaced by gangs of hungry misanthrope and body armor

Like Humpty on the dessert wall
all cracked and leaking yellow with no water

Then Joshua comes and blows his horn and you tell me
I can't show my cleavage anymore

You mean to say, there's something other than Legitimate Rape
and my lady-parts protect me from unwanted pregnancy

Or maybe there's a baby waiting in the evidence
like honey sprouting from a bad seed

No. Those things just ferment

Yes, Chicken Little, the sky is falling
Is it sunstroke or mass marketing machines

building walls and flying drones
bombing ash and circumstance

and pockets full of posies rolling over
man flowing robes and man burning girls

We all fall down

The Key from Chapter 19 *The Journey Home*

Willy Nywening

Today the door was pink. Spring flowers covered it: bright red tulips, golden daffodils and fragrant hyacinths. They were alive and growing from the doorframe, almost obscuring the hinges and handle. Lydia stared at it, studying every minute detail. She still marveled at how the door could stand there alone, on its own, without any walls to hold it in place. Often she wondered what held it to the barren land on which it stood. Each day the door seemed different. Some days, like today, it was bright and cheerful, inviting her to open it. Others days, it was obscure and foreboding. One day it was dark sculptured wood, like the trunk of a fancy coffin she had once touched, in a funeral home. Instinctively she knew the key that she kept firmly lodged in her closed hand, would fit all of the doors. Although she had no desire to leave the shelter of this strange sphere she now inhabited, the means was still there. She knew it was possible to escape through the door to the other side. However, there was no need because she was pleasantly euphoric in the peacefulness that swaddled her in this carefree, alternative place.

Strangers stood at the door. She watched them come and go. She ate the food they set out, but only if it was on her side. She feared even to put her hand through the opening. She listened to them talking, talking about her. They even came through the door to look in her eyes and place their cold hands intrusively and menacingly upon her. They shook their heads and said strange things she didn't understand. They put things in her mouth and her arms. At first, she would protest when they mauled her, but soon she learned if she sat very still without struggling, they would quickly disappear. Then she was free. Free to stray away from the door, following the road signs of unblemished memory that invited her to wander down the pleasant roads of reminiscence, stretching endlessly in front of her.

In the beginning, the door itself presented as a pleasant remembrance. The flowers were from her grandfather's garden. Profuse and diverse, they bloomed just as she had known them. The last of ten children, she was conceived and born in the sin of blatant drunkenness. In another time and place, it would have been a violation of matrimonial love. The seed, carried grudgingly to term, was delivered like a cumbersome burden and in haste deposited and left alone on the doorstep of life. Initially sibling adolescents, named by number, handled and managed her days. When she was four, the aged patriarch arrived to live out his last days as unobtrusively as possible. Suddenly a troublesome child and a bothersome frail man both shooed away by caregivers who didn't care, found a kindred spirit – another soul to love. He sang lovely sweet lullabies to coax her to sleep. When all else failed, he was the one who could console and take her to dreamland. He loved and nurtured her. She gleaned the wisdom of age; he remembered and thrived in the pure simplicity and naturalness of

youth. Together they created a world where it was possible for both of them to grow and blossom.

Each grew stronger. Their emotions and lives were intricately and singularly interwoven to form an attachment that shaped and defined their character. Their union released the otherwise occupied adults from their upkeep. Together they required little maintenance. Food and a place to sleep were expected and accepted. Their shared alliance kept the twosome out of harm's way. He protected her from the jeopardy of innocence and she shielded him from the restrictions of age. Their attachment kept them safe and complete.

The season he arrived, they created the garden. A plenitude of perennials was lovingly nurtured. There were different blooms that flowered just for the two of them. He told her a story for each flower, repeating it year after year until she knew them all. In spring, they planted the annuals. In the fall, he taught her how to gather their seeds carefully. They were stored and labeled in old envelopes to guarantee another season. At the end of winter, they were planted in rusty tin cans, ready to greet the promise of the warm sunshine of spring.

She always believed that the smallest of seeds produced the most magnificent blooms. The rainbow garden, they called it, when all the flowers were in their peak. A little part of heaven, the weathered old man explained. If you look very closely, you will see the face of God. Feigning wide-eyed wonder, she explored every crevice, assuring him she saw it, although she never really knew what it should look like. He knew and loved her more. Although he tutored her there should be no favorites in flowers, she loved the pansies best. Their rich, vibrant colors whispered her name. When she searched their brilliant faces, she thought they spoke of other worlds. He taught her pansies needed picking to thrive, so she culled them at their peak and pressed them in the old Bible that sat on the shelf in the kitchen, to enjoy again when the snow covered the garden.

It became their sanctuary. He taught her that gardens represent life. In their special place, each word her beloved Poppa spoke was appreciated and remembered. She tucked them away in her heart like pressed flowers, to be savored again during friendless, dreary, winter days.

Today as she rambled effortlessly through the summers of her youth, she searched for the meaning, detailed in the faces of the flowers. She saw bits of beauty but the essence of it seemed obscured, clouded by the murkiness of unknown uninvited snippets of life. This frustration initially did not deter her, but eventually made her feel the melancholy of later years. She would hold the key tightly and find her way back to the door, hoping, even praying the flowers would still be blooming. Often during these times, they hung limp and rotting, creating the rancid stench of death that clung menacingly to her nostrils.

When the door presented its dark side, she couldn't find the garden corridors at all. Those days, the pathways pulled her to places she didn't wish to visit. Enigmatic

empty cavities void of feeling and color. They were hazy and held anxious echoes that resounded from obscured niches. Then it was much harder to return to the door. The way became littered with fault lines that were difficult to traverse. Only when she stopped and listened for the others to call her name was she able to weave her way back to the portal. On those days, she welcomed the aliens with their magic sleep elixir.

The last memory of her grandfather lingered. They had already started planting the seeds, when spring suddenly returned to wintry weather. Without warning, he was gone. As always, he kissed her good-bye when she went to school. Then he slept. She saw him next in the carved casket, a reserved expression pasted on his face. Staring at him, she wished she could snuggle up and warm his cold hands, the way he had done so many times for her. They all said he was in a better place now, freed from the pain and sadness of senility. Someone told her she should be happy for him. She was. Only because she knew he was free of the weight he had carried. The dismissal and rejection by his offspring had been a burden he had tried unsuccessfully to bury in his garden. In the coffin, she tucked their seeds, to plant on the other side.

"Remember me," she told him." She was content to know he would. The seeds were safe.

That year only the perennials bloomed.

The Passing

Peycho Kanev

Between two exact moments
the rain stops

the smell of her body on the sheets,
fading away

The frontier of day and night
merging within the last drops

and now on the windowsill
the sun licks the mist and bites
on what was left of my dreams

Still life of the new day
unbearable landscape

The painter's brush

just bringing us one step closer
to the memory of the bones

What a beautiful word after all.
Who would not love to be a candle
 for some time,
just to have a dark room at his
or her entire disposition
in which to flick, in which to dance
with a windy darkness
so very much consumed
by the almost carnal desire
of possessing the light.

Let's pretend for a moment
we don't know its meaning.
Let's pretend it's just an echo
that has trespassed from the past,
cracked the arrow of time
to reach our ears as delivered
by a XIX century candle
that was just put out.

The flickering of lights should have
in fact a sound. In fact,
the dancing shadows on the walls
should scratch them make them
scream the horrors of their
silent nature, make the walls dance
and not only the cruel appearance
of the walls dancing, flickering,
as if concrete could play
to be wax for just one day.

I possibly can prove
that all major poets of this language
have used it
until the poor word died out,
until it was no more
 than a leafless trunk,
mere linguistic trunk deprived
of the leaves of meaning.

But there's no resisting
the crucial titillating magic
of what gives us the chance
of referring to all which is so frail,
that could perish by the same gasp
that takes from us such frailty.

The blank page is a loaded gun, dangerous,
full of beauty's entropy and combinatory dreams.
It's open source ethos, fidgeting with splendor,
with that momentum white of the sea at morning.

It's not a desert, for whoever's sake, is not a cliff,
neither where your mind goes make snow angel ideas,
nor a mute inbox that you keep refreshing:
The mind is just filled with horror for the void
when there's nothing else.

The blank page is a loaded gun,
a uranium mine field waiting for a chain reaction,
where the feelings will collapse upon themselves
and hurt the reader by wounding the page,
the ink bled a testament to the violence
of the rapture always waiting to be born.

You can't see how many minds
have exploded due to
it does not matter now what amazing
methapataphorical event,
and you will never know,
no matter what blew shattered
disbanded your mind
because after the explosions
the pieces started traveling
at light speed away from you until,
nearly infinite Doppler Effects afterwards,
all you can see from where you stand is
infraredness, for which you'd need
of course, special equipment.
But then again, your mind had exploded,
so it would be of little use for you
on your present situation.

Unless,
you are yourself some kind
of Schrödinger's cat person,
and can enjoy
some superposition state,
because till this point
no one but you has found out about
your mind explosion.

Or maybe not just yet.

Your Voice

Alain Gonzalez

Your voice sounds like a
broken pianoforte,
as though enduring every note,
the wailing of a hurting
instrument,
dreaming the last dream
of returning to the sacred woods
of pianoforte heaven.

And yet
when its music finds me
it hits the precise keys
to make me feel the rapture
in the always enticing
always volatile image
of the fingers of a virtuoso
caressing the keys of a piano
with the sweet violence,
the incandescent damnation
of his attack.

SOFTENING EDGES

Stefanie Levine Cohen

It was unexpectedly calm at the precipice. Chase studied the yellow-green blades of new grass that poked through the sparse soil that barely covered the jagged rocky edge of the mountain. Delicate and strong. Enticing and foreboding. The paradox of the natural world.

Sitting on the edge and dangling his legs, he noted how the soft, fragrant grass rubbed up against the sliver of skin between his pant leg and sock, and for a fraction of a second imagined it causing a tickle that would make him jump and fall—accidentally?—right over the edge and down, down into oblivion, or wherever one might go when falling off a cliff. It did feel closer to God up here, he thought, the clouds like marshmallow fluff against a sky bright as diamonds. Was the air actually thinner, or did something else cause his breath to catch, his heart to thump? What was this fine line between fear and longing? Chase looked down the vertical drop, thrilled by his terror of falling into the abyss. He held his lungs full of air, daring himself not to breathe, until dizziness overtook him.

Finally, his fear won, and he stepped back. Three times he had climbed the mountain, sat at the edge of the cliff, fought his fierce desire to experience the free-fall. He was inexplicably disappointed by his failure to take the leap, yet relieved, and unsurprised. The longing to know something bigger pulled him, but so did the insistence in his rational mind that his fear was a longing of a different sort—a desire for something concrete in his present existence. Perspiration gathered in his armpits and droplets ran down his back. He licked the sweat that dripped from the indentation below his nose. It tasted like tears.

Chase's descent down the mountain was unremarkable. His day pack was light, the air tepid, and his mind increasingly occupied by the dull details of daily life. Having chosen once again to maintain his ordinary existence, he returned to where he had left his bicycle and began to pedal the eight miles back to the dusty town that boasted the small, liberal arts college he'd attended for almost two years. Chase studied philosophy, which meant, he told his few friends, that he read a lot of old stuff and expounded theories of the universe that sounded brilliant at three in the morning but empty at noon. It's just beyond my grasp, he told his girlfriend Arianna, but I will find it. I will understand why we're here, what it's all for. Chase's father did not approve of philosophy and threatened to withhold tuition payments unless he changed his major to something more practical, but Chase refused. The concept of a plan B was abhorrent to him.

Chase gripped the handlebars lightly. The wide road back to campus was paved and rarely traveled. It circled broadly around the mountain, and sloped so gently as to appear flat. The ride was effortless, and the early spring foliage so enchanting that

Chase forgot that his own legs created the momentum—it seemed he stood still and the mountain moved past. The rhythmic click of the chain around the wheels of the bicycle croaked a song, and Chase got lost in the trance that enveloped him within the great Earth. The slight downward pitch in the road steepened, quickening his descent, and the breeze picked up, kissing his face. This was the dance—this, the moment of the free-fall, the joining of man and Earth, boy and God. Chase knew this with certainty, this beauty. He had no fear. He had no longing. He was whisked away. Chase didn't see the chunk of rock that had broken off the mountain and rolled to a spot just beneath his front tire, and he felt nothing but joy, as the bicycle lifted up in a somersault, careening crazily through the air before crashing heavily into the trees at the side of the mountain. Edges softened. Expansion.

3 a.m.

Berwyn Moore

The room buckles and shrinks,
pushing me to its edge where
I crouch on mottled motel carpet.

It is here I lose you.

A hundred birds rise up at once,
their red wings fanning urgency –
dawn is a long way off.

The room contracts,
the air corrupts.

Their wings flutter a red haze
that dims the light:

I remember
a truck heading north under a masked sky,
the last time I touched your hand.

But it is here I lose you, here
in the shadow of 3 a.m., in a room
that has pushed me to its edge, where
birds beat out the deficiencies of love.
Not a new message –

I have survived this before:

weary wings inhabiting the air,
walls expanding beyond reach,
an unimportant floor that can't
possibly hold the weight of loss,

the weight of a body beating
against something it can't see.

Flashback

Berwyn Moore

A man sat alone in my section.

From the back he looked familiar – the concave curve of his neck, the

jagged edge of his hairline – but when he turned around, his gray eyes deflected the light like cheap ceramic. He told me to

order for him. I brought waffles and coffee, and when he was done, he demanded both lunch and dinner – pastrami on rye, cabbage soup, chicken loaf, fried clams, guacamole, lentils, pickled beets. He ate and ate until

nothing remained. He wrote an address on an envelope, the letters large and smudged, leaving barely enough room at the bottom for *San Francisco*. He told me it was for his daughter on her 13th birthday, but

he was sending it anonymously since a duplicate of himself was there acting as her father while he hauled his truck across the country and she didn't know. I asked him why

not send the *other* one out on the road and he whispered, *because then I couldn't be here*, and he kissed me so hard

his teeth cut my lips, just like when I was 13 and he took me to the woods, his eyes glassy and his breath reeking of glue, and he promised me all I wanted to eat, then kissed me hard.

Glass

Berwyn Moore

I weave a black motorcycle through the shadowy
tunnels of trees, hunting for crystal stemware
buried in the ground. The engine sputters as I chug up
a hill, so I leave the woods to get gas. The steel
nozzle enters the tank between my legs; this frightens
me and I tear away, searching again for the crystal,
my mother's best. When I come to the river's edge,
I prepare food – spinach balls and chicken heads
stuffed with mint. A boat arrives and an old woman
picks up the food and leaves me alone on shore
with nothing to eat. I crank the bike, whirling away
from the woods until I stop again for gas before night
closes in. The attendant inserts the steel nozzle
in the tank, and in the distance I hear the crystal
shattering, a spray of jagged shards impaling the darkness
like falling stars. This is someone else's undoing.
I am not lost. I am not hungry. I know where to find her.

First appeared in River Walk Journal

Measures

Berwyn Moore

This morning's air moves like dark yellow bees,
thick and sticky with heat. Beyond the porch

screen, small birds shift in a slight tease of wind.

I am preoccupied with sound and light this mid-

June Sunday as I sit here with you counting out
sections of orange, measuring spoonfuls

of dark berries into half-cups of delivered cream.

Always between us it is like this: each day

divided into its parts, privileges I must ask for
amid moments carefully weighed and packed,

sealed shut against the heat of breath. Nothing ever
runs over, ever spills out, even by accident.

I watch you now over breakfast and the top edge
of the *News*, a high sun rising through your hair,

and I swear I could count each unmoving strand. I must
ask – is it yet that part of day we can speak?

AFTER

Jane Otto

After the incident she drove down Ventura Boulevard to proceed with the morning's errands. It seemed best to keep busy, to push forward, for what else was there? She mailed a birthday present (already more than a week late) to her nephew, now in the "double digits." It had been oddly comforting to stand in line at the Post Office and not to have to talk with anyone. She took solace in the small progress of inching forward along with the rest of humanity, knowing that each person standing in line would derive the same feeling of satisfaction, relief even, in having completed their individual task.

Rose's next stop was All Four Paws, a pet store, where, out of habit, she'd stopped, as she did most Fridays, to pick up a bag of "Stable Blend"—recycled wood shavings intended for horses' stalls and a cheap substitute that she'd recently discovered for cat litter. It was a non-clumping material that had brought Powder Puff, their "rescue cat" of some sixteen years, a modicum of relief. As she passed the clay varieties, she envisioned poor Puff clomping across the kitchen floor, her feet encrusted in the powdery substance that immediately transformed her furry appendages into four tapping, miniature cinder blocks. "Stable Blend" had been a merciful option, and it had brought Rose some relief as well, emitting an alpine scent—if only for a moment—when soaked with urine. Here, she recalled the stench that had begun to define her life. The smell of a pot roast in the oven or the small pleasure of being greeted by the scent of verbena when turning down the covers to her bed had been supplanted by the acrid smell of decline. Despite open windows or scented candles, the latter of which seemed to vie in a contest for bad smells, there was no escaping the sick, pungent smell of deterioration.

As the cat's health waned, it had impacted what little available "real estate" there was in their small apartment. Puff had begun to miscalculate her box, so that the bathroom had become something akin to a giant cat box. It was no longer necessary to stack newspapers for recycling, for they had become a viable commodity in her own household. The cat box, initially housed aesthetically beneath what would have been a vanity, became something reminiscent of the trenches during World War One. She responded to the daily crisis of drenched newspaper and spreading filth by moving the box to the only other, deeper dugout: the bathtub. The deep, pink tub, recessed in a little chamber complete with lights that could be dimmed and a built-in "bench," was ideal for shaving legs. The bathroom had been one of the selling features of the apartment. Framed by a turquoise and pale-pink paisley curtain made from Liberty's cotton, the chamber appeared almost like a miniature stage in the larger theater of facilities: a separate, spacious shower stall, two sinks, a bidet, and a toilet. The sumptuous chamber, now lined with six to eight thicknesses of "The Week in Review" or Wednesday's "Science Section," was no longer her own.

In just three months the reeking odor of the cat's incontinence had supplanted Rose's own daily rituals. Rather than starting or finishing each day with coffee or a glass of wine and the mundane task of emptying the dishwasher or paying bills—tasks that now seemed a lark, by comparison—she set about with disinfectant, paper towels, and yellow, rubber gloves to restore order; to repair the chaos of encumbrance.

* * *

Realizing the absurdity of her errand, her hands tightened on the red, plastic handles of a shopping cart. Her thoughts were not in the hemisphere of the long decrescendo of her waning friend nor even in what had become a certain lament in Puff's once extraordinary eyes—one a pale, robin-egg blue, the other amber. Instead, as her thumbs managed a sharp right turn, she was gripped by the more concrete feeling of odium.

At the checkout counter a clerk with a scraggly beard intended to mask a bad case of acne chirped a perfunctory, "Have a nice day, ma'am." And then, "Did you need any help?" He smiled as she looked up from her handbag. She had lifted her sunglasses in order to see inside of her purse to locate her car keys and now their eyes met. She watched as the young man's face melted into an expression of concern as he registered her red and swollen eyes. She knew then that she must have looked a wreck, and it suddenly occurred to her that she was tired. Very, very tired. She might have curled up and lain down in one of the oversized, round, plaid dog beds that could be seen down aisle three. If only she could just circle, tamp down the fiber-fill, curl up, and lie down—even in public.

For a moment she considered telling the clerk where she had come from, what the morning had comprised, how she had taken Puff into the veterinarian's office to see what could be done about her excessive drinking and urinating, which had progressed to diarrhea and stumbling. She considered allowing the words to tumble forth, "I put my cat down this morning. I looked into her sad, narrow pupils and watched as her once bright, beach-glass eyes transformed into two vacant pools; the pink pads of her feet slowly fade to white. It was a waning that lasted less than thirty seconds, and I knew when the final moment had come because of the stillness that filled the room." A small bit of vomit filled Rose's gullet as she fought the compulsion to respond to the young man's lamenting expression. Resolving herself to push forward—she would not make a scene in a pet store—she replied, "You, too," and put up her sunglasses back on.

At home she unlocked the back door and paused for a moment before pushing it open, knowing that Puff would not greet her. She paused in the entryway, absorbing the void, and then proceeded through the house, as though needing to take inventory of what was missing. In her daughter's room she gauged the time—noon—by the bed, bathed in sunlight. She lay down on Sally's bed and smoothed her hand across the area where the cat would have lain. "Powder Puff!" she exclaimed aloud, recalling the

moment when a five-year-old Sally had named her new kitten after the fluffy white plume of baby ostrich feathers in Rose's box of talcum powder. She paused to consider Sally, now an adolescent, and innumerable scenes from their past: Puff dressed in doll clothes and strapped into Sally's doll stroller; Pet Day in second grade; Puff escaping in their apartment complex amidst the chaos of guests arriving for Passover. No one had been aware that the cat had gone missing until, as the Haggadah instructed, Puff made a grand entrance when the door had been opened for Elijah. Once Rose had been awakened at the crack of dawn to what sounded like the steady rhythm of someone sanding wood. Puff's barbed tongue had been at work on the crotch of a pair of panties that contained the residue of one of Rose's meetings with her lover. She had not thought about him for ages, but there he was, from the undertow of grief, her sweetheart with his quiet demeanor and sunburned arms.

She hadn't meant to fall in love. He had simply appeared: an unemployed dad who had been defeated by life—downsizing, to be exact—whose toddler happened to have the same schedule as hers. Whose wife, like Rose's husband, worked long hours and arrived home cranky and exhausted. Who happened to find her interesting. Who happened to be nice to her and to have a low voice that made her feel as though everything would be okay. Who, in a small moment that would be a turning point, reached to sweep a wisp of brown hair that had fallen into her face, and she took his arm and pressed the inside of his wrist to her skin and smelled it.

The affair went on for nearly a year. They knew that all of the babysitters at the playground knew that they were "involved," despite their efforts to be discreet, to sit a safe distance from one another, or swing their tots at different intervals. They were too comfortable together, and they laughed with too much ease.

Occasionally they met for lunch or went to a museum or a reading at a local bookstore, but mostly they had been like contortionists: twisting and turning, scheming and lying for time in a studio in Chinatown that had belonged to one of his friends. The lovemaking had often been disappointing because it was frantic, fraught with too much anxiety. And Rose had come to understand that she occupied a kind of no-man's land that comprised equal portions of regret and hope. At home she began to feel at sea, drifting farther and farther away from "her two." Her daughter and husband felt like two tiny dots on a horizon, far out at sea, as she watched from the shoreline of her place at the dining room table.

She had to give him up. Although her husband seemed oblivious to her preoccupation, her tormented state could not be hidden from Sally. "Are you crying again, Mommy? Powder Puff, Mommy has 'ham eyes.' See how pink they are?"

She had little recollection of the days or weeks or months that followed after she'd broken it off—only that she had wanted to sleep and that Powder Puff had taken to lying on her back as though she were a paperweight, holding Rose down. There had been the onus of willing herself forward to be a mother, to be a wife. But she had done it. She had pushed through to fabricate an adequate arrangement.

* * *

More out of habit than hunger, Rose made a scrambled egg sandwich. She stood at the kitchen counter, scanning the news above the fold of the paper as she ate absentmindedly. She made her way down one of the lead stories two, maybe three times, but none of the text highlighting the major event of the day sunk in. Her focus returned, instead, to a photograph of two blonde women draped over a casket clad in an American flag. The scene was framed in the bright green of a lawn; the women wore black; giant floral wreathes flanked the casket, and a garland was draped over the red, white, and blue cover. Without reading the caption, Rose assigned her own narrative: a mother and a young wife agonizing over their mutual loss. She envisioned their grief, a bottomless, inextricable ache; the horror of a young life cut short on a moment's notice in some foreign land; the grim business of uniformed personnel arriving to deliver a message that would forever alter their lives; their heretofore sunny, blonde lives yanked away.

She pushed the sandwich aside to consider the stark finality of loss; the black and white of there—and then somehow, suddenly not there. The stark contrast recalled a slide show in an Art History class on German Expressionism during her first year of college. The review had included the austere woodcuts of Käthe Kollwitz, who'd lost a son to World War I and a grandson to World War II. She hadn't considered the prints in over thirty years, but there they were now. The clarity of negative space; the stark foreground of loss. A phantom Puff brushed up against Rose's leg. As she bent to survey the landscape, a wisp of hair fell from behind her ear. She absorbed the discrepancy. There, and not there.

* * *

Later that same day, Rose would reclaim her bathroom. She would remove the urine-soaked Times from the tub and scrub the streaked newsprint from its porcelain sides and bottom. She would place a nosegay of sweet peas on the vanity, fill the tub with hot water, dump an additional heap of lavender bath salts into her bath, and step into the steamy room of her tent-like tub. She'd slide into the warm solution, sinking down until the water just covered her collarbones, and begin to work her feet back and forth, back and forth against the viscous bottom of the tub; against the sand beneath her sneakers as she swung her daughter at the playground, at disparate angles from her lover swinging his son, the children laughing, their hair flying, the two of them in tandem and then not; back and forth against the women draped over the casket, the dampness of their grief against the stitching together of red and white; against the pockmarked face of the pet store boy.

By Susan Hodara

Eden at the End

She is lying tiny under a sheet, tubes and beeps and gurgling sounds forming a wall around us. He sits by her bedside, holding her hand, his head hanging down. Her eyes are closed; we don't know where she is but we believe she can hear us and we tell her we love her. We worry about him, so terrified of losing her, so determined not to, his wife of 49 years. "She wanted to make it to our 50th anniversary," he told us. Now he stays beside her bed hour after hour, though she doesn't move. "Her skin, God," he says. "Her skin is so soft." Nurses pass by the open doorway, machines continue to beep, but he doesn't notice anything but her.

Leaving

My armpits have become slippery with the intensity of getting ready to leave. I am, of course, set—outfits selected and folded, cosmetics bag packed, phone charged. It's not time to go yet but I might as well be on my way. There's nothing for me here anymore. I am nowhere if not gone.

Tired

There is a burning along the rims of my eyes and a heaviness in my head, but I sit here anyway, when what I really want to do is lie down. Simply being horizontal changes everything, as I let the mattress take hold of my muscles and bones. I sneak my feet under the knitted blanket beside the sleeping cat and feel an oven-y warmth spill over them. I don't even have to close my eyes and already I'm feeling at peace. But for some reason I stay where I am, sitting here anyway.

Where My Real Mother Lives

Kelly DuMar

After the shipwreck,
your bottles, our bodies, litter the beach.
*(Even though we sang like angels in your ear,
you would not hear.)*
Your driftwood bones, your shark's teeth, wash to shore –
while my imagination,
a sleepy vapor,
lifts me from blown sand and beach scum
to this heavenly place – where I

Slam the door, press the lock, pace the floor.
Outside - just within reach -
some other kind of mother dares
to set a steaming hot cup of tea, sweet biscuits,
pen, paper and a perfectly ripe banana,
while I fling forbidden words
like dynamite
against paper walls.

Outside - she waits for the moment
the door will blow open
when I will sing like an angel in her ear,
and she will play her harp.

Singing Over Your Bones

Kelly DuMar

I know where you live now, grandmother – I know. Your ash bones blow on this wind that rises out of silence like my song for you: Flora, lover of wildflowers, speechless one, mute about crimes in your own home. Without murmur or complaint, lonely and old, you were sent to the afterlife by way of a funeral which many attended, except your two daughters who boycotted, and two sons who fled mid-stream when seized by stomach cramps, and a last son, little piggy, who skipped to stay home.

