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Ginosko (ghin-océ-koe)

To perceive, understand,
realize, come to know;
knowledge that has an inception,
a progress, an attainment.
The recognition of truth by experience.
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And who over the ruins of his life pursued its fleeting, fluttering significance, while he suffered its seeming meaninglessness and lived its seeming madness, and who hoped in secret at the last turn of the labyrinth of Chaos for revelation and God’s presence?

—Hermann Hesse, *Steppenwolf*
Nude with Green Silk
Amy Unsworth

She looks over her shoulder
as if she couldn't say no
not to you or anyone
much less to posing
in the spring light
stretched in the bay window
milk pale in a puddle of sea green silk.
She arches her back slightly
and the artist sketches
the correct circumference of her breast.
Her hand rests on the sill, the other
almost unbidden, tracing the knot work
of a mantilla spread across her
abdomen like a shadow. Lace work
and light chart her contours
and here her belly rises, and her breath
falls and even the dust takes pause
in the midmorning luminosity.
At the beach we cross a makeshift bridge of driftwood, stones, and boards that spans a small tributary—one of a handful too wide to just hop across. At the second bridge a girl appears on the opposite bank, tests a board. *Use this one,* she says, *it’s really stable.*

She walks with us awhile, points out hazards, strides to the next rivulet and makes adjustments. *We come here every week to fix the bridges,* she says. She weaves between us and her parents, far ahead.

We search for beach glass. A group of teens throws a section of trunk into the surf. It rolls back to the shore and away again. We lose sight of the girl. Two swans float together way out on the water. A thin line of sun breaks the gray sky.
Inland
Vincent Berquez

I am lustful for the sea to be within
for the shore to rasp my feet for the water
to cover its sheet about my body and cover
this city lightly and then darkly the shingle to tickle
my senses and secrets.

I am lustful for the sea to transport this man of slate
far away from the mountains of plastic and carouse
in exploding waves breaking the shouting of cars
and crying of polluted false winds.

I am lustful to be drenched
and to remove the smoke from before my eyes
to wash me to make me swim in currents
far from streets of hopeless discourses.

I am lustful to sink in the sands and not in me
to splash in a strong adhesive away from the glue
away from the quag-dosage of the city’s condition.

And when the cyano-night comes at me
I am lustful for the sounds of glassy chattering
to come calling for the sea to be lusting for me.
The Balance of Water

Amy MacLennan

A little more, we think, just a little more rain. The earth here is heavy and a trickle could tear rivulets or streams or rivers across our backyards. We watch the skies, try to foresee the future, as we feel the weight of canyon walls surrounding us. Even now the water seeps through the soil, in cracks of small rocks, and tempts the cliffs to surrender in a tumble of shale. Though our houses still stand, the ground must shift only one last time. We will fear the clouds soon.

First published in The Sand Hill Review
Bass Waves
Mira Coleman

My father taught me to cast
a fishing line,
unhook a silver scup,
keep a good lure
and make it last
out there in the harbor,
at the edge of a dock.

He’d say waves out by Eustis Rock
at sunset meant the bass were in:
“bass waves” he’d say, mirth in his eye,
handing me the spyglass
as if it would seal my faith.
I was thirty before I learned
there was no such thing,
just old wakes
from boats gone by.

In August, the pogies came,
chased in by the bigger blues,
sudden fish in the channel.
He’d chew the soft side of his cheek,
determined and patient
as he took a rod out to the dock
and cast that clear rubber minnow
again and again.

Later, he’d play the uke and spoons
and sing a low harmony
when my brother came
and no one really knew
how hard my mother worked
to ration his whiskey down
in that big shingle-house
on a grassy bluff
lit like a ship
on a late summer night,
full like a vault of memory:

Of fish, in a sautee, and glads in a jug,
of cribbage and cards and very good gin
in the usual din of guests
from all over the world.

No one knew how hard he tried
there
at the edge of a world
where the bass waves came in
just wetting the red-legged dock.

first appeared in Daily Bulldog and Ink Sweat and Tears
Swimming with the Ornamental Fish
Carol Frith

She imagines an imperfect circle: an ellipse, an out-of-kilter moon, off-round pool of water that she populates with goldfish:

Bubble Eyes and Comets, Fantails and Orandas, Egg Fish and sweeping Veiltails.

She will act-out this abstraction, make an “0” with the fingers of two hands. Taking photographs, she says.

Water may or may not occur in this ellipse, bright fish patterning her informal circle: Pearlscales, Pompoms, Dragon Eyes, small colors and willowy fins. She imagines herself a solitary Celestial Eye, moving slowly into the white space of her formed ellipse, swimming with the Fantails and Orandas, with the Egg Fish and the Comets. Swimming with the Dragon Eyes.
Where We Are

Phebe Davidson

Wind rises off the mountain for days.

Nights are purple and lack stars. Trees

bend nearly double but do not break.

Nothing is silent. Nothing is still. Sleep seems

not to come while dreams sweep

the restless dark. Voices rise in the wind

without meaning the wind without thinking the wind

without a word. Blankets are damp

and have no warmth. All night we

are cold in this narrow bed. All night we hug

our untongued sleep, rising at dawn to wind

coming up and off the mountain like

something we might have heard before like

something we might have longed for like

something we might have understood

back when we still could speak.
He can see them sometimes out of the corner of his eye. He shifts them right to left, left to right. Everything else is tight, reigned, still. When he looks at them out of the corner of his eye the stiffness grates and his mind undoes itself like a piece of Velcro. In the center, Julie, red and white polka dot dress, the whitest pearls, she nods, demure, photographs well that way. On the sides, Bobby and Chris. Each one with hands in their pocket, looking bashful, looking down. Why are they all looking down? He wonders. They hardly come around anymore. He holds his breath for long intervals and when he lets go they are there. First though he must stop up his nose, the rib cage must rise, bellow, then constrict, a corset of whalebone, and then release, laces of corset undone. Sometimes they are festive, sometimes they have all come in wearing blue shirts and don’t realize it. Sometimes they carry the cold in with them, if they forgot to shut a door. They won’t come for days sometimes weeks and in the meantime, he’ll sit back and watch the scene unfold. People walk by and swat at flies with butter-gold swatters. He watches a swimmer in Speedo take a perfect dive. Listens to the noise the body makes as it breaks against the water. Life passes by like this, life seems to float, thought seem to puff out of the top of his mind, conversations passing like clouds overhead, like floating text boxes. His mother walks by with a glass of lemonade. In his bedroom, there are books under his bed. The bed is low and when he used to slide his hand under there, it smelt like cool clay. He remembers this now and then the memory retracts, like the tricky wheel that pulls away without even realizing. Some days are like fish in a tank, got to tap the glass in order to make them move, but Julie, Bobby, and Chris always arrive in time, their own strange clockwork. They dole out memories, unfurl ribbons of all different colors, red, gold. They repeat stories, poses, like a clothing catalog, but funny. Sometimes one of them hangs their feet in the pool with their head down. Sometimes he realizes this after they have left. Sometimes the disconnect is unbearable. And when he can’t bare to see even them, he bends his head low, in supplication, lets two hands press against it, cups it, bends lower and the content just seems to pour out with the tilt.
The Physiology of a Glance
Jacob Erin-Cilberto

eyes of blue

retreating into you
corneas corner me into moodless days
unprotected from sun's rays
i blink to think
and think to blink
could get lost in your breeze
balanced on soft gaze
i graze in iris fields
as my retina yields

to the succor
of your

eyes of blue.
Reflection on Shadows
Andrea Cumbo

The silver-blue flicker collides with the amber glow of light bulbs; someone is home. On my dusktime walk through the neighborhood, I peer in and see a woman with long dark hair standing in her living room, a denim shirt draped about her shoulders. On the floor below her, a little boy – maybe he’s six or seven – sits doing addition.

Or a dinner party is happening in the dining room behind the street side window on the second story. Men and women in their 30s sit around what I assume to be a table -- I can’t see it from this angle. As I walk by the first time, everyone is sipping wine and chatting, the food long-devoured. On my return, people are laughing, leaned far back in their chairs, legs and feet stretched long beneath the table.

Sometimes, I can’t see people in these golden-lit rooms. I can make out built-in bookshelves painted in a color that is probably cream. I catch a glimpse of a kitchen, granite countertops agleam in the pre or post dinner emptiness. Maybe I see a lone dog, shaggy and longing, staring out the bay window, a single light left on for the owner’s return.

But it’s not what’s happening inside that pulls out this voyeuristic impulse in me. I don’t care if it’s a shirtless, hairy guy watching Monday night football or a lithe ballet dancer practicing plies as she folds socks; as long as the people are living in that soft warm light of evening, I want to be in there. Somehow, in that light, everywhere seems better than where I am.

* * *

His hand is stretched into the dusk in the middle of the painting, a pen clutched between his fingers. St. Jerome, the saint of historians, librarians, students, but not of writers sits, in Caravaggio’s masterpiece of light, across from a skull that so resembles his own bald head that it looks almost as if he rests before a mirror, his hand transgressing the glass boundary.

The light in the painting reflects back and forth between the skulls, off the white of their pates, but it doesn’t refract and bend to show us, its viewers, what is being written. The saint’s head is bent forward in study, so beyond intentness, his thoughts are hidden, too.

“See how the light beams down from the upper right-hand corner, leaving everything beyond it in deep, deep shadow,” the teacher at the Villa Borghese tells his class. But the light belies the painting because Jerome only has a candle, and he’s inside, in a cave even.

I stare at the shadows, what’s left unilluminated, my eyes losing focus, and wonder what Caravaggio has hidden there. A companion, a napping cat, himself.
Maybe it’s just all the gold leafing in Fra Angelico’s paintings that wins me over. The glistening light dances right off the page and into my eyes. In his *Annunciation* at a small museum in Cortona, the light in those musty, dank rooms sparkles off the words issuing from the mouth of the angel and spinning forth toward Mary. I don’t know exactly what the angel says, but given typical angelic greetings, I imagine Fra Angelico had him say, “Fear not . . . .” Somehow the shimmer makes that both more and less possible.

Fear not. Such a simple directive, one that the light in these paintings seeks to undergird. Fear not, there’s light in the world despite of all the scary things. Fear not, the dark isn’t all encompassing. Fear not, the light shines even under the bushel. Fear not.

The light bifurcates her body, her back and feet in shadows, as she kneels in the pocket of light by the window. Her hair tumbles, waves crescenting in the sun’s rays, and her hand reaches forward, so much like the Madonna’s in sculptures - porcelain, soft, strong.

In Manuel Alvarez Bravo’s photo “Portrait of the Eternal,” the young woman is combing her hair, perhaps preparing to hide it away, tuck into a bun, wrap it under a scarf. Gather it behind her into the shadow that obscures all but her profile, long tresses, and a hand reaching forward.

I want to be so beautiful, so serene in my solitariness, as I gaze at the printout of this photo that hangs, curling, above my desk.

Tonight, I sit at my computer, a halogen lamp beaming the most unbeautiful of lights on the desk. My curtains are partially open. I can see headlights from a neighbor’s drive as they rake my office, not bright enough to wake the orange cat on my lap but with just enough glare to startle me out of my writing reverie.

I try to imagine myself standing outside, sneaking a furtive glance into my own window. Yet, I can’t split myself into two – one woman in the light and one in the shadow.

So I look to see if anyone is watching me from the street. I imagine a young woman on her evening stroll gazing up at my office, catching a glimpse of the side of my desk, a peek of the white laptop. My face tinged blue from the computer screen, hair disheveled, jaw clenched in concentration. I know what I must look like – an intent emailer, a woman writing a letter, someone checking her My Space page. I must look busy, content, focused – a solid purpose piercing out from behind my skull.

I stand and walk to the window. I pull back the curtains and look out to wave. Only shadow reflects in the hazy streetlights.
What it Means to Glisten
Caroline Hagood

I write you the wordless song
a hymn to your speechless kingdom
because you know my most deep
before I change it to make words

our eyes are open as we start to glisten
we don’t need to speak of the snow drops
that cover our bodies so soaked in snow
they are everything now

this moon night
we become the wordless moment
between us and the moonlight
so still and so open

our eyes hold a silence of sound
we speak a tongueless night
encircle bodies with light
and silently we glisten
EYELASHES

Austin Alexis

We curve upward.
A prototype of grace, if we could sing:
what rhapsodies.
But instead we gesture,
attractive in our shapeliness.
Like tiny arms
no, feathers—wings—
we interact with wind and light.
Sunlight plays upon our delicious figures,
wants to eat our minuteness
and feel sated.