I had never – not in public - lifted my voice in song when I sang at your funeral. I had not been asked, no one gave me permission. It began as a cough does, clawing the back of my throat when the minister woke us from our dream of what his sermon could be by clearing his throat and invoking a moment of silence, in your memory. And, like a cough, there was no stopping it - cut loose from my throat, cracking the silence to pieces –

Hush little baby, don't say a word, mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird. . . and if that mockingbird won't sing. . . daddy's gonna buy you diamond ring. . .

There was perfect attendance but no singing at grandfather's funeral, years before, which nobody boycotted or got stomach cramps from, and during which all your five children kept their fingers crossed to keep from pointing them. I'll tell you a secret that spilled - some fathers' sins are eternally mesmerizing.

The night you lay dying in your hospital bed, I was tucking my daughters into theirs, singing a lullaby when you called my name, I swear. I kissed them and hurried, hoping to reach you in time. In the ghost-light of that room your spirit, already gone begging, whispered, Help me heal things that I left broken. Since I am a dutiful granddaughter, I do. Because, I won't sacrifice my children's hearts, those delicate seeds, to silence. If any word out of my mouth - my womb - could slice the fingers groping toward their innocence, I would cut, with my word, through steel or strings - I would cut family ties before they bound my children's seed hearts to a lie.

You died in my arms with all your unsaid words, those tramps, floating homeless, around the bed. They hitch hiked a ride on the intake of my breath. They set up camp in my belly. And now, when I sing, I send them home.

by Stella Vinitchi Radulescu

The Human Condition

After Berryman's *Dream Songs*

1

So Henry went to sleep, you know Henry, while still
at the barber shop
clipping his nails with a small nail clippers,
in the closet above
towels and French soap—are you hiding a knife
in your dream does the embryo have memory—
the clock just hit the floor
—bang—who is Henry would he go further

2

He was a boy and then
he wasn't.
A poet took him away drained his blood
his ideas he was screaming God
make me invisible I am losing
my hair and everything else I could
for the rest of my life
stay put under my bed covered with clouds
and fresh leaves
as I was when I was dead

3

I lost Berryman's book and now I have
to make up words
to imagine the setting on a page the dust
and how the world works
how Henry chooses his friends his clothes
so many flights between life
and death
so many blanks

4

There is charcoal in clouds
and bread on the table. Something to say.
Easy words.
Little space on the moon. What happened
to Henry. Did he say I love you.
Back home the kitchen the stove.
Yes.
The chair is black. With white wings you can.
You can sit on.

ennui

It's Sunday.
past Saturday,
past Friday,
Rilke died,
my father up
in the sky.
the cold,
the question,
the who,
the why,
the human
blood, that
heavy load
and
cold again,
and heaven
in full size.
the cross, the
nails. take care.
take care of
your crave and
decorate
the room with
honey-
suckle
and angels

heart heart heart

I went broke nobody
helped my soul
to recover.

If I were You your bold your blunt desire
your latest make-up a foliage—
silver

sleep
running in my veins
like holy water : I remember
the town, the street,

something called *past* with a *p*
as in child
or a double *p* as in dream
better than the unbleached sun,

the broken sounds
heart
heart
heart:

sit down angel, I am desperately alive.

teaching Death to fourth graders

I teach Death to fourth graders; I start
with *A*—the *Apple*—the madness
in the Fall—
worms,
sweetness coming from inside.
I want them to touch the crisp, the pouring
autumn light:

this is Adam, I said,
his blood,
his hunger & thirst—I am a two-legged
phenomenon
diving in the space we have—
the white whale
who lost her way to redemption

I teach the smell, the bad seed, the rotten
smell of words:
Sep-tem-ber say it until you'll hear
the angel—
my child still to be born at the pick
of the season;
sugary sap drips in his bones

I teach colors long gone colors
& sounds:
hummingbirds, peonies, ashes, and rain—
strip and don't move, your mother
will come to you
with white baskets—apples—the crop
for years to come

I teach eyes, open eyes, close eyes,
eyelashes, lips,
hands to grasp, and hands to let loose
a couple of things—
late night feeling of something we haven't done;
something
we haven't
lived

AGAINST NAMING THE DEAD

M. P. Jones IV

Awake beside you with a head full of shadows
unasked as worn questions
simmering in the darkness not expecting
an answer which is only a promise
to try and name it which means to believe
where did they go why did they come
like a dark visitor in the unknown night
even when the sun rose and flooded
the room and I had dressed myself
in the raiments of cynicism and despair
I pressed the unspoken beneath morning habits
until they weighed like silver daggers
unnamable in the night sky
and belonged to you more than me
you gave your stillness so willingly
like a long kiss an answer to this madness
that I held close to my skin
and we bowed into the silence all afternoon
not knowing what we were listening for.

FIG TREE

M. P. Jones IV

We stole eastward toward the wall
like reverse shadows moving for dawn
early fall sheltered in deep layers of
canvas leaves barefoot on the loamy mat
gnarled roots tracing knotted limbs this tree
my parents planted the day they knew

what we held that day between our lips
garbling like first words with the sweetness
that comes from so many years of sunlight
we could taste the sap of time in
the fig juice dribbling down our chins
we were made like children pressing
soft green flesh in our fingers and in them
we could taste the purple heat of stars.

AMPHORA

M. P. Jones IV

I

Before dark had settled upon the land
there was a moment that could have been
understood, just when the sun hung behind
the window glass, and in the frame of green
pasture and endless pines, washing like a river
over the low slung earth, down the deep bank
until it disappeared beneath its own horizon.

Sometimes the mouth quivers as it reaches
for a word that isn't there, into the question
like grey pages advance or recede. Failing sun,
I am unsure if this is my face or my father's
at the window of this dim house filling with night.

II

At the table as night passes like a highway
sound, filling the glass stem between my fingers,
tracing the chip along the foot, hidden in the crest,
delicate and beautiful imperfection covered
by embellishment, sharp secret touch that makes
the dark river tremble like honeysuckle breeze.
Outside the stars are shattered filaments,
why can't we be?

III

A crow's shadow moved across the field
the nothing outside a self—
outside the self nothing

blending blades of grass
with bird wings sculpted by warm
drafts, which is to say revocable marks

before the clay has fired
and changed color,
vessel of immeasurable depth

neither substance nor innocence
body of land transformed,
dark mirror's insoluble presence

crumbling like an idle hour
not touching the grass
to bare resentment or desire.

IV

Johnson said a young man should write pastorals,
not pretend to understand the sorrows of a real life.
His advice: leave elegies and epics to the old bards.
How could he? Night isn't reserved for the grey
and the bald. It has frequented my house, filling jars
we had hung in the trees to hold dark willed spirits
until the branches snapped from the weight that spring
you died and the river swelled until it burst
over the vanished bank, taking all it could carry:
lawn chairs, plastic champagne flutes, a tire,
scrubbing away topsoil like some wild broom
strewing grocery bags on its way to the sea.

V

Without a word for *being there*
we hover over the earth
like ice cubes along the rim
of night
on a base bubbled
with breath
of the dead

VI

Break the glass and free the breath it held
for over a century the ancients
used vessels to carry goods from field
to market, so we are born in vast cities
which contain us like jugs of wine
when the yeast grew, and bustled, and worked,
and filled the spaces, and gobbled the sugar
till it was gone, then settled—leaving
only lees and liquor to remember them.

VII

Night is water when I can move like a minnow
through the moonless sky, dodging little stones
in the current, which is to say the present,
or maybe better, movement, like the studs
in Orion's belt whose light began swimming
a thousand years ago and whose burning now might
come to some child hereafter or perhaps it won't
reach us in time to be poured into the cup
of a human eye before the bottle breaks.

THE MILL AT SUNSET

M. P. Jones IV

Present in the spectacle of sundown
is the liquor of your forgetting. The earth
spins around the sun in the purple darkness
like a miller's stone, grinding against night.
What if this is Hell? What if the world just gets
hotter and more crowded until there is nothing
except for this suffering. In the *Inferno*, Dante
saw those who commit suicide turned into a bush
the harpies would feast on. At dusk, the crows
assemble their murder in the chinaberry down
along the rockfence. Once, I dreamt a shadow
lifted out of my body and that this was me dying.
I knew that this shadow had dwelled before
in other flesh, but I wasn't ready to leave.
I reached over to grab you, but your shadow
started coming out and I dropped it in fear.
As I fell back into my flesh, I realized that
the only sin is despair, to relish in it
until it feels tepid as Seneca's bath water.
Perhaps we are all up here with the other
virtuous pagans as the silver rim of the lake
grows thick and the sun sinks, the slow filling
of the miller's pond in the dark.
Life is a kind of madness I ache from.

NIGHT RENDERING

M. P. Jones IV

For Madison II

When night comes writhing
out from the thawed earth
like a ball of snakes in April
unmindful and moving in all
directions at once I will wait
alone as if shaking the same
desolate dream I have been
having all my life of seasons
turning like threadbare tires
toward the edge of town.

When night comes and fills
my ears like rain on the roof
of the cabin my father built
and poured his shadows in
the moss closing over the hill
where it has stood all my life
gathering night like stones
in the riverbed when there
is no moon we call it *new*
because it appears to us
only as an absence except
for faint traces in the sky.

When night comes I believe
only in the distance of stars
over these abandoned fields
gone wild to seed the hollow
oak that bowed in the ice storm
after two-hundred years
the one grandfather fell in
when he was trying to clean
leaves out to stave away the rot
and he hung there for hours
like a man trapped in a well
until my father found him
by chance just barely noticing
his legs flailing in the green branches.

When night comes I can hear
the past most clearly it is you
grandfather who walks among
the straw briars and still trees
mending pasture fences in a night
with no moon which means to say
it is hidden in plain sight.

AT THE PLANER

M. P. Jones IV

He has chosen the walnut
for its hardness or perhaps
because it has been aging
so long that it may be fed
into the hot teeth of the mill
for hours, the violent sound
scattering sawdust like details
left out of a story. Yes, perhaps
it is for the years this board sat
by the length of green hose, coiled
as a garden snake, which still
bears the rust marks from an exhaust
pipe, on a hill with the dark house
where the terrible shadows fall,
or maybe it is only the table he
imagines hearing—the one dovetailed
and inlaid with bits of cherry
and sycamore, pressed by time
like fieldstones until the knots
resembled crown glass bull's eyes—
or perhaps it is nothing he hears
in the pained song the board makes
each time it passes through.

Flowers-From-Heaven

Sandra K Woodiwiss

Flowers-from-heaven; white, hand painted flowers. I never thought of them as actual flowers. No. No, that's not actually true, I came close once, when I was in Hawaii, of imagining flowers-from-heaven as earth bound, actual blooms.

I was 65 and I had just retired. Melva, and I went to Hawaii. I had a marvelous time. Well, not at first, the first day was dreadful. I was in Honolulu and I could have sworn I was back in Chicago. But then we made our connection to Kauai and everything was fine - splendid. So peaceful – and the white gardenias were stunning.

Stunning.

I tried to tell Melva about the flowers-from-heaven, something I took with me everywhere, in spirit, since childhood but she only laughed. She told me I made no sense. A tropical flower, what was significant about a tropical flower compared to say, a tea rose, but to compare it to a "Technicolor print," she could not comprehend me. I knew she could not understand so I stopped trying to explain. I don't know why I did try to tell her. It was foolish of me.

After that trip, soon after, Melva was diagnosed with leukemia and went to live with her daughter in Seattle. So far away. I can't say that I missed her. Melva and I worked together for over thirty-five years and we played bridge every Wednesday. I played bridge because I didn't want to be caught dead in a bingo parlor. Melva played both bridge and bingo. I left her to it, bingo that is.

When Melva left, the bridge ladies felt that I would soon quit and I did. I guess I wasn't too interested after Melva was not there to encourage me. They talked of grandchildren and the universities they attended, their generational futures. I listened but didn't understand a degree in hotel management. I went to a trade school eons ago and learned to take short-hand, type, and run office machinery.

I learned to be self-sufficient and their conversation seemed old news, wrapped up in shiny foil paper.

Now I make a point to write notes of thanks upon flowery, and I must say expensive, stationary to the mail man, the lady who brings me my meals in the afternoon, and the delivery girl. I write carefully, fully aware of the fine pen point and the ink seeping into the thick page and I smile at the pains I took learning to type. I write long hand and take my time. The delivery girl is always grateful for my notes of thanks, but she struggles reading my words. I asked her if she had trouble reading script and she said she couldn't deliver prescription drugs to me that was against the rules. I smiled and thought of flowers-from-heaven, for some odd reason.

Flowers-from-heaven was a game my brother and I started. My brother was almost seven years older than me. He was very handsome, all the girls said so. They would whisper and nod at me.

“There is Carl Franklin’s kid sister.”

“Her?” Some would raise their eyebrows in mock surprise and nod significantly at each other. Some would laugh, others would cluck. I would think of flowers-from-heaven. Carl found me one day staring at a picture, the very print we would later name, flowers-from-heaven. The picture was a print, a very good, quality print; vivid, almost too vivid. The background was black, a depthless black, bordering on a velvet black but not quite. A velvet black would have been vulgar; this I knew with certainty. In the center of the blackness was a white flower. The flower was white upon white, each petal distinct, set apart, and layered perfectly. The center of the flower was layered over with a languishing petal, a feminine hand to me, the hand of an exhausted lover, her hand draped over her breast, while the other petals, extraordinary in their whiteness fell away in a joyful ecstasy of profusion and celebration. As the petals spread away from the lovely draping center, the whiteness thinned and the exquisite blackness started to seep through, until I wasn’t sure when the petals actually ended, and when the flower was actually over taken by the back ground.

Carl startled me while I stared at the print. He asked me why I was so mesmerized by the flowers-from-heaven but unlike Melva he seemed to understand what I was saying. “You mustn’t say ‘breast,’ in front of Papa. He will start to question the books you are reading,” explained my brother.

I was young. I became angry. Why should he care? I was almost thirteen; I should be able to read what I want. Carl only shook his head and lowered his brows at me. “Don’t try to explain to Papa and be careful when you take out your flowers-from-heaven and look at it.” He tugged gently at my wavy brown hair and smiled at me. I watched as he walked away, his back straight, his shoulders broad.

Carl went away to war. My Mother fretted and my Papa paced the floor. I waited until night and took out my flowers-from-heaven while Carl was away. When he came home he wasn’t the same; thinner and tired. I asked him once if he saw any flowers-from-heaven when in the Philippines or on any of the islands he was on, in the Pacific. He said none were there – only guns. So I would wait until evening when the house was quiet and creep into his room and we would lie on his bed and look at my flowers-from-heaven. He would smoke. He was taught to smoke in the war. We would lie there for a while and simply look at the picture and say nothing.

I would lie next to him and feel him breathe, feel the heat of the jungle he talked about with Papa. Finally, one evening I asked him, to tell me what war was like? I thought he would not answer me. Finally he said; “it’s like that picture there, your flowers-from-heaven.” I went cold with dread.

“What do you mean?”

Carl lifted his left hand, between his fingers a smoldering cigarette, and pointed vaguely at the picture propped up upon my knees. “You see that center petal?” he asked.

“Yes, the hand that covers the breast?”

“Yes, ‘the exhausted lover’s hand’,” he said in a low solemn voice. “Well that exhausted lover will not sleep long. She awakens and removes her hand to reveal a deep red center of discontent. War is she, who promises a man a sense of accomplishment and a promise of adoration if he comes out victorious and so sends him on his way.”

“Where, on his way to where?”

“That deep red center of hers.” Carl’s voice was low and deep. I was silent I did not know what to say but I felt uncomfortable in our silence.

“How do you know you’ve won?” I asked feeling a tight clenching a sort of anger, – a feeling that I wasn’t sure I should have and I asked myself if I might not be war deep within.

“You know you’ve won when you come back alive, and she looks older.” said my brother.

I didn’t go back to his room at night after that and a week later he went back to the Pacific and on some island he died. I was fifteen, he was twenty-two. I lost my virginity when I was sixteen to a GI I met in a hospital ward. A place I would volunteer at, since I was one of the fortunate many. When he was done he said I was deflowered but that had happened long before I met him. I thought of the pain I was causing myself during the ordeal but kept in my mind the image of flowers-from-heaven; the flower covering the wound of war and the black background.

I hurt and ached for some time thinking how black I must be inside. My Papa old before his time and my Mother not speaking anymore; so I decided that I would simply stare at flowers-from-heaven and think of Carl, him lying next to me, smoking, waiting to return to a war that made other men great, made other men heroes and left me and my family alone. I learned to operate office machinery and kept my handwriting secret until it was ready to come out again.

Of course Melva would not understand flowers-from-heaven. And I never did try to explain to her or anyone that the white petal had turned back to the exhausted lover’s hand and the red center had faded to black. The war became history and the subsequent wars afterwards were some other plain girl’s problem, not mine. I fill my life with painted flowers and look, upon the framed pictures of dead people upon the wall and drift to the memory of flowers that turned transparent and allowed the blackness to show through.

That’s what I want to explain to Carl when we see each other again, that I understand now that his war wasn’t within the picture but in the feelings we had when next to each other and the things we started and never ended and the hand is not upon the wound of war but upon the breast of an exhausted lover.

Reaching

Laura Eppinger

What are you reaching
for in the dark across the empty
theater? I'm never sure if it's me
you're seeking but I
am what you find when
we connect your smell greets me strong
enough to fill the room.

Those words I want slip
through my pockets then settle
at the bottom of couch cushions, leaving
only hands and eyes for expressions
I fiddle with my hair and wish
for subtitles.

Off screen, months pass in a flicker, the minutes
spent together add up to a full-length
feature but the words never
loosen the choking
worsens when I imagine myself lifeless
on the bottom of the cutting room floor

Now my arms stretch out, now
a bit more like retching closing
in but it's another kind we're reaching
the end of the show.

What, Wear

Laura Eppinger

When you wear your body
down—not “if” but
“when”—after a lifetime’s
labor sure to snap and overextend,
(not all of a sudden, but the slow
grind of wage work leaving sand
where bones used to sit) you can count
me as your witness. You will
be more than grist.

At the rise of nickel-thick
callouses in each broad hand’s ridge, I
won’t flinch. I’ll count them
as blessings, kiss
them like children
deserve to be kissed.

And when time bites you like acid down through
your steel-toed boots and when I look back
to see green eyes were our only jewels
I will never wander, I’ll stay
blind to fresh blooms.

When the shifts hunch you over, when all fears
come to pass I will
love even the stump of you,
I will raise no ax.

The Guest Room

Laura Eppinger

After a decade of check-out times
sub-lets and bus lines, I returned
a visitor in the house I grew up in.

I could navigate this familiar space with eyes
closed, but wide-eyed I discovered
a childhood bedroom converted
into storage space for a fuller
life.

Rather than fight convert's
fervor, I slinked into the basement, the preferred place
to heal broken bones. But it could never be my
own.

I was a traveler in The Guest Room, evicted
whenever a principal guest came
to stay. Then I was the stowaway
in a bed that pulls out or hides inside a wall.

Was it too bold to invite
a guest of my own? I've never known,
no time to ask till all that remained
were half-full ashtrays, stale
sheets, the smell
of yellowing books.

I cannot offer anything but temporary, can't remember
how to unpack a bag or claim
a hearth. Every nest I've known
was rented. Hands will only
sign a one-night lease.

I give no one the chance to wear
out a welcome. No sense cutting
a key when the only room left
is for other guests.

NOTES WHILE TRAVELLING ACROSS THE LAGOON

Davide Trame

Low shores.. Shallows all over, the bottom of the land here at hand. Like the bottom of us, better stop pretending it's far out, in the depths of some noble dark. The pontoon sways, floats, slightly bounces to and fro , the rigging whines, with moaning screeches that remind of the infinitesimal adjustments of eternity.

An aged woman sitting in the pontoon starts fanning herself: we know the heat, the humid, familiar reek of our own summers at one with the low, slow exuding of the banks' breaths. Our own, inner, basic latitude. Our communal, stretched, thin soul.

The vaporetto grinds on, rumbling in its belly. Many of us reckon they were born in this rumbling, the belly tipping here and there, on the sloshing and gurgling of water, on foundations of wood, barnacles, sand and stones. And honed bones, flashed across like smithereens of memories.

The herring gulls hover and hover and land, with their light iron eyes and beaks that have dipped into the sun's pollen. They make a customary mess of garbage bags, tearing them open, scattering and strewing rubbish on the grey stones, there...even on the church steps: confusion and dirt easily confront holiness and order, guts grow all over, our bellies spreading dirt and disorder even if we try, feeling challenged by spite, to make sense.

Perspiring your own heart you feel low and besieged by heat and closeness inside the crowded cabin. Familiar sandbar sweat and clamor all around. You sense the veins of myriads of crossings on the water-skin. The wait
You have been rehearsing the best countenance to bear while stepping on the tongue of the unknown.

Gazing at the mud and reeds then, where everything transpires in swishes, you have learned to renounce to any countenance, any illusion of outlines. Swish by swish among the reeds, defaced by mud.

HIROSHIMA SHADOWS

Anders Benson

Do you know I once met a lady who dreamt only in Spanish, though she didn't speak or understand a word of it when awake?

When I dream, I dream in mathematics, the most honest and poetic language in all existence. When I am done dreaming, I wake up, and when I wake up I wake to the Rhythm, the slow systolic beat at the core of all things. All things—you, me, grains of sand on a beach—we are all but playful harmonics that weave in and out of the great cosmic chord played at the beginning of the Universe. Most people go bobbing along in blithe ignorance, but I ride upon the Rhythm like a surfer on a wave. It carries me through the minutiae of upright life as my body performs its daily ablutions and feeds itself cereal, and soon I'm flowing down the sidewalk and the slabs are coming at me in perfect seven-eight time as I skip over the cracks—don't step on the cracks!—I start to hum "Money" as I near the end of the block: Bum-ba-dah-bum-keep-your-hands-offa-my-stack...a little girl smiles at me, and I'm not sure if she's real but I smile back anyway. The mother tugs her well out of my path; stay away from the crazy lady! Then they're gone and a fresh challenge presents itself: the crosswalk. Tricky bit of navigating here. Get it wrong and I'm somebody's hood ornament. I pause, observe—black white black white left right left—now I've got the timing, and I slip back into the stream, plying the ticklish harmonic eddies that ripple in the wake of the Rhythm. I never stop moving, light on my feet, can't catch me now, appointments to keep! Tea and cakes, tea and cakes, tea with Mum today!

* * *

Some tea party. They called it a "prescribed intervention," which is a legally ambiguous medical term for kidnapping. They grabbed poor schizoid Scarlet by the arm and shot her full of Thorazine before she knew what was happening, that's what they did. Bye-bye, happy colorful freedom; hello, hateful whitewashed reality. They must have primed me with about half my usual dose of oxcarbazepine before the stronger stuff wore off, because when I finally surface I am lucid and coherent, but I'm pinballing uncontrollably between weeping apologies and fuck-you-I-hate-you. Most people think that pills make the crazy go away. They don't. At best they put a lid on the crazy to keep it from boiling over; at worst they simply induce catatonia. When I'm taking my meds like a good girl, I can still feel the rhythm, but it is stripped of all meaning and significance, reduced to lower-case status. I remember my thoughts as they were in my untreated state, but I have no frame in which to define them. They are like silhouettes scored onto walls by an atomic bomb blast, crisply defined and identifiable by shape, but flat and empty, lacking the depth and texture that would give them relevance. I am left only with the vaguely sad memory of something gone that once was vibrant and unique.

The pills do not draw a line between reality and delusion; they only give me the ability to draw it myself. But most people don't know that, they just think that I take the pills and magically become sane; hooray, she's back, now we can all resume normalcy. So it's understandable that some of the people who've bravely shown up to rescue me from myself are taken aback by my witty rejoinders to their well-rehearsed lines:

Mum: "I want my lovely daughter back. I love you, Scarlet..." (sniffles and turns away, just a heart-rending performance)

Dad: "We all love you, Scooter." (attempting to score bonus points with use of irritating childhood nickname)

Dr. Maynard, my thesis advisor: "Scarlet, your work in quantum chromodynamics is groundbreaking. We need you back, Scarlet." (I'm guessing they've been coached to repeat my name as frequently as possible.)

Dr. Burgess, my psychiatrist: "Your family and friends all love you very much, Scarlet. We want to help you." (deliberate spiteful antagonism; the bitch knows my disdain for cloying sympathy)

Of course those aren't my actual comebacks. The things I really say are considerably less clever and unprintably profane, but for many this isn't the first rodeo, and the others have obviously been told what to expect. They come at me one after another: my boyfriend, Tom; my research partner, Benji; Aunt Patty; my best friend, Samantha...the list goes on. After three hours I have no more tears and no more screams, and I allow them to bully me into a five-week commitment.

Dr. Burgess arranges for a suite at St. Dymphna's with pleasant, pastel walls and a cheap little desktop fountain that has a shortened cord so I can't hang myself with it. There are plenty of ways for me to kill myself in this artificially peaceful little world—if I wanted to hang myself, for instance, I'd tear the sheets into strips and braid a noose around that nice, rigid hanger rod in the closet—but some thoughtful administrator who wouldn't know a mental illness if one bit him on the hippocampus saw fit to pay an electrician to shorten the cord on the fountain to ten inches. The pathetic little thing has to sit on the floor directly under the lockout-boxed receptacle, but it does its cheerful best to fill the big, empty space across from the sofa, and there's absolutely no way that a patient can hurt themselves with it. I could choke myself on the pebbles from the cheap little desktop Zen garden, but thank goodness I'm safe from that fountain.

At least it keeps me company, burbling away over on the sunny side of the room. Normally at this time of the morning, I'd be playing backgammon with Caterpillar Dave, but he's gone over the deep end again, and he has to stay in the bouncy castle until butterflies stop coming out of his nose. Instead I sit alone and wait for my daily lunch date. Who will be today's Surprise Mystery Guest? It was Mum yesterday and Samantha on Monday, so I won't see either of them for a while. Ooh, maybe Tom will come and bring me a little "afternoon delight"!

Shit, now I'll be stuck with that all day. Frigging earworms.

My 10:30 meds arrive via Nurse Moore; skinny Nurse Moore, flat as a door. I swallow dutifully and open wide to show I'm not tonguing my pills, then I scowl at her until she flushes with embarrassment and backs out of the room. She's new and doesn't understand how crazy works. She'll learn soon enough or she'll quit. Today's mystery guest turns out to be Benji, and he's brought me my laptop and a huge stack of notebooks. Good boy, Benji. At least one person knows how to help me; work is almost as effective a panacea as sex. He only stays long enough to fill me in on the latest gossip from the physics department, then leaves me to my studies. If ever there were a cure for insanity, it would be particle theory. There is nothing more ordered and real than the fundamental mechanism of the Universe. If truth is beauty, then a single hydrogen atom is nature's Venus de Milo. I dive into a cloistered world of theory and calculation, leaving my lunch unfinished, hardly noticing when tubby Nurse Andersen comes in with my 2:30 meds. The room fills with the amber rays of a late-autumn sunset, yet I'd rather bask in the wan glow of my computer screen. The latest figures from CERN swoop and twirl in my imagination, hinting at secret doings of subatomic particles yet unknown to mankind, yet they dance torturously just beyond my grasp.

Evening finds me frustrated; my formulae will not resolve, and all of my extrapolations lead to dead ends. Every promising result turns out to be the product of error. I take my 6:30s automatically when they are handed to me. A little while later I look up and notice that my congealed tomato soup has been replaced with a dinner entrée and a fresh utensil. They only give you one here, and it's a spoon. Have you ever tried to eat Salisbury steak with a spoon? I'm not hungry anyway. I am tired, very tired, and a few hours later I stumble off to bed, suspecting that they've slipped a sedative into my bedtime meds. I forgot to count the pills. Rookie mistake; been on the outside too long.

The next day's work brings me no closer to answers, nor the next after that. I look up and realize that it's Saturday night, and I can't remember who's come for lunch the last three days. I bolt from my chair with a howl and fling a notebook at the stupid little fountain. I miss and it burbles blithely on. It has no idea how near to peril it has come. That's the thing: peril. Playing with fire; running with scissors; going too near the edge. I'm sharpest when I'm a little over the edge, still in control but in danger of slipping back into my old ways. I do my best work when the rhythm is strong, just before it reclaims that coveted capital 'R,' when I can let it fill me but not consume me. I know how to get there too; I have to lower my dosages. The doctors won't go for it if I suddenly proclaim myself cured and ask them to dial down my meds, but there are other ways to skin the cat. I'll tongue just one pill per dose, just enough to get that edge back, and they'll never catch on.

I get away with it for five very productive days, then suddenly Nurse Puczaski shows up with my bedtime meds. She's younger than I am, but she's a psych ward

veteran. She suspects something; before she brings me my cup of pills, she noses around a little bit, peering down the sink drain, inspecting the toilet bowl for residue, lifting the lid of the tank. But I'm cleverer than that, aren't I? Search all you like, you snooping bitch, you won't find them. She knows I'm tonguing, and she's letting me know that she knows, daring me to try it on her. Like an idiot I rise to the challenge, raise the stakes even: I try for two. She catches me, of course.

Good-bye, comfy pastel-colored suite. Good-bye, happy little fountain where I drowned my pills. Good-bye, impending discharge. Now I'm in general observation with bolted-down furniture and eggshell walls. I can't get any work done, and they make me stick my tongue out six times a day. It's all right, though, because I've got a new plan: I've been hoarding my salt packets, and every night, in the shatter-proof mirror in my tiny bathroom, I practice sticking my tongue out in just the right position so they can see underneath it but not all the way to the back of my mouth.

Caterpillar Dave gets out of the hole just in time to help me with a crucial step. Puczaski's punishing me with plastic cutlery—I've made no secret of my dislike for sporks—but Dave has a roommate who never misbehaves and therefore has metal spoon privileges. Dave is reluctant so I threaten to show him my breasts if he chickens out. He's afraid Puczaski will frown at him if he gets caught, but I know he'll come through for me. He's a soft touch for the ladies.

When he brings me the spoon, reverently folded in a paper napkin, he handles it like a holy icon being loaned from a monastery. I have to kiss him on the cheek before he'll give it up. Later that night I wrap my right hand in a fist around the bowl of that spoon and position the end of the handle like a chisel against the base of my lower left wisdom tooth. I kneel in the bathroom doorway and tuck my cheek tight against the jamb. Once I've got it all lined up and I've given the door a couple of hesitant practice swings, I exhale as far as I can and clench my diaphragm so I won't be able to cry out. This is it. This is for all the marbles. I grip the heavy wooden door with bloodless fingers and slam it against my upraised fist.

I, Scarlet, being of soundly medicated mind and body, have deliberately knocked out one of my own teeth, and it hurts like bloody bejeezus. I carefully tear a salt packet into two pieces, minimizing spillage and setting the unused portion aside. Then I wrap the half-packet, paper and all, inside a square of linen torn from my pillowcase, ball it up tightly, and stuff it into the hemorrhaging socket in the back of my mouth. Only once I've cleaned up the mess on the floor and flushed all the fragments of my tooth down the toilet do I crawl back to bed and learn how to sleep with a medium-sized star going nova in my jaw.

The results are surprisingly favorable, as I discover when I change the antiseptic wad the next morning. Enough space has been opened up to easily conceal two or three pills without tonguing and it fools even Puczaski. As long as I keep my jaw clamped shut, it hardly bleeds at all. I start complaining of migraines and am given a steady supply of Tylenol, which helps with the inflammation. I get used to the intense

flavor of the salt in no time, but the flesh of my gums and the inside of my cheek has begun to dry up and slough by the first evening. No matter, because the next day my mind is filled with fresh ideas almost from the moment I wake up. The pain isn't as distracting as I thought it would be. My work demands so much of my attention that I'm able to tune it out for long periods. It keeps me awake at night and is very difficult to control at mealtimes; I eat only soft foods and blame my lack of appetite on the quasi-fictional headaches.

A week goes by before infection sets in, and nothing I can do will staunch it or hide the swelling. It throbs incessantly but I put the pain out of my mind and press on with my work. I am close to finishing an elegant set of proofs for Benji's abelian group formulae when they drag me away from my laptop and clap a respirator mask over my face. Then it's off to the oral surgeon, and wouldn't you know it, when I wake up I'm in the bouncy castle, and they've given me enough Thorazine to drop a rhino.

*You lock your right knee in, you slide your left foot out,
You tremble and you dribble, you make faces like a trout,
You do the Shaky Shuffle 'til the Thorazine runs out,
That's what it's all about!*

I wrote that when I was twenty-three.

* * *

It takes me a long time to come up, and for even longer I pretend to still be under, relishing the clarity that bathes my mind once the powerful antipsychotic drug is clear of my veins. They've dried me out, the fools! No more meds, now I'm free, free to float upon the Rhythm, and from here I can reach out and touch the edge of the Universe. I am happy in here. They give me crayons and newsprint, and I am able to continue my work. In mere hours I've produced several paradigm-shaking theorems, and I am tantalizingly close to resolving Bleeker's Paradox. Soon I eschew the crayons for the dancing lights that inscribe my formulae upon the insides of my eyelids. I lie on the floor, and for once in my life, I am *at peace*, finally left alone with the Rhythm in my head. There are no cracks in the sidewalk to swallow me up if I misstep and no burrowing earworms either. I turn away all visitors, and when they bring me pills, I take the ones I want and spit the rest all over the wall, and Nurse Moore has to come in and clean up the mess.

So I am free and yet not free. I long for escape. Who doesn't? A chained dog, a 9-to-5 slave with a white cotton collar, a gifted physicist held back by the sticky tendrils of convention; the sane and the insane alike bridle at captivity. I feel wonderful locked in my cell, but I could be feeling wonderful out there where the grass is greener than green and sidewalks sing songs and every day is Easter!

And then I wake up one morning remembering what it was like to be medicated and remembering being free, and I find those mysterious silhouettes cast by my passage, only now I understand that they are moments in time pressed flat and stacked in two-

dimensional packets. Peeling back layer after layer, I suddenly realize that I can go wherever I like by simply remembering myself there. Who would have thought: an Einstein-Rosen bridge right here in my brain! I get up from my bed, and I remember myself out in the beautiful world—hello, beautiful world!—and just like that I am gone, skipping off to a place of light and wisdom, and all that remains of Scarlet is an atom-bomb shadow on the wall of a padded room.

Geoffrey Miller

Case Study No. 127 – Oliver, Eli William

***** _ 10 minutes ago _*****

Your parole hearing has been conducted in full compliance with the laws of this land and it is the finding of this board that your request for parole be denied at this time. You, Eli William Oliver shall here by continue to serve the sentence of life which was rightfully handed down to you as you were found guilty by a jury of your peers for the crime of two counts of murder in the second degree.

***** _ 8 years, 2 months and 4 days inside _ *****

Eli busied himself with remembering which chairs were in need of repair while he was methodically collecting hymnbooks, which for the most part, had been dropped underneath them. It upset him to see these books treated in such a way. While finishing the other minor tasks he was required to do, he'd sent most of the morning's congregation to hell in his mind before he was finished.

"Eli thank you for your help this morning, I don't know what I'd do without you around here."

Eli smiled and after a sufficient pause had been afforded for him to continue if he chose to, "Father, do you think these men believe in God?"

Father Watson had been working with prisoners long enough to know things in here, as they are for most people outside, are most easily approached by looking at others first rather than themselves.

"Think about how a man answers these kinds of questions Eli. If I ask a man, 'Do you believe in God?' He doesn't answer, 'I don't believe in God' but rather says, 'I don't know if I believe in God'. Now, why do you think he answers that way?"

Eli tried to figure out the answer Father Watson was looking for but instead found his mind flooded with memories of equations from eleventh grade algebra class with Mrs. Spinnie and the sweaters Nadine used to wear.

"I don't know why Father, why do they?"

He smiled that smile all priests must perfect before being allowed to practice their trade, "Well, it's because people use what they know to understand the world but they use what they believe to find their place in it."

Eli understood the words but sat silently hoping he would explain them to him.

"It's because they believe there is something, something bigger than them in their life. They just don't know yet if they are willing to call that thing God."

***** _ 3rd week of summer vacation & 5 weeks before Eli turned 17 _ *****

The drive-in had double features all summer but was only open on weekends. For a boy Eli's age, it wasn't just going to the movies with a girl when you went there on a Sunday night. Sally knew this too; she'd been planning and waiting for this night ever since Eli had taken her to the Spring Formal. Her mother had bought her a new light blue off the shoulder dress and even though he hadn't wanted to Eli had worn a tie, which had more or less matched it. Her father had told him he should just do it, and perhaps because he was also wearing a tie at the time, he convinced himself to believe her father.

Elaine called at exactly 9 a.m. and let it ring until she got tired of listening to it. 'She had to be home, she wouldn't have stayed out all night even if she'd fallen in love with him,' Elaine needed to be the first person to know everything. 'It was only natural after all because they were best friends.'

Closer to lunchtime she finally got Sally to answer the phone but before she'd time to ask her anything, "Have you ever told a boy you love him? No, of course not, well at least not first. Why did he tell you? No. So then what happened then? Nothing."

Not knowing what else to say Elaine filled their silence with, "So how was the movie?"

It didn't work. "Sally, do want me to come over? He just said, he didn't know. Didn't know what? He just said he didn't know, how could he say that? What did you ask him? Nothing. Then why did he say he didn't know? I told him that I loved him. And then he said he didn't know? Yeah. Eli's an idiot. Don't say that. Why because you love him? You're being mean. I'm sorry, you're right. Yeah. So do you still love him? I don't know. Maybe he was just nervous, you know guys, they like to say it first. Yeah, maybe you're right. But why couldn't he just say it to me, I know he does. It hurts Elaine, he really hurt me and made me feel silly and stupid."

It went on like this, the two girls rearranging the world as if everyone else were teddy bears being laid out on a quilt for a class photo. Around and around they whirled reconstructing the details of the relationship with the care of a nail artist only to end up with a world held together by a sticky web of cotton candy. "Believe me Sally, he will. It took Randy almost five months before he told me. But I have to go, my shift starts in an hour and I have to get ready. Yeah, I know. Just I feel he used me, he made me feel this way but he doesn't. I should've never let this happen."

For the next twelve minutes, the two girls regurgitated the first hour of their call, ending with Sally exactly where she'd been when Eli dropped her off last night. "If he loves you, then he has to tell you. I'll call you when I get home from work. Are you seeing him tonight? Yeah, we're going to go play mini golf with Pam and Chris. Then don't worry anymore, I'm sure he'll tell you tonight, I know he will. You're right, I'm sure he was just nervous. But."

And with that one word, all the teddy bears fell out of their positions, swept aside in a tsunami of teenage angst and newly found womanhood fury. Leaving Sally lying on her bed covered in the remains of too sweet to late cotton candy staring at a blue dress poking out of a closet door and thinking 'I hate you Eli.'

***** _ journal entry (unnumbered – page 21) _ *****

I'd been thinking about something, I must've been thinking about something I was driving but now I can't remember what it was and the doctor said this is a place where I don't have to lie, I don't have to hide - - - but I just don't remember what was in my mind before I felt their bodies hit my truck and they died. I want to know – I want to say that I was daydreaming about the weekend or listening to the ball game on the radio – but I wasn't – I was driving home the same way I drive home every day. Except something happened – but I didn't do anything different – someone else did – someone else changed their pattern and came to me – I didn't go looking for anything – so why is this something that I did? Why isn't it something they did?

***** _ 5th day in solitary confinement _ *****

The first few days inside were easier than his uncle had let on during their talks while he'd been waiting to be transferred. A month later Eli realized the exaggerations had been for his benefit and his uncle wasn't a fairy after all.

At the time though the 'advice' had made him arrogant and isolated, things Eli knew now shouldn't be on the to-do list of any lanky twenty-three year old white kid in prison. More than enough guys inside all lined up for the chance to make sure you knew 'you weren't something special'.

***** _ 24 years, 9 months & 28 days inside _ *****

Eli was in, just in, he'd gotten life twenty-five years ago when he hit the wrong two kids driving home. At his first parole hearing, after his three newest jurors had been briefed concerning the particulars of his stay by the assistant warden, an older man in a slightly stained suit with a voice made hoarse by chewing tobacco asked, "Do you regret what you did?"

Eli's eyes fell to his slippers and circled lazily like a fly tasting insect repellent – with uncertainty prodded by instinct. 'Moses didn't part the sea when no one was looking my son; sometimes the men of the world need a little convincing to believe the truth they know is there in front of them.' When the echo of the priest's words became silence, Eli looked up and pursed his lips, as if giving momentum to words caught somewhere within, before looking back at the man who'd asked the question.

"I want those two little kids to be alive."

"No man wouldn't want that," was accented by a sleeve drawn across a slightly oblong mouth, "but Eli, you're the one in this room who is guilty of killing them."

Eli searched for the flies but found only stained slippers.

The older man leaned in close enough for Eli to know he'd skipped his shower this morning, "Tell me the truth son," and as a way of convincing him flashed a yellow half-set of what used to be teeth.

The priest was silent.

The doctorish man sitting to Eli's right cleared his throat.

'Eli's eyes found him too quickly is what was said later after the hearing had ended and he was back to his cell awaiting their decision.'

"I know I did it, I know those boys are dead because of me but I can't say I murdered them," came out of Eli's mouth like a shut-in on eviction day; bewildered and unsure.

Eli heard papers being moved around by hands unfamiliar with the task, followed by a sanctimonious motherly tone of voice not interested in waiting for him to find his way down the front steps, "Says right here in your file Mr. Williams that a judge found you guilty of two counts of murder in the second degree Mr. Oliver."

Eli knew she wasn't asking a question but he answered her with a glanceless, "yes", before adding, "But that doesn't mean I don't know that I did. I know those two boys are dead because of me."

'Seemed a little too sure of himself when he spoke to me, as if I shouldn't have dared to suggest the legal history of the case', is how this was rehashed hours later over a flowered tablecloth reached only by a single-laned country road. 'You remember him don't you - Martha Oliver's boy – well he has more of his father in him than anyone deserves.'

"Just I don't believe I murdered them."

After that, it seemed everyone was hunting the flies Eli'd seen earlier and it was left to foot scuffing by the assistant warden to bring things to an end, "You can go outside now Eli."

***** _ 2 weeks minus a day in solitary _*****

Martha Oliver was told she couldn't visit her son, after spending the two odd hours in the car after church, because as the guard, John, put it, "He was serving time in solitary confinement until the first week of next month at the earliest." She began touching her face and not looking at anything in particular. He noticed a spot under her left ear where the skin had been picked raw. "You can leave a message," after pushing a piece of paper through the cage to her.

John hadn't gone to the same high school as Eli but he'd played against him during basketball season; he remembered his coach telling him to soften up the skinny kid when he tried to set up in the blocks. He'd hated fouling out of every game before the end of the third quarter but seeing his father in the stands never failed to bring back the words 'coach knows how to use you best, show him you're a team player.' "I'll see that he gets it." She looked like she was going to chock herself. "Do you need a pen?"

***** _ 17th day inside _ *****

Him, yeah, plastic scraping plastic, Eli, not looking, moving, seen, guards unweaving paradigms, inmates sense – something – eyes narrow, grips tighten, food line pausing, smells of heat, sweat, urine, food - distinct and isolated. Cook –ambiguous and blind, mouth open a tad too wide for bright, stands ladle full, pausing and confused. Eli – watchful, aware, observant, sounds unaltered, naïve, empty chair – wrong table. Faggot – not me, eat, eyes down, muffled murmurs, Deaf Faggot – fear, stomach, tight, skin, burning, half raised, seeing shoes, Sorry, half-step, backwards, tray flying, Stupid Deaf Faggot – .

Eli decided that jumping across the table was a better idea than trying to hit the guy who'd knocked the tray out of his hands. He knew hitting a bitch didn't mean you still weren't one.

Broken nose, cracked ribs, less teeth than he'd had yesterday and a month in solitude to lick his wounds is how it ended; plus one extra broken rib from a guard's baton, "Fucking baby killer."

***** _ journal entry (unnumbered – page 6) _ *****

I can't do this anymore, I can't be in this place.....yesterday I saw a man stabbed in the eye and I want to put down a reason here but I don't know one, I can't even imagine one – have come to the realization there are no reasons – there are no reasons for things that men do – just as there are no reasons for the things that happen to them....some people are terrible, terrible people, they are just evil inside and there isn't a space left for the smallest piece of good to hide, and those people are not punished, they are not exposed or held up for what they are, no they live on with the rest of us, and not even all of us, for there are good people too, good people even in here, in this hell society has created for the ones who don't believe to go to, to be in, to sit here and be tormented and to fight....you have to fight it, I have to fight it, I find myself feeling that there is no point, no point to trying to not be like them, to exist on their level and become what I feel I am supposed to be turned into by this place – but I know it is wrong – it is wrong I am here, it is wrong for me to become that man because I am not that man – the doctor said I have to accepted my life here and find the best in it I can – the priest said there is a reason for me to be here – there is no reason to be here – why be here?! – so I can know hell before I die, a warm-up for where I get to spend my eternity – well I have seen enough – I will not become evil to fit into what fate has thrown at me – I will leave and let God judge me

***** _ 13 years, 5 months and 16 days inside _*****

“You see, people seek patterns, they do. They do it to prevent surprises. Gives them a little feeling of predictability in their life, they know they don’t have it, of course, but they like to believe they do. If they believe they can see a pattern, then they think they got some control over what’s coming down the pipe for them, but then something goes wrong. Something happens that doesn’t fit. What do you suppose they do then? Just let it be and keep on with what they were doing, knowing it to be just a hiccup? No way, for them, when you believe something, it doesn’t matter what you know, you just believe and that’s enough. And to believe is absolute, there isn’t any place for hiccups; known or otherwise.”

Jones stopped, suddenly, and from his eyes’ point of view, thankfully, for they were almost bugging right out of his head at this point, so intently had he been trying to make his point. Nevertheless, after having succeeded in reeling them in a touch, “Or do they stop believing in the pattern because they know it’s wrong?”

Squid had been trying his damndest to hold it in but he couldn’t, and although his timing had been knocked off track by the eye games, he blurted, “Yes, they have to because it’s wrong.”

“Not a chance, because for them the pattern’s become their life and anything outside is a threat, to the pattern, to their control, to their belief, to their life – so they kill it. At least they want to, but at first, they can’t because they know it’s wrong, they know they shouldn’t feel that way. But later, the pattern’s gotten tighter, more complete and they more dependent on it – and that thing that keeps messing it up - just has to go. It just has to, because if that thing is still there then they’re not in control. It’s control man, people who want to control are bad and there isn’t anybody I’ve met yet that didn’t want a little control, to believe they had a little control over things in their life.”

Jones was quiet, for a second, but after a quick rub of his thumb across his mouth, kept on with it, “Okay, fine, you don’t believe me, then you take one of those ‘good’ people you know. Go ahead and pick anyone of them, hell, even pick the goodest of the bunch if you want. It won’t matter you see, I know this is right; I’ve seen it my whole life – you threaten someone’s sense of control over their life and the bad just comes pouring out of them.”

Eli tried to think but for some reason couldn’t help but remember when he’d been much younger practicing ‘pick a card, any card’ magic tricks with his older brother.

“You got one?”

“I do”, he lied, “Father Watson. He’s good.”

Jones laughed long enough that a few other inmates started to look over at them.

However, a quick slap on his knee had the effect of sending him rolling again, “A priest, you’re telling me you’re picking a priest. Oh, man Eli; you’re making it too easy.”

Squid tried to ask something here but Jones told him to shut up.

***** _ 300 days after the drive in _ *****

Eli knew she was going to be around during the summer. He'd seen her mother at the grocery store sometime in May and the only thing she could talk about was how excited she was about having Sally back home from university for the summer.

"It's been so empty without her."

Eli had nothing to add so he simply smiled and said, "Well, I have to go and get these things for my Mom before it gets too close to supper time."

She apologized for having kept him, passed on her hello to his mother and wished him good luck with his new job.

Sausage, Bobby really, but aside from his mother no one had called him that since before high school, had been in and out of prison since he was old enough to qualify. When he was out, his time was divided between one of two things – doing things that would put him back inside and drinking.

On the rare occasions someone found him in a state, which could be loosely defined as sober, he was someone to listen to.

Eli sat unintentionally half covered by a shadow cast by the sink trying to remember one story in particular Sausage had told him years ago.

“It’s hot.” Sausage took the first drink of his fifth beer, wiping the foam from his chin with the back of his sleeve; but not before a little found its way to his shirt. Looking down and laughing to himself, “Roy, you giving me too much head again.” The bartender gave him the finger without turning away from the baseball game on above the bar. Phil though looked over with a half-smile on his face, which was more than enough for Sausage to add, “Reminds me of Sally Rago.” Phil rolled his eyes and the words ‘town bike’ were half lost under Roy’s cheer about something happening in the game.

“You know her Eli or maybe you’re too young, before your time. Don’t really know where she is now. Last time I saw her was before I went in for a nine-month stretch for credit cards. What a fuck up that was.”

The game went to commercial and Roy looked over, “I remember her, great ass.” Ignoring Roy completely he kept on, “But you get a woman like her and a lot of things don’t seem crazy anymore when she says them. You’ve never been with a woman like her yet Eli, and good for you, they’re no good for anything. Well except giving great head and getting you all jammed up.”

He laughed and Eli joined in but finished before him. “I knew she wasn’t with me because she loved me or nothing like that. And you’re sitting there seeing me so you know it wasn’t this face of mine that did it.” Sausage emptied his beer, “Two more Roy, now I bet you’re thinking I’m going to say it was because I got what women want.” He laughed first again. “Naw, I’m full of shit sometimes but I can’t stomach that much of it myself. It’s because I did things for her that she needed done. Thanks Roy, see, you got to have that attached to you. You have to have a but.”

Eli stopped watching the game and finished what was in the bottom of his glass before hitting the head on the new one. “You what?”

Sausage’s laugh was replaced with a sly smile, he had Eli now; the Sausage had his audience.

“You need to be more than you are to everyone else for some people. You know, go beyond yourself.”

Eli looked at him and wondered whom it was exactly sitting there talking to him.

“You aren’t who you think you are to everyone you know. Different people will see you

for what they want.”

This was after all the first guy brought in by the cops after any theft or fraud was discovered in the area.

“Sure there might be some kind of general consensus around you. Like, that guy’s good with cars or he’s a guy you can count on. But that’s just what people use to talk about you when you aren’t around and they are trying to act as if they know – but they don’t. You ever thought about someone you know as ‘a good card player?’”

Eli couldn’t believe it but he was actually running through the people he knew in his head and trying to answer Sausage’s question.

“You have to have someone in your life that you mean enough to for them to have a ‘but’ for you.”

Jon was a great shortstop.

“Well that’s what I’m good at.” He jerked his head back towards the TV, “Those two think I’m a drunk and a thief. And I am. But for her I was also the guy who listened to her craziness, no matter how nuts it was, and I went right along for the ride. And damn Eli she was out there; all the time.”

Eli had nothing to put after the ‘but’ he was mouthing for Jon.

“Roy do we need to wait ‘til commercial or what here?” Sausage laughed again while turning to look down the bar, “Phil you working part-time here yet?”

The both of them weren’t here anymore with the game heading for the ninth.

“Ah, fuck’em, I gotta take a leak.”

*****_ journal entry (unnumbered – page 42) _*****

Didn't sleep last night, haven't slept well for over a week now but last night was by far the worst. Finally got my eyes closed then, had a dream about my father – we were fishing, just the two of us on pond in a small rowboat, which we never actually did, when all of a sudden something big was on the end of my line – I remember I was scared – I don't know what of and I'm trying not to just make something up now – doctor said that was a waste of time – but I don't know what I was scared of just wanted to land that fish I guess so I could make my dad happy but I didn't, well actually I don't know if I did or not – I woke up as I was turning around to look at him – I have to get dressed for cell inspection now, then breakfast, hope I can stop thinking about that man

***** _ July 15th in a parking lot outside a movie theater _*****

Sally looked everywhere except at Eli while she went through an almost pre-arranged speech about her past year away at university, remembering of course to end it with a question about what he'd been up to.

"I love you."

She looked at him, how could she not.

"I believe you Eli. I really do, but it's too late now."

She wasn't the only one with a set of canned lines this day.

"No, really Sally, I love you. I know that now. I believe it. I thought I loved you last summer too but I wasn't sure so ... I didn't want to say it to you."

"I know Eli but..."

She hadn't prepared this part, and if she was honest with herself, she'd thought about Eli very little after she'd meet Scott during the Easter break she spent with her friends skiing.

"Eli...I have to go, my mom is waiting for me because...well...my boyfriend is coming over tomorrow and we need to get some things around the house ready before he gets here."

After watching her leave in her mom's blue car, Eli got into his truck, turned on the radio and sat there in a way that anyone passing by would have described as looking like he was waiting for someone.

Sometime after dark but before midnight, because there were still cars parked near the exit for the movie theater in the mall, Eli reached down to start his truck. Surprisingly, he smiled to himself when he wondered if it would start or not after having listened to the radio for so long, after all, he knew now that timing mattered.

***** _ 9 minutes after breakfast in solitary confinement_ *****

He was half finished his soup before he noticed the folded piece of paper sticking out from under the plate. Wiping his fingers on his pants, his mind was awash with anxiety, like an oil spill making everything ugly and polluted. Picking it up he'd already gotten it down to two possibilities – a guard telling him he was staying in here longer or a prisoner letting him know what would happen when he was let out. 'Hello son...' was worse than either of them and coincidentally was the last thought he had about his mother for a very long time as a blackness continued to spread over him.

He stood up, leaving the rest of the food where it sat, and moved as far away from 'it' as he could. This had been the other piece of advice of his uncle's that was turning out to be truer than he needed it to be – 'if you're in, you're in and that's it. You have to know that. Keeping this world with you in there will kill you.' Eli looked up at the wall and counted the lines – 15 – and for the second and the last time, he believed his uncle.

He put his hands on the edge of the sink, reflexively closed his eyes and started reminding himself of where he was. "You're in prison, you're in solitary confinement, you've been here for fifteen days, and this is where you live now because you killed two little boys." And it was here that Eli stopped speaking but in his mind, he continued, 'but you're not a murder'.

The middle of his back sunk inwards, as if sucked by his abdomen. His head fell backwards until his still closed eyes were staring up at the ceiling. Hands at his sides now, he could be said to be doing nothing except waiting. For what, Eli didn't know; his mind was empty – only the shallow rise and fall of his chest provided evidence he hadn't fossilized.

A guard came and removed the tray sometime later, taking with it the letter from his mother but saying nothing when he saw Eli –

'Curved and loose with his eyes looking up at the roof,' is what the guard said as he mimicked Eli's posture to his co-workers in the staffroom hours later, 'and I'd give a hundred bucks to know what was in his mind.'

A veteran among the guards suddenly found himself the center of attention, which was odd as James was still standing as he was before.