Our misleading delicateness handles
the scrub of face-washing,
harsh chemicals of mascara.
Only hair, nonetheless we survive,
bounce back when pressed down,
angel soft
yet resilient as healthy tendons,
tough as strands of steel wool.
LIGHT AND ITS ABSENCE
Marjorie Kowalski Cole

1.
Flames in dark glass flicker
at the entrance to a side chapel.
Banks of candles in black iron frames,
black and red. Lit and unlit. I am ten years old,

learning endurance. Below the candles a dark board
on which to kneel and examine
any troubling secret, which will rise
in the darkness, offer itself

for judgment or mercy under the gaze
of an olive-eyed saint. Everywhere carvings
like verses or footnotes in stone.
They left no surface unworked in the old days.

I stare at the bowed backs of men and women
praying in the shadows at the feet of saints
whose white faces, like wandering rocks,
shine only with reflected glory.

2.
In a blazing new parish in Fairbanks, Alaska,
the one great room is white with light.
It could be a dentist’s office; globes like snowballs
press on my eyes, threaten to conquer sin with wattage.

My son pounds a keyboard
and teenage girls with a gap of pink skin
above the waistband of their jeans
send up sweet voices in counterpoint
to the winter solstice: *sun, sun, sun, here it comes.*
At the kiss of peace we gladhand each other like doctors
at a conference. There is no place to kneel
but at communion the priest smiles and says my name
as if we share a secret. *Thanks be to God*

and folding chairs return to their closet. We are sprung
into darkness and the lingering moon.
A halogen lamp near the sidewalk
illuminates a birch tree, whose frosted branches
weave a basket above our heads against the night.
THE MIRROR CONFERENCE
Zyllah Zala

The silence of the cavernous public restroom at first spoke of escape, a lucky choice, but the mirror over the sinks had an icy glare as if signaling danger not far behind. Even the reflection of her face seemed to have turned against her; washing her cheeks and forehead didn’t help. That cold, critical expression did not come off.

Still, the cacophonous voices of the conference crowd were muffled by the door, and the stalls stood behind her in a silent row like an unbreakable line of sturdy guards ready to leap into action.

Time seemed to have stopped in this sanctuary, but outside, in the two-story lobby it kept rolling, being thunderously rolled by attendees running from one session to the next, by debates spilling out of the meeting rooms to the bar, by questions hurled across the thick coffee cloud, etc, and it was a matter of minutes before time would sweep through the door and reassert itself in the mirror too.

Locking herself into a stall would not help either; its door was only a door, made to break down, and besides it had no ceiling, was only covered with a canopy of curious grimaces peering in.

The mirror turned murky in front of her like a giant flat screen TV, and she could see an army of scholars, armed with briefcases and power-point programs, pouring into this temporary shelter of hers, to this public bathroom whose protection was so short-lived, and the rest was predictable. She could see herself dragged out by the determined attendees to the lobby, dozens of hands pushing and pulling, and in the rough handling her clothes quickly rubbed off, ripped off, and she could see her naked body tied to a speaker’s podium by the flexible microphone stand twisted around her hands, and she could see her bare back, from her shoulders down to her buns and thighs, brutally whipped with computer cables.

She could have written the rest of the script, but she stood there watching events unfold with horrified fascination. Even while her skin was thus being sliced by the merciless lashes, a goateed professor came with a pair of rusty pincers, reached into her vulva, and pulled out a full complement of male genitalia, penis and balls and a rain of dark hair that covered her legs.

An eager postgraduate student — with long blond hair and wearing a sari — brought in a punchbowl full of tar and smeared it on the victim’s face and worked handfuls of more hair into it, mostly imitation hair of vegetable origin, maybe just dry grass. At least that part of the ritual didn’t hurt, unlike the finishing touch which
consisted of being crowned with a wreath made out of barbed wire, most likely the piece brought by an illegal alien participant from abroad as an exhibit, evidence to illustrate a paper.

By that time her legs felt wobbly, she was hoping to pass out and avoid suffering through the final act on the afternoon’s agenda which she knew was coming yet; her crucifixion on the two-story window where the frames came together to form a cross, she’d be nailed to the slats, on display for inside as well as outside... She could see herself hanging there, whispering softly: “I’m innocent, I don’t know anything, I don’t know anything about tenure in heaven...”

She felt a convulsion shake her body, maybe the final one. But no; the mirror in front of her suddenly cleared up except for her own haggard face. And the noise outside was coming to a roar as if the events shown by the mirror were indeed taking place out there.

Quick, perhaps if she could pile up all the toilet bowls against the door she could barricade herself in forever. There was plenty of water, what else did she need?

And she’d have reams of time to wait until people got tired of looking for her and went home, forgetting all about her and her paper.

The mirror beamed back at her in agreement. And silently, another face appeared in it without the door having been bashed in or crashed down, without any noise. And the other pair of eyes were looking only at themselves, not at anyone else. Another faucet was turned on, and the noise of the lobby was softened to that of gentle waves lapping on a shallow shore.

There was nothing else to do but wade into that ocean and start swimming. Or sinking. Didn’t matter.

The worst part was over. Even the mirror would not have recognized the face that walked out of the restroom.
Rose understood secrets in a strange way. In her mind, secrets were, by definition, made with secretive intention. She didn't consider the embarrassing or shameful things she had done or others had done to her in her life to be secrets; these things were conventional corruptions which only became secrets when they were found out. Rose categorized secrets like her sister's abortion or her father's affair to belong to soap operas, celebrity tabloids, and human nature. These shameful mistakes were the type of secrets she didn't keep. She knew that her sister didn't intentionally forget to take her pill and her father didn't take up with a plus-size lingerie model just so the family could hang one very small and one rather large skeleton in the familial closet. No, Rose knew these were simply common mistakes of a pitiable human nature. They were not real secrets, but only slips of ignorance so commonly exploited in dime store romances and daytime television. No, these were not the type of secrets she loved.

The secrets she loved, the ones she harbored like orphaned puppies or fantasies of death, were the secrets destined to be secrets. Rose considered secrets to be precious. They were precious because they were unexploitable. Secrets, unlike shameful abortions or disguised affairs, concealed nothing acknowledgeable. Hints were not dropped. No map led to their discovery. Even Freud couldn't uncover a slip to a secret of Rose's. She made them precisely so that no one, not even herself, would acknowledge their existence. She made them to to prove to no one that she made something which could not be deprived of meaning or shame. Shame was almost as precious as secrets to Rose but it, unlike secrets, was meant to be dispersed upon discovery. Shame, when found out, would dissipate like pollen carried by the workerbees of her friends, therapists, and one night stands. Secrets of Rose's could not be dispersed like shame in drunken candor or morning-after heart-to-hearts.

When she thought of this, which she did very rarely, Rose thought of albino lizards living in the dank waters of underground caves. She had seen photographs of these veiny things in a high school biology class. They were eyeless and albino. They lived without light. They ate through the chemosynthesis of predation and not the photosynthesis of life.

Rose came to understand herself in that lecture in spring of 2003. Rose understood that these lizards were eyeless and albino because they had never needed pigmentation and vision. There was no light to shield them from and their bodies acted as plate-glass to the algaed murk of the stagnate water. They were nothing but veins and flesh and little slits where eyeballs might have been. Rose understood then that her secrets to be like the lizards, they needed no shame just as the lizards needed no light. Just as the lizards were blind to themselves and transparent to the observer, so,
too, were Rose’s secrets. She kept them blind and invisible because they never needed sight or substance, they were secrets, made to be secretive. Whenever she thought of these precious little unexploitable indignities of secrets, she felt the eyeless albinos like babies in her belly. Precious in their purity, they swam, blind and diaphanous, in the stale waters of her stomach.
A Science of Transparency
James Miranda

Across the street from my building, in a burlap grass park, there lives a bum who collects goldfish. He lines them up on the park’s benches in mason jars, chipped scotch glasses, cracked vases. A veritable science of cast away transparency speckled here and there with an opaque container: the only intimation of life within a fleeting bronze silhouette where the sun’s rays slice their way through the chalky glass.

On the weekends I go into the park with my kids. On particularly bright Saturdays, when the sun’s rays search out glass to shred, the park materializes as a strange scorched planet; the only inhabitants living isolated from each other, submerged in liquid and encapsulated by thin layers of silica. The fish look at me cock-eyed. Hang limply in the water waving their fins as if to an aquatic breeze. A pair of Orange Orandas (some of the fish have tiny labels taped to their respective containers written in a childish chicken-scrawl) share a sensuously fluted pitcher. They furrow their jellied brows to passersby. A row of five to six beta fish in long-stemmed wine glasses whip their lavender and magenta tails like silk ribbons, spiral the glasses with martial artistic precision.

My wife Cheryl and I, we argue about the fact that I still use the word *bum*. She thinks it’s a crude and antiquated term.

“No one says bum anymore,” she says.

“Well I do,” I respond stubbornly.

_Bum._ A three letter jab. A word that I had heard countless times from the lips of my father and his father. A derelict. An outcast. Quitter.

The bum is usually nowhere to be seen on Saturday’s. He’s out scrounging food for his troops. His wall-eyed army. A battalion that lies languidly in wait for its general to animate it; set its fins fluttering in anticipation.

Jason and Matthew, my two sons, unearthed a veiled goldfish graveyard one afternoon where tiny plots pop up each week like puzzle pieces. It’s tucked away behind a crumbling granite water fountain whose pipes have run dry for years, the spigot clamped shut by the department of Park Services. The miniature bone yard is replete with crosses fashioned from deli toothpicks. Red, orange, and green cellophane flags adhere to the miniature crosses like scraps of sinew and flesh.

They stood, heads bowed with intuitive reverence until Jason, the older of the two boys, crudely toed one of the little crosses apart and they both ran toward the basketball courts, bubbling with nervous laughter. Invisible ghosts swimming in their wake.

For quite some time Saturday morning cartoons were followed with the same tinny pleadings.
“Please, Dad! Please! We want to see the fish!” they would chirp in unison. I would try to hold them at bay for as long as possible, hoping that maybe they would forget.

“Later,” I would say from behind my newspaper, “we’ll all go down later.” I understood their attraction to the strange man with his vast fleet of fish, but something about it made me uncomfortable. I felt uneasy around the park with my children. Not because I thought the bum would inflict any harm upon them. Nothing like that. It was just that—well—the idea of the fish haunted me. It was something that I couldn’t quite place my finger on. A childish fear of the curio-shop maybe. Exhibitions of the bizarre popping up in magnified flashes. The same emotions induced by the yellowed hunks of bloated anatomy behind the looking glass in science classes.

The knowledge of that scruffy man with his bowls of fish—creatures whose eyes roved in their gelatinous sockets and were always staring, impenetrable, probing stares—there, right across the street, day in and day out, invaded my dreams at night.

In the depths of sleep I found myself groping my way through reflective chambers, surrounded on all sides by undulating waves of glass. Occasionally, a tiny island of flat reflective stability might be found amongst the roller coaster planes of sloping glass. But when I gazed into it, fixed it in my line of sight, the eyes and face staring back at me were not my eyes and my face but the slick brassy features of a goldfish, kissing back at me, blowing invisible smoke rings. Its eyes rolled momentarily back in its head before jerking to attention.

I would wake up in cold sweats that seeped straight through the bed sheets and it would take my wife Cheryl some three to four minutes to help me get my bearings. “It’s just a bad dream,” she would say in a soft maternal tone, running her hand through my soaked hair, “that’s all it is.” “I know…I know,” was my reply between ragged breaths.

When she asked me what the dream was about, with a hint of self-consciousness to her voice I always said that I couldn’t remember and eventually we slipped back into an uncertain slumber. Elusive fears hanging in the darkness above our bed like shadows cast by invisible zeppelins.

***

It was on an early October morning that I ran into the bum on the street—quite literally plowed right into the guy—I was running fifteen minutes late for a business meeting with some associates up from Tennessee. My wife laughed at me as I stumbled across the bedroom with one leg in my pants and the other prematurely plotting the next move. I dropped a cuff link behind the radiator in the bedroom, a tiny topaz stud that had once been my father’s. At the breakfast table I spilled orange juice on my tie, much to the chagrin of Matthew, our six-year-old.

Cheryl grabbed the sides of my face before I could scoot out the door to the
apartment and looked me square in the eyes. She has little gold flecks in the hazel pools of her eyes that always seemed to be laughing at me.

“Ev-ery-thing-is-go-ing-to-be-fine-hon-ey.”

She spoke in soft but purposely chopped up syllables.

I nodded a quick assent, kissed her on the cheek and rushed down the hall of our apartment building to where three other men in almost identical suits, my neighbors, stood by the door to the elevator shaft patting their chests and hips in feeble attempts to ascertain whether or not they were forgetting something.