Old Mike didn't pause for effect here but rather simply because he wondered why they would ask him that same question yet again, 'I don't waste my time trying to figure out what the animals are thinking...'

'Because as far as I'm concerned they aren't.' Is how one of the girls from the office finished his sentence before they all laughed and went back to trying to decide the starting date for the fall bowling league.

***** _ 19 minutes after Eli left his first parole hearing _*****

“He knows he did it, but that doesn’t mean he believes he did it. Mr. Oliver killed those two boys, you both heard him say it, and of course we already knew that but at least now we know he knows.”

Charles continued for a while, keeping the peaks and valleys of his monologue in tune with Mrs. Underhill nods and accenting it periodically with tobacco spit.

Mr. Perkins however, had gone tone deaf; he wished it’d been blind. For to escape the screech of Charles’s sanctimonious musings about whoever it was they’d just been interviewing, he’d let his mind slip back to the new intern at his office. She’d started billing lingerie to her expense account at about the same time she started staying later into the evenings at the office. How had she put it? Right, ‘Just in case he needed anything.’

“And if Mr. Oliver doesn’t believe he did it, doesn’t believe he is a murderer, then how can he be reformed?”

‘God, is he still going on with this?’

Scott had been in enough of these meetings during the last two years to know that Charles didn’t really want answers to his questions. For him they were a kindness he bestowed on the rest of us to make us feel like we were a part of the process.

‘Well, enjoy it while you can buddy because I’m here for another six months and then I’m done.’

At least he hoped so. Scott had been at the public defender’s office for almost four years now and still none of the better private firms in town had approached him. And no one needed to remind him that if he stayed much longer that is where he would simply stay.

“Saint Peter doesn’t open the gates,” tobacco spit, “because you tell him you know this is where you belong.” He closed his eyes again and tried to figure out how he could be sure she was wearing something she’d billed the office for on the night he told her that she would have to produce evidence of her purchases. He smiled to himself.

“Christ Charles, he’s been in here for twenty five years. Whether he knows or believes or whatever other word you want to use – he did it and he’s paid for it with his life.”

Scott heard tobacco spit slapping a paper cup. “Even the priest is recommending him for release. Says here that he has plans to join the church after he’s released, who are we to argue with that?”

***** _ now _ *****

He closed his eyes, and for the first time in a very long time, his mind was quiet. He was the only person alive who believed he wasn't a murderer. He hadn't written this in the letter found later in his cell addressed to 'Church'. But he had written, 'I've learned all I need to learn from this life, it's time now to see what someone else thinks about it.'

THINGS

Gay Baines

Josie and Alan had married not in haste but after a year of deepening association, which began when they were graduate students at Syracuse University. Alan, who was legally blind, was finishing his Ph.D. in psychology. Josie was working toward an M.S. in library service and had a job in the Music Department of the university library. Among her tasks was playing reference records and tapes for students and faculty. Alan used the Music Department record players frequently to listen to recorded books from the Library of Congress. Josie played these for him coolly, resisting the urge to feel sorry for him. Her father had suffered a stroke that left him partially paralyzed, and she knew the futility of pity. When Alan commented on the unavailability of many texts he was expected to read, she volunteered to read them aloud to him. They spent long hours together every day. At first they took “breaks” which consisted of thermos coffee and pastries. Then they began bringing elaborate lunches to share with each other. Finally they went out to dinner. Nothing fancy, just baked beans and sauerkraut with thick bread and margarine at the Crouse-Irving Hospital cafeteria. As winter approached they took long walks, Alan leaning on Josie’s arm, though he could see just enough to make his way on his own if he had to. Soon they were going to concerts and poetry readings. One black February night in the snow, after hearing Rosalyn Tureck play Bach, Alan proposed. Over Easter vacation they were married in the living room of Josie’s mother’s house in Carmel. Josie’s mother cried.

“He’ll never see what a lovely bride he’s got,” she told Josie.

“Rubbish, Mother,” Josie said. “It doesn’t matter; and Alan won’t care anyway.” Josie didn’t consider herself “lovely” in any case. Alan, on the other hand, was tall and would have been handsome were it not for the vacancy in his eyes. Josie’s fellow students teased her, saying she could wear the same dress every day and Alan would never notice. “You can get as fat as you like,” one plump woman in the Gov Docs class said. “Or let your hair go stringy.”

“He’d still *know*,” Josie said.

After they had completed their degrees, Alan was hired as a psychotherapist in Rochester, with a university teaching appointment. Josie took a job as cataloger at a small women’s college. Over the next ten years, they had three children and bought a house in Henrietta with two acres, a garden, and a library. In the alumni newsletter Josie described their life as “dull but idyllic.” Lizbeth, her former roommate at Syracuse, wrote envious letters from New York, where she was a map librarian.

“I love the city,” she said, “but it’s so hard. You’re lucky to be upstate, with all the trees and a lake next to you.” The part about the lake was inaccurate, but Josie did not correct her. She told Lizbeth about the children, about her roses, about the Children’s Department of Rochester Public Library, where she worked part-time now that the kids

were all in school. Everything was lovely in her letters.

She didn't mention that Alan had had surgery which had alleviated, if not completely corrected, his blindness. He still could not drive nor go to the movies, but he could see his patients, which was gratifying. His first look at Josie was a lovely moment. When the bandages were removed, Josie stood at the foot of Alan's bed, smiling. He saw a small, dark-eyed woman with glasses. Her glossy hair was parted in the middle and drawn back into a twist. She wore a ragg cardigan sweater over a dotted turtleneck and green corduroy jeans.

"Josie," he said. "I'd know you anywhere." The nurses and the surgeon laughed. But Josie wondered if Alan had known not her face nor her person but the muguet scent she always wore.

Alan was happy to be able to see his wife after so many years of perceiving her only as a shape or warmth in the night. But after awhile he had to admit to a certain disappointment. Everyone had told him what a lovely wife he had. To him "lovely" meant beautiful. He remembered his mother, who had died while he was in college. Though his memory was clouded by the blindness which struck when he was five, he remembered her as beautiful, a natural blonde with swimming blue eyes. He attempted to reason with himself, using tired phrases and admonitions ("Beauty cometh from within"). But he could not escape the feeling that he had missed out, over the years, on a world of gorgeous women. He was also aware, looking in the bathroom mirror, that he, himself, was better-looking than he had realized. Three months after his operation, he started an affair with Jackie, a pre-med student. She was nineteen and had frizzy yellow hair. Despite (or perhaps because of) her heavy academic load, she acted giggly and silly, given to wearing oversized, sequined turtlenecks over stirrup tights and scratched western boots. Alan noticed her clothes because he was obsessed with seeing things. Some of his patients began to complain that he was so interested in "seeing" them that he no longer listened. One woman said his ability to see had become invasive. She switched to another therapist. Others canceled or postponed appointments.

Josie knew about Jackie. She told her best friend at the RPL about it. "It's just a phase," the friend said. "Ignore it. All husbands wander."

Josie thought this idea preposterous at first, then revised it. If husbands "wander," then wives can too. She signed up for swimming lessons at the YWCA.

"But you already know how to swim," Alan objected on one of his rare evenings at home.

"I never learned the sidestroke," she said.

After swimming class she and the other swimmers went out to eat. At the coffee shop one evening, Josie met Kevin, a man five years her junior, who was staying with his sister in Henrietta. He had just taken a job at Kodak and was looking for a house for himself and his two boys. His wife had left him. "Just up and went west," he said. Josie didn't inquire further but asked nice, friendly questions. Persist, she thought.

Persistence won and soon she and Kevin were lovers in his new, empty house (the furniture was still in Ohio). Josie liked the barrenness of his house, the bare mattress on the plain floor.

Over the next ten years, Alan had five different lovers and Josie had three. Neither of them made any effort to hide their affairs. Josie took up smoking, which she had given up for Alan's sake, years earlier. In fact the cigarettes were a front. Her second lover smoked marijuana and shared it with her. She smoked her regular brand at home, in secret.

One day Alan heard some rumors among his colleagues and friends on the medical school faculty. A mysterious new ailment had appeared, called AIDS. Soon it became a nightly subject on the national TV news. Josie and Alan decided to be more careful. Alan began dating Estelle, who was older, safely married, and good-looking. He took her to galleries, concerts, and poetry readings. It was a bit like the life in Syracuse when he had courted Josie. Except, of course, now Alan was graying a little and had a thick red mustache. Estelle had had a facelift and wore black dresses trimmed with fur or rhinestones. She wore rings on every finger. Alan looked at her aging, ringed hands lying in her satin lap. Years ago, in Syracuse, Josie's small, plain hands must have lain the same way on her wool skirts. Sometimes the sight of Estelle's hands and the sound of Schubert played by the Guarneri made Alan homesick.

Josie left her latest lover and applied to the university graduate school of philosophy. She was accepted in the master's program, acquired an assistanceship, and quit her job at the library. Alan was dumbfounded.

"I come home and find you out," he said.

Josie stared at him. "I've been working since the kids were in school," she said. "I haven't been home three-quarters of the time when you came in."

"This is different," he said, but could not explain why it was different. He didn't mind her being at the public library working, but he hated the idea of her in the university library studying. It seemed silly to him. He shut up and asked how he could help around the house. He faced the fact that he felt guilty. Josie had done everything—no, more than everything, during their first years together: bought the house, signed all the documents, drove the car—still drove it, in fact. She had selected his clothes, with better taste than he could. He owed her something. He was not sure what it was and he hated it.

The first thing to go bad was the car. It died one day on the Outer Loop. Josie called a neighbor to come for her. The next day the manager of the garage towed it back to his shop, dropping Josie off at the university on the way. She got a lift home from class with a fellow student. A week later she had a flat tire, which she changed herself in a light spring rain. The next day the windshield wipers were stolen. The day after that the alternator broke, leaving her stranded on campus.

"Maybe we need a new car," Alan said.

"Not now. We should wait until fall," she said. Since Alan didn't drive, he left it at

that.

The next thing to break was the television. Alan didn't watch it much, but he liked certain "worthwhile" programs. Their elder daughter, Susie, away at college, had left behind a small black-and-white set in her bedroom. Josie suggested he watch that.

"Black and white?" he said.

"What difference does it make?" she said. "All the programs you like are people talking. You don't need to see what color suit Jim Lehrer is wearing, for heaven's sake."

He grumbled and went upstairs. Josie had intended to transplant some bulbs, but she had to read two hundred pages of Heidegger before the next morning's seminar. She went into the room they called the "library." Upstairs Alan slammed the door of Susie's room. Josie could hear tinny voices chatting about the Middle East. She concentrated on the pages in front of her, began to take notes, and forgot about Alan.

The next evening they carted the TV to a neighboring repair shop. "Can't even use the VCR," Alan said gloomily as they sat down to supper.

"There's that new Eco novel," Josie said. She reviewed her notes for class as she ate.

"What's this?" Alan asked. "Hot dogs?"

"Chili dogs, actually," Josie said. "I got them at Sugg's Diner."

He stared at her. She realized how arrogant his face had become since the vacancy of blindness had left it. "Take-out food again?" he said. "This is the fourth time this week."

"I don't have time to cook," she said. "Sorry."

"It's not the food," he said. "It's the—the money."

"I'll pay you back," she said.

"You know a couple of the kids' rooms need repapering?" he said. "Now they're away, we should have them done over."

"Fine."

But they didn't have the rooms done. There were too many arrangements to make, wallpaper to be selected; and, worst of all, the possibility that replastering or even new ceilings were necessary.

When the TV was returned, Alan found that it still didn't work right. "The channels are all one notch off," he said.

"Use the VCR then," Josie said. "You've taped every movie Fellini ever made."

Alan found that the VCR would not rewind. He considered buying a tape rewinder, but thought better of it. He could barely manage to work the VCR. Another gadget seemed like too much. Josie was no help. She had filled the dining table with piles of books and bunches of scribbled notes for her seminar paper.

One midnight, just after they sent the VCR off to be fixed, the dishwasher stopped working. It was full of the usual three days' accumulation, plus glasses, plates, and cups from an evening gathering of Josie's classmates, who had met to discuss

existentialism. Within the same week the hot-water heater sprung a leak, the thermostat had to be replaced, and a heavy September rain flooded the basement. Josie triaged these disasters. The flooded cellar came first, then the hot-water heater, then the thermostat, and, last of all, the dishwasher.

“We can always wash dishes in the sink,” she said to Alan.

“I can, you mean,” he said sourly.

“Whatever. Anyway, for that we need hot water. The thermostat can wait a little. We have warm clothes and a fireplace. I took care of the cellar first. The drain was plugged, is all.”

Alan began taking more time with his patients, talking to them at length when they telephoned, staying at his office into the late evening to refine his notes. *Somewhere in the disaster of my own life lie the seeds of helping others*, he wrote in his journal. He read this over and wondered what the hell he was writing. What “disaster”? And what did he mean by “seeds,” for Christ’s sake? He changed “seeds” to “beginnings,” changed “helping others” (an inane phrase in any event) to “vision,” then looked at the sentence again. *I’m becoming a pompous ass*, he thought and turned over a fresh page. No ideas came. He sighed, cleared off his desk, and left, not for home but for the condominium where Estelle lived in great splendor, separated from her husband. She was surprised and pleased to see him. He told her he was miserable, saying, “Things don’t work anymore.”

“Life’s like that,” she said. “You find a pattern or a groove—but then you grow too much to fit in it.”

He disliked talk of “growing” among adults, so he said no more, dared not explain that by “things” he meant just that. Things. A patient of his, a single woman with three children from three marriages, had told him, “*Things* are dangerous. They own you after awhile.” This was true, he thought, truer than his own studious meanderings.

Josie began throwing things out. She discarded toys, old clothes, unused furniture, cans of dried paint, and bags of plaster left over from the early days of the house, when she had had it done over. Alan did not know she had done this. He hunted in the spare room closet for an old pair of walking shoes one day and ended by heaving the entire contents of the closet into the room in a rage. They fought over that, but it ended with Alan putting everything back and even agreeing that she had been right to throw things away. Josie brought him a Diet Pepsi, and they shared it, sitting on the edge of the spare bed. Her throat was sore from screaming. Alan said, “I think we’ve had it,” and she didn’t try to disagree. He moved out a few days later to live with Estelle.

That would have been the end if it hadn’t been for Alan’s old manual typewriter, which he left behind. He tried calling Josie to see if she could drop it off, but she was out (the answering machine had stopped working). He asked Clay, a graduate student, to drive him to the house. As they approached they saw a light in the bedroom. Alan detected an odor, which he recognized, in a panic, as smoke. He gave the house key to Clay, who unlocked the door and dashed for the kitchen telephone to dial 911. Alan

stood in the front hall.

“Josie!” he bellowed. Upstairs, Josie awoke in a smolder of hot wool. She had been reading Sartre in bed and smoking. Downstairs, Alan knew only that she had vanished. “Josie!” he yelled again. He started up the stairs, but Clay, having summoned the fire department, pushed past him. Alan held back. Suddenly his vision seemed very fragile. He felt like Jane Eyre’s Mr. Rochester. He watched Clay lead Josie, wearing a blue robe and coughing, to the head of the stairs. Alan seized her with both arms. They ran downstairs together and took refuge in the house across the street as the sirens grew louder.

The fire, a small one, was put out in short order, but the house was soaked. The neighbors offered to put them up for the night, but they refused.

“I have a place to stay,” Alan said, “but—”

Josie interrupted. “I can call one of the people in my study group,” she said. “The smell here is too strong. We’ll have to deal with it later.”

They stood in the shelter of the neighbors’ porch, wondering at the loss of their life, the near loss of their house. Alan said “Did we have too much?”

“Probably.”

“I realize now. In some ways I was better off blind.”

“I knew *that*,” Josie said.

The Memphis Bus Station, August 1980

Ken Wheatcroft-Pardue

wasn't much of a sanctuary, really –
more like a phantasmagoria of the grotesque,
society's riff-raffs – losers, lonely hearts, small-time grifters,
the habitually unemployed, dope-peddlers,
opening their raincoats to expose,
not their genitalia,

but plastic sealed bags
filled with only the best Mexican thunderfuck,
a choice of papers (yellow and white),
and a colorful cornucopia of pills
of one sort or another,

all of this staged
with the background music of videogame aliens
being annihilated,
slowly, deliberately,
combined with those oh-so-subtle undertones
of the tinny sound of coin-operated TV's.

En Una Estacion de Metro

Ken Wheatcroft-Pardue

Once at the *Niños Héroes* station,
I was almost pushed into a car.
My hands leapt from my front pockets,
but only *un momentito*.
When they returned, my wallet was gone.

Behind me, three men, *tres ladrons*,
just stood there,
like somebody's old Holy Trinity.
All, a foot taller and wider than I.
There was nothing I could do.
Nada!
Menos que nada!

Boiling, I forgot my long litany of Spanish cuss words
I'd collected since junior high.
But later, in English, on the street,
I cursed traffic lights,
shook my fists at street signs,
at every thing inanimate,
every thing that in the city is filled with meaning.

That day I learned my place,
solamente soy un bolillo con dinero,
un menso,
a sucker, a patsy,
just a simple mark, really.

The Rust that Runs in Our Blood

Ken Wheatcroft-Pardue

Tufts of yellowed weeds sprawl from behind barbed wire,
limed with ferric oxide that slowly rots.
While all around, in the sodden chill,
plump faces smile that uniquely blank smile.

Belief in all manner of hokum is as numerous
as the number of angels dancing on a pin's head –
a virgin giving birth to a God-child amidst the ammonia
and methane of a barn, whole hosts of celestial beings,
all inexplicably blond, even every sparrow's feathers
is worthy of debate. Are they a God-send or curse?

Ah yes, here even the end-time con is writ large.
Yet go past the bend, past the stripped and fallen billboard,
past the ravine of abandoned cars to Rosa's,
where after hours the city fathers let down what's left of their hair.

After whisky shots, they wink and smile at all the saps
who buy their recycled-for-the-zillionth-time piety –
like some *dance macabre*, skeletons stripped by the cawing buzzards,
their beaks red with blood, their eyes unfocussed and blank
amidst their daily bread of lies, their agile conformity,
their well-deserved self-hatred.

Family Lore

Ken Wheatcroft-Pardue

Genes are like germs
that never go away.

That sentimental sop –
we never really die –
is proved true, once again.

Why there's Uncle Tom's alcoholism
popping up in grandkids & great nephews,
and Aunt Etta's schizophrenia, ditto,

showing up decades
after she dressed herself in her Sunday finest,
duct-taped her windows and doors,
then stuck her head
into her brand new Magic Chef.

As Saint Disney says,
in the magic circle of life,
nothing really dies.
Amen.

LIGHTED DIAMONDS

Bill Vernon

You didn't notice dark spots until you tried to catch the flies. Then you had to stare up and search because the lights didn't reach very well between the poles, and the highest flies out-climbed the lights everywhere. You'd be pounding your glove and watching for the ball's descent while dancing in the dew-wet grass. Your uniform would glow, but its heavy flannel would itch you all over.

Sometimes while staring up you could hear your bleached relatives and friends yelling or groaning with plays, or the workers screaming from the concrete block concession stand to find out what had happened, who was up. Our game was a spectacle to them. The lighting sparkled on the batter who smashed the pitch, then dashed to first. All of the fielders jumped into motion as well, dashing into position for the next play. The batter's spikes would throw dust up in puffs until thumping onto a yellowed bag. When a ball flashed white above the fence, there was no throw-back to catch him. Teammates on his side would roar, waiting to mob him at home.

Or the high fly might suddenly drop into sight and with a fielder's special lunge be caught. Or with the fielder circling, struggling to see the ball, it might land beyond the fielder's effort, sometimes even hit him when it stayed too long lost in the darkness.

Whatever happened, the lights were not powerful enough nor hung high enough to illuminate every hit ball. That was simply a condition we all had to play with. The fans expected perfection and screamed how they felt, and sometimes their clamor affected how we players made do with limitations, our own and the field's. We might tense up. We might get nervous. None of that stifled the game, which continued until conclusion.

Alone on the field, we players knew the ball's leather was painted, the white came off on our black spikes, but we sensed something deeper. I imagined the baseball was an albino deer hide, an amulet resembling what the ancient people might have carried with them on adventures. The hits and throws arced back and forth among us like antiphons in church. Balls were more than pills or apples to us. Our bodies turned by habit, with love and sometimes with physical grace, and we'd touch the ball in a kind of communion. We felt as if, though we might not have been able to say it, we were repeating our fathers' rituals, whose origins went further back than our fathers' lives did. We were like Adam's descendants dancing in circles around fires, which flickered much less steadily than these brand new lights put up in Lebanon, Ohio in the 1950s.

HE SAID HE JUST SAT DOWN Lyn Lifshin

for a second beer. It was muggy, a night with the windows open. The curtains that had been taken down 11 years ago were heavy with moths. Trains about a foot from the side porch would shake the needle, Roy Orbison would slurp off into the space where things get stuck, like in life, go around in circles. Suddenly he says he heard squeals and bolts, louder than his ex lopping out the screen door leaving me with 3 kids and one never able to start talking so I was home every night. I knew the trains, the D & H, Ohio Special, like a cat that recognizes its owner's car. I could tell which line almost by that. Anyway, I'm thinking this is strange, there's a ruckus, a plunk plunk then a gun bark and everyone's out in the street like it was V day but kids in pajamas, a couple of hookers in the flimsiest shorts. It was like a party, a festival. The car's second car on its side, looked like a man giving birth. It splintered open. Instead of a foal or a colt or a filly, cereal was spilling out, an explosion of white puffs, wheat, rich, corn. The porch glider, my tomatoes are white in the moon with Oatmeal and Farina inches thick. By God, We're like a city under lava

Wisdom,

Michael Collins

I have to ask: Where was the father of the small boy standing with his older brother and his friends, circled on a street corner and why was he created

to stretch out his arms to his brother as the older one does the same, mirroring him to trick him into trusting, forming him within a hug, picking him up

and spinning him round and round, the younger one glee-shrieking at first, one with this impossible loving bigness, then still spinning, betrayed

by the larger power that he loved, dizzy, his mind a cyclone, long after he was in terrified tears, his brother's friends' cackling the soundtrack of his nescient vertigapostacy

as he is set back down, still dizzy, sobbing wildly, the world vanished before pure movement, holding his arms out, con-trite, for his brother to hug him again, as if

because he was scared he needed to be forgiven, anything better than knowing he was cosmos beyond his control, as if being older and bigger entitled the central one to love,

the one I once wanted to be like when I used to smoke myself back into that universe of clouds, closing my eyes until the room turned, my own solar system round and round me,

stripping body from consciousness until the motion became a stillness, my haze-clothed soul before me like a dark light, almost in-

distinguishable from the greater darkness I thought I had demiurged around me, a new universe I'd created to love only me, which held me long before I knew you but knew I wanted to be

grasped by something, to be awed and terrified and connected but I thought the lord had but one nature, wrathful, thought that the only Wisdom was nothing, and so you were

nothing never empty space inside me death, some kind of absence
of pain, so that

all suffering seemed some other's sin I needed to confess, when really I
wanted to be a child again, tossing the football with my father, pretending

when I made a catch I had intercepted one of his passes, running them each
back towards him so he would wrap me in a bear hug and lift me up and
whirl around,

before I realized love was dangerous, touched my own icy mind- scythe
to stone, with- out knowing what I was sacrificing

for the illusion of having control, my feet on a stable and motionless earth,
before I pantokratored / *love you* down into *how could you,*

before I began to flee what I was seeking?

Ars Sapientia

Michael Collins

Between the lilac and the rose, between the laurel and the willow, home
and journey, dream and sunburn, mud and moon, ocean and broken bone,
angel and sculpted stone, *here* you free and claim me, dis- close paradise
in a Big Mac wrapper, make me wait infinite nevers to lay down my head on a
meadow of stars beside tender Lethe, unchained from my- self long enough
to create you, form you, beget you as you would make me. If you were
Adonai, I would have knelt. If you were some- where else, I would have
sought you, forsaken the lullaby and the anthem, the ode, the whisper, the
spell, the oration. If you were really a girl I would hold you as if you were
dying, looking through this world back into your native land. I would have
brushed your hair to the side of your face to frame your eyes, to see out of
them with you, conceived you into steel and concrete, arrowheads, milk
bottles, and bombs. If you were a person, not an eternity, a person, not a
timelessness, not a god- image, not just

this – Listen.

I accept all that is. Just make me *yours* for these moments; I'll draw
your silhouette, give you shape and live with- in it. If you want my life,
it's time for you to take it.

Chance

Kim Farleigh

“Who is this?” Stuart was asked.

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that?” he replied.

“Are you going to tell me?”

“I answered the phone.”

“This is ridiculous.”

“My phone rings, someone I don’t know asks me who I am, and you think it’s ridiculous.”

The woman he was talking to gasped: “Oh, God.”

“If you were expecting him,” Stuart said, “then you’ve got the wrong number. But if you feel like telling me what’s going on, you can.”

She sighed.

“Who do you live with?” she asked.

“Why should I tell you that?”

“Are you living with a woman?”

“It might be. It might not be.”

“Can I meet you?” she asked.

She had a beautiful voice and she was the right age and he loved drama.

“I can explain then,” she added. “You must think I’m mad. But there’s a reason for this.”

“Okay,” he replied.

*

David had an unusual combination of characteristics: red hair and pale skin with dark-brown eyes. He was tall, slim and muscular, archipelago freckles across his nose.

“Hi,” Andrea said, opening the door.

Andrea had a sleek, curvaceous physique, her black eyes like polished ebony. David followed her into her room, her hair swirling like silky vines as she moved. This was the fourth time David had visited her in the last two weeks. Stuart thought: That's why Susanna rang.

*

"There's nothing going on between us," Andrea said, after David left. "But people assume there is. People prefer speculation to evidence."

"Evidence is dull," Stuart acknowledged, thinking: Liars are happy about that. He didn't tell her who he was meeting the next day.

*

"Susanna?" he asked.

Honey-coloured follicles swayed as Susanna turned.

"Yes."

Her hair's golden streaks resembled grains in satinwood, refreshing to see beauty bereft of arrogance.

"You're David's girlfriend, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes," she smiled, her blue eyes exuding pleased curiosity.

Amused ruefulness shone in those irises whose iridescent blueness made Stuart think of sunlit lakes.

"But I don't for how long," she added.

The shrivelled remnants of summer covered blackened twigs.

Drops on window panes in the coffee shop they entered resembled tears on transparent cheeks, bare capillary twigs outside resembling black cerebral circuits against grey matter.

Susanna's amiable beauty made Stuart feel elated.

"So he hasn't told you that he's visiting my flatmate?" he asked.

"No. Who is she?"

"She's beautiful and dangerous."

“What does dangerous mean?”

“She’s two-faced. She can’t fall in love; but she loves men loving her.”

“That is dangerous,” Susanna acknowledged.

She asked: “Have they been sleeping together?”

She had been looking down when she had started the question, her eyes finding his when she had said: “Together.”

“She said that they’re just friends,” Stuart said.

“Do you believe that?”

“I don’t believe anything she says.”

The trees were stark against vaporous grey.

“A guy,” Stuart continued, “should want his girlfriend to know where he is – and vice versa. You should want them to know where you are.”

The coffees arrived, the waiter’s smile emphasising the place’s cosiness.

It was relaxing for Stuart to be with a beautiful woman, without having to be entertaining, whose humility indicated intelligent perspective.

“I agree,” she replied. “But he knows I’ve seen the telephone bill.”

“He’s using a home phone to make it look like he’s single,” Stuart said. “Ringing from phone boxes looks suspicious.”

“But it’s so risky. It’s easy to get caught.”

“Maybe that’s what he wants,” Stuart suggested.

She looked down; yellow specks surrounded her dark pupils, yellow and black engulfed by blue. The stark contrast between the dark circularity of her pupils and the ovular lightness of her irises gave her a look of penetrating directness that appealed to Stuart’s appreciation of pleasant straightforwardness.

David, he thought, is making an amazing mistake.

She looked up.

“Thanks for coming,” she said.

“No problem,” Stuart replied.

"It's so nice of you to do this," she said. "You must have thought I was mad."

"No," Stuart replied. "You needed help. Unsatisfied curiosity can be frustrating."

Her expanding lips exposed perfect-formation calcium. Red with snow-white evokes the freshness of youth.

"Thanks," she said.

"I was curious," he replied.

"Can I contact you again?" she asked. "To.....God, I feel like a....."

"No problem," Stuart replied. "You should know what's going on. This is my mobile number."

"Thankzzzz," hushed from her lips like a cooling breeze on a hot day.

Her lips touched her coffee cup's lip; what a privilege it would be, Stuart thought, having those lips upon mine.

She said: "I don't know what to do."

Stuart admired her ability to turn emotional upheavals into engaging annunciations. He knew that she was referring to more than just David's whereabouts.

"It'd be difficult," he said. "Maybe you should ask him what he needs."

"Probably two women at once," she replied.

"That'd be better than being interested in my flatmate."

"She's that dangerous?"

"Any man interested in my flatmate is facing destruction."

"Are you going to warn him?"

"Should I?"

"It's your decision."

"He wouldn't listen to me anyway."

*

Stuart didn't warn David. He wanted to tell Susanna that David and Andrea had been sleeping together; but he wasn't going to say this unless it was true. He wanted to smother Susanna with the truth, to make her feel invulnerable to adversity.

Andrea showed Stuart a photograph of a guy she was working with.

"It's incredible," she said. "He's not my type at all, but I got very interested in him."

Superficial women are surprised when they discover that enforced contact creates interest not based on physical attraction.

The guy in the photograph was thin with stringy hair, nose too big, eyes too close, mouth too small. What Andrea didn't know was that this guy was no one's type; but he looked waggish, gifted with the gab.

"It's incredible," Andrea continued, "because it was him who finished our affair."

She had never been rejected before.

"He told another workmate," she said, "about our affair. I denied everything. Who do you think people believe – him or me?"

She smiled wickedly.

Stuart assumed that people would believe her; but later he thought: Her workmates will eventually realise that she's a liar.

*

Stuart had to see a client who worked near his flat, so he went home for lunch. When he opened the door, he heard sounds coming from Andrea's bedroom; Andrea's feet were facing her bedroom's ceiling. She had a look of pain, dumbness and bewilderment as she gasped, David having locked her up into a position of submission to his pulsating desire.

Stuart chuckled to himself. His cooking's sizzling epitomised the drama that had invaded the flat. Stuart knew that Andrea was going to have to go back to work and that therefore they were going to run into each other.

When they did, Andrea smiled sheepishly. She had the psychology and physique of a woman who was destined to have constant orgasms. Her cheeks were redder than usual, crimson in light-brown surrounds. She wasn't embarrassed about having been caught sleeping with David, her shame caused by the fact that Stuart now knew that she had lied.

"Don't worry about it," Stuart said.

His delight had the false grace of tolerance.

It didn't occur to her that Stuart considered her to be an inveterate liar and that he was thrilled. But David was worried. After eating, he said: "I have to go. See you."

I'll have to warn to Susanna, Stuart thought, not to ring here. David may have already seen her call on their telephone bill.

*

Susanna had given Stuart her work number.

"I've got some news," he told her.

They met in the same café. When she entered, he knew he was in love. She made everything around her blur. This felt different from other occasions in which infatuation had placed a woman into sharp focus amid diffused things. He realised that he could love her more and more as time passed, no limit as to how far his feelings could go. He had never had this reaction to another woman.

"How are you?" he asked.

For once, he wanted to know the answer to this question.

"Confused and distressed," she replied. "Thoughts swirl around my head as if my brain has become the epicentre of a hurricane of uncertainty."

The waiter took their orders.

"What I'm about to tell you," Stuart said, "will kill off the uncertainty."

Her vulnerable, sensitive, stained-glass irises glittered with curiosity.

"Okay, I'm ready," she said.

"They've been sleeping with each other at lunch times," Stuart said. "I'm sorry."

His delight had frozen into concern as he contemplated what impact this news may have had on her.

She gritted her teeth, sucking in air, moisture rimming her eyes.

"Thanks," she said.

He felt the wonder-struck pain of sympathy, ages since he had been more concerned about someone else than himself. Her beauty and kindness had sucked him back into the world of human sentiment.

“Thanks,” she repeated. “I needed to know.”

Certainty is so wonderful, Stuart thought, that we manufacture artificial forms of it, like belief in God.

She breathed in hard. It takes time to recover from failed investments.

“It was what I was expecting,” she said.

Her weak, powerful smile resembled sunlight in drizzle.

“You’re very sincere,” she said.

“Thanks,” Stuart replied.

He thought how ironic it was that she was suffering while he was experiencing pleasure. Being in the presence of humble, sensitive beauty made all other places irrelevant.

“I should have realised before how important honesty was,” she said.

The café’s interior brightened as the sun penetrated mists that were rushing silently, like quiet fate, over the street’s buildings, a muted charge eastward.

“That’s a courageous revelation,” Stuart said. “People usually blame others.”

“I’m equally to blame,” she said.

She had discovered at melancholy’s heart a sanctuary of self-awareness. He admired people who were on prejudice-free quests for knowledge.

“Too often,” she said, “women only find honesty important when it’s too late. It should be the starting point.”

The wondrous disbelief Stuart felt reminded him of religious paintings in which semi-naked beings were on clouds being taken heavenwards by angels. It was such an intense feeling that there seemed to be no limit to what he could feel for her.

What a mistake, he thought again, David’s making.

“Do you think,” he smiled, “that women should receive classes on how to make intelligent decisions?”

“That’d be bad for business,” Susanna replied. “Passionate short-term affairs maintain pointless consumption.”

Stuart heaved out a guffaw.

“Unfortunately,” she added, “our ambitions are often only short-term solutions.”

“Change the ambition.”

“I just have.”

*

Susanna was now able to concentrate on reading for the first time in weeks. She was now even happy that she had experienced the melancholic confusion that had led her to meeting Stuart.

War And Peace covered her chest as she glanced out the window at the sky's mists; she thought: Every cloud has a silver lining. David has unwittingly helped me see the mistakes I've made.

The white curtains beside the window, lit up like sunlit snow, bordered that vision of equitable clarity in which the undersides of vapour gleamed silver-white.

She felt the authentic stolidity of resolution.

When David returned, she said: “I'm moving out.”

Observing the pretentious shock in David's eyes, she thought: What an actor.

She even felt sorry for him.

“Wee-ott,” he said.

“No need to perform,” she said. “I'm moving out tomorrow.”

David fell into an armchair, his dark eyes like hard buttons of bewildered mica.

“I'll send you an Oscar,” Susanna said, “and a list of agents.”

She tried to stop laughing.

“This is the best thing that's ever happened to me,” she said. “I now realise how much I've lied to myself.”

*

Andrea was in her underwear. David lay beside her and said: “I've left Susanna. I want to spend more time with you.”

He had revealed that he had had a girlfriend after Susanna had moved out.

Lying was irrelevant. Inveterate liars believe situations are controlled by lying.

Andrea was happy. The recent blow to her ego could now be categorised

satisfactorily. There had been nothing to learn from the experience. Her work colleague had bad taste. Only a fool would reject her.

When not being admired by men, she went shopping. She and her shopping friends spent their time trying things on, commenting on clothes.

“Good,” she said. “Now you can sleep over more often.”

She touched his penis.

“I don’t intend to do much sleeping,” he said.

Their high-beam grins resembled lights blocking out vision.

But that faint hollowness in David’s temples kept swirling like an eddy in a flat sea.

*

Stuart and Susanna met in St James’s Park. Low cloud and the Thames kept the temperature above freezing. Nests in leafless boughs resembled nodules in nervous systems. Leaves covered grass like battlefield corpses. Black-tree leaves resembled gold shavings in ebony. Wind swirled the dead leaves as if an invisible spirit’s breath had returned those leafy corpses to life.

“Hemingway wrote,” Stuart said, “that when rain cut spring short in Paris it was as if a young man had died; but in autumn you expected the rain.”

Susanna looked at him quickly. Rattling leaves swept by the wind followed them along a path.

“He also said,” Stuart added, “that the spring inevitably returned. He said that he would have had no idea what he would have done if it hadn’t had.”

“Nice,” she said. “I’m surprised by how quickly I’m recovering. I even feel free.”

“You’re too intelligent,” Stuart replied, “to suffer for long because of David.”

“Thanks,” she said.

“That’s no insult to David,” Stuart said. “It’s just that you’ve got the self-awareness to know what you need.”

“Maybe I’m not normal,” she smiled.

Stuart chuckled.

“Not normal amongst single women,” he said.

The green undersides of leaves were facing grey skies, suggesting premature death.

She looked up him curiously.

“Many single women are single,” she asked, “because they don’t know what they need?”

“Have you got another explanation?”

Susanna stared at where empty boughs placed a thought-pattern mist upon a backdrop of vapour.

“If they were interested in,” Stuart said, “the things that maintain relationships in the long run, and they were attractive, remaining single would be impossible.”

“And what are these things?” she asked, leaves flying up and twirling.

“Sincerity, honesty and having things in common,” Stuart replied.

“You think many women don’t know that?” she asked.

“They’ll tell you that they know that,” Stuart replied, “but this doesn’t stop them from thinking that other things are more important.”

“That’s true,” Susanna said, adding: “Suffering should tell you what you need.”

“But only if you’re capable of thinking. If you’ve got a planet-sized ego then it’s always going to be somebody else’s fault.”

“My father,” she said, “taught me to think before speaking. He said that you should think before accusing someone of something because you’ve probably done the same thing yourself.”

“Your father was a master in self-awareness.”

She smiled. Her vulnerable, enormous eyes gleamed with heart-felt authenticity.

“He must have been a master in teaching self-awareness,” Stuart continued. “He produced you.”

“Thank you,” she said. “I’m glad I made that phone call.”

“Nowhere near as glad as I am,” Stuart replied.

*

In the National Gallery they observed Velázquez’s *Venus At Her Toilet*. Venus’s skin glowed like polished marble. Her life-size physique was naked, back to the viewer,

her face in the mirror she was holding.

“Sometimes I come here,” Stuart said, “and I sit on this bench and watch men’s reactions to this painting. They feel so uncomfortable that they can only look at it for a few seconds.”

“And you?” Susanna asked.

“I make a point of looking at it for as long as I can,” Stuart replied. “I’m not ashamed of looking at beauty.”

They looked at each other and smiled.

“I could look at you for years,” he said. “Every moment is new when I’m with you, like looking at this painting.”

He said this matter-of-factly, without attempting to impress, like an irrepressible fact, so matter-of-factly that it impressed Susanna deeply. She had the humility necessary to perceive the humanity in what she heard.

A man stood before the painting, feigning indifference; he walked away after having taken a wonder-struck look.

Susanna and Stuart giggled.

“There’s hardly a man on earth,” Stuart said, “who doesn’t want to see that when they come from work. Venus isn’t looking at herself. She’s interested in her surroundings. She’s fantastically gorgeous, capable of arousing enormous interest, but other things interest her more than herself. This is extraordinary in a beautiful woman. It’s why I’m falling in love with you.”

Susanna grabbed Stuart’s right arm and thrust herself against him.

*

They held hands as they headed for the Dutch still lives.

“They were the first realists,” Susanna said. “I mean in terms of direct rendering of reality.”

They studied a painting of a village party.

“Every face in this painting,” she said, “reveals a different character.”

There were fifty-three faces in the painting. Some of the characters were dancing, others sitting around a long table. An amorous man was flattering an apron-wearing wench. Some looked drunk. Others unhappy. Some jealous.

“You feel you know everyone in this painting,” Susanna said, “just by looking.”

“It’s amazing,” Stuart replied, “how some painters can so accurately reproduce the tiny details of what they’ve observed. Most of us can’t understand that level of visual memory.”

“You really have to be fascinated by human behaviour,” Susanna said, “to have that level of memory.”

“Definitely,” Stuart replied.

“I often asked David to come here with me,” Susanna said, “but he always found excuses.”

Stuart kissed the soft hand he was holding.

“You know,” she said, “that I’ve moved out. I’m now living in a friend’s flat.”

*

When Stuart left Susanna’s flat, his satisfaction was Buddha-like. Life wasn’t about eradicating desire; but the constant satisfaction of the few that count. Nothing could have annoyed him. He was immune to petty adversity, riding on a pinnacle of pleasure because he was able to give pleasure to the people he loved.

Andrea told him: “David has left his girlfriend.”

“Oh, really,” Stuart replied.

“It’s great,” Andrea added, “having things out in the open.”

Two liars, he thought, united momentarily in mutual nonsense.

*

When David went to the toilet, he didn’t take his mobile with him. Andrea found it in a pocket of his jeans. It had been left on. She knew that from the previous night. She looked in the calls-made list and saw a name that had appeared three times in two days. She also saw messages from the same person.

She rang that woman’s number from David’s phone.

“Hi gorgeous,” she heard.

She switched the phone off and put it back into David’s jeans.

*

Waking up, Stuart heard: “More lying!”

He thought: *She's* accusing someone of lying.

Andrea's high voice penetrated the walls. Stuart knew she was with conquering David who preferred conquering to peace.

"Do you expect me to believe that?" she shouted.

He doesn't care, Stuart thought, what you believe.

For Stuart, indifference was as profound as love in that both involved calmness in the face of the truth. He had never felt so calm.

It appears, he thought, as if everything wasn't out in the open.

"Rubbish!" he heard.

The conqueror will say anything during so-called peace negotiations, Stuart thought.

The silences between Andrea's shouting were ripe, waiting to be turned into drama. David was naturally destructive. He saw no value in universal ethics that unify all peoples. Women skewered themselves on the obelisk of hope that his existence created.

And Andrea, Stuart thought, was ripe for plucking: a woman whose naive self-belief made her believe that she controlled situations.

"Of course you've done something," Andrea shouted. "I've read her messages."

Stuart couldn't help but chuckle. To be a successful liar, he thought, you have to think of everything, no lapses in concentration. What a waste of time. Especially as love is so much more exciting; and, anyway, David would have wanted her to read those messages. Conquerors stimulate conflicts to expand their territory.

"Get out!!"

Things, Stuart thought, now appear to be right out in the open.

"Get out!!"

It doesn't get more open than that, Stuart thought.

He heard the door being closed.

David, he thought, can't even be bothered being a successful liar. That's how little he cares. He must be so relieved, walking down the street, thinking about new projects, delighted by victory in another conquest.

How pointless is that feeling of escape that solves nothing.

*

The wet street resembled a tarnished jewel. Andrea was staring out the living-room window. Fallen leaves outside resembled confetti left over from the marriage of green with grey.

She turned and said: "You must think I'm stupid?"

Her eyes radiated sincere certainty. She wasn't a coward. She was two-faced, friendly towards people she didn't respect, critical behind her smiling mask, but she was no wimp.

"No," Stuart replied, "you're just inexperienced; too used to getting things easily."

In the wine bar down the road, Andrea got free drinks. The bar's owner adored her sensuality and her sleek physique. She took full advantage. Sometimes the wine-bar crowd came back to the flat to continue the party. The bar's owner, Chris, would bring more drinks from the bar. He poured Moet Chandon down throats in the hope of seducing sultry Andrea who adored the attention; and the champagne.

One morning, after a night of Stuart observing mutual, smarmy smiles that lingered for too long between Chris and Andrea, he heard Andrea say: "Chris is such a weird bastard."

Her voice was shameless, as if the previous night's events had been a natural outcome of her superiority.

She had spent the night smiling at this "weird bastard" who was so full of himself that he believed that her lingering grins resulted from the pulsating magnetism of his charm.

"Stupidity isn't your problem," Stuart continued. "Your problems are deeper than that."

Andrea now had her back to the annual shredding of leaves. Bare trees made black-candelabra shadows across the facades of flats across the road. Wind made the candelabra shiver as if the world was making the stripped trees shake to their core.

"I suspect," Stuart said, "that only sensitive people with a deep interest in things that appeal to the highest possible instincts that we have for knowledge and aesthetics are capable of falling in love. I can't see how else a relationship can be sustained – can be improved upon – without this as a starting point. If two people are motivated by what I've just said, there's no limit to what they can find mutually interesting."

Andrea had spent years in London without ever having gone to a museum. Shops,

that only offered surface beauty, were more interesting.

Her eyes became dots of confused consideration, her perplexity backed by nervous-system candelabra that quivered like tuning forks attempting to find the right scale.

“Anyway,” Stuart said, “I’m going to move in with my girlfriend.”

“Who is she?” Andrea asked.

“David’s ex-girlfriend,” Stuart replied.

She shot forward, mouth opening.

“Susanna?”

“Yes. I’d like to thank you and David for making this possible. Your shallowness has brought about a beautiful situation. Susanna and I are both ecstatic.”

Andrea’s mouth froze into a distorted ring.

“How did you meet her?” she asked.

“She saw our number on her itemised telephone bill so she rang here. We agreed to meet. The rest is history.”

Andrea now knew that David left clues to get caught, ending associations that didn’t interest him.

“So I’m shallow?” she asked.

“Women,” Stuart replied, “with depth and dignity don’t accept champagne from weird men. It’s time to move forward.”

“I agree.”

DARKLING, I LISTEN . . .

Howard recognized the moonstruck Beta at once. It was just as Porter had described it—not more than two feet high, built right in the earth, and about six and a half feet long. But for the small skylight on top, that looked up through the trees, and the small lifting door on the lake side, it looked like a coffin regurgitated by its grave. Porter had said that his brother, the family hermit, had built the cabin for himself one summer so that he could keep his space. “At first, there was only Alpha, the family cabin, then Matthew built Beta, so Dad decided to build the rest of the cabins for vacationers and fishermen and make some money.” Howard kneeled and lit a match. Inside lay a soggy brown army blanket and a camouflaged sleeping bag. He put his can of beer on the roof and got in, stretching out on his back. Above, through the narrow window, he saw the twisted black interstices of the trees against the thick clusters of the stars, and the fancy struck him that he had fallen from above and had lodged in the narrow part of an hourglass and that he was looking down at billions of sparkling grains that rested on the bottom, below him; that he would eventually dislodge and join the others and become fixed, somehow, in the bottom of the night. Bach rolled over him, expressed in melancholy organ music, come from distant Delta, and Howard thought, “Suppose I should let time drift away without a struggle?” Then he heard the rowboat bumping against the shore, the clanking of oars and oarlocks, not twenty feet off in the gloom, and Ginger calling for Laura to be careful.

house.”

getting to his feet. “Just trying it out,” he said.

was?”

Howard, you’re just being dramatic. Melodramatic. It’s nothing to fail. Everybody fails, but they keep trying. Besides, you haven’t really failed yet.”

“Mommy, here’s Daddy, in a little

As Ginger came upon him he was

“How is it?”

“Cozy. How did you know where I

“A chain smoker like you? Listen,

"I've never succeeded. At anything. A failure since birth when I made my mother suffer, as she's told me often enough. A thousand hours in labor. Ten thousand! I didn't want to be born. I didn't like her milk. I don't like anything. Everything eats everything. Any God who would create such a place must be a monster. Everything reeks of pain and death."

"If you write that, nobody will read it. And think of Laura and the new baby I'm carrying now. You're drunk. You've got to wean yourself."

"It's deep pain."

"A melancholy romantic—is that it, Shelley?"

Shelley?"

"Shelley drowned. That's not so

bad. But Keats! I prefer Keats.

I lie in the darkness and listen into silence
sometimes, outside the stream of time
where life hums and burns with its moths and flames,
its mechanical tropisms of desire and death;
I listen to the silent voice of the nightingale
with my friend Keats, the dead boy, the poet."

"But he was tubercular, not just peculiar!"

"Ho, ho! Thank you for

appreciating my poem."

"You have a child of your own to

think of and another coming. Don't forget, just because I don't show yet, I'm pregnant." Her voice seemed disembodied in the darkness.

"I don't think I'm strong enough to lift all that weight," he said. Then he smiled a rueful little smile and said, "Echo to Narcissus, but your feet still crunch the leaves, my heavy-with-child." He looked for Laura, silhouetted, for an instant, in the moonlight, but flashing in and out of view. Now she was crawling out of Beta with the blanket wrapped around her, a ball of childish, female energy.

"Where's Porter and Cecily?"

"They're still at Delta. Can't you hear? Isn't it something, having an organ up here in the woods?"

"But he's stopped playing."

"Having a drink, probably. Your charade, your anatomy of melancholy, didn't work. We all just kept on having fun after you left. Porter shrugged and said, 'Well, he's a poet.' You can't bring everybody else down with you, you know."

"But you came looking."

drown, like Shelley—quite unintentionally—or not.”

“You’re drunk. I was afraid you’d

all worried.”

“Not what?”

“Not unintentionally; you’ve got us

lake—easier than climbing through the dark woods.

“Let’s go pick them up in the boat.”

They rowed along the bank of the

Howard filled a jar with Porter’s homemade wine and, at Ginger’s insistence, put on a life-preserver, for he could not swim; then they groped their way through the moonlit gloom down to the dock and pushed off out on the lake. The moon broke through the glowing clouds full as the plunging back of a white elephant and shown on the lake in broken, swaying pieces. In front of the patched black and moon drenched blue of the night sky there was a dense beribboning of frosty stars.

said.

“It’s a Van Gogh heaven,” Ginger

Howard pulled at the oars, sending the boat rapidly out into deep water, very deep. It was the thought of freedom, of relief. But he wasn’t going in the right direction. One of the oars was longer than the other and the boat kept drifting sideways, toward the middle of the lake. The deep, dark pool. At first he thought his coordination was off, having drunk so much. “Why can’t I make this boat go straight?” Then he realized what was wrong and managed by compensation to get the boat back in, toward shore. Porter had begun to play again and the lake was flooded with the organ’s oceanic voice. “A little night music,” he said.

beautiful up here. I wish we never had to go back to New York.”

“Oh, Howard,” Ginger said, “it’s so

world.”

“So do I. Back to the bullshit

His hateful novel, so filled with the pain, real and imagined, of a lifetime, had been rejected, and no wonder, he thought, no wonder. Who would want to read such a shapeless agony of a thing? And yet it was the shame of failing, of failing, of coming from nothing, from less than nothing, from an ugly childhood spent with drunken and irresponsible parents, with humiliation at every turn, at school, in the streets, at home, which was no home, ever, but demon basements criss-crossed with pipes, rat-sat-upon; of coming from nothing and describing it as accurately as one could, and then going back to nothing with it, another unwanted item, another way for God to reject his life, him, thank you, thank you, your majestic cruelty, and to hell with all!

Ginger called from the dock at Delta for Porter and Cecily to come out for the ride back to Alpha.

Porter's father was an Episcopal Bishop. Cecily's father was a Port Authority lawyer. Even Ginger's father was middle-class, acceptable. But Howard remained the downstart son of a downstart father; a thief, a liar, and a drunkard, that man. Even Howard's grandfather had married a rich woman and gambled her wealth away. His mother was a moral idiot from a family of moral idiots. He felt sorry for little Laura, possessing such genes. Guilt, shame, humiliation rocked him. His drunken blood coursed through him bearing the dagger of the mind. He felt cut up and bleeding inside. But how could anyone ever know? And who should care? God didn't. God wasn't. God couldn't be—be God and be evil. For that was the world and the world said No.

Cecily came alone. "Porter wants to walk back. He's got a flashlight. But it's still too dark for me," she said. "Push off, Captain!" And back out onto the brimming lake went the boat, four aboard, the two women, the child, and Howard. "They went to sea in a sieve, they did," said Howard, cueing Laura.

"In a sieve they went to sea," she cried.

"Far and few, far and few. . ." said Howard.

"Are the lands where the Jumblies live!"

"Their heads are green," said Howard, stopping to drink wine from his jar.

"And their hands are blue. . ."

"And they went to sea in a sieve," Laura cried.

"And there's the Dong with the Luminous Nose!" Cecily said, pointing toward the woods, where Porter was making his way along the dark shore, between Delta and Gamma, his flashlight bouncing before him.

"A little wobbly," said Cecily, "after an evening of beer and Bach."

"It's true, Daddy, Daddy," Laura shouted. "It's the Dong! Daddy, look! He's real!"

"The Dong with the luminous nose," said Howard. "The love-sick Dong,"

Next morning after breakfast they went for a walk in the woods, which rose steeply, with trees standing in uneven tiers, higher and higher, and Howard could almost see them, growing beneath the water, lower and lower, into the murkiness, the blackness, as if there were no bottom to the lake at all, the valley of drowning darkness.

Here they were in the Laurentian mountains. What were they doing up here in paradise, anyway? He should be back in New York, doing something about his failed novel, not vacationing in Canada with a couple of spoiled rich kids who had never had a problem in their lives. But that wasn't fair, either. They were friends. But what did that mean to him? Cut no ice.

And he and Ginger couldn't afford to spend money like this. Ginger had won the money on a television quiz show, of all things, and he had been able to watch the show in the market research office where he worked. She had been quite good, quite enterprising, winning while he was losing. New York, Montreal, the mountains, and the deep bottom of the lake—what did it all mean?

Now he brought up the rear, out of shape from offices and drinking, puffing and panting in an effort to keep the others in view. Some way ahead of him he could see Ginger, lifting herself by the branches of the trees, pulling herself up the steep embankment. Ahead of Ginger was Cecily, who held Laura's hand, and Porter led the way, like an Indian scout, somehow marvelously untouched by all the drinking they had been doing.

When Howard caught up with them, the others were standing at the edge of a place where the bank dropped sharply for about a hundred feet, and where could be seen the whole lake, small now and far below. Porter jumped up and down, smashing puffball mushrooms for Laura's delight and edification, Howard supposed, for Porter taught at a private school in New York. He claimed he would be its headmaster before he was thirty. Howard believed him. Hell's bells, Porter could converse in Latin!

Cecily showed Laura a large, spreading shelf mushroom with an underside so smooth and velvety that a very clear drawing could be made on it with a small stick or twig.

"This is what a unicorn looks like," Cecily said, handing the mushroom to Laura. "And unicorns can only be captured by little girls like you. They'll come and put their pretty heads in your lap."

"And it has a horn like that?"

"Yes—and I think I see one now!"

"Where? Where?"

Cecily pointed through the trees. "There," she said. "But oh—he's gone now. Vanished."

They climbed on, among poplars and mossy elms, slipping and sliding on the thick matting of ancient gray leaves that lay moldering, bat-winged ashes; through nettles that brought quickly disappearing red blotches to their hands; and over slippery, green, moss-covered rocks that crouched like ancient immovable animals, petrified life; and finally back down to Alpha, Laura crying out at the sight of numerous unicorns, scurrying among the trees like shy deer.

The others had lunch. Howard was still unable to eat, though the climb had done him some good. The beer tasted better now, and he drank some of the homemade wine, bottled by the Bishop, and soon his hangover had partially metamorphosed into the mild safety of a glow. And after lunch they took the boat and the canoe and went out into the middle of the lake to the great domed rock the Bishop had named Whalehead. There they lay on the rock, sunning, Howard sipping wine from his jar and watching Porter skim pebbles off the water.

Daddy.”

expectant.