When we reached the lobby of the building there ensued a little stutter-stepped foot race to the revolving doors where we all nodded hurriedly to Jonathon, the doorman in the morning, and spun our ways into an urban fall day.

I rushed down the sidewalk with my attachÊ case held open in front of me, leafing through papers to make sure everything was there and in order and when I turned the corner at the end of the block, still absorbed in the task of rummaging through the case, I slammed into the bum in mid-stride.

“So sorry,” I mumbled while simultaneously trying to side step him in an attempt to make up for lost time and was stopped in my tracks by the sound of crunching flesh and bone.

I knew what it was that I stepped on before I even lifted my foot. I could see it in the bum’s eyes as I pretended to balance my weight precariously. I felt and heard it in the unmistakable pop of a tiny body cavity. And when I looked down at the mans quivering hands, I saw an empty mason jar of delicate blue-tinted glass—empty except for an inch or two of cloudy water.

It was a familiar looking jar, like something great-grandmothers line up on the windowsills of their sunrooms. I had flashes of sensory memories that I had never remembered living. Caught in dazes as I stared up at the light coming through these jars and felt the sun tickling the insides of my nose, smelled mothballs and camphor.

I lifted my foot and stared down at the sidewalk.

There, twitching on the ground in barely discernible spasms was a tiny gold fish. Its spine crushed by my own weight, organs squeezed to capacity. Sections of grey flesh showed dull where my shoe had torn the scales from its body.

The bum motioned towards me helplessly. He faltered a bit, emitting some strangled sounds before forming any coherent words.

“That was a new one,” he said, his voice jarring me from my reverie.

I wasn’t sure if he meant the fish or the way it had died.

“I’m so sorry,” I said. “I…”

“Brand new,” he trailed off.

He began tugging at his long yellowing hair where it stuck out from under an old battered homburg. I could see that beneath his mass of gnarled hair—hair that you would picture on longshoremen, weathered and brittle—his eyes were moistening a bit.
I panicked and instinctively reached for my pockets, came up with a five-dollar bill, taped together on the corner, and it seemed an almost obscene gesture as I thrust it out in front of him. He stared at it with a look that made me immediately regret my actions.

When he finally removed one of his hands from the jar, which he still clutched to like an ossuary, and took the bill from my hand, I was down the block at mid-jog before he could even put it in his pocket.

I felt the man's eyes on my back everywhere I went that day. Though I had never looked back, they trailed me through layers of concrete and steel, through sheets of glass, walls of formal conversation and social niceties until I had to fight the urge to look over my shoulder. I was vague and distant at my business meeting. I called my secretary by the wrong name twice. Having to leave my office was like the torturous moments between stepping from a warm pool and wrapping yourself in a towel on a cold day.

I stayed awake long after kissing Cheryl good night watching television and it didn't dawn on me until the 4 am life support drone of the Emergency Broadcast System Tests that I was afraid to go to sleep.

For the next few days I avoided the park or anywhere out in front of the building with childish superstition. I became an expert at dodging the bum. If I thought I saw his hat bobbing along the other side of the stonewall that surrounded the perimeter of the park, I turned the block before my building and went around to the laundry entrance. If he was begging outside the building in the morning I ordered a car service in the lobby and waited inside until the sleek black car pulled up and I was ushered into it by the doorman. As much as I wanted to, I just couldn't curb my behavior. I was like a man with a tic who cries in frustration while compulsively tapping you on the shoulder.

It wasn't until three days later, while I was walking Matthew and Jason home from a mutual friend's apartment, that I ran into the bum again. He came hustling across the street toward us holding something high up in the air that glinted in the sunlight, almost getting clipped by a cab in the process. His hair hung wildly out from underneath his cap and the sight of him running across the street caused Matthew to squeeze in behind me and pull at the inside of my pant leg.

"I got it.....I got it," he was huffing, out of breath from running across the street.

Jason, who was a year and a half older than Matthew, squeezed my hand tighter and seemed to be attempting the same disappearing act that Matthew had been successful with.

"Brand new," the bum said.

I looked at what he held in his hands and saw what appeared to be an old Waterford Crystal sugar bowl, the multitude of cuts and facets in the glass glinting in the sun and throwing off a kaleidoscopic pattern onto the sidewalk. There was a small
squared notch in the lip where the sugar spoon was supposed to rest.

“Whattya got there pal?” I asked, attempting to comfort the kids with my nonchalance.

From the angle that he was holding the object I couldn’t see into it. All I could see was the ornate cuts of the bowl. The delicate craftsmanship. The kids, who were brought out of their shells by sheer curiosity, peered out from behind me at the bowl.

The bum eased down to one knee so that he was just about the same height as Matthew and proffered the bowl like a sacrament—awaiting a reaction.

From this angle I could see a bulbous black mass suspended calmly in the bowl. The fish was soft, even doughy looking, with folds of membranous flesh around its eyes and enveloping its whole head. Its eyes were large and bulging like two soggy peppercorns.

“It’s a Black Moor,” he muttered, “From China Town.”

Matthew and Jason peered down into the bowl somewhat perplexed. I could see a few drops of water clinging to the bum’s ragged sleeves from his hurried attempt to catch us before we went in the building.

“From China Town,” he repeated and pulled a crumpled black tea bag from his jacket pocket, dangling it back and forth in front of Matthew like an odyle as proof.

I could see the question forming in Matthew’s eyes before it even touched his lips.

“Can we keep ‘em Dad?”

The bum wagged his head from side to side.

“No, no, no…this fish is for the park.”

I looked at him with what I hoped appeared to be appreciation, but he brushed me off with little or no thought.

“Your Dad, he paid for him, but he’s gotta be in the park with all the others,” he nodded back at the park as if the “others” were listening.

The bum seemed threatened. He seemed to believe that a six-year-old had the power to take this away from him.

Matthew tucked himself back in a bit behind me.

“Like a museum,” the bum explained, “They write the money people’s names on the tabs, but the painting stays in the museum…where everyone can see it.”

I didn’t really like the tone in the bum’s voice—the way he stressed the word every in an accusatory kind of way. Matthew seemed disappointed but you could see that the idea was getting through to him.

“You can come see it,” he added as if in compromise.

He was coming off awkward and overly protective. Nervous. Put off. The encounter with us was obviously straining for him. I made an attempt to lighten up the mood. The kids could sense deviance and weren’t sure what to make of it.

“That’ll be nice, huh Matt? We can go see the fish on the weekend,” I mussed his hair uncertainly and thought I felt him nod under the weight of my palm.
“Alright then,” the bum forced a stoic smile.  
He tucked the crystal bowl into his chest and made his way hurriedly across the street and back into the park.

Jason brought it up at dinner that night.  
“You should have seen him Mom, he was crazy lookin’. Had this big weird hat on and nasty dirty clothes.”

Jason was overly excited, accentuating his descriptions with grimacing facial expressions and dramatic hand gestures.  
“Just came right up to us with this ugly fish in a bowl that you couldn’t even see through,” he looked at me with squinted eyes, “Why would you keep a fish in a bowl that you couldn’t even see through….seems stupid if you ask me.”

I just shrugged, avoiding the look from Cheryl that I could feel from across the table.  
“I liked the bowl,” Matthew said softly while prodding at some peas with the tines of his fork, “it was pretty.”

Jason snorted. He’s at one of those ages.  
“Boys don’t say pretty,” he mimicked the way Matthew had said the word, “Preeety, it was pretty.”

“That’s enough Jason,” Cheryl piped in, “and boys can too say pretty.”

She turned her attention to Matthew, tucking a strand of his almost girlish blonde hair behind his ear.

“That was a very nice thing to say Matthew.”

She smiled at him, and I could see him slumping a bit in his chair, whether out of embarrassment or affection I couldn’t tell.

After dinner the kids were put to bed and Cheryl and I lay in our bed with the TV on.  
Cheryl ribbed me playfully with an elbow.  
“What are you doing letting the kids around that man across the street,” she whispered, concerned but somehow sexy at the same time.

“He practically ran in the building after us to show us this damned fish,” I said, sounding a bit more defensive than I had wanted to.

Though I wasn’t looking at her, I could tell that she was staring at me. I could feel the tiny gold flecks dancing around her irises.

“Why, after all these years,” she propped herself up on one elbow to gaze at me, “would he run up to you now, on the street, to show you one of his fish? After we’ve lived here for so long without so much as a word with the man?”

I reluctantly put down the book that I had been feigning interest in and looked at her from over the rims of my glasses.

“Alright,” I said in surrender, “I gave the bum some money the other day to buy a fish.”

I didn’t realize the truth in this statement until it came out of my mouth.
Cheryl propped herself up higher, raising herself as if to a challenge. A look stole across her face that I recognized but had been seeing less and less over the years. It was the look she used when I did something completely unpredictable. Something she would consider “out of character” for me. I liked this look more than I was willing to admit. It made me feel powerful. I had some mystery that she hadn’t quite cracked yet.

“Why on earth would you have a homeless man buy you a gold fish?” she asked incredulously.

“A Black Moor,” I corrected.

She rolled her eyes.

“Ok. Why on earth would you have a homeless man buy you a Black Moor?”

“I didn’t give him the money to buy me the damn thing.”

She laughed and pinched me under my arms.

“Ok…Ok,” I surrendered.

I started to tell her of my encounter with the bum earlier that week. I’m not sure why but I delivered it more as an amusing anecdote, a story told on a whim at a cocktail party. I knew halfway through that it was a poor choice. My wife gave me a strange smile rife with pity, though I couldn’t tell if this was reserved for the bum or me. She pursed her lower lip a bit, something she does before tearing up, and picked up a magazine from the nightstand.

“It was nice that you bought him a new one,” she said.

For weeks afterward I didn’t think about the man across the street or his fish. The nightmares stopped. I didn’t run into him or even catch a glimpse of him while coming and going from the building. Matthew would mention the fish from time to time, but it seemed to be with fading interest until his requests to visit the park on Saturday stopped altogether.

The entire incident took on the aura of a collective familial dream. The more persistent I was in trying to file it away as novelty; the more substance it amassed. Walking into the apartment some nights after work I felt as though I had stepped under a microscope. Certain topics were avoided altogether. We were banded as owners of the same hallucination, estranged by our reactions to it.

On an abnormally cold Sunday night in October I noticed Matthew propped against the window in the living room that overlooked the avenue and the park across the street. Cheryl and Jason were curled up on the couch watching animated rabbits skate hearts and figure eights around each other on a seemingly endless plain of ice. Intricate white lines laced their way across the cartoon pond in fluid scribe-like arcs. I passed Matthew at the window while getting up for a glass of water from the kitchen.

“What’s up Matt?” I asked softly, kneeling behind him and staring out the window. He gazed straight ahead to the park where I could make out a tiny orange glow tucked off in one corner, the unmistakable glow of a fire.
“Dad, where does the fish guy go now?” he asked without looking back at me, seemingly transfixed by the somber glow in the park.

“Well… I don’t know Matt, probably a shelter or something.”

“And he takes all the fish with him?” he asked.

“Yeah, Matt, the fish go too,” I said.

“Oh.”

He stared out at the glow for a long while with me kneeling there behind him. I noticed the condensation from his breath fogging the window and then the fog immediately subsiding as the coldness outside ate away at the fleeting warmth produced by my son. As I followed his gaze I noticed the slightest hint of a silhouette in front of the glow from time to time. A subtle shadow seemed to be going back and forth between some place in the darkness and by the side of the fire like the repeated eclipse of a miniature sun incapable of warming anything.

It was a while before I realized that Matthew had fallen asleep. I could feel him leaning into me closer and closer but hadn’t noticed that he was slowly losing consciousness, the far-off glow of the fire putting him to sleep.

I picked him up gently and carried him to bed.

When I came back into the living room I found that both Cheryl and Jason were asleep as well, as if a spell had washed over the entire house.

I turned off the TV, roused Cheryl and Jason gently from their sleep, and made sure that we were all comfortable in our respective beds before drifting off to sleep on the sofa by myself. The white noise from the volumeless television singing its silent lullaby.

In the morning a rind of frost crept up the outside corners of the windows. Feathered crystals sucked up the sun and threw off needle-points of light. I could smell coffee brewing in the kitchen and I could hear cartoons coming from the tiny television installed above the kitchen counter where the kids were eating their breakfasts.

The tile floor in the bathroom numbed my toes with cold; the hot water of the shower bringing with it pain and relief simultaneously.

When I was dressed and sitting at the table drinking my coffee I could feel Matt’s eyes on me through my newspaper. I lowered it slowly to confirm my suspicion and found my son staring at me as if he was trying to lay an issue to rest in his mind, something that he had been puzzling over in his dreams.

“Hey Dad, how do you think the fish guy gets all of those little bowls and things to the shelter? Does he have a cart or something?” he asked.