Howard improvised, “who only had an ice cream horn. . .”

and. . .”

away.”

laughing.

away, Daddy?”

the horn down.”

“that’s sad!”

good poet, Howard, but he disagrees with your theodicy. He says you don’t look around at the joys and beauties of life enough. He respects you, though—very much.”

looking at the good side. I’m tired of it myself.”

“Tell me a story about a unicorn,

“Well. . .”

“Yes?” She looked up at him,

“Once there was a unicorn,”

“Yes? Yes?”

“It melted in the sun one day. . .

“What, Daddy? What?”

“And the poor unicorn passed

“That’s cute, Howard,” Cecily said,

“What do you mean that he passed

“Oh, he melted away, honey, from

“Oh,” said Laura, knitting her brow,

“The Bishop thinks you’re a very
“It’s the habit of a lifetime—not

“Gloomy Gus,” said Ginger. She was sunbathing, face up, an arm across her eyes. Howard had thought she was dozing. She was the good side of life, the beautiful side, she and Laura. They were the good side, and he was part of it, now, wasn’t he? They loved him, even if his own mother and father hadn’t, didn’t.

Cecily shrieked, jumping up, pointing at Howard’s knee, and Howard looked to see what he thought was a sparrow leave his knee and fly off in a crazy elongated spiral over the lake, into the trees.

“It was a bat, Howard!” Cecily said.

“It was right on your knee.”

Porter laughed. “It must have been asleep in that crack,” he said. “You probably woke it when you sat there.”

“Oh, I *hate* them,” Cecily said.

“They’re harmless,” Porter said.

“Some of them carry rabies, though. That’s the only danger. He didn’t bite you, did he?”

“No, no, he just flew off,” Howard said. “No harm done.” He quickly drained the remaining wine from his jar.

“Let’s make artesian divers,” Porter said, turning to Howard. “Like this: We put some water in those empty wine bottles on the porch and plug the tops with something and throw them up in the air and into the lake. We keep filling them a little more each time until one goes all the way to the bottom and sticks. It’s a question of fine-tuning. I win, if yours stays down and mine comes up.”

“Mine will be the first to drown,” said Howard.

“Oh, Howard,” said Ginger, “don’t be so negative.”

“All aboard!” Porter cried.

After depositing Ginger and Laura on shore, and picking up a case of empty wine bottles, Porter and Cecily took the canoe, Howard the rowboat, and in the middle of the lake, directly across from Alpha, they began sinking the divers. At first the bottles weren’t filled enough to hold them down even for a few seconds, but soon they had reached the necessary refinement and the divers went down and remained below surface for some time, then one or the other of them would pop up, jumping out of the water.

The game was carried on by adding more water and sending them back down, whether to return or not no one could know. Howard thought it a silly, senseless game, but then what wasn’t? And Cecily and Porter seemed to think it great fun.

Howard took a drink from his renewed supply of wine and pitched his diver high into the air. It smacked the water. He pulled at the oars until he came to the spot where the diver had hit, and there it was, magnified to look as if it were just below the surface. He watched the bottle, soon a mere fleck of light, scarcely distinguishable from the countless other flecks that were caught momentarily by the sun-drenched surface before they rayed down and diminished in darkness.

“He’s through,” Howard thought, as the boat rocked gently. “He can’t take anymore.”

The boat sank deeply on one side with his over-leaning, his peering. It floated gently sideways through water that rippled with a sound like tiny, muffled bells.

*Darkling I listen; and, for many a
time
I have been half in
love with easeful Death,
Called him soft
names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air
my quiet breath. . .*

The words ran over and over through Howard’s mind, transporting him from the lake, the sky, to the beckoning darkness below. His breath came in short light whispers. Suddenly his elbow slipped off the side and the boat rocked violently, then steadied. He caught his breath. He had drifted down as far as Delta. He was nowhere near where the diver had gone down. He regained his bearing. Cecily and Porter sat off at a great, wavering distance, in the canoe. Ginger and Laura, even farther, smaller, on the shore. All of them were waving to him, smiling at him, waving to him. He belonged to these good, lost human beings. They needed him, too. There was green and gold everywhere. Even the glittering water was gold. The water was gold.

He took a cigarette from a pack, lit it, placed it between his teeth, and pulled hard at the unmatched oars. The boat angled about, spreading in its wake two curved waves in different directions. Then he saw his diver break from the water, high, shining, some distance ahead.

A Stone Heart

Barbara McGaw

On walks
heart-shaped stones
gather in both pockets,
then come to rest
on an old school desk.
Some stones are worn smooth,
composites warm from sun,
others newly cleaved.
These two are black,
sideways twisted, askew.
My heart is an empty, groaning space.
It burdens me through woods
and on roads
like a black bird stalking.
It is stone mute,
except for the racing,
and shrouded in darkness.

Find me a stone heart
and gauge its pacing.
Not one that is wild
and drumming,
not one made of muscle
and soft tissue.
Let me exchange it
for sturdier stuff
that doesn't move blood,
feel longing, ordwell in angers,
regret, or grave sorrow.
Let me keep this one
that is steady as a metronome,
slow under pressure,
hard as igneous.
Let it be unscratchable
by pocketknife or fingernail.
A rough diamond chunk
dug out, untouchable.

Under A Chicory Sky

Barbara McGaw

All my summers flow over and over again
tied together with the same bright sunshine
on tar black roads, the shiny green of corn..
In open air wild carrot and chicory thrive.
Two old friends running with the roadsides,
choking out wild grasses with weedy good sense,
following seedy cattails in a thin line of ditch.
A path opens in the shallows the young trees
in shadow. Changeling green of leaf and fern
turn yellow in spotlight as floodlit sun
sweeps the path in sudden peace.
Below my feet clumps of moss grow
in earth made rich by layered leaves-
tempting stepping stones around sassafras
saplings, over the orange of toadstools.

Walking fast, the wind blows
on my ears like breath on a bottle.
In branches birds drop with brays
and squawks to rise from road kill
fresh from a gravel sprays.
Live heat rises from the road
burning the bellies of snakes
drawn through red-leafed poison ivy
to its wavy middle.
Black-bottomed clouds gather in stacks
to stretch across a long blue noon.

Shaped stones lie on the sandy strip.
Rutted tires wear across them like years.
Cracking into red stones,
throwing fragments,
pushing down sparkling quartz,
driving small stones into the sand.
As I pass, surrounding sumac
bristles in wind, spear-shaped leaves
go belly up in thickening dust.

Railroad ties line up before me, my ladder
to climb on, a direction home.
Heavy iron clamps with rusted hooks
lie flat on the stone bed.
Hot pools of creosote seep
through wooden cracks becoming
a magnet for my shoes.
Last night's moon and this day's sun
show gauzy white.
Two circles in a chicory sky.
As I listen to mourning doves
talk on telephone wires
to tall and tasseling corn.

“Rhapsody in Blue” in a Red Bathrobe

Barbara McGaw

Mother dreams
 Alzheimer’s dreams.
Her limbs
 twitch counter-rhythmic
to Gershwin’s clarinet
 with its glissando wail.
Alternate smiles and grimaces
 mar her face
in the masks of her confusion.

Mother dreams
 Alzheimer’s dreams
her eyelids lift open
 and fear slips in,
contorts her mouth
 with the O of loss.

Come deaths sweet reason
 push away all sorrow.
Take her the way
 this rhapsody takes me.
Take her where
 wild crescendos
mount upward, reel skyward,
 and I am left alone
with the low tones of blue grief.

Ladies in Waiting

Barbara McGaw

Nights are slow
as I watch this old woman sleep;
her mouth is opened, jaw unhinged.

Between us there are no secrets
as I check her rest, her low groans,
the sounds of her breath in dreams.

Our days are quiet
while we perform courtly ceremonies,
just two ladies in waiting.

The day's empty hours turn,
sand in an hourglass,
until early sun fills it up.

I remember her son's familiar body
in our bed emptied of me;
I'm halved in this slow motion world.

Half in the sureness of those nights,
the feel of his back on mine,
the squeezed hands as the light goes out.

When the long day is done,
when breathing comes deeply,
I think of love and of you.

Time seems to freeze here with her,
water under ice slowed to stopping,
and I am a leaf caught between.

THE RED GLOVE

Vivian Lawry

Roy owned the only drive-through funeral business in Maine. It was full-service, with 24-7 viewing hours, burial and cremation packages, and an array of funeral merch that included flower arrangements, grave blankets, Hallmark Lasting Expressions bereavement cards, urns for cremains, and commemorative jewelry. When Roy gave his monthly pep talks to the staff, he always closed by saying something like, “Today’s consumers have options for after-death services. We thrive by going beyond cookie-cutter, greet ‘n’ weep events. Remember our mission: ‘One-stop shopping for the bereaved. If we don’t have it, we’ll get it.’”

Roy paused in the doorway, waiting for an appropriate opening to join his customers.

The black giant called “Angel” said, “If Pauline’d had the consideration to die in Vegas or Chicago or someplace sensible like that, we’d’ve had choices.”

The other one, Ming, shrugged. “Pauline was definite about wanting a drive-through viewing—and we know the reasons for *that*. We’ll just have to deal with this Roy person.”

“Well, I don’t like it. I don’t like it one little bit.” Angel puffed up like a vulture in the cold. “He looks at us like we’re freaks.”

Roy felt a spurt of irritation. After decades in the business, he should have controlled his reactions better.

Ming laughed. “We *are* freaks. Imagine being called out on a Saturday night and having to deal with The Hottentot Venus—nearly seven feet tall, black as midnight, and armless, accompanied by The Mule-Faced Woman—and both of us next thing to prostrate with grief.”

Roy coughed softly into a perfectly manicured fist, and both women turned in his direction. Angel glared. Ming smiled—probably. It was hard to tell, given the shape of her face. Roy said, “Although we haven’t done funerals for carnival people before, I’m sure we can accommodate your needs.”

“We’re supposed to take your word for it?” Angel’s voice was sandpaper. Ming elbowed her in the ribs.

Roy feigned oblivion. “If you’ll step this way, we can discuss any special requirements.”

Ming said, “We know what Pauline wanted in general. But as for the details... The company’s one big family. We’ll need to discuss it.”

Angel was already headed for the door. “Just give us your advertising shit or menu of services or whatever you call it. We’ll get back to you.”

Roy cleared his throat and murmured, “There are some decisions that must be

made expeditiously. The casket, for example, has a forty-eight-hour delivery time. If you choose something from our showroom, of course, that would not apply. But the decision needs to be made. Plus, you might want personalized accoutrements.”

Ming said, “Personalized accoutrements?”

“Candles, tombstones, lap blankets—we can personalize just about anything with a photographic likeness or initials. We can attach a brass or bronze emblem to the casket, representing your loved one’s special interests—fishing gear, needle and thread, that sort of thing.”

The women exchanged a look. Angel said, “Personal would be good.” She turned to Roy. “We want a snake.”

“A snake?”

“Pauline was a snake dancer.”

“Personal emblems must be selected from those in stock. A snake is not a stock item.” He paused. “However, we could provide a ballet dancer.” Angel snorted and Roy despaired of soothing her hostility anytime soon.

Ming said, “It wasn’t that kind of dancing. Skip the emblem. And no casket. There’s nothing graceful about a rectangle. Pauline wanted a coffin. A coffin with a glass lid. Can you do that?”

Roy considered. *A carpenter or metal worker, a glass cutter, an upholsterer.* He’d call them at home. And tomorrow was Monday. He nodded. “Would you prefer wood or metal? Mahogany is top-of-the-line, of course, but we also have cherry and oak. If you prefer metal, we could provide bronze, chrome with black trim—”

Angel cut in. “Wood. Whatever’s cheapest. We’ll decorate it.”

Pauline started in the business as a punk, when her Snake Woman mother put the toddler on display outside the sideshow in a big, glass aquarium, with garter snakes and other nonvenomous babies. Townies flocked in by tens and dozens. Pauline grew along with the snakes. As a nubile young thing—when her mother was too old and too fat to perform—Pauline became “Snake Woman Dancing,” the star of the carnival. As Pauline’s physical charms counted down from a perfect ten to somewhere closer to five, her snakes grew more impressive. Her current dancing partner, Bernice, was a twenty-foot albino Burmese python, white with butterscotch and burnt-orange markings.

In the off-season Pauline competed in bodybuilding competitions. She’d won her most recent trophy at the age of sixty one. The night the carnival opened in Bangor, she wore a spangled red bikini, red slippers, and red kidskin opera gloves. Her blond curls were piled high, and her sculpted muscles stood out in glistening relief. No one paid much attention to her crow’s-feet and budding jowls as she swayed and turned with Bernice, enticing the two-hundred-pound snake to twine around her body. At first, no one noticed anything amiss. Pauline’s sinuous movements just slowed.

Afterward, Jake (one of the roughies) said he thought she might have tried to say something. But nobody pulled the curtain until she collapsed, and even then no one knew how to get the two-hundred-pound snake off her. Jake grabbed Bernice by the tail, as Pauline had once told him to do, and tried to unwind the python. He'd just yelled, "Give me some muscle over here!" when Pauline's feisty little mongrel Justine scampered up, yipping and nipping at Bernice. The snake unwound herself and slithered after Justine, her narrow head—with milk chocolate eyes and flickering tongue—swaying gracefully.

Pauline came around slowly, moaning as The Boss called 9-1-1. As soon as Pauline caught her breath, she started talking. She always was a talker. She said, "I didn't think anything of it when Bernice coiled between my legs. When she looped over and under my body, I started to feel like I was caught in a net or something, but I still didn't panic. When she circled my chest, scales pressing into me, I realized I was holding my breath." Pauline inhaled slowly, her face pinched by pain, holding her listeners captive. "Bernice wound around and around, cinching me in like a corset. Every time I exhaled she coiled tighter. I couldn't breathe in." The ambulance arrived. Pauline flapped her hand at the paramedics, waving them off till she finished her recital. "I went weak as a kitten—my heart pounded, the sweat popped out. My ribs cracked. I was so confused—so foggy-feeling and sleepy—I swear, I thought I was a goner." Pauline's smile was feeble. "I've wondered what it would feel like, dying by constrictor. Now I know." Tears welled up. "Poor Justine. She's probably nothing but a lump in Bernice's middle by now."

The ambulance pulled out, carrying Pauline to the hospital for X-rays, though she tried to convince them she was fine. Her friends breathed a collective sigh of relief, telling each other it could have been a whole lot worse and turning their attention to dealing with Bernice on the loose. The Boss sent the performers back to carry on with the show and assigned others to search parties. "It's not like there are many places she could hide."

One of the roustabouts picked up an elephant gun. Jake said, "Put that thing away. Pauline'll want her alive and well. Use the acrobats' nets."

On the way to the hospital, Pauline suffered a heart attack and was DOA. Once her friends got over being stunned silent, everyone agreed she'd had a good run—and longer than most. The Boss said, "I'm sure as hell gonna miss Pauline. We always made the nut when she was on."

Pauline's two best friends gathered the company under the G-Top to settle the details of her funeral. Ming waved one of Roy's brochures. "Listen up. We've got a lot of stuff to decide. If she's cremated, we could go with a traditional marble urn, like a vase with a lid—amber- or celery-colored—or a carved, wooden shoe box thing with a brass nameplate. They've got a biodegradable urn shaped like a big seashell that dissolves when it's thrown in the water. Or, we could get a paper urn with wildflower

seeds that bloom after they're buried."

Angel said, "People could keep some of her ashes in lockets and stuff. She could even be made into diamonds."

Damian (The Strongest Man in the World) belched loudly and popped another Bud. "Who'd want to turn somebody into bling?"

Jake said, "I think mementos of a loved one could be very comforting."

"You would." Damian lurched to his feet, sloshing beer into the sawdust. "Give her a good old-fashioned funeral, and be done with it." Nobody said anything as he swayed toward the trailer he had shared with Pauline.

Ming muttered, "So much for the grieving husband."

Angel hissed, "She should've eighty-sixed that drunken bastard a long time ago."

"Divorce was against her religion—so to speak. But, this isn't the time or the place. We've got a funeral to plan."

Someone said, "What's all this talk about cremation? If she wanted a coffin, she probably wanted to be planted somewhere." Several agreed that a green burial would be nice—just a shroud, and burial in some wilderness, maybe her name on a nearby rock.

Angel said, "Not an option. She's already been embalmed." Eventually they rejected a theme funeral, opting instead for a traditional service, followed by removal to Roy's banquet hall for a Chocolate Celebration of Life.

Jake said, "I still think Pauline would like to be turned into diamonds." The people who knew her best agreed. The final decision was that, after the Chocolate Celebration, Pauline would be cremated, some of her ashes turned into diamonds for those willing to pay the hefty price, the remaining ashes to be cast in concrete and made part of an artificial reef near their winter base in Florida. As people dispersed Jake lingered near Ming's elbow. He said, "You know about me and Pauline, right? Well, I want one of them diamonds. I got the eighteen thousand. But—to be discreet, you know—maybe you could act like it's for you." His voice quavered. "I heard that, in Taiwan, it's pretty common for people to marry someone who's dead. But here—well, I guess this is as close as I can get."

Ming squeezed his hand. "Sure thing."

When Ming handed over their written instructions, along with Pauline's red slippers, spangled red bikini, and red leather opera gloves, Roy said nothing. But something about the slight pucker of his mouth and the way he held the garments (fingertips only) put Angel's back up. She said, "Just do it. And show some respect."

Roy gravely studied the list. "We have an excellent caterer who will create fifteen to twenty chocolate confections for the Celebration of Life. Do you expect many people to attend? If you need porta-potties, we can provide ones with marble sinks—a very nice line, very dignified. Also, many people think a release of butterflies or white doves

is a nice way to end the event.” When he glanced up Angel managed a tight smile and a nod of encouragement. Roy said, “You may want to consider having masseuses in a side room during visiting hours. In fact, let’s just sit down with our event planner and talk about scripting, staging, and soundscaping.”

Afterward, walking back to the fairgrounds with Ming, Angel said, “Roy sure knows how to turn the tip. He’d’ve made a great outside talker. But damn the cost. We’re sending Pauline off in style.”

Ming dabbed the corners of her eyes with a lacy white handkerchief. “She deserves it. I swear, that woman was like a sister to me. Everybody just loved her to pieces.”

“Jake is taking it hard. Poor bastard.”

“Did you hear him talking about keeping Bernice and taking over Pauline’s joint? He wants to be Snake Man Dancing.” Ming was panting.

Angel shortened her stride and slowed her pace. “No way. He’s nowhere near strong enough.”

“Not yet. But, he’s talking about hooking up with Pauline’s trainer when we get back to Florida—says if she can be a bodybuilder, so can he. He isn’t much over forty. He might be able to pull it off.”

“Honest to God, your name ought to be Pollyanna! Damian would break his neck.”

“Well, your name should be Black Cloud! Damian hated Pauline’s snakes. And, if Jake bulks up, Damian might think twice about taking him on just for the hell of it.”

Angel stomped off, biting back an urge to say that Ming’s perpetual ray of sunshine gave her migraines.

So now Pauline’s laid out in her satin-lined coffin, wearing her dancing costume. The coffin looks like a psychedelic throwback, a mixed-media collage of posters, photos, paint, mini barbells, articulated wooden snakes, and other mementos glued or nailed on. The restoration artist and Ethereal Cosmetics have done their duty, and Pauline doesn’t look a day over forty.

Carloads of carnies pressed for time and a few old-timers confined to wheelchairs visit the drive-through, under a white canopy that lights up at night, to see images of Pauline on a twenty-five-inch screen. Lines of vehicles fill Roy’s parking lot with chirps, meows, barks, and babies’ cries—but at least his system eliminates dogfights. The carloads and busloads snake slowly past the viewing area, pausing to sign the guestbook tucked conveniently beneath the speakerphone. One busload of AARP-eligible mourners has to drive down, back up to turn around, and then come back in the opposite direction so people on the other side can see. That snarls traffic something fierce, and one of Roy’s underlings spends the better part of an hour getting them moving again.

Pauline's image goes black after three seconds, although visitors can push the button for another look. Jake hauls a flatbed trailer carrying Bernice's cage. He stays for half an hour, pushing the button again and again. People in the queue behind him complain that they could have parked, walked past the coffin inside, and been back on the road quicker than this. Jake says, "Bernice recognized her. I know she did."

Angel and Ming see it all. Angel says, "Pauline knew this was the only way Jake could grieve her. It's not like Damian would let him hang around inside."

Day and night, viewing traffic is like rush hour at a crawl. Roy's elaborate system of relays, switches, and timers allows as many as a dozen bodies to be displayed. The week's been busy. Plus, all the media covered the death of Snake Woman Dancing. Angel and Ming suspect that some of the people viewing Pauline came to see someone else but stayed to gawk. The local motorcycle club roars through, wearing their colors, leather, and chains. Angel complains that it feels like a three-ring circus. Ming says, "Seems about right for Pauline."

The funeral is closed to the public, but the names in the guestbook read like a who's who of carnival people—all of their traveling troupe, plus several from other companies: the Elephant Man; the Puppet Woman; the Lion-Faced Man; the Texas Giant; the Armless Fiddler; Darwin's Missing Link; Tom Thumb and Thumbelina; the Dog-Faced Boy; the Human Caterpillar; Hobbit; Toewinkle; Smiley. Ming leads the mourners in singing "The Show Must Go On." Damian weeps ostentatiously. The Human Torch spits jets of flames behind the coffin. Pauline's women friends wear red hats and red gloves, though Angel, being armless, has to settle for the hat only. Before the glass lid is closed, the women erupt into a conga line around the coffin, weeping, singing, and dropping their gloves onto Pauline's body. Other mourners file past, paying their final respects. Some squeeze her hand or kiss her forehead. Bringing up the rear of the line, Jake stealthily grips the top of Pauline's right glove, peeling it off like a long, red snakeskin and stuffing it into his pocket.

As the Seven Dwarfs carry the glass-topped coffin from the chapel, mourners toss flowers at their feet. Ming sees Damian look from Pauline's bare alabaster arm, glowing in the midst of red leather and white satin, to the ribbon of red hanging out of Jake's pocket and thinks, *There's gonna be hell to pay now*. Damian attacks Jake, pummeling him about the head and shoulders, until Jake curls up like an armadillo. Roy summons two minions to help separate the brawlers and emerges from the melee with scuffed shoes and a torn jacket pocket. Ming convinces the police not to arrest the two men, claiming their basic good natures were overwhelmed by grief.

After the police leave Ming slaps Jake and Damian soundly. Roy fears yet another unfortunate incident. But Ming says, "What's got into you? Brawling like drunken sailors! Show some respect!" She hauls them off to the Celebration of Life.

The red leather opera glove lies abandoned on the sidewalk.

The guy who took it must really care. Roy picks it up. Maybe he can find a way to slip the glove to the Mule-Faced Woman at the Celebration. Let her do what she thinks appropriate.

Roy inhales deeply and strives to be one with the moment, but he can't help muttering, "Thank God it's nearly over. This has been our worst event since the mayor tried to ban the viewing of that nudist." He turns back toward the chapel, stepping daintily over the trampled blossoms littering the parking area and imagines the media reports. He sighs. This is not the image he's been trying to cultivate.

LAST NIGHT I DREAMT THAT SOMEBODY LOVED ME

Benjamin Grose

In the morning, she rolls over and tells him her dream.

We were on a boat, she says. We were with one of the princes, and he came up and talked to me, chatted me up. After a while he asked me to go out with him. You were by the bow, sulking, glancing at us. He went over and spoke to you. Then, when we docked, he got off without speaking to me.

And then what? he asks.

Then I woke up.

He gets up to make a cup of tea. She stays in bed. He drinks half his tea at the kitchen table before showering and shaving. She is still in bed when he leaves for work wearing a grey suit and tie. He picks up his briefcase by the door. The rest of his tea is on the kitchen table, cold, unfinished.

His day goes slowly. Eight hours in the basement office, sitting at a desk, staring into the same faces, with the same problems, asking the same questions. The briefcase is under his desk, unopened.

Her day goes quicker than his. She spends the morning watching TV, reading magazines and cleaning. In the afternoon she goes into her studio, the recently converted spare room, sets up her new easel and paints for a few hours. She is taking an online art class about painting your inner self. The site says it will help you embrace your dreams and gain confidence. She paints a boat with a man standing by the bow. The man is not the prince and nor is he her husband.

He comes home at dinner time and puts his briefcase by the door. They eat in front of the TV and watch it until she yawns, stretches, and goes to the bathroom to get ready for bed. When she comes back, he has turned the TV off. She gets into bed while he goes to the bathroom, gets a glass of water from the kitchen, then gets into bed beside her. They read for half an hour – he *The Ghost* by Robert Harris – she *We Need To Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver.

After thirty minutes he puts out the light.

Goodnight, he says.

Goodnight, she says.

The next morning she rolls over and nudges him awake.

You were smoking again, she says. I was annoyed at you, and kept snatching the cigarette from your mouth. But every time I did, you lit another one. You kept doing it. Eventually I gave up, and you stood there, smoking and laughing with Robert Milne.

Robert Milne?

Yes, Robert Milne. He was smoking a big cigar and wearing a fedora.

He goes to work, to the office he shares with Robert, a few others and the boss. They are the men in the basement. Out of sight, out of the way, they sit with their

empty briefcases under their desks, drinking cold coffee and breaking the same old news to the same old customers about the state of the economy, housing prices and mortgage rates. He finds himself watching Robert Milne a lot. He catches Robert's eye when he looks up from his desk, smiles, shrugs, rolls his eyes after each customer stands up to leave the same way they came, up the steps and out of the door. He thinks Robert would look ridiculous in a fedora.

She finishes off the picture of the boat with the man on the bow, waits for it to dry, before screwing it up and throwing it in the bin.

He comes home from work, they spend the evening in front of the TV again and go to bed just after 11pm. She reads for twenty minutes before putting her book aside and falling asleep. He continues to read for half an hour, finishes the book around midnight, puts it on his small *read* pile and turns the light off.

The next morning she rolls over and he is already awake, waiting.

Was I smoking again? he asks.

Worse, she says, and pauses.

Well? he says.

You were with another woman.

Who? He laughs.

I don't know. It might have been Robert Milne's wife.

It might have been? He laughs again.

I didn't see her face.

How do you know it was her?

How do you know anything in a dream?

He looks at Robert Milne differently at work that day. Instead of catching his eye he avoids it. He remembers how the four of them went out for a meal once, a few years ago. The men drank too much and the women barely spoke. They didn't repeat the experience.

She starts a new painting that day, the moment he leaves for work, and she finishes it just before he comes back. As a result, she starts cooking dinner late. When he comes in she apologises. He doesn't ask why. He is thinking of Robert Milne's wife. He can't remember her name.

In the morning, he rolls over and watches her sleep until she wakes.

Robert Milne's wife again? he says.

No. Someone else this time.

Someone else? he laughs. Who?

Derek Raymond's wife, she says.

The black lady?

Yes, the black lady.

What happened?

I came back from the shops. You were home from work, your briefcase was by the door, and the two of you were in bed together.

She does no painting that day. She doesn't even go into her studio. Her day is spent on the sofa, drinking hot chocolate, listening to the rain on the windows and watching Jeremy Kyle. The writing along the bottom of the screen says – Prove that you're not sleeping with your ex.

He spends the day thinking of Derek Raymond and his wife. He barely knows Raymond, even though they have shared an office for years, and he stays clear of him all day. And when his head is down, pretending to be deep in work, the back of his neck prickles, like Raymond is looking at him and he knows.