Jason scoffed over a spoonful of Cheerios.

“What’s with you and the stupid fish guy?” he said rolling his eyes and shooting me a look as if we were both in the know.

“I’m just saying,” he pleaded, “how could he carry all those things himself?”

I placed my paper down on the table and took off my glasses.
“Well he probably had someone help him Matt,” I was groping for answers, “Social Services or some other homeless guys or something.”

“Oh,” he said. The very same oh I recognized from the night before. The "oh" we learn at a very young age is reserved for just letting things go.

I kissed him on top of the head before going out the door.

When I reached the lobby that morning I could see the other men from my building hanging around outside before I even went through the revolving doors. Nobody was rushing, patting themselves down, making small talk.

When I swung through the revolution of the doors I could see that the men were lined up down the sidewalk like tin ducks in a shooting gallery, staring silently down at their feet.

If I hadn’t been so curious as to what was going on outside I might have noticed all of the missing name labels from the mailboxes just past the front doors of our building. I might have seen the little blank spaces that on any normal day told the outside world who this particular building, like so many others in our city, contained.

When I reached the first man, a guy on the fourth floor whose name I think was Parker, I found him staring down at a cracked jelly jar, the label having been peeled off long ago, inside of it a frozen cylinder of water pushing its way through the strained glass. And in the center of the frozen cylinder, like a cel from an animated movie, was a tiny frozen goldfish, fins caught in mid flutter, tail iced in mid-contraction. The man whose name might have been Parker stared down at the little fish as if utterly confused.

It was only after looking from him to the fish and back a few times that I saw a little tab sticking out from under the jar. The tab was printed with neat black script:

4B Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Parker

The man seemed to be reading his name over and over again, as if in vague recognition, but couldn’t bring himself to pick up the label. To claim it.

It was like this all the way down the block. Underneath the frozen contents of a scotch glass:

7c Mr. Gregory Epstein

Just next to an old jellybean jar in the shape of an elephant:

14f Mrs. Kathleen O’Connor

Caught just under the bottom edge of a tall chalky flower vase:

2a Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Lak

Underneath the base of a long-stemmed wine glass:

6g The Bateman’s
I looked at each label as I made my way down the block, stole a glimpse at the contents of each container. And when I finally reached a small crystal sugar bowl, frost caught on it’s rim, a tiny black mass frozen in its center, I read my own name over and over again, waiting—I suppose—for someone to tell me to pick it up.
Seven images suggested by empty air
Jay Michaelson

The wide tan car hood of a Buick LeSabre
Like the expanse of the unconquered west.

A dry winter without snow or shine,
the oyster-overcast ice,
as imagined by ancient primeval gods.

The reduction of all breath
to a hair parted this way.

And yet also the expansion out of windows
from cracks in the weather
to expanses of amber waves
to include everything but the everything outside,
and to imagine that.

An old resolving note.

A scrap of mail
delivered across the globe
in rain
precisely to its destination,
indicated in the arrangement of ink
somehow stable on the paper of the envelope.

The open point of air, as in a sigh,
that precedes exhalation.
Transmission of light outside tradition
David Appelbaum

A cloud of mirror
   mourning
bowed in a dark ring
that holds the dawn sea
in a green cup
   I imagined
pagodas and stone spires
where people talk
in solitary pairs,
their meager life counseled
by the rift
into which tears must fall.

When a grey osprey darted
at the sun’s irradiant eye
the glint gave light
to that fissure, I drifted
there a phantom on unloved streets
a caul child
   to my own heart
and its vagaries.

Then a salt wind came
from beneath the water,
within reach above me
that common line
that divides one
   from no thing.
In the courtyard
David Appelbaum

The mist caught a web and held fast
its quarry snared
above the marsh-grass flexed and militant
until the salt air suckled dry the blades,
and freed the jailer,
so that death might weave again
her lovely trap.
PUTTING LILLI DOWN
NATALIE SAFIR

1. I’m watching her walk an edge between survival and release, an old woman dragging her bones, an innocent entering a forest.

   How wide is the ribbon of her will -- is it taut or slack as netting?

   Her eyes are clouded uncertainty. Cirrus threads trail across winter skies.

2. Flesh is silently leaving her frame. Daily there is less of her hunched on the soft cushion.

   The bones pronounce themselves outward. She is an inverted cage any loud noise or wind could crack.

3. I ask if she wants to leave, there is silence in her eyes. She turns away as I moisten her lips.

   At every turn the decision I will have to make meets me.

4. I wish her into a sweet sleep. Let soft fog protect her from pain. Gentle one who trusted the world.
5. When we are both ready
the day will be very long.
Ten years.. How do I not
continue to care for her life?

6. I carry her to the car,
one hand flat across her back
grateful she does not make a sound.

At the vet's office she settles her body
humbly on the steel table
covered in dark green cloth.

7. She moves down easily into slumber.
My hands feel no difference
when the second injection
stills her heart.

8. Her drift into death is seamless.
Her open eyes are clear dark glass.

Sweet Lilli.

Her box with the chenille pad is empty.
I leave it just as it is.
Frank leans back in his studio chair, slowly allowing the smoke to exit from his nostrils. He watches the smoke curl and weave toward the ceiling, following its slow motion undulation until it dissolves and disappears. Years of hosting radio had honed his timing; he knew without having to glance that there were 45 seconds remaining in his break, prompting the red light to flash chaotically, indicating that he was, indeed, back on air.

The excitement of being on the radio had never left him. Most radio veterans had expressed a lack of the old thrill, the thrill of knowing that one’s voice would carry over most of a given county, that any mistake or lack of judgment would be heard almost instantaneously by hundreds of thousands of listeners. Frank considered himself fortunate for his still very real fear of blowing it on the air. His fear of using the wrong word or sounding less than knowing or of allowing a profane word to slip out into the land of radio.

Radio had found Frank; it was not a field he’d set out to conquer. His show was conceived by an offhand remark he’d made to Jim the program director, never intending it as a pitch. Having screened calls for years he was happy with the meager salary and dependable hours.

Frank and Jim had been half listening to a political call in show in Jim’s office, when a caller began a most entertaining, albeit insane rant.

“Why do we always cut off the crazy callers? Listen to that guy go, Jim. Those guys make for good radio.”

“Yeah, you could have something there, Frank. Crazy fuckers do keep things interesting.”

Two weeks later Jim approached him with what would become one of the most syndicated radio talk shows ever, The Frank Sound Show.

He’d smirked at Jim assuming he was up to a prank when he’d offered him the slot.

“Have my own show? You kidding with me?”

“Nope. The nine to one slot is yours. Thing is, you’ve got to follow the format.”

“I’m afraid to ask, what is the format?”

“It’s your idea actually, keep the crazies on the air, egg them on Frank, support any weird notion they bring up, be the one guy in the universe who not only listens to them, but offers them back-up. Make up shit. In two weeks of air time you’ll be a pro.”

His first night on had felt like a disaster, but the ratings indicated success, not huge, but for the nine to one slot the best numbers ever.

Frank found that the callers did all the work; he simply substantiated whatever the hell they said, hoping that by doing so they would unveil their darkest beliefs.

“Hey Frank, this is Cliff from Riverside, I sent you an email attachment last week, did
Thursday nights proved to be the most rewarding, callers like Cliff seemed to come out of the woodwork. Frank didn’t know what it was about Thursdays in particular, what caused these lonely people to be more drawn than ever to his show, but he knew to be ready.

“Refresh my memory Cliff, I get so many emails with attachments.”

“Oh yeah Frank sure, it was a photograph that my buddy from D.C. sent me. He was let go from his Smithsonian job and I suppose he was pissed and just took it with him when he left, or a copy of it, I’m not sure…..”

Frank interrupts, sensing the caller’s drifting dialogue, “What was the photograph of Cliff?”

“Dr. Mengele and Sir Winston fuc…” A loud beep interrupts Cliff’s profanity.

“Cliff, that isn’t a word allowed on air.”

“Sorry, Frank, I get carried away, anyway it’s a picture of Dr. Mengele and Winston Churchill, Frank, chatting it up in a Paris cafÈ!”

“My, my, my. Cliff, are you suggesting you have evidence to show that these two men actually met? That Dr. Mengele, a Nazi physician who willingly conducted torturous experiments on Jewish victims met with Sir Winston Churchill? In Paris?

“Oh yeah, and during the war, Frank. Oh, and it gets worse, if you look real close at the picture, you can see that they’re holding hands under the table.”

Frank embraced the silence allowing it to add importance to Cliff’s story.

Letting out an audible and long breath Frank continues in a grave tone. “Cliff, this puts a whole different light on the war, this is, well this is an extraordinary find, this picture.”

“You bet it does Frank, and on top of that, they were faggots.”

Frank smiled while recalling Cliff, his first caller. He inhaled from his cigarette once more, leaned toward the console, placing the headphones over his head and switched on his microphone. Behind the glass wall he could see Joe, his screener, counting down the seconds to airtime. Frank’s readout indicating that Lucinda from Watts was on line one.

“Hello Lucinda from Watts, you had a run in with a shadow person, did you?”

“Hello Frank, well yes, but its not my first. I’ve had a history with these folks.”

“Shadow people, for those of you listening who don’t know, are remnants or particles of people, that materialize in the shape of shadows. They hide underneath things in an attempt to avoid detection.”

“Mine Frank, are refusing to get out from underneath the bed. I haven’t been able to have, you know, be intimate with my own husband.”

“They are a fearful bunch, different than ghosts in that regard, shadow people don’t like to be looked at or photographed or….”

“Sorry to interrupt Frank, you said photographed? What about video taping, does that scare them?”
“Lucinda, this may be the problem, did you attempt to video tape them?”
“I did Frank, I didn’t think it would harm them.”
Frank smiles, sensing the strength of his bullshit as it feeds off itself, as it self-generates.
“Well, harm no, scare yes. You may have to allow them time alone. Can you and your husband sleep elsewhere for a few weeks, in another room? It would help them. They may leave on their own if they sense you won’t be coming back for a spell.”
“I suppose we could use the guest bedroom. Do you think this will work, Frank?”
“It has in the past, other callers have mentioned a two to three week time frame to get them to leave. I’m afraid you frightened them with the video camera- their images being replicated is threatening to them.”

Leaving the station at one in the morning was always odd for Frank. Few places were open so late, even in Hollywood. Prostitutes, johns short on cash, addicts of all kinds, serious drinkers and guys like him who had nowhere else to go, frequented most of the bars that were still open.
Matilda’s was close by and he knew Tim tended bar on Thursdays. Frank found a stool at the bar, greeted Tim with a nod, and set to drinking his first beer. He didn’t notice the old man sitting next to him in as much as he smelled him. His stench a noxious mixture of dried piss, an alcoholic’s stale breath and an onion-like armpit smell that always reminded Frank of chili. The man’s smell caused Frank to look over, driven by curiosity more than mere repulsion.
Without a word of prompting the man addressed Frank, “I’m Uncle John.” The old man put out his hand and Frank shook it.
“Thursdays are not my usual days, that’s why you haven’t seen me before.”
“What’s that?” Frank looked into the man’s clear and almost pretty blue eyes noting that he wasn’t as old as he’d first believed.
Uncle John took a gulp from his scotch, and then looked deeply into Frank’s eyes. “Thursdays were the nights I’d go home after work, so I don’t normally come here on Thursdays.”

Alix Reeves

“I see.” Frank felt at a loss, he didn’t know exactly how to respond, or if he really wanted to.
Uncle John shifted in his stool then signaled Tim for another round including Franks glass in the gesture. Uncle John smiled a big smile leaning forward into the bar placing his elbows on the shiny wood surface.
“I gave up drinking twenty-five years ago. I’ve been re-drinking for a week, is it a week Tim?” From the far end of the bar Tim calls, “Keep me out of this.”
“That’s right, it truly is my responsibility, that much I know, thanks for the reminder Tim.”
Uncle John looks away then back into Frank’s eyes. “This is no longer a world for my sort, nor can I say it ever was. I don’t mean this in a self-pitying manner, no. It is a statement of truth.”

Frank gave up the thought of moving from the bar and away from the man; there was a keen intelligence in the manner in which Uncle John spoke that intrigued him that caused him to stay and listen. He was clearly an educated guy, but there was darkness here, too, what it could be he didn’t know but Frank sensed it.

“I was born different, that much I know. My life stings. Do you know what I mean by this?”

Frank holds his glass, turning it in the light instead of replying.

“It stings, a cold piercing sting that hurts, it feels physical, this sting. I see families, I see happy couples, everyone at peace and I know they don’t sting, like I do.”

“So ah, what causes this, this sting?”