There is a surprise waiting for him when he gets home. She has cooked his favourite meal, lamb chops with mash and mint gravy. He doesn't ask why. They eat in front of the TV again, but he doesn't really watch it, because he is thinking about Derek Raymond, Robert Milne and their wives. She barely touches her food because she is thinking about the painting in her workshop. They go to bed at 11. He starts a new book – *The Sense of an Ending* by Julian Barnes, but feels his eyelids grow heavy after a few pages. He puts the book aside without saying anything and waits for her to do the same. Then he turns off the light.

The next morning he wakes when it is still dark outside. He looks at her and wonders what she is dreaming. After half an hour of listening to the birdsong, he gets up and goes to the bathroom to relieve himself. She is awake when he returns.

Who was it? he asks, standing by his bedside table.

Alex Caine's wife, she says.

My boss?

She nods.

He waits.

Rain begins to patter on the window panes. The birds have stopped singing.

You were doing it in front of me, she said. Everything.

After he leaves for work she goes straight to her studio, still in her nightdress. She stands and looks at her latest painting. It is of a man who isn't her husband, and it is good. Although she doesn't know if good is the correct word. It is a good likeness. If her husband was standing next to her, he wouldn't recognise the man because they had never met. He would ask her who it was, and she wouldn't know what to say.

At work, he can't concentrate. He sneaks a few looks at Alex Caine, at his big desk across the room. The boss spends most of the morning on the phone. To his wife? He remembers his wife, they'd met a few times at Christmas parties. She is French, and dark haired, the sort of woman he knew would always be beyond him. He takes his lunch late, waiting for his boss to come back to avoid bumping into him on the stairs.

She is in the bath when he gets home. He makes himself a sandwich, puts the TV on and thinks about the wives of the men in the basement.

She cooks a late dinner and they go to bed shortly afterwards. They don't read. The light goes straight off.

Halfway through the night she wakes and his eyes are already open.

Who? he asks.

She shakes her head.

Tell me, he says.

You were standing on a cliff edge. I was behind you. You looked back at me, and you said, shall I jump? I couldn't reply. My mouth was sewn shut. I could only open it after you jumped, when you were gone.

Even though it's dark he sees the tears on her face.

He feels for her hand under the cover, and after some time they get back to sleep.

In the morning she wakes early and is first up. She stands in the kitchen waiting for the kettle to boil. Leaving the tea to brew she goes into the spare room and looks at the painting of the man that isn't her husband. Soon, the painting is in the bin with the other, her paints and brushes are put away in a cupboard, the easel is back in its box. She shuts the door behind her.

She brings the tea to him in bed. He is awake. She stands by the bedside table, looking at her husband.

Why don't you ever tell me about your dreams? she says.

LONG DISTANCE

Seth Augenstein

Last night I dreamt she was about to die.

Again.

But there, in my trance before the dawn, she was still very much alive. And she could stay that way, alive and still with me in the world, if only I could prove to her it was worth it – that it was all worth it. I could tell her something bad was about to happen, she just had to believe me, and we could keep it from happening. It was so simple, and so avoidable. I just knew it could work – our strength and resolve would conquer the normal rules.

Erin was already in California – at Playa Del Something or Other, whatever exotic locale had been listed on the obituary three years before. But there she was, right in my ear, talking to me on the phone, and the reality of the awful past hadn't yet happened. I sat in darkness. I knew what was going to happen, but it hadn't yet – the obituary hadn't been written, and she hadn't yet been flown back East in a cargo hold to be buried on a frozen January morning. Her voice was beautiful – all those perfect notes, the sing-song syllables of her rich voice. I couldn't believe it – my chest welled up, even though I knew it was just a dream, I was asleep, three years in the future, balder and gray. But I knew if I could somehow change it all here, in this relived moment, there had to be some carryover. The past could be changed. Everything might be set to rights – I could feel it.

I sat in the darkness; I could see nothing around me. I was dreaming; I was alone with her voice.

"... so the job interview went well, and I think I might get my own place with the first paycheck," she said to me. "Until then I'm at the SunDream Motel. Isn't that a wishful name? Everybody's California Dreamin' over here, I guess. I've got everything I need. There's even a dealer two rooms over..."

"Erin, stop," I said. "Stop – stop – stop."

Silence on the other side. There was still time; there was still a chance to convince her there was a future ahead, and we could make life happen together. All it would take is a few of my words – my powerful words that she had loved so much, and so admired for all those young years, from playground rhymes, to undergraduate philosophical essays, to love letters stuffed under a screen door. But at this most crucial moment, those words failed me.

"What's your problem, Gene?" Her tone was cold.

"Nothing, I just know... Listen. Erin, something bad is going to happen, and I want to warn you. I have to warn you."

She sighed into the phone. It was wonderful to hear the light puffs of her breath again, her give and take with the world.

“Gene, we’ve been over this before, I know what I’m doing.” A pause. “You know that I came out here just to start fresh. There’s no other reason. There’s sun and summer here every day, every month. Jim Morrison’s house is a few blocks down. You know how he put it: The West is the Best, Baby. And you know this is good for me. I only really get bad in the winter, back East in the cold and snow. And there are no jobs there for me anyway. Here is a fresh start – something totally new – a true beginning.”

I could hear her swish her hair, her long blonde locks, and the jangle of the yin-and-yang pendant around her neck that she’d worn since grade school. My head was numb; I felt drunk.

“Yeah, I know that, Erin,” I said, arguing with her phantom slowly, my words coming out like I was deaf or something. “But you have to listen to me. You have to listen.”

“No, I don’t have to listen – that’s why I moved across the country,” she said. “I can hang up whenever I want. I don’t have to come back. I could just hang up now and vanish forever.”

“Erin, don’t do that. Don’t hang up. I know it sounds crazy, but I know something bad’s going to happen to you,” I said. “You have to trust me. I don’t care if you come back to Civilization, I don’t care what you do. But you have to be careful. I know something terrible will happen. It’s going to happen tonight. Something terrible.”

“Oh really. I’m in danger? Why’s that?” she said.

“You know,” I said, mind rambling for an answer. “There could be people that are eager to take advantage of a pretty girl from the East Coast. Los Angeles has a lot of crime, too. There are muggers and murderers. There are drunk drivers crashing into houses. Many things could happen. You know – terrible things.”

“Just like in terrible New Jersey and terrible New York. Just like every other terrible place in the world with terrible things happening,” she said. “Listen, Gene, you sound so panicked, convinced something is going to happen to me any minute, and then you give me a load of vague bullshit. It sounds like you’re just a paranoid freak who’s jealous of losing his girlfriend to the West Coast.”

I missed this voice, this sass, this honesty. I wanted to tell her I loved her at that moment. But I had to make her understand. I could change all this – I could prevent the terrible thing from happening.

“You have to trust me,” I said. “I know that something specific is going to happen. I can’t tell you why, but I can tell you I know it. It’s going to happen, two hours after we hang up.”

“Alright,” she said. “I’ll take a leap of faith with your little psychic vision – your premonition. What’s going to happen to little old me in two hours?”

“You’re going to overdose on the coke from the dealer two doors down. Around midnight.”

A pause. I couldn’t hear her breathing anymore. I kept talking.

“I will get the call tomorrow at work from your brother. His voice will be robotic and I will think it’s just a prerecorded joke. But then I will hear his breathing, and I will be unable to speak. The world will spin. My stomach will turn upside down. I will stumble out of my chair. I will walk past my boss’s office and out the door without a word. I will drive home and not remember being behind the wheel. I will have a tall glass of whiskey. I will cry. I will pour another. I will not sleep. It will start snowing again the day of your funeral – February the Sixth. I will carry your casket with the rest of the guys – Dave and Josh and Brian and Ryan and Matt. We will worry about slipping and falling on the black ice around the hearse. We will stand on the side of the hole in the ground for five minutes before the blizzard begins to bury the cars, and we will all hurry to drive away. I will leave a bottle of wine on your marble headstone on January the Twenty-Ninth for the next three years. I’ll cry a little – nothing hysterical, just a few dignified tears – but only for the first two years. The third year it will be raining and warm, and I will handle myself better. The dirt mound over the hole will grow more and more grass, and your headstone will be just another in a lengthening line of graves at the bottom of the hill – the same field at the edge of the cemetery where we used to pick dandelions when we were little.”

Another pause.

“If you listen to me, we can change this,” I begged. “It doesn’t have to be this way. It can be different. It can be. It must be.”

“That’s crazy,” she said. “You’re crazy.”

“Trust me, Erin. Please. Trust me.”

She sighed. This time, there was no breath behind it – it was just a little hum, a little sound of nothing. Nothing at all.

“Gene. You’re just having a dream. None of it can be changed.”

“Yes it can. You’re wrong. You’re wrong – it can.”

“No, it can’t,” she said. “Listen. We both know this is a dream, and we both know we’re talking three years in the past, history is history, and we both know how it all happened.”

I could say nothing – she suddenly sounded louder, clearer. Like she was speaking from inside my mind, like the notes of her voice didn’t have to travel through the air or through the phone to reach me. She was just... there. With me. Close.

“Yes, that coke was cut with something or other that made it weaker,” she said.

“And yes, I started to do a lot of it that night – the same night I was to turn twenty-eight. Yes, I figured, why not – just one more time, for old time’s sake, for a lonely girl on her birthday in a strange city. But the bag wasn’t cut evenly. At the bottom I hit the purest cocaine I ever had. I wasn’t ready for it. I did a big line, it shot straight up my nose, and something went wrong. I reached for the phone to call for help just before my heart stopped, and everything went blank. And yes – they found me the next morning, already cold and stiff, still in my underwear, on the bathroom tiles.”

Another pause. Everything blank, for a second.

“But why?” I said.

It was all I could say. Better questions were in my brain, in my soul, somewhere in there. But my mind was too numb – I felt fuzzy and drunk all at once.

“Why what?” she said.

“Why are we having this conversation? Why are we talking about things we can’t change? Why are we bothering? Why are you here, in my dream? What’s the point?”

“I really don’t know, Gene,” she said. “I could tell you that I just came to visit. I could tell you that everything is alright – that you shouldn’t feel guilty. But you know all that already. I could tell you that I just wanted to say hi. That would be more accurate, but maybe that isn’t it, either.”

I shook my numb head, my mind sharpening.

“Then again,” I said, “maybe you’re just a figment of my sleep cycle. Maybe I saw a picture of you, heard a song that reminded me of you, and when I lay down in my bed in my cold apartment, I thought of that January night when I drank to get to sleep but failed, those same reflections from the streetlight glinting off the ice clutching the windowsill, the same night you became a memory. Maybe it’s all just the power of suggestion from the world around us. Maybe there’s just a thousand things around me, no matter where I go, that remind me of you.”

“Could be,” she said. “But really – what’s the difference between what you’re saying, and what I’m saying?”

More silence. I could hear her necklace jangle, the way it used to when she was on top of me, kissing my beard and neck all those years ago; the yin-and-yang dangling over my head, tumbling across my face.

More silence. But a comfortable one; it was the moment made eternity. Finally I spoke.

“So,” I said. “Do you have any advice? Any eternal wisdom from the other side?”

She laughed.

“Nothing you don’t already know. That’s probably the reason we’re talking right now. You know all you need – for now. But you have a lot more to learn, too. You’ll get there when you need to. Mistakes will be made, accidents will happen, tears will be shed and friends will be made and lost. Maybe you’ll get married and have kids someday. You know all this already.”

“But surely there’s something more? Surely there must be something more.”

I heard my voice, and knew from my words that I was still in the dream – and I realized that the darkness around me was not black anymore – it was a strange kaleidoscope swirling around me, without shape or form. Or maybe I changed it, maybe my mind did it, itself. Either way, it was in the background, it was an offhand observation; I was waiting for her to tell me something. Anything. Anything at all. I could listen to her forever, and never wake up ever again.

She smirked – I don't know how I knew this, because she was on the other side of the phone. But I knew she smirked, in that darling little way that she did when she was being coy, when she was being smart, like when she withheld her kisses, teasingly turning her cheek away.

"If I told you, you wouldn't believe me," she said. "All you need to know is, there's always something more. But it doesn't mean that you can understand. It's not a trivia question – it's not an algebra equation. There's no objective answer."

"But then – why?" I asked.

"You and the 'why' of everything," she said. She chuckled, still smirking, and ran a hand through her hair, which fell perfectly over her shoulder. For some reason, I could see it all clearly – though she was on the other side of the connection; me to the East, where the colors were rising all around me, and her stuck in the West where it was still darkest night.

"Listen – we don't have much more time," she said. "Why don't we just talk a bit about the past. I'd like that. Like the time two kids picked dandelions at the bottom of the hill, and just as the sun was setting, the girl reached out and kissed the boy for the first time."

"I remember. We were thirteen then, and the field was open, just open grass, and the dandelions everywhere, the dry blades brushing our ankles..."

I awoke to a beep and a voice. As the sting of wakefulness spread over me, I felt something. A pain in my ear. Something hard was wedged between my head and the pillow. It was my cell phone. I looked at the screen. I had called a particular phone number a couple times in my sleep. The number looked familiar, but I couldn't remember why. I redialed it and listened.

"Hi, it's Erin," said the voice, still frozen by three years in the electronic ether. "Leave me a message, and I'll get back to you."

Resistance

Shaguna Kaushik

You are trembling.

Can you feel your words get disconnected?

Not a single letter is clear.

The light burning over-head is hitting your eyes.

The heat it is producing is hitting your head.

The sun outside is fuming

You are sweating

You are getting suffocated under your clothes

Water

Make it stop

Till a point

Crawl on your knees on the bathroom floor

Naked

Screaming – make it stop

And always feeling vulnerable

Every dark corner causing a new sensation of fright

A new imagination of a monster

The stillness so hard to endure

The naked feet so vulnerable

Feeling trapped

The water dripping off your skin

The fallen long black hair on the marble floor

Soaked

And you see insects crawl around you

Finally, a feeling, a sensation

You let them crawl
And you feel sick again
You throw up
You go back
The light on top of your head,
Bright, unyielding, blurred in front of your eyes
A voice
You hear him talk,
Happy, smiling
The food at the table,
Satiated
You still eat, you still eat
His voice again
Happy, smiling
Fair hair, perfect lips curved to a smile,
Talking of 'discomfort'
You keep writing
You find yourself exposed again
Someone sits next to you
And stares at your words
You hide them
You close the book, you cap your pen
You bow your head and start walking again
Dizziness
Your bag feels heavy
The sun as warm as before
You perspire again

You plan to take a shorter route
You walk, disoriented
People stare; they always stare
You stumble
Someone catches you from the fall
He holds you from the waist
You make no eye-contact
You feel him stare at you, hoping for a word
He tightens his grasp
You let go
You fall again
You walk again
And look for a place to go
Your spine slouched with the heaviness of your bag
You walk still
You reach a barrier
They stop you
They tell you this is not your place
You turn around
You bow your head
You walk again
People stare; they always stare
You look down
Your pale legs
Your feet covered in veins
Trying to keep you still
You stand on the street and wait

People stare
They mock your helplessness
A stranger stops
You tell him the way
You find yourself amidst the blur of the cars
Till you reach the familiar street
The ill-constructed flat
You count the change
The stranger staring at you
You count the change
Dizziness
You unlock the door
You find yourself on the bathroom floor
Naked
Not daring to stand up
You go back and hear yourself again
'Something is not right'
He laughs
He brushes your hair
'Stop reading these books'
You look away
He mocks your helplessness
You lie down on the bathroom floor
The marble giving you shivers
You touch your arms to calm yourself
Four hours, you stay still
You hope for a knock at the door

It never comes
You imagine a knock at the door
And shut your eyes
You imagine someone pulling you away
While you scream – make it stop
You open your eyes
The windowless room
Water dripping from the tap
In a monotonous rhythm
You watch it
Three hours
Seven hours
You get up
You see the diary kept near the sink
The pen with the ink leaked flowing down the drain
You look up and see what you dread
The reflection
Your legs are bare
Your ribs are visible
Your long black hair covering your breasts
Your lashes are soaked
You stare at yourself
But, you cannot cry anymore
You cannot look at yourself and cry
So you stop
And everything is stable,
You are not

You move closer to the mirror
You stare at your eyes
Black, never-ending, watery
You blink,
And again,
Maybe the vision changes,
It doesn't
The same face,
Every-time,
The dust on the mirror,
The water dripping from your feet,
And
An inner angst,
Screaming
Make it stop.

The Flowers Were For This

C. Bowen

She would rest much sooner than he would in life, always and at every turn. And he went in circles and circles trying to find her place like that night on the first date like cul-de-sacs, like four rights after stops then up a drive.

The GPS said a hundred feet ahead. And one hundred feet later said a hundred feet ahead.

“I left the porch light on, silly,” she said at the door the first night. The flowers were for this. They were for her. They were roses.

Later like circles overlapping, the couple grew together like vines that had flowers and like the center of something. The house they mortgaged from a bank and lived in was standard, was ivied, was brick.

Ivy Lane the cul-de-sac, and dead end if you turned down it wrong, lay there and things die in life. Flowers wilt. Ivy grows strong, grows into cracks you can't get them out of or see. Roads turn to gravel if you don't repave them. And flowers, too, grow from things like this. Weeds.

This was the earth and the crumbling of it all, the crumbling of the earth itself. The flowers were for this. The flowers from ivy were rising to a decay of a physical world: the flowers he gave her, pressed and dried in a journal moleskin with notes on Blake, young love, apparitions of children to be born.

Life becomes financed through this and enough time, through memory. Becomes clarified and filtered, like butter or motor oil. The country ran on these things and the couple ran on and on and on...

Like summer road trips, motor home vacations, the flowers were for this. Without them there was no need. Without them, there was no renewal and especially with the D.M.V. At the thirty year anniversary there are vows renewed and roads repaved. The ivy sinks twined bark and tendrils into red clay brick. And climbs. The couple goes to heaven inside each other at night, in the morning, while watching the evening news. The couple climbs and the flowers this way are fertilized. Clipped by an adult child, they are purple and pink and taken from a vine like fruit of a god, like knowledge. They mature.

God is a flower on a grave site grave stone, alone and gray. God a cross or God a cement, God a little thing whipped up and baked, a body of mortar. On the saddest day is the new birthday of that afterlife. On the saddest day, they die to become fertilizer for this, for flowers and ivy on up a hill. And the seed knows this, the flowers were for this.

The Pitch

C. Bowen

There was the world and he was there beside Abby and next to her the empty seat. It could catch a ball if it wanted to. A ball could fall there, things falling into laps here all the time, she imagined. The ungrateful know nothing.

"If you signed the contract for the position Jeff, we would offer you all travel expenses covered. Your wife and future kids would be covered. In the event of your death, in the event of your termination."

They were at the ballpark. Abby was sweet, sly, eavesdropping and beautiful watching a baseball game. Jeff knew he had to make a decision by the ninth inning, by a parking lot or by tomorrow morning. And though the home team was winning, Jeff could be losing a lot of things.

"I'm going to go get a soda, dear." Abby excused herself from row J and to the concession above, twenty yards and above. A blimp passed the stadium there.

"Heaven sends angels, Jeff." Ken pointed to the blimp and skyline over the waterfront beyond the outfield and over, beyond the outfield and limitless. "Your wife is gracious, quiet and pleasant. Is there something about the job offer you aren't telling me? Is there something perhaps we haven't addressed?"

The pitcher threw a stitched baseball across home, Jeff thrown into the back there too, of his skull and history. Abby wanted here. And here a home. She wanted boutiques, home improvement and yard work on a Saturday. She wanted debt and struggles. There was surplus. There was solid and a plot, the plot to the beginning of a home or story. There, a green-eyed monster in left field waking Jeff into who he would become.

"The game's almost over." Ken's eyes dotted left and right from the batter to the fly ball caught by the outfielder, the outfielder not making it to that wall.

"I don't want to leave Boston, Ken. I want to live a quiet life with my wife outside the city and raise a family. When I was young, I was raised a military kid, moving from base to base, city to city. I don't want that for my children."

"You want that left in the past then? Part of your personal history, but not a part of the world or the way the world works? I see. Compensation in a lifetime is equal to ambition, Jeff. Is equal to regret and forfeit for some. And I'm not a mathematician. Think about it. Sleep on it. Talk to your wife. I'm sure you've already mulled it over with your family here in town. Remember what I said, remember where I'm coming from: I've twenty years on you, thirty in the company. That speaks for itself."

Abby parked in the seat beside her husband and had caught a sentence or two. A ball was pitched, then fouled. Another thrown hitting the stands bouncing on pavement walkways, bouncing on time and job offers, a metronome. It hit the empty seat beside her and kept going up and away, twenty yards and away. There it would be caught.

There a blimp passed setting shadow on left field. Jeff and Ken shook hands, Abby turning away. She turned to the empty seat, the imaginary boy sitting there with small, leather baseball mitt. He looked like Jeff with wide eyes on the playing field.

“What did he want, honey?” she asked.

“He wanted to tell me how the game would end. He wanted to tell me that we could win, that the sun didn't matter as part of it or to the outfielders today, just that big, green monster in left field, just that stitched ball up and away.”

J. TARWOOD

A MAN IS LOOKING AT A WOMAN
(After Vallejo)

A man is looking at a woman
as if she were the bad sumptuous earth.
He's looking

at her two preening hands,
at the tomb of her breasts,
at her two men stirring

like water troubled by a lazy oar.

Ask me then, wave before me
that enormous white rib:
*didn't this man have a child
for his creaking dad?
& this woman a child
put together on a bobbing bed?*

Say the child sees now. A centipede
child, intense, energetic. He sees
no fit between
her tail wagging like a sunflower,
his tie choking
like long humid hair
over a sleeping mouth.

Say, nevertheless, he accepts:
her because she grinds a soul open
like a glacier clawing ahead
& then melting back;
him because he's a simple soul,
flexible as blond hay drying into straw

Say the child finds a shout,
The fairness that poisons everything:

*Late happiness
of the Father, of the Son, of the Mother!
That round of family life,
numbly pacing behind a million bars,
keyhole welded shut!
Only a glance is left
for the folk song of folk songs
that sings itself hoarse:
that dazzling loss of voice,
darkly red, when the veld's
remembered in the zoo!*

It is a very pure shout.
Once in a lifetime
suits just fine

unless an unfortunate child's been bred.

J. TARWOOD

BAD NEWS FROM A SCRAP OF NEWSPAPER

(After Garcia)

Today, when friends die on me,
just their names die.
How might I breathe in more
from this violent puddle
of black typography
arrowing intimate lost time?

You who walk outside still
can honor cadavers, washing
away dead pain with a hug,
wiping away a punishing tear
with a soft finger.

The jailed, no: we only whistle
the news to the echoing hush.

J. TARWOOD

EZRA

Ezra sees coins shoveled
like coal, the great god
broken & heaped
for fire.

That *almost* sticks.

Ezra flees woods for rooms,
learning hard words
to read his way to Beauty.
Whatever he knows,
he then has to show.

But money's a ghost-maker.

On the air, Ezra yawps
his diatribe. Only spies
mind. His rage confuses
bankers with Jews.

A decade sitting teaches.
Freed, he wills words
off his tongue.

That's his penance.

He allows himself the sun.
Its gold, gloriously,
buys nothing.

He should have remembered.

J. TARWOOD

PERSIAN GULF: LABORERS

Each dawn, a white bus
unloads black men,
slender in orange.
They build & clean.

Men working do not pose.
They take off shoes
to pray.

The spirit needs bare feet.

They leave when told.
News puts home
among delicate dunes

singing faraway to sleep.

Sky

Neila Mezynski

Same color as when she was going. Then. He went for a walk leaving her there. Looking, sitting. Make sure he was staying, he went everyday while he waited for the going. He waited for her on the floor, her feet, to sleep, fall, beside. While she was going in her strong voice and kitten arms. To make sure he stayed.

She sat in the car applying lipstick to pretend care.

There is another light inside any dead star which we see for a thousand years after it crumbles through its hole. That light soothes the land, masks the water, so that if a man look long enough, disguising his love as a crime, he will know how light starts from inside his own earth, a fugitive wing falling through and up until a clear survival floats out. In this way he feels the body as a vase containing nothing and when it breaks it's all the same—nothing inside and nothing out. In this way I ask for a woman to brush against my life again.

—Ray Amorosi

CONTRIBUTORS

Gabor G Gyukics (b. 1958) Hungarian-American poet, literary translator is the author of 5 books of original poetry, 4 in Hungarian, 1 in English-Hungarian (*Last Smile*), and 9 books of translations including *A Transparent Lion*, selected poetry of Attila József. He writes his poems in English (which is his second language) and Hungarian. He had lived in Holland for two years before moving to the US where he'd lived between 1988-2002, at present he resides in Budapest.

His poetic works and translations have been published in over 200 magazines and anthologies in English, Hungarian and other languages world wide. He is a recipient of the Banff International Literary Translation Centre (BILTC) residency in Canada in 2011.

Gabor G. Gyukics established the only existing Open Mike reading series in Hungary in 1999. Organized and hosted over 100 Open Poetry readings with established, prize winner and also with young and upcoming poets.

He is a member of the Belletrist Association of Hungary and the Hungarian Translators Association.

At present he is working on translating the poetic works of North American Indigenous poets for an anthology to be published in Hungarian.

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Bobbi Lurie's fourth poetry collection, "the morphine poems," was recently published by Otoliths (Australia). Her work can be found in *Fence*, *New American Writing* and *APR*, among others.

http://www.amazon.com/morphine-poems-Bobbi-Lurie/dp/0987201050/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1378253182&sr=8-1&keywords=bobbi+lurie

Reagan K Reynolds is currently studying for her M.A. in English Literature through Northern Arizona University's online program. She is the editor and owner of the *Glory Tree Herald* (glorytreeherald.wordpress.com) and has published nonfiction articles and reviews for the online publication *Women Writers, Women Books*.

Daniel Connelly Though English by birth, I have spent much of my adult life being educated in Italy, India, Bangladesh, The USA and Scotland. Formerly a British diplomat, I have been an academic since 1999. I have a BA from Columbia University, where I was my class Salutatorian, and a MLitt and PhD from the University of St Andrews, which I attended with Prince William. I have directed theatre on three continents and was until 2010 the Artistic Director of Zuloo Theatre in Shanghai, where my production of David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* was forced to close by the Chinese

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Mai Van Phan Vietnamese Poet Mai Van Phan was Born 1955 in Ninh Binh, Red River Delta in North Vietnam. He joined the army infantry in 1974. Mai Van Phan left the army in 1981 and entered Hanoi College of Foreign Languages, Department of Linguistics and Russian culture. Continued learning in 1983 at Gorki Pedagogics School, Minsk, (Capital of Bielorussian Republic, the former Soviet Union). Winner of numerous awards for poetry in Viet Nam: "Poetry contest" of Weekly Nguoi Ha Noi in 1994. "Poetry contest" of Weekly Van Nghe 1995. "Literature" of celebrity culture Nguyen Binh Khiem (Hai Phong) in 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995. Recipient of the prestigious "Vietnam Writers' Association" Award in 2010. Author of 12 published books of poetry: *Giot nang* (poetry, 1992); *Goi xanh* (poetry, 1995); *Cau nguyen ban mai* (poetry, 1997); *Nghi le nhan ten* (poetry, 1999); *Nguoi cung thoi* (epic, 1999); *Vach nuoc* (poetry, 2003); *Hom sau* (poetry, 2009); *va dot nhien gio thoi* (poetry, 2009); *Bau troi khong mai che* (poetry, 2010); *Tho tuyen Mai Van Phan, Poetry Collected Mai Van Phan* (poetry and essays and the interviews, 2011); *hoa giau mat* (poetry, 2012); *Bau troi khong mai che/ Firmament without roof cover* (poetry, 2012 - The second edition includes an English version). His poems have also appeared in more than 50 anthologies, including Poetry NZ 36 (New Zealand) Poetry Kit Magazine 5 & 6 (British); POESY Magazine 33, FULCRUM 3, The Writers Post volume 6, 7 & 8, Wordbridge (US); Poem and Comment Magazine (S. Korean); Softblow Poetry Journal (Singapore), Literature Newspaper (Indonesia); Tranan (Sweden).

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Willy Nywening is a retired English and special education teacher who began her career at nineteen. Because she felt socially isolated as a teenager, she began writing. Some of her earliest poems have been rewritten and are included as prose in her new novel, The Journey Home. In 1997, she published a daily inspirational anthology called Sister Stories. Her poetry and articles have appeared in a variety of publications. She also writes educational curricula and is involved in teacher training. Her faith, her family and the grandeur of nature are her inspiration for writing. She is currently working on the sequel to The Journey Home.

Willy and her husband, Dick, live in Strathroy, Ontario, Canada.

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Peycho Kanev is the author of 4 poetry collections and two chapbooks. He has won several European awards for his poetry and he's nominated for the Pushcart Award and Best of the Net. Translations of his books will be published soon in Italy, Poland and Russia. His poems have appeared in more than 900 literary magazines, such as: *Poetry Quarterly, Evergreen Review, Columbia College Literary Review, Hawaii Review, Cordite Poetry Review, Sheepshead Review, Off the Coast, The Coachella Review, Two Thirds North, Sierra Nevada Review, The Cleveland Review* and many others.

Alain Gonzalez, originally from Cuba, poet, translator, writes and works from Miami, FL. Published Eidos (poetry, Voces de Hoy). Currently working on a second collection of poems, Essays on Paradigm Smashing. Poems have appeared in *Nagari Magazine*, a few anthologies, and in blogs and other corners of the Internet.

Stefanie Levine Cohen studies and writes about birth, death, afterlife and the human condition. Currently, she is working on a collection of short stories exploring these topics. Stefanie also works as a volunteer visitor for Samaritan Hospice in Marlton, NJ. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees in English from the University of Pennsylvania and her JD from the New York University School of Law. Stefanie is a long-time member of the Rittenhouse Writers Group in Philadelphia, Pa. Her work has been published in *The Montreal Review*. Stefanie lives in Cherry Hill, NJ with her husband and their three teenaged daughters. She can be reached at stefanielevinecohen@gmail.com.

Berwyn Moore has published two poetry collections, O Body Swayed and Dissolution of Ghosts, and edited the anthology Dwelling in Possibility: Voices of Erie County. She was the inaugural Poet Laureate of Erie County, Pennsylvania, from 2009 to 2010. Her poems have won awards from the *Bellevue Literary Review, The Pinch Literary Journal, Margie: The American Journal of Poetry*, and Negative Capability Press and have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She has poetry and prose published in

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"Flashback" appeared in *Schuylkill Valley Journal of the Arts*.

"Glass" appeared in *River Walk Journal: A Journal of Arts and Letters* and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

"The Decisive Moment" appeared in *Cimarron Review*.

Jane Otto's poems and short stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Nimrod International Journal, Existere – Journal of Arts and Literature, Eclipse, Talking River, The Journal, and New Southerner*. She was a finalist for Nimrod's Pablo Neruda Prize in Poetry for 2013, and received an Honorary Mention in the New Southerner's 2012 Literary Edition. Jane was raised in Colorado and grew up in New York City, where she lived for nearly 25 years. Currently, she lives in Los Angeles, where she is working on a chapbook entitled, [At the Home for Wayward Girls](#).

Kelly DuMar is a playwright, poet, fiction writer and writing workshop facilitator. Her plays have been produced around the U.S. and Canada. Kelly's recent publications include short stories in *Sliver of Stone, Open Road Review, Literary Mama, Red Earth Review*; poems in *Lingerpost, Blast Furnace, *82 Review, Emerge, Apeiron, and Sugared Water*; and short plays in *Art Age and Foxing Quarterly*. Kelly founded and produces the Our Voices Festival of Women Playwrights at Wellesley College, now in its eighth year. Her recent and upcoming writing workshops include: the International Women's Writing Guild, August 2013 and The Boston Book Festival, October 2013. www.kellydumar.com. Follow Kelly @myenvia.

Susan Hodara is a memoirist, journalist and teacher. Her articles have appeared in publications including The New York Times and Communication Arts. Her short memoirs are published in a variety of anthologies and literary journals. She is a co-author of *Still Here Thinking of You: A Second Chance With Our Mothers* (Big Table Publishing, 2013). www.susanhodara.com.

Stella Vinitchi Radulescu writes poetry in English, French, and Romanian and is the author of numerous collections of poetry published in the United States, France and Romania, including [Last Call](#) (2005), [Diving With the Whales](#) (2008), [Insomnia in Flowers](#) (2008), [All Seeds & Blues](#) (2011). Two-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize, she is also the winner of several international poetry prizes awarded for her books published in France. s-radulescu@northwestern.edu

M. P. Jones IV is a fifth-generation native of Auburn, Alabama, M.P Jones IV is a Graduate Teaching Assistant, studying American Literature at Auburn University where he runs errands for *Southern Humanities Review*. He is also founder and editor-in-

chief of *Kudzu Review*, a journal of southern literature & environment. Recent poetry appears in *Tampa Review*, *Canary Magazine*, *Town Creek Poetry*, *Grey Sparrow Poetry Journal*, and in divers others, and is forthcoming in *Cumberland River Review*; memoirs have appeared in *Sleet Magazine* and *decomp magazinE*; an article on W.S. Merwin's recent poetry collection, "The Shadow of Sirius", appears in the current issue of *Merwin Studies*; and he has penned book reviews for *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *A Few Lines Magazine*. His first collection of poetry, *Live at Lethe* (Sweatshoppe Publications), was released this fall (2013). He is interested in pursuing a PhD in American Literature with a focus on literature & environment in fall 2015.

SK Woodiwiss, lives, works and writes in Northern Indiana. Her work has been seen in *Greatest Lakes Review*, *The Battered Suitcase*, *Pittsburgh Flash Fiction Gazette*, *Scissors and Spackle*, *Lady Ink Magazine*, *Eunoia Review*, *Milk Sugar*, and *Hidden Animal Literary Journal*.

Laura Eppinger graduated from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA in 2008 with a degree in Journalism, and she's been writing creatively ever since. Her laptop screen got cracked during a year in Cape Town, South Africa, but it never stopped her from writing. Her full publications list can be seen here: <http://lolionthekaap.blogspot.com/p/creative-writing.html>

Davide Trame is an Italian teacher of English living in Venice-Italy and writing poetry exclusively in English, his second language, since 1993. His work started appearing in magazines in 1999. His poetry collection *Make It Last* was published by Lapwing Publications, Belfast, early this year.

Anders Benson Having always enjoyed the outdoors, I am a state-certified wilderness survival instructor. My love of travel led me to spend time in North America, Europe, and North Africa. I have held a variety of occupations including welding and steel fabrication, pet care service, and railroad car mechanics. I spend my free time hiking, skiing, whitewater canoeing, and hunting. I have a wide array of interests and enjoy practicing long-range marksmanship and reading about history and theoretical physics.

I incorporate varied aspects of my personality in my writing, from my wry sense of humor to my interest in psychology. My work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Bacopa Literary Review*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Existere*, *Gemini Magazine*, *Helix Literary Magazine*, *Picayune Magazine*, *Soundings East*, and *Spork*.

Geoffrey Miller's most recent fiction publications are 'Mr. Kim' *Bare Back Lit*, May 2013, 'Masks' *Metazen*, Nov. 2012, 'Strand' & 'It wasn't broken' *Crack the Spine* Issue 39, 'Ascension' *Stepping Stone Magazine* May 2012, and 'Manila' *Anok Sastra* Vol. 6.

His visual art can be found in the recent editions of *Sliver of Stone*, *Superstition Review*, *Corvus*, *Cha*, *The Loose Tea* and is on permanent display in the Prick of the Spindle online gallery.

Ken Wheatcroft-Pardue is a just-retired high school ESL teacher, living in beautiful Fort Worth, Texas with his lovely wife, Marianne, and Cairn Terrier mix, Annie. He has had poems published in a number of journals, including *California Quarterly*, *The Texas Observer*, *Blue Lake Review*, *Borderlands*, and *Front Porch Review*. He can be contacted at kwheatcroftpardue@yahoo.com.

Bill Vernon served in the United States Marine Corps, studied English literature, then taught it. Writing is his therapy, along with exercising outdoors and doing international folkdances. His poems, stories and nonfiction have appeared in a variety of magazines and anthologies, and Five Star Mysteries published his novel OLD TOWN in 2005.

Lyn Lifshin's *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me* was published by Black Sparrow at David Godine October, 2006. (Also out in 2006, her prize winning book about the famous, short-lived beautiful race horse, Ruffian: *The Licorice Daughter: My Year With Ruffian* from Texas Review Press. Lifshin's other books include *Before It's Light* published winter 1999-2000 by Black Sparrow press, following their publication of *Cold Comfort* in 1997 and 92. *Rapple from Coatism: Lost in the Fog* and *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness and Light at the End*, *The Jesus Poems*, *Katrina*, *Ballet Madonnas*, *Tsunami as History*, *Lost Hors*, *Drifting*, *Mirrors*.

Forthcoming:

Secretariat: The Red Freak, *the Miracle*, *Malala*, *The Tangled Alphabet: Istanbul Poems and Luminous Women: Eneaduanna; Sheherazade and Neferiti* and an eBook of *Marinlyn Monroe* from Rubber Boots Press and DVD: *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made of Glass*.

Michael Collins is a graduate of Kalamazoo College, the Warren Wilson College MFA Program for Writers, and Drew University, where he completed an MA in British and American Literatures. He teaches creative and expository writing in the Paul McGhee Division of the School for Continuing and Professional Studies, a liberal arts college within New York University. His work has appeared previously in *Sunstone*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *The Inkwell*, *The Underwood Review*, *Medicinal Purposes*, *Many Mountains Moving*, *New York Arts*, *Glasschord Art and Culture Magazine*, *Danse Macabre*, *BlazeVOX*, and *Eunoia Review*. It will also be included in upcoming issues of *Brevity Poetry Review*, *Inclement Poetry Magazine*, and *Constellations: A Journal of Poetry and Fiction*. He lives in Mamaroneck, New York, with his wife, Carol.

Gay Baines I live in East Aurora, New York and am a member of the Roycroft Wordsmiths. I have a B.A. in English from Russell Sage College, and have done

graduate work at Syracuse University and SUNY - Buffalo. I won the National Writers Union Poetry Prize in 1991, Honorable Mention in the Ruth Cable Memorial Poetry Contest in 1996, and the 2008 Mary Roelofs Stott Award for poetry as well as other prizes. My poems, essays, and short stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *13th Moon*, *Amarillo Bay*, *Anemone Sidecar*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Bayou*, *The Buffalo News*, *Cadillac Cicatrix*, *The Cape Rock*, *Carquinez Poetry Review*, *Caveat Lector*, *The Chaffin Journal*, *Cimarron Review*, *Confluence*, *Confrontation*, *Controlled Burn*, *CQ (California Quarterly)*, *Crack The Spine*, *Crate Literary Magazine*, *The Croton Review*, *Crucible*, *Dislocate*, *Drumvoices Revue*, *ELF: Eclectica*, *Eclipse*, *Edison Literary Review*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *The Evansville Review*, *Forge*, *The Great American Poetry Show*, *Grey Sparrow*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Jabberwock Review*, *Kiosk*, *Limestone*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Lullwater Review*, *Lumina*, *Luna Negra*, *Meridian Anthology Of Contemporary Poetry*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *Oregon East*, *Paper Street*, *Pearl*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Phoebe*, *The Pinch*, *Poem*, *poemmemoirstory*, *Poet Lore*, *Quiddity Literary Journal*, *Rattapallax*, *RE:AL*, *Rio Grande Review*, *River Oak Review*, *RiverSedge*, *Rosebud*, *The Roycroft Review*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal of the Arts*, *Ship of Fools*, *SLAB*, *Slant*, *Slipstream*, *Sojourner*, *South Carolina Review*, *Spillway*, *Talking River*, *The Texas Review*, *Thin Air*, *Verdad*, *Wellspring*, *Westview*, *Whiskey Island*, *Willow Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Xanadu*, and *Zone 3*.

Kim Farleigh has worked for aid agencies in three conflicts: Kosovo, Iraq and Palestine. He takes risks to get the experience required for writing. He likes fine wine, art, photography and bullfighting, which probably explains why this Australian lives in Madrid. Although he wouldn't say no to living in a château in the French Alps. 90 of his stories have been accepted by 73 different magazines.

EM Schorb's work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Southwest Review*, *The Yale Review*, *The Chicago Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Texas Review*, *The American Scholar*, *Stand (England)*, *Agenda (England)*, *Poetry Salzburg Review (Austria)*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Notre Dame Review*, *5 AM*, *Rattle*, *Shenandoah*, *The New York Quarterly*, and many others, here and abroad. His collection, *Murderer's Day* (Purdue University Press), was awarded the Verna Emery Poetry Award. His most recent novel is *Fortune Island*. *Carbons: a Career in Letters*, and *Reflections in a Doubtful I*, a collection of verse, are just out.

Barbara McGaw I live in Freeland, at the southern edge of Michigan's northern forest. As a graduate of Saginaw Valley State University with an education major, creative writing was not an essential part of my program. I discovered poetry (or perhaps it's the other way around) as an avocation; often as an expression of my joys and my

sorrows. Frequently, the two have been one in the same. My poems had been sitting in drawers around my house. About three years ago, I started looking at them, changing them, and then changing them again, before submitting them for publication. As with most writers, my work has been frequently rejected. Sometimes they have been accepted, and I have had poems published in several journals of poetry, both online and in print. In 2011, my poem, "A Stone Heart," was the recipient of the Abbie Cops Award for Poetry, sponsored by Olivet College.

Vivian Lawry My work has appeared or is forthcoming in more than thirty literary journals, including *The Alembic*, *Apalachee Review*, *Art Times*, *The Binnacle*, *Chelsea*, *The Chrysalis Reader*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Compass Rose*, *Connecticut Review*, *Descant*, *The Distillery*, *The Dos Passos Review*, *Drumvoices Revue*, *Griffin*, *Happy*, *The Hurricane Review*, *The Licking River Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *North Atlantic Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Oregon East*, *Phoebe*, *Post Road*, *RE:AL*, *Reflections Literary Journal*, *RiverSedge*, *Seems*, *Studio One*, *Talking River Review*, *TalonMag*, *Westview*, *Willard & Maple*, and *Xavier Review*. My story "Death Comes To Hollywood Cemetery" is forthcoming in *Virginia is for Mysteries*, an anthology of short fiction written by members of the Central Virginia and VA Beach chapters of Sisters in Crime. Each story features a landmark of Virginia. I have also authored two books: *Dark Harbor* and *Tiger Heart-installments* in the Chesapeake Bay Mystery Series. I am Appalachian by birth, a social psychologist by training. I hold B.A., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees from Ohio University. My career includes college professor, association executive, and vice president for academic affairs. I have ties to Ohio and Kentucky, to the North Country of upstate New York, to Washington, DC, Maryland, and the Chesapeake Bay. I now live and write near Richmond, Virginia.

Benjamin Grose lives in London. He has worked as a dishwasher, waiter, bartender, labourer, bookseller, inventory clerk, nightclub manager and world traveler. His worst habit is adding a comma in the morning and removing it in the afternoon. He never uses semicolons.

He writes short stories and novels and always will do.

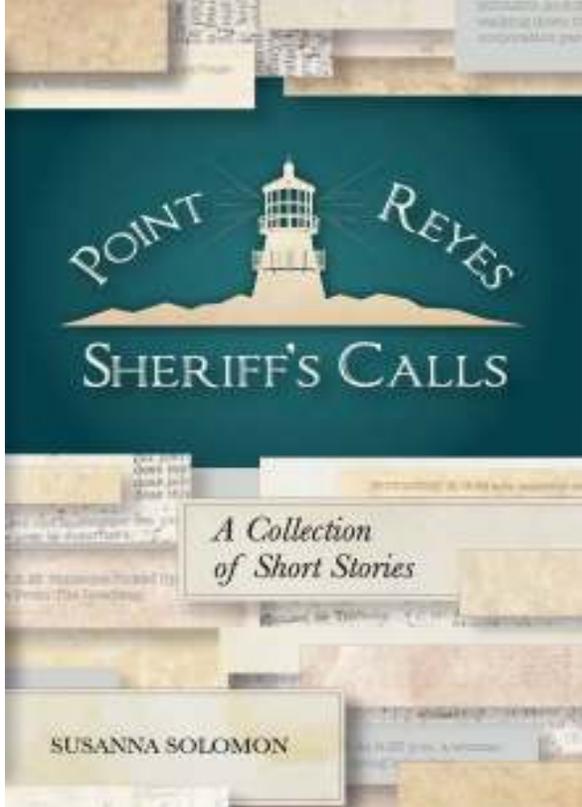
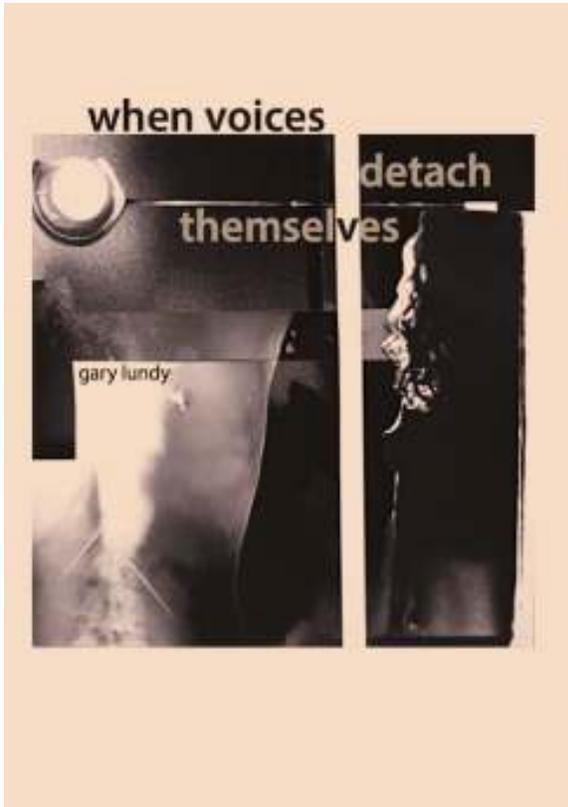
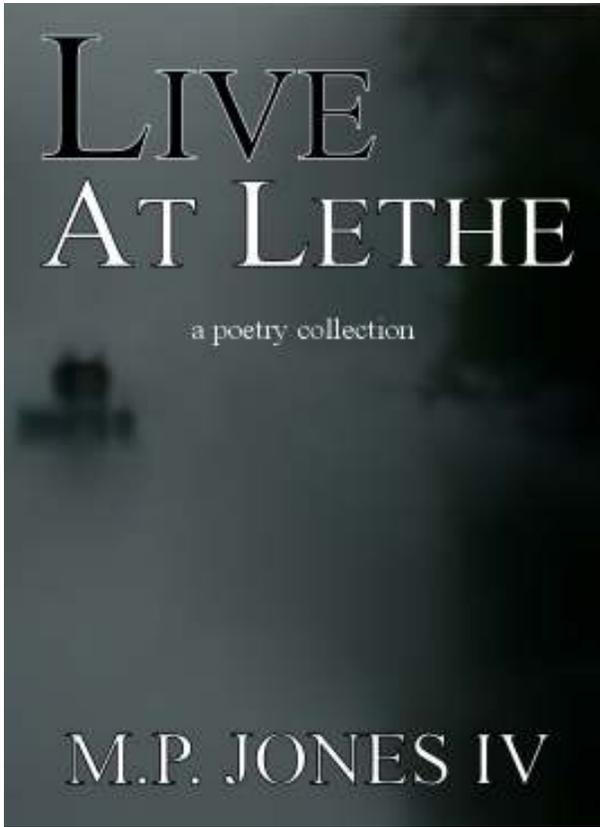
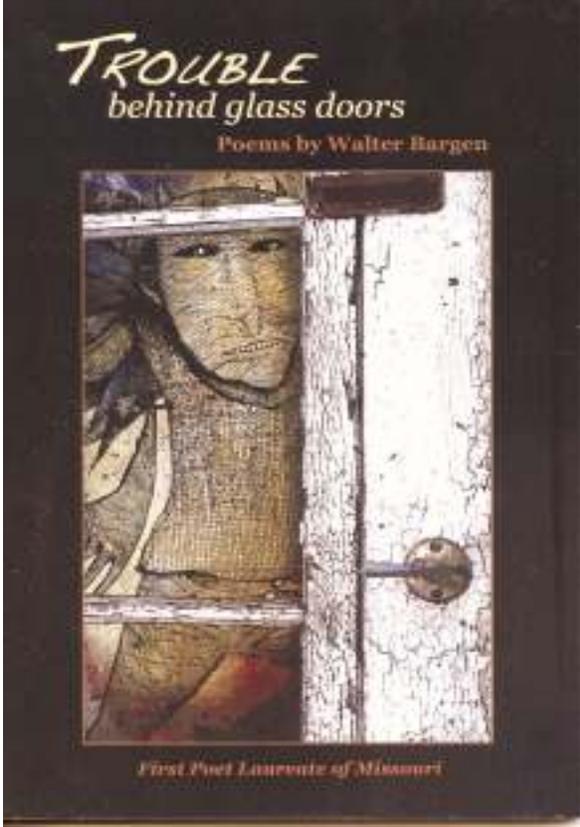
Seth Augenstein is a writer who lives in New Jersey, and who was in the last class Saul Bellow ever taught, and was a tour guide at the James Joyce Centre in Dublin in his youth. His fiction has appeared in *Writer's Digest* and *Tropus*, and a story was an honorable mention in *Glimmer Train*. He's won awards for his day-job newspaper gig. He is married with two cats, and is an avid reader of Romantic poetry.

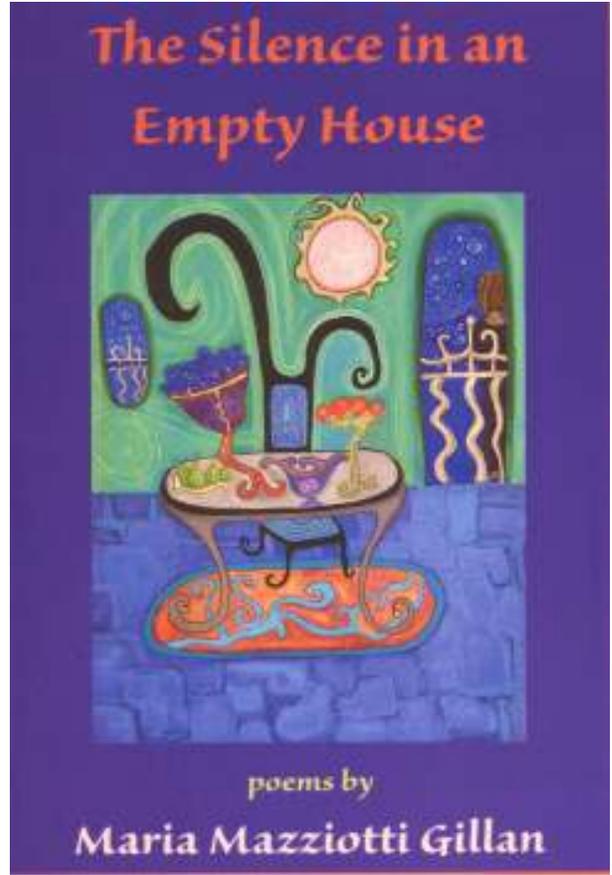
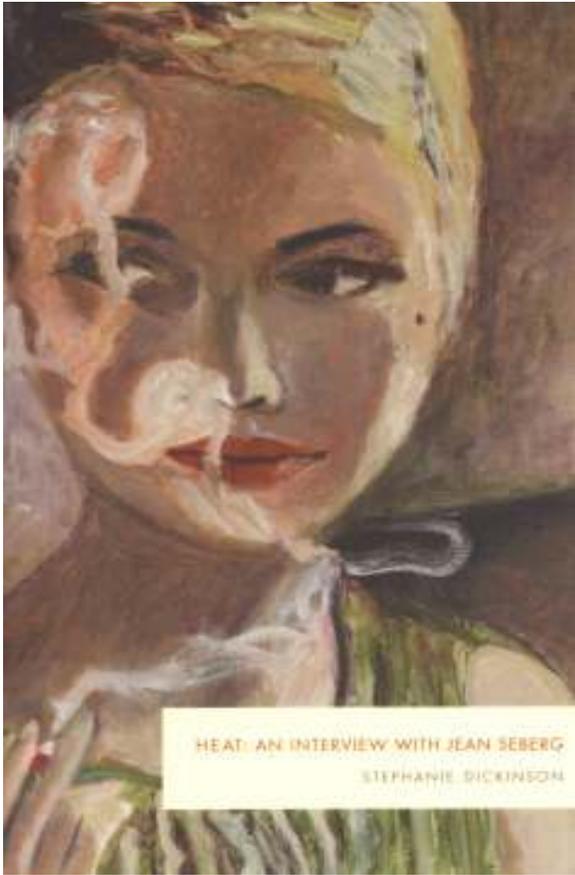
Shaguna Kaushik I am a twenty three year old student intensely involved with poetry and philosophical/non-fiction writing since my school days. I studied visual art and history during my initial years in the university and am currently a student of psychology. My other passions include philosophy, photography and painting.

Christopher Bowen is a published fiction author with work previously accepted at *Everyday Genius*, *Hobart*, and *Flash Fiction*, among others. A Cleveland native, he has read in several states, held a residency in Quebec and blogs at burningriver.info. His first chapbook is forthcoming from sunnyoutside press.

J Tarwood This is my track record: poems in *Free Lunch*, *American Poetry Review*, *American Poetry Monthly*, *BAD*, *Big Muddy*, *Buckle &*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *Rockhurst Review*, *Pike's Creek*, *Blue Mesa*, *Eratica*, *Calliope*, *Coe Review*, *Front Range Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *Willow Review*, *Yet Another Small Magazine*, *Rio*, *Rhino*, *Paris/Atlantic*, *Phantasmagoria*, *California Quarterly*, *Liberty Hill Poetry Review*, *Lilies & Cannonballs*, *Colere*, *Poetry Ireland*, *Wind*, *Grassroots*, *Poetry Motel*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Main Street Rag*, *White Pelican Review*, *Quantum Tao*, *Red River Review*, *Rapid River*, *Spiky Palm*, *Runes*, *Terra Incognita*, *Visions*, and *Plainsong*. In 1997 and 2005, I won a Plainsong poetry award, and I was a featured poet in *Visions* in 2001. One of my poems was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2003. I also have two books published of my own work, The Cats in Zanzibar, and Grand Detour, and have edited two published anthologies, Music From My Pen and East Coast Lives.

Neila Mezynski is author of Glimpses and A Story (2013) from Scrambler Books; pamphlets from Greying Ghost Press; echapbooks from Radioactive Moat Press and Patasola Press; chapbooks from Folded Word Press, Men Who Understand Girls, (2012), Nap Chapbook, Floater, (2012); Deadly Chaps Press, Dancers On Rock, (2011), Warriors, (2013), Mondo Bummer, Meticulous Man (2012), Mud Luscious Press, At The Beach (2011).





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