“Angst, I was cursed with an inner angst that few others are born with. Now, you look away believing me to be an elitist of some sort. But you’re wrong, there is nothing special about my curse, it’s a punishment.”

Frank’s ears prick up at this, “Yeah well, we all have demons.”

“How right you are my friend.” Uncle John stops to consider his scotch, then continues.

“I attempted to hide away in my field or rather launch myself into my career, astrophysics, which one would think all consuming. The only thing that was all consuming was my curse, turning away from it only made it call out to me more vehemently…like a desert plant requiring water that begins to root deeper and deeper into the soil.”

“My work involved other worlds where normal didn’t exist, where I would not feel compelled to ruin or where I felt no sting. My efforts didn’t work but they sure did stop me from, from acting out. If it was determined by, I don’t know who or what, that I be born with this odious lack of impulse; so be it.”

In an attempt to lighten the mood Frank says, “How about we trade? My curse for yours. Like I said we all have demons, pal.”

Uncle John reaches out for Frank’s wrist turning Frank’s hand over to expose his open palm. Uncle John places his other cupped hand over Frank’s open one, as if to place something inside it. He allows his cupped hand to sit. The warmth of the man’s dry skin on Frank’s surprises Frank, whose unease with touch is suddenly magnified.

Uncle John slowly turns over his cupped hand to reveal an empty palm. “If only it could be so easy to hand over understanding, to hand over compassion, well compassion no, that would be too much to ask, in all seriousness but to hand over my impulse, to be rid of it, how very tempting.”

“That would be even more damning, for me to hand over my predicament to
someone who perhaps, cannot show restraint.”

Frank snorts a laugh, then turns his head to see Tim at the other end of the bar wiping glasses and reading the bar for whoever else might walk in.

“The first time I watched Frankenstein, I saw myself. Like me, he had no manner of not stinging, not hurting in this world. I knew he had to be destroyed and although I was just a boy I knew my impulses were just as incurable as his. Imagine being just a boy and knowing your destiny, I was angry just like the monster was. Why bring me into such a world? So I can hurt?”

They sat for a long time, Frank too absorbed in his thoughts to speak. For a time he believed that Uncle John was finished, he considered thanking him for the beer and heading home.

“As God is my witness and as much as I’ve wanted to, I have never touched a child. Oh, the times I’ve been left alone with a much too trusting parent, the times I could have fed my monster…. I’ve carried my detestable load from the day I recognized it, and chose the sting, the loneliness instead. Imagine the monster opting a life of loneliness and hurt, denying himself the need, the desire to kill. Perhaps, killing to him came naturally as does my, well, my inclination.”

Frank is startled by the man’s confession, his honesty and yet, he saw something coming, something dark, but not this dark. After years of radio he came to accept the darkness of others, after all, his show was the forum for these people, the one place they could go for, what? Confession? A safe place to expose their lonely insanity?

He’d once been interviewed by a television psychologist who’d asked if he believed his show helped others or hurt them by exposing them as comedic figures. The question had remained with Frank for years. He’d long forgotten his (most likely trite) response, but not the question.

“Consider me, a monster who for all his want, for all his need has always chosen to sting instead of the alternative. How many men have you met who have turned away from every single temptation? Who would you say is the better man? The man undaunted by a horrible proclivity and lives a sin free-life, or the one who struggles with one?

Frank openly looked at Uncle John’s profile, at the man’s sharp long nose and considered the predicament, the question asked of him. His thoughts roamed and he remembering the first time he’d watched the same Frankenstein movie that had shaped Uncle John’s life.

He’d been young too, probably just a kid. He remembered sitting alone on the bare living room floor, his dried out, half eaten bowl of Capt’n Crunch sitting next to him. The sound of a neighbor’s lawn mower humming not too far off and happy to hear it, a reminder of all things mundane and normal, happy to know that the ugly, frightening world of the monster was far away, somewhere where he wasn’t.
Strange Flesh
Vivien Jones

I spied a grey log
beached
on a grey pebble shore.

Coming near,
a glint of bone showed
it was not a log.
A glint of bone showing
through a scoop in flesh,
made crosses, a spine.

A jaw with broken lines
of thin teeth,
gums stabbed away
by complaining gulls,
no fins, no tail, no eyes,
no name.

A sea creature wrecked
by a violent tide,
a dry rotting banquet on
hot stones.
Because it is nameless,
small boy like, I take a stick
to punish its leather carcase.
Funeral
Michael Cuglietta

I’ve never been to
your funeral
but I smelt
the bouquets of flowers
piled beside
your casket

I listened for
the pretty words
buried inside
the voice that
delivered your eulogy

I said a prayer
with your mother
helped her
catch her tears
inside a tissue

I even ran my fingers
along the engraved letters
on your headstone

I’ve never been to
your funeral
but I’ve been
talking to you
in my head
since long before
they told me
you were gone
meeting the angel of death near sunset
at Wingra Park
Ingrid Swanberg

_for James Wright_

you might not have noticed him at all,
save for the streaks of dust and clay on his trousers
that in his innocence
he did not brush away
as he leaned
pale and young
into the lovely dusk
at the far edge of the trees
when he turned and nodded to me,
though in quick terror
I looked away,

you know,

I recognized him too
This is a big city, the subway has 13 different lines; it is a big university, it has 24 different majors; this is a big health clinic, it has thousands of patients. They were sitting on a bench on campus, under the sun of May, smoking a cigarette and carrying on a lifeless chat, not knowing how much they had in common, or maybe, aware of the similarities, they had secretly decided to talk about something else, something meaningless, something unadventurous.

I have never seen them together before, and, as far as I know, the two girls just share a class and had never really talked. They were sitting on a bench, smoking a cigarette. To the outside world, and even to themselves, they look alike, both with long dark hair and sharp noses, but not to me. I knew it; I knew there was something else.

They both have been my patients, and only I know that one has been beaten up by her boyfriend and is recovering from an eating disorder; and the other one has a bipolar father, a schizophrenic uncle and is recovering from a phobia. They were sitting on a bench, smoking a cigarette, under the sun of May, and as I passed by, I, the keeper of their secrets, I felt that this city, this university, and this clinic are not that big. They are nothing compared to the secrets I keep...
here I am written too
Ingrid Swanberg

the shame of loneliness
has brought me here
to hide
in the cool shade
of your absence

it is the way
I make you up

braiding the black ribbons of loss
with the white ribbon of desire

I am already beginning to forget
that which cannot be written
that which cannot be said
PETREL
Dawn Paul

How quickly the body heals. The gash on my right knee is already taut with pink, new skin. The cut on my chin is a pale, beardless furrow. I don’t remember how I cut my chin or even if it hurt at the time. I remember being in pain as I thrashed my way ashore, but my body cannot summon the exact places and severity. I’m left with only the abstract idea of pain. Fear, however, is easily summoned. I need only close my eyes. I try to keep watch outside the window in front of me, but when my eyelids drop, even for an instant, the waves rise up and fear pools in my belly. Now I see that I was in some amount of fear from the very beginning. I was afraid of the emptiness of that desolate coast. And I feared that KJ, reckless KJ, would forge ahead and I would not have the strength to follow.

My left arm is wrapped in a soft length of flannel. It is still swollen from the effort of paddling. I can summon pain by lifting it, and I do. I lift my arm whenever I close my eyes, and pain drives out the waves that rise hissing and boiling behind my eyelids. It drives out the sound of my name under the wind. I don’t know what I will do when my arm heals.

It has started to rain. I hear the hollow gurgle in the drainpipes and gutters. The windowsill is wet. I stand, close the window, and wipe the sill with a sponge. A thought surfaces, a reflex still—that KJ does not waste his time wiping windowsills. KJ would leave the window open, let the hardwood floors dampen and buckle, let mildew bloom on the hand-woven rug from Guatemala. I continue to sponge the rain water. It’s a good oak floor. But I open the window again. I need air, and you have taken the rug with you.

KJ and I were part of the same clubby group in college. He was popular. More than that, he was what the rest of us wanted to be. We changed when he walked into a room. We became aware of ourselves, our awkwardness, our thin bravado. We stood straighter and quit our nervous horseplay. We adopted KJ’s deep-voiced, self-deprecating mode of speech.

I always felt there was something unearned in KJ’s status among us. He was a middling sprinter on the track team. His grades were average. He was not active in campus politics. His reputation for wildness was based solely on one three-tavern night in town that was easily smoothed over by the campus PR people. Mostly, KJ had style. Once a week he went into town for a haircut, close-cropped on the sides, longer on top. He always looked freshly combed and shaved like the leading man in a 1940s movie. He favored button-down shirts and dress slacks that would have looked absurd on the rest of us. He carried a cigarette lighter and wore a heavy stainless steel watch that was slightly loose on his lean wrist. I still remember him leaning down to light a girl’s cigarette, flicking that lighter. Always, the girls looked up in surprised pleasure.
While I stood by, conscious of being grubby and disheveled, wearing a musty jersey I’d grabbed from the floor of my closet that morning.

In his easy-going, effortless way, KJ remained the center of our group for our four years at college. We were never really friends, but when the others drifted off after graduation, KJ and I stayed in touch. Or rather, KJ stayed in touch with me. I’m not much of a correspondent.

Through the years, he showed up at our door on his way to or from someplace else, still lean and easy-going. Now that we’d all become comfortable in button-down shirts and mandatory dress slacks, KJ had become a youthful vagabond. His hair was still thick and dark but now it curled over his collar. The wristwatch was replaced with a woven bracelet. Though multinational corporations were happily paying to fly him around the world, he always arrived looking fresh off a tramp steamer or one of those trains where passengers sleep on bench seats. He’d stand in our doorway wearing a few day’s growth of beard, one beat-up travel case slung over his shoulder. He had now, in middle age, an earnest, boyish appeal that made men have faith in him and women want to take him home.

No matter how inconvenient his arrival, I always found myself glad to see him. He’d have a bottle of inexpensive but good wine and some reason why he hadn’t called sooner. Then he’d borrow my shaving cream and a clean shirt for dinner and eat as though he hadn’t had a meal in weeks. After dinner, he would stretch his long body out in my reading chair and, with a mixture of apology and bravado, light a cigarette. He still carried the same lighter. Inevitably, he would fling his arm out in some wild gesture and drop ashes on the fabric of the chair or the rug. Then he’d fall to his knees, making frantic apologies while scrubbing the ashes. I always saw something exaggerated in that performance, sensed mockery behind with his concern—Oh, Peter! Your precious chair, your costly carpeting! After a late night, he’d be off in the early morning for some country neither you nor I could find on a map.

For days after one of his short visits, I was always restless. I wandered our house, looking at our collection of botanical prints, the furniture we had refinished with such care, the authentic handcrafts purchased on vacations. At those times, our belongings and our sixteen well-ordered years together felt like heavy ropes keeping me moored in a shallow backwater. I wanted what KJ had—nothing and everything. Temporary assignments in exotic locales, hotel rooms, trains, sunburn, malaria, a life he could pack into one bag at a moment’s notice. And women who would remember him years later while in the arms of another man. A stable sort of man. A man like me.

When KJ asked me to accompany him on a paddling trip to the north coast of Maine, I was pleased and flattered. I was eager to prove that the man of brocade upholstery and antique oak floors could live without all that. I could have said no to KJ. I have a business to run and I had never paddled a kayak in my life. He would have taken my answer at face value. It was your calm certainty that I would never attempt such an adventure that made me say yes.
The morning I left, we stood at the end of the driveway. It was a close, muggy day, unusual for early fall. All my gear was packed in stiff, new waterproof bags. I was checking each bag against my packing list. KJ was late, no surprise there.

You stood with your head down, your arms folded, still in your white bathrobe. You had that rumpled, barely awake look that I love, your hair gathered around your shoulders, and your eyes and lips still swollen from sleep.

“Promise me you’ll come back, Peter.”

I knew what you were thinking. A friend of ours had recently been killed in a freak accident on a bicycle. We had analyzed it over and over—chance decisions, God’s will, human inattentiveness—as if by making some sense of it we could ward off a similar fate.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be careful.”

“Promise me, Peter.”

“Yes, I promise.”

You kissed me lightly on the cheek. I hadn’t bothered to shave, and you rubbed your knuckles against my chin and gave me a wry smile. Then KJ drove up and we busied ourselves packing the trunk of his rented car.

KJ had arranged for an outfitter to supply us with kayaks and drop us off on a pebbly spit of land in the middle of nowhere. He had sea charts, but typically, no itinerary. That was fine with me. I had a full five days before I had to be back for an important meeting, a meeting that felt distant and trivial by the time we packed and launched our little boats.

I grew up around small boats—day sailers, canoes, rowing skiffs—and I was pleased to find that early experience served me well in a kayak. I handled the paddle easily and knew to keep my weight low and centered in the boat. The water was calm and clear. It magnified and enhanced everything in it. I saw every stone, each frond of rockweed and bit of white shell in shining clarity. Trees on the small islands offshore stood out singly against the sky. Thick stands of fir and spruce grew down to the rocky coast, and the only signs of human culture were a few battered lobster traps thrown up on shore by the tides. When KJ and I left the shelter of the cove and headed north, we might have been the only people for miles in any direction.

We paddled, each in his own thoughts, until by unspoken agreement we headed into a cobble beach for a quick lunch of smoked bluefish. My legs were cramped, and it was glorious to get out to stretch them. I took a short walk and came upon a small patch of late blueberries. KJ congratulated me on my successful foraging, and we had a perfect dessert.

We paddled through the afternoon. Harbor seals poked their dog-like heads out of the water and looked at us with astonishment. A fog bank built up into a solid bulwark on the horizon. Blisters burned on the soft pads of the palms of my hands, but my shoulders felt wondrously loose and strong. I had deliberately left my watch at home and guessed it was about five o’clock when we beached our kayaks to make
camp for the night. I pitched the tent in a small clearing in the sweet-smelling firs above the rocks. KJ gathered driftwood and made a fire below the tide line.

We roasted hot dogs over the fire and ate them with our fingers. We’d forgotten to bring rolls and laughed about it. KJ told a story about attending a meeting in Bhutan wearing shower sandals.

“I am such a fool. Can you imagine, Peter, having to tell your esteemed host that you have somehow forgotten your shoes?”

I assured him I could not. “You must love it, though—all those foreign places.”

“It’s business. Sometimes I just want to be home. But I don’t really have one, do I?” He stood, stretched his back and groaned loudly. “I’m getting old, Peter.”

“Not you, my friend. That’s only for the rest of us.”

KJ laughed, such a human sound on the quiet beach. Then he trotted back to the boats, broke out a portable fishing rod and stood mid-calf in the cold water, surf casting. I broke out a flask of good bourbon and sat sipping on the beach. The smooth water was streaked with soft blues and lavender in the long twilight.

The next day we continued north. The landscape became wilder, a young coast with high, sharp headlands. Bare roots of spruce and fir extended over the water, their soil washed away by storms. My back and shoulders were stiff from paddling the day before. I had hoped to condition myself during the trip, but hours of paddling around steep headlands outpaced my ability to build strength. I felt tired and old before midday.

We quit early and pulled out on a little pocket beach that KJ had noted on his chart. The beach was steep and a wave swamped my boat as I clambered out on stiff, numb legs. KJ helped drag my boat out of the surf. I was grateful for his help and too tired to care that I needed it.

We threw ourselves down on the stony beach as though it was a feather mattress and lay there for a long time in an exhausted stupor. Finally, we roused ourselves to set up camp. The beach was hemmed around by a high cliff and we had to pitch the tent on a narrow strip of cobbles above the tide line. There was no driftwood, so we ate a cold supper of sardines on crackers. Then we sat on the rocks and finished off my bourbon, passing the flask back and forth until it was empty.

I realized that when I wasn’t worrying that I’d become too settled, too cautious, and too comfort-loving, I liked KJ. I liked that he sat and watched the water and didn’t ruin the evening with self-congratulatory talk about our tough day of paddling. I liked the way he gently pointed at things—spume shooting up over a ledge, a mink that stepped out onto the beach then slid back into the rocks—a quiet invitation to notice and enjoy.

The breeze died at sunset and mosquitoes came out of nowhere in hungry droves. We escaped to the tent. I drifted off to sleep while KJ studied his charts by flashlight. It seemed like only minutes later we were awakened by the wind. The tent fly, which we had casually left untied, flapped and snapped like it would be ripped to
shreds. I stumbled out of the tent and tied down the guy lines by touch. There were no stars. The tide had gone out, and the water was a far white line in the darkness.

I dozed, then woke again to the sound of surf. This time we both dashed out. KJ flashed his light on the water. The tide was coming in fast with big dumping waves. In our bare feet, we carried the boats further up the stony beach. Back in the tent, I lay awake and worried about the boats, pictured them tossed and smashed by the waves. I worried that the tide would reach the tent and soak us and all our gear. Finally I willed myself into a restless sleep, waking again and again to the booming surf and the wind pressing against the tent like a giant hand.

In the morning, I woke dry-mouthed and weary. The night’s high winds had brought in heavy clouds. There was a stiff breeze, and the water was heaped with a confusion of waves lifting in sharp, white peaks. My shoulder joints felt like hot lumps of steel. KJ was up and breaking camp. I told him I was not up for paddling, but he pointed out that there would not be much to do all day on our little patch of beach. We were also getting low on fresh water. He picked up my empty flask and dangled it upside-down.

“More importantly, Peter…”

I laughed and packed my gear.

We both got soaked launching into the surf. I nearly capsized as I threw my legs over the cockpit rim. Then I frantically paddled through breaking waves to the calmer water beyond. When I was out of reach of the surf, I stopped to bail water from my cockpit. I was shivering from cold and fear. KJ turned and stopped to watch me, deftly using his paddle to stay pointed toward me and the shore. He raised his arm to give me an okay sign and I wearily okayed back. All I wanted was to get someplace warm and safe.

My boat kept turning into the wind, what KJ called weather-cocking. It was maddening. I had to keep paddling hard on my left side to keep the boat on track. In no time, my left arm had a buzzy numbness from elbow to wrist. I kept paddling, trying to keep the land on my left, the horizon on my right, and KJ straight ahead. My clothes were soaked and despite the hard paddling, I was cold. My chest was tight and shivery and my feet were numb. I wished I had looked at the charts with KJ the night before. I had no idea where we were heading or how far it was. I was afraid my left arm would give out before we got there.

I was musing about nerve-endings, trying to visualize what was going on beneath the skin of my overworked left arm, when the squall hit. You cannot imagine how quickly it all happened.

The wind roared in as though someone opened a huge door. It began to pour. Waves reared up like dragonheads, huge things, sickening in their immensity. I couldn’t see the sky. I had no thought of trying to reach shelter, it didn’t seem possible there was any. I only wanted to stay upright in my small boat, to keep myself out of those loathsome waves. I looked ahead for KJ, hoping for some sort of signal from
him, something that would save us. But there were only the waves and the steady drone of the wind.

Then, on the crest of one of those horrible waves, I saw a paddle turn end over end. It looked odd to me, an artifact of civilization in that wilderness of water. I was aware that my mind was sluggish with the cold. It seemed disconnected from my body, which continued to flail away at the water. Some part of me watched my disintegration with helpless detachment. That part noted how long it took me to realize that the paddle must belong to KJ. It also noticed that under the steady sound of the wind there was another sound—my name, called over and over. That part of me knew I must heed that voice.

But the slow-thinking part of me pushed on, sobbing and shivering, to some imagined safety. I stopped once and called KJ’s name. Then I kept paddling. The detached part of me was appalled at how quickly my focus had narrowed down to my own survival. At one point, I looked back and saw the white hull of KJ’s boat carried across the face of a wave. The voice calling my name ceased. There was only the hiss and seethe of the water. I continued to paddle, a reflex action like the twitching of something severed.

The squall passed over and the wind died as suddenly as it had risen. The waves subsided to smooth gray swells, like the backs of breeching whales. I stopped for a while and leaned on my paddle, hoping to hear the sound of my name again. It was very quiet.

Then I saw a remarkable thing. On the glassy crest of swell, a tiny dark bird appeared. It hovered for a moment on sharply angled wings and pattered its feet on the water. It seemed a sort of blessing, a companion, this bit of life out in the huge ocean. My boat was caught broadside just then and I had to lean and paddle to avoid capsizing. When I looked up again, the sea had rearranged itself and the small bird was gone. I was utterly alone.

For a moment, I thought I’d imagined the bird. But though I was numb with cold and fear, my senses were keen. I was, perhaps, more sharply alive than I had ever been before.

I told the Coast Guard, and later, the doctor at the small inland hospital, the story in its simplicity. That KJ and I had been caught in a squall and I was unable to rescue him. No one questioned me further. An inexperienced paddler thrashes his way ashore and his experienced companion is found washed up on the little pocket beach they had launched from that morning. No one faulted me.

Perhaps you would not have faulted me either, had I told only that simple story. But no. I told you, how in the midst of the terrible waves and KJ’s calls, I remembered my promise to you. I did not tell you how I watched my arms save myself, how my selfish body found strength I did not know I possessed.
The rain has stopped now. My left arm still aches. I cradle it against my chest and pack my bag one-handed. When you return to pick up the rest of the furniture and the crated prints, I will be gone. I will be traveling lightly, and alone.
**Iris**

Kristine Ong Muslim

The real ones are those which she can see and touch with her spider-babe fingers drawn from a Hollywood film set costume.

The strangers in the halls are her friends, always waiting for her final curtain call.

**Pear**

Kristine Ong Muslim

It was that kind of yellow-green mourning which had nothing to do with losing something.

One wild-eye less, it swayed--a stout hourglass.

**Perpendicular**

Kristine Ong Muslim

is that edge of the wall to the concrete floor.

One looks more weathered than the other,

but there is enough sky for both of them.
Portrait in Gray
Kristine Ong Muslim

Age has encrusted over you
when you have left it to dry.
A husk inside--you
scratch and claw
at your brittle outer layers
again and again.

Theater
Kristine Ong Muslim

After the curtain call,
she surrounds herself with mirrors
to see how the applause
makes her cheeks glow.
What the Ethiopians Say

Tuck gels and liquids into plastic zip-top bags. All items fit like a glove within the confines of 7.5 by 8 inches of spacious skies. Like bombs, potential HAZMAT zigzags into strategically positioned trash bins. Enough liquid and gel to reanimate the universe. Or rebind history books. A TSO tells me my sun block is cursed—it can't make the trip to New Mexico. The four ounce tube is perfectly folded in half with two ounces missing. There are not "three ounces in one bag, one bag per flyer." I refuse to hurl my potential HAZMAT into the trash. \textit{When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.} He tells me it's a small price to pay. I tell him not to \textit{use a spoon to get water from the Nile.}

A baby-in-a-bin went through the scanner just last week. Doctors found only minimal radiation residue. I slip back through the scanning booth, lie down on the conveyor belt behind carry-ons, purses, strollers, bins, sandals, potential HAZMAT... I lay perfectly still, nose and soul pressed firmly against the foul-smelling rubber. Perfectly still. Holding the folded tube of Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Dry-Touch Sunblock Number 70, I raise my right fist before reaching the monitor. My body fluids, then my sins are unmasked. I keep rolling, rolling, rolling right on through to Albuquerque. \textit{Cow dung can't be gathered where there are no cows.}

Faith

- from \textit{In Kenya, a Spiral of Killings, Los Angeles Times,}

I never thought it'd ever be this bad.
I heard fierce screams in villages I saw.
Machetes flew from nowhere. I am mad.
I slashed some bodies running where I was:
Kikuyus with sacks of maize upon their heads
or clothes or mattresses on wretched backs.
A daughter clung to mother's khanga threads.
I sliced the woman washing near her shack.
The daughter, Faith, escaped my fateful arm.
She roams the dusty fields, sleeps here and there
amidst the stench of corpse and cooking fumes.
I slaughtered some, but I'm not quitting here.
I won't stay put until I bleed the sore.
My country's not my country anymore.
The Dunes

I whispered to him the results were positive.
He was feeding the dog filet mignon biscuits.
The drummers opened bottles of Corralejo tequila.
The basement felt dreary, kept its dust to itself.

I picked up the Weimaraner like a shiny gray infant.
He climbed the stairs to the kitchen to blend margaritas.
The drummers positioned their djembes and congas
The basement smelled like California missions.

I told the dog the news, then sent her up to play bongos.
His hands were already slapping a djembe from Bamako.
The drummers got stoned then tapped their guan guancos.
The basement smelled like a souk in Marrakesh.

I wanted to talk; he wanted to drown in percussion.
He always broke dishes when I said "need to talk."
The drummers pounded their drums like veal scallops.
The walls crackled and plugged their ears.

I was two months pregnant; I joined the drum circle.
He screamed across the rumble that I should end it.
The drummers stopped short, gulped margaritas in unison.
The basement called up to me: "Get down here now, you."

The basement kept yelling, Vaya, Batala, Vaya.
The basement tried hard to keep its bald head up.
He shoved all the dog's toys into a didgeridoo
That the drummers buried in a Death Valley dune.

The basement wept after the dog's toys left.
It missed the drums, waited for the next beat to hit.
We never talked about the extra drum beat inside me.
At Dumont Dunes I drove a quad into the sunrise.
Division of Property

A mother kneels in her living room in front of a Louis XV style walnut armoire. She digs a trench in the thick Persian carpet. She lays down her spade, picks up a foot high nude marble statue. Maybe a Clodion. Maybe not. The right breast of the marble woman is cracked. The left one has chipped just below the nipple. She was beheaded in the last earthquake-Rococo head tumbling onto hardwood floor. The mother places the statue into the thick Persian carpet. This dirt free burial has been on her mind for a long while. Tomorrow she will bury a carved wood, rectangular French mirror and a silver service for twelve. The following day she will lay her own Lexus and the family Mercedes in the trench. Side by side.
Madame Desiree sighed heavily and thought about her last day on earth. She stared absently at the cool reflection in the water before her; she watched as the usually levelled line of her tiny mouth melted somewhat into a slight frown. Her skin was so smooth and white it was almost indistinguishable from the unlimited sky painted overhead. She hadn’t always been this young though, in fact she could remember a time when she had been quite old, with skin like crumpled parchment. She thought of the line she had spoken from the last role she had ever played, and it came to her with such vividness that for a moment she actually believed she could feel the hot lights baking her skin, hanging above her like man-made stars.

“When the curtain goes down, I want to know that the role has ended, I want myself to return to me as though it had just been off to the side a little, waiting in the wings and re-evaluating. I want to join with that self and become whole”.

Another sigh escaped her lips and this time it swept her away.

From the view from her bed all she could see was the massive oak dresser that seemed to stretch away from her the way she imagined the dining table would have at the Last Supper, had one stood and looked from one end to the other. On it were several little trinkets, a necklace, an eggshell hairbrush that clung to a few random hairs, wiry strands the colour of desert rocks bleached after eons in the sun, and a bottle of perfume so old it had lost it’s original smell completely, fading into a kind of generic non-smell. She knew this of course (smell is one of the senses it seems that never quite loses it’s sharpness no matter how old one gets, unlike sight and hearing, which she reckoned had begun fading decades ago). She kept it now only as a physical memory, for it recalled to her the days of her youth. Years ago the sight of that brush would have caused a wash of worry to course over her; the thought of losing hair like that, back then, was unthinkable. Now that it had actually happened she realized the pointlessness of any concern in the first place. In fact, it may have been the worrying itself that had caused the hair to fall out. Her head shook silently as she considered this small irony but not because she felt moved to do so; the old woman shook her head at everything these days, in fact it seemed that it never stopped shaking. It was forever wavering back and forth, as though unceasingly asserting just how much she disagreed with the situation. The truth was, she was just old. Or was it?
She glanced up at the single unadorned light bulb that hung directly overhead and she immediately wished she hadn’t. Light bulbs always reminded her of the word *bulbous* and that always made her think about the pill. A gush of saliva immediately secreted into her mouth and she cringed slightly. In reflex her right hand arose to meet a clump of her remaining hair and she twisted it gently around her forefinger; now that it had entered her mind it would be damn near impossible to let it out again. And really, why shouldn’t it? After all she did *need* it. Certainly not to the degree that she *needed* water, or oxygen, but it really wasn’t too far off, was it? *No,* she assured herself, it wasn’t just a simple *want,* it was a definite need, and that, in a nutshell was the whole problem.

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The pill was in her head now, it was embedded into her brain like a long ago hammered nail; it had been there so long it was rusted with time and age; to try to remove it now would be worse that simply leaving it there. But this time she was determined. *Bulbous.*

Her mind pushed around the corner of her room and down the hall like an epic film’s final revealing camera dolly, slow and forceful, forever controlled. She watched in her mind’s eye as she came to the door at the end of the hall, stretched out a set of withered grape-vine fingers and pushed the door ajar. And then she was in, inside the pristine purity of the bathroom, surrounded by all things white and porcelain. Madame Desiree, that is the *real* Madame Desiree, the one still in her bed, glanced up at the glass of water and fizz resting at the end of that long hard wooden dresser. *Teeth.* *Yes,* *that was it,* she thought, *the bathroom always reminded her of teeth, equally white and just as easily cleanable and chippable.*

Immediately she was back in the bathroom. Her hands were reaching up to the medicine cabinet, trying to find the latch that would lead her to relief. The lightbulb hanging above. *Bulbous.* Her hand kept reaching, kept moving but so slowly, as if encased in glass. She watched as those weak and feeble fingers tried to pry open the cabinet, having been unable to master the latch. They pawed at the cabinet, slapped it, began beating it with clenched fists, and she was screaming and crying, or trying to but all that came out was a pathetic whimper. Suddenly, and without warning, the hand turned and slapped herself in the face.

Back in bed, she felt that slap. It was not the first time she had come out of such a trance by such a method. Sometimes it was the only way. Even when she was younger, when her mind had been much more acute than it was now, she had occasionally required a taut slap cross the face in order to draw her out of one of her roles. It was too easy for her to lose herself completely.
Back in bed she felt the heat across her face. She swore she could feel each splayed digit and the crimson mark it had painted there but at the same time she knew that this was probably her imagination. But one thing that was not make-believe. The craving was still there. Her little day-dream had done nothing to dispel that desire.

The craving she felt now was nothing new, she had known it for years, decades even, but in the last remaining years it had grown sharper and sharper. She found herself constantly taunted by that pink button of a pill; it shouted out to her, called to her by the very knowledge of its existence. Her mind and body ached for it’s liberation, and these desires channeled into her head as an imploded geyser into the earth, digging, rearranging, negating all other designs.

And what could she do really? What could one in her situation do? Was there anything to do when one was truly locked in a vacancy?

She sat there for a long time, sometimes closing her eyes and sometimes just staring off into nothingness. For how long she sat she had no idea, she kept no clocks in the house and hadn’t for years. It was her contention that her wrinkled skin and careful step were reminder enough that her time on this earth was bound by a limit; she certainly didn’t need something whispering tick…tock…tick…tock over her shoulder twenty four hours a day. She guessed it couldn’t have been that long though because she had yet to feel the inevitable pang of hunger that she knew to usually strike her around the hour of noon. But she did want a drink, and badly.

For a brief moment she considered simply downing the glass of water that rested just a few feet away on the end of the dresser but the sight of her own gummy teeth resting in the bottom of the glass was enough to dispel that thought quickly enough. Even still…

Damn did she hate to have to walk down to the bathroom. She absolutely musn’t taste of that pill today, not today! But could she really abstain? Was it even possible?

She certainly couldn’t remember all lines of dialogue she had been required to say (indeed it was questionable as to whether or not she could even remember the roles themselves) but occasionally one or two would pop into her head. It was from a play she had done, centuries ago, in which she had told the crowd “The proximity of a desirable thing tempts one to overindulgence. On that path lies danger.” And she had always had her pills right by her side, hadn’t she. Just waiting for her to reach out and pluck one up, like Eve in that primal garden. She tried to recall the name of the play from which the line had come but found she absolutely couldn’t. It would be right on the tip of her tongue, balanced there sitting and waiting only for her to put some air behind it, and then it would be gone. Kind of like the way she was imagining taking that pill. It would be there, stuck to her tongue by equal amounts of saliva and desire, and then it would be gone.
This time that push down the hall was for real, her joints creaking like flaking iron fences and her greyed hair flowing out behind her like ripped threads of a ghostly costume, a spirit returning from stage left for the final closing act.

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Staring in the bathroom mirror only made her think of the pill all the more, and it wasn’t because she knew it to be sitting on the other side, just a tiny piece of glass separating her and that other self, but because looking into her own eyes confirmed how tired she was. Her eyes were big and round and seemed to be the only thing on her body that had any real life left. But even still they were bloodshot, misted red; one might even go so far as to say pink. She stared at that reflection and tried her best to concentrate on it as she ran the tap for a moment, letting the water cool, and then slowly filled the glass to the brim. She took a long cool, satisfying sip, her gaze never leaving her own eyes the entire time. Her eyes, so…bulbous.

Staring so intently into that mirror things began to change. Her longing seemed to twist the very air between her and that tiny thing, manipulating the very atoms of empty space the way heat over a fire will ripple all above it. It was as though she was actually seeing through the glass mirror of the cabinet, or was she just seeing through herself? Into the cabinet and into herself. And the two fed off of each other, she knew, working together to create a pathetic and pitiable symbiosis. One could not, it seemed, have survived so long without the other. The pills would have gone to waste and she would have gone to the nuthouse, certainly, but here they both were, old friends who had together seen many other friends long lowered into the earth. The box. She thought of that box, the wooden kind that is, and then about the one before her. She knew within this one lay many things, but there was always one that stood out. A narcotic gum-drop the colour of cotton candy, amidst tubes and dusted jars of pre-storm sky hue, potions and lotions collected over a lifetime, trophies footnoting to conquered ailments. In the other box, who knew? Not much, she was almost certain, not much. But only almost certain, not one hundred percent. She continued to stare at the mirror. Bulbous.

Uncertainty.

Finally she pried her hands away from the cold porcelain of the bleached white sink. They were painfully cold; again she had no idea how long she had been standing there, but judging by the way the joints of her hands flared up she guessed it to be quite a while. After much deliberation, and many attempts to actually do so, she finally managed to draw her gaze away from the mirror. She glanced left, at the crimson shower curtains that hung off to the side, separating one part of her routine from another, that of the toilet, which to her represented purging, and the shower, which
was a tool for cleansing. She thought about the shower curtain and the way it bunched itself against the bathroom wall all the way back to her bedroom. Once there she settled in, leaned her head against the back pillow,folded her hands across her chest and felt herself slowly drifting off to sleep.

   Her last breath pushed out from her stomach like the sigh from an aged pair of bellows, collapsed and forgotten, an original sound that seemed to contain all words the woman had ever spoken, a resonance comprised of all manners of desire and need. A final noise that remained a plea forever unanswered. Evening had come, and around her the lights of her house dimmed, lowered to nothingness by some unseen hand. Her younger self bowed to a wash of imagined applause.
Possessed
P Alanna Roethle

Incandescent sparks against the liquid,
velvet black

Your silken, heavy smothering rope

Across my chest, bound up in tangles of my overgrown skin

The comfort making it hard to take a sip of the bitten air

You rub my foot gently

Underwater pulling me away from the stars

The steam of water slightly warmer than my skin

Obscures your blurred and reticent mouth

Are you afraid I'll float to the brilliant sky

Taking the melting moon with me?

Unrelenting, you affect me harder.
Facets
P Alanna Roethle

He looked at her from behind burnt glass
Noting a crooked eye, hair too stringy
Tried the mirror, and that was no better
Woke up one morning and found the beauty again- sighed, relieved
Balancing, rigid, holding on to one view, one facet
An act, a futile snatch, needing that to push on
To remember why he loves her.
Searching always for that crooked shiny star
Waves of light from years away
You can't see it unless you look away.
Feeling foolish, but he knows sadly if he can't find it again
All will be lost.
Bait
P Alanna Roethle

Sweet scented honey, poisoned sickle
A trickle
Down breasts as white as milk, as dry as bone
A smile.
Hair flows like water, water flows between the hills
A moan
Let go, take a breath, feel the pulse under the skin
A thanks.
Somewhere beneath the stone
Cracks splinter outward, a shell overturns
Crab-walking toward the light
Peeling, upheaval, against the fear.
Comfort breeds a woman, a lover.
Scorn waits in the corner wanting blood.
Scales, balanced silently.
I have a child of stone. I dare not tell my husband or daughters. They would not think it healthy of me: I invest so much into my sculpting. But their thinking isn’t what counts. They won’t be around after we die. The child who carries my name will be stone.

And nobody will be forgetting my name – not when I have a statue this big to it. I dangle from its nose, a rope and pulley system holding me where I can use a torch to polish the surface above his lips – Native American chiefs weren’t big on mustaches. Crazy Horse was no exception.

I’ve been carving Crazy Horse into a mountain side near Mt. Rushmore for over 18 years. It’s been like raising a child – except better: Crazy Horse won’t snap back at me when I try to add a little refinement to him. I’ve left my two daughters below, to be off somewhere to be kids, South Dakotan hurricanes of hyperactivity.

Dusk has arrived for those on the ground. Up here though, I have a few more minutes of light. There is always more light for those above the daily affairs.

I close my eyes and the world is remade.

In my self-imposed darkness, I remember the wind, as it tries to unbundled my hair. I run my calloused fingers over the rigid lips, passing over the rim, and on up to the nose. No matter how many times I had read the stone texture like Braille with the half-conscious dream of finding my name, with my eyes closed these are shapes I cannot know the ultimate meaning of. What I have given birth to here wasn’t just larger than human scales: it was beyond human comprehension. But you could only know that when you couldn’t see. Someday, my daughters would see that when their silly dreams of being writers and politicians proved themselves to be dreams. They would see that no matter how large they made themselves, life would always be larger than they could comprehend. That is the truth you see when you close your eyes. They said they would understand that one day, when they had given birth. I’m not so sure.

The wind shifts and shifts till it is impregnated with such a cornucopia of scents they dare me to define them. There are bird droppings, dust from the drills, granite tainted with minerals not cataloged. The second you try to put your finger on which one has come to you, the wind changes, and the world is new again, like a child who changes scent every minute from mud, to soap, to vomit.

I shudder, and open my eyes; my world is back.

I lower myself to the flat surface that will eventually become Crazy Horse’s arm, and will be all but tattooed with my name. Until I unbuckled my tool belt, a dozen handles tapped my thighs like they were my daughters learning to play the piano. The wind sang through the slack ropes like the violin strings my daughters had also pinned
their dreams on. With a few practiced motions that let leather groan against steel clasps like a mother bound to unbending children, I free myself of the harness, and light up a Marlboro. I’d told my daughters to find dreams that could be more than dreams, dreams that did not ask you to close your eyes, dreams that could be real. Like accounting. Or child care. But they would have none of it. Writing. Politicking. I told them how few people made a living at these, and they rallied by the word hypocrisy. How many people got to be sculptors? I told them I was lucky, but luck wasn’t a concept they shared with me. No matter. Let them drown themselves in poverty: I didn’t need them to carry on my name.

I take a drag, letting the Marlboro take a calming hold on me, and then let the smoke drift out of my mouth: I’d smile if I went out with that white cloud as long as my name stayed down here. I’d burn my name into stone even it left nothing of me but smoke. I’m not afraid of standing on the edge of the cliff. Death cannot hold itself over you when the world will remember you. And no one will forget my name. So I bring fire to my lips. So I stand one step away from the forever abyss. And so therefore I am.

I take a step closer to the edge and flick the nearly spent Marlboro into the valley below, which yawns like a great maw big enough to swallow Comprehension itself. I lean over the edge to watch the cigarette be extinguished before it had given all it had to give. There was still smoke left in it – and where there was smoke, there was fire, that power which could make a name burn brighter. Then a gust tore itself up into a fury from out of nowhere.

There was a clatter of loose rubble, and then I was falling. This is not a cartoon. I’d looked over the edge enough times to know there are no convenient trees growing out of the side of the cliff. Wouldn’t have wanted those on a statue. Statues were for names.

My heart quickens, but I am not afraid. Two hurricanes brew below, out of the last light of day, their screaming winds never ruffling my bundled hair. But I am not afraid. I have Crazy Horse, my child of stone. But what would Crazy Horse say if his lips could move: “When people look at your work, will they say your name – or mine?”

I close my eyes. The air is stone-still, but I fall, and in falling, hear the howl of wind that is not wind.
Weight
Kyle Garret

Jimmy Eckhart, she thinks. June of ‘95, a week before the car accident and another four years before her dad would get sick. She was wearing overalls and it was hot out and he was chewing a large wad of gum. It was a quick kiss, like all the kisses they’d shared over the month prior. The sun was setting and he jumped on his Huffy and peddled home.

A week later he was dead.

June is still a few months off, so Abby isn’t sure why she’s thinking of Jimmy. Her thoughts tend to wander when she’s waiting for a drink order.

“Seven and seven…” says Douglas as he begins placing glasses on Abby’s tray, “…vodka cranberry, and a white wine.”

“Thanks,” she says and Douglas smiles at her because he wants to sleep with her. He’s wanted to sleep with her since she started here two months ago. He generally has a thing for blondes, but in this case he’s willing to make an exception. Abby knows all this without ever talking to Douglas for more than two minutes at a time.

Abby is graceful. She sidesteps customers, sweeps past full tables, and skips up two steps. She acknowledges the people at her table with a smile.

“Here you go,” she says. “A seven and seven, a vodka cran, and a white wine.”

This is the moment that sticks in Abby’s head every night. These three people are happy to see her. They’re happy to get their drinks and they’re happy to place their orders. They’re hungry and they want to get drunk. Abby has nothing to do with their smiles or their gratitude. In this moment Abby could be anyone; it would not matter.

“Are you ready to order?” she says.

There’s not much on TV at two in the morning, at least not on the local channels, which are the only channels that Abby gets. Cable is a luxury that she can’t afford. Neither is air conditioning, but right now she’s too tired to take off her clothes. She’s fine with sweating.

She’s managed the energy to pour herself a glass of red wine, the bottle that she and her roommate opened the other night while watching “Dirty Dancing,” on TV. Her roommate’s a bartender. She won’t be home for another hour.

Becky Agnotti, she thinks as she flips through the eleven channels that come in clearly. May of 2002 when Abby left her at the airport. They’d been best friends for all of two years and used to joke that if they never found the perfect man, they’d marry each other. But then Becky had to drop out of school and Abby had to drive her to the airport for her flight home. And they hugged and they kissed like family kiss, quick on
the lips, and then they hugged. They were both crying and they reassured each other that they would stay in touch. They would keep that promise for the following year, but they would never see each other again.

Abby misses friends like that. She misses forming attachments for superficial reasons like a love of vodka or a hatred for math. She and Becky had the same actors on their top five list and that was enough for them to be best friends. There was no need for anything more.

Channel 4 is replaying the nightly news, three hours after the fact. Abby finishes her glass of wine. She stands up and starts to unbutton her shirt. She’ll have another glass of wine and she’ll sit on the couch in her bra and underwear and she’ll fall asleep in front of the TV until her roommate gets home.

“Shit,” she says. “Shit shit shit.”

Abby’s late. At first she thinks she slept through her alarm, but then she notices that she never even turned it on. She grabs the phone on her night stand and calls the restaurant.

“Tangiers,” answers the hostess.

“Hey, Tanya, it’s Abby.”

“Hey, how’s it going?” The two of them are friendly, if not friends.

“I literally just woke up,” says Abby. “So I’m going to be a little late.”

“Oh, okay, I’ll tell Manny,” says Tanya. “It should be fine, though, you know how dead Tuesdays are.”

“Great. Thanks, Tanya. See you in a bit.”

“Bye!”

Abby hangs up and falls backwards onto her bed. Adrenaline has her wired, but she still wishes she could go back to sleep, or at least lie in bed for another hour. She loves her bed; it’s the only piece of furniture she’s ever really spent any money on. It’s the perfect firmness, it’s covered by the best sheets she could afford, and it’s all hers. There are days when she would be perfectly happy to do nothing but lie in bed. Those are most days.

“Gwen?” yells Abby.

“Yeah?” comes a response from the living room.

“I’m late for work,” she says.

“Sorry?” says Gwen.

“I’m late for work.”

“No, I heard you, I’m just saying I’m sorry.”

“I blame the wine,” says Abby as she sits up.

“Me, too,” says Gwen.

“Is there coffee?”

“I just made some.”

“You’re my hero,” says Abby.
“Just remember that when I come by tonight,” says Gwen.
“Whatever you want – it’s yours.”
Abby stands up, grabs her robe, puts it on, and heads towards the bathroom.

Toyota quit building Tercels in 1999. Abby read an article about it somewhere online. She was bored one day and decided to look up her car. Hers is a ’97 and well past any warranty that might have been on it originally. She bought it used three years ago. It is one of the few things in her life that has stuck around for that long.

The car doesn’t have air conditioning, but that wasn’t really a problem in Oregon. It’s a big problem in Los Angeles. She’s saving as much of her tip money as she can for a new car, but at the rate she’s going it will take at least a year for her to put together a decent down payment. She’ll need as much as she can as her credit isn’t the best (a trip to Europe she’s still paying off saw to that) and she doesn’t exactly have the most stable job in the world.

Abby would like to work somewhere else.
But she waited tables in college and Los Angeles seems to have more restaurants than all of Oregon combined.
Abby’s trying to stay calm. It’s hot out and traffic is bad. She knows there’s no point in getting anxious, that she’ll get to work when she gets there. She’s trying not to let the situation get to her, so she tries to think of something else.

Porter Radio had a strange name and an equally strange family, and he was the first gay guy Abby ever met. They became the best of friends over night. Abby’s convinced that if she hadn’t met Porter, her last two years of college would have been a complete failure. He made everything about her life brighter and more unique.

Porter gave her a big, long kiss in front of her aunt and uncle just after the graduation ceremony had ended.
“I’ll see you later, bitch,” he whispered into her ear. Then he walked away, off to find his parents and his brothers. Abby heard from a friend of a friend that he lives in Chicago now.

Abby opens her glove compartment. There are a dozen cassette tapes, all mixes, all labeled to reference a particular year of her life. It takes her a few seconds to find the one from her senior year of college. She slides it into the tape deck, turns up the volume, and looks out at the traffic ahead of her.

Gwen has tattoos and she’s not afraid to use them.
“Hey,” says Abby and she walks up to the table. She likes Gwen. She’s liked her from the moment she met her. It was an extraordinarily lucky break, finding a roommate like Gwen.

“Hey,” she says back. She’s on a date. It’s a first date and Gwen, in her infinite wisdom, decided that Abby’s restaurant would be the best place to go.
“This is Mark,” says Gwen nodding towards the guy sitting across from her.
“Hey,” says Abby.
“Nice to meet you,” says Mark. It’s clear that he’s already been told who Abby is.
“What do you guys want to drink?” says Abby.
“The usual,” says Gwen.
“Jack and Coke,” says Mark.
“Cool,” says Abby, “I’ll bring those right out.”

Abby turns and heads towards the bar. She can already see Douglas leering at her. He’s getting a two for one tonight, as he’s made it clear to Abby that he likes girls with tattoos, and Gwen has a penchant for wearing short sleeve shirts that reveal hers. Abby supposes that, in Douglas’ mind, Gwen’s tattoos make up for the fact that she’s a brunette.

Abby’s always been a little surprised that she even got this job. She’s the only non-blond waitress. She doesn’t consider herself to be all that attractive. She sometimes thinks she’s good looking, but not to the standards that seem to be in place in Los Angeles. She’s under the impression that every establishment in L.A. must follow some sort of affirmative action that requires them to hire at least one person who isn’t blonde and has yet to go under the knife.

“Hey, Douglas,” says Abby as she sets her tray on the bar. “I need a vodka tonic and a Jack and Coke.”

“Is Gwen on a date?” says Douglas. Gwen comes in pretty regularly, mostly because Abby can get her free drinks.
“Looks like,” she says.
“That guy doesn’t look like her type.”
“Gwen doesn’t really have a type.”
“Interesting,” says Douglas as he starts making the drinks.

Her type is anything but you, thinks Abby, but she keeps that to herself. The last thing she needs to do is insult the bartender. Timely drink service determines the bulk of her tip.

Mark looks like a nice guy. He’s definitely more clean-cut than the guys Gwen normally dates. He’s definitely attractive. Abby will know soon enough if he’s the real deal, though. Gwen generally only sleeps with guys on the first date if she has no intention of having a second date. If she comes home alone, Mark could stick around a while.

“Here you go,” says Douglas as he puts the drinks on Abby’s tray. “Tell Gwen I’m free later if she wants to upgrade.”
“I’ll let her know,” says Abby.
She heads back towards their table, wondering if Mark is a big tipper.

Abby never remembers her dreams. She wakes up in the middle of the night and they are fresh and vivid and every where she looks it’s a snap shot of what she
just experienced in her sleep. But she goes back to sleep and wakes up the next morning and doesn’t remember anything. She remembers waking up in the middle of the night, but she doesn’t remember any of the thoughts she had in those brief few minutes.

Her dreams are frequent and varied. Three months ago she bought a dream journal. She’s used it twice.

Jack Dessens used his tongue. Abby remembers that most of all. It was the last time they’d ever see each other and he stuck his tongue as far into her mouth as he could. It was a gesture that, in the past, had turned her on. It was a sign that he was passionate for her, something a guy like Jack seldom was for anything.

In that particular instance, however, it seemed entirely inappropriate. Abby was expecting something smaller, something sweeter, something that would leave her with a sense of romance and longing. Instead she got a tongue in her mouth.

Abby’s eating a bowl of Frosted Flakes and watching the noon news when Gwen comes out of her room. She can hear Mark’s voice coming from the room. This is the continuation of their fourth date, which means Gwen actually likes Mark.

“Hey,” says Gwen.
“Good morning,” says Abby.
“Mark’s here,” she says as she grabs two mugs out of the cupboard.
“Yeah, I heard him.”
“God,” says Gwen as she stops setting up the coffee maker, “not last night, you mean.”
“Ha! No, no, just now.”
“Oh thank god,” says Gwen. “I thought we were pretty quiet.”
“I didn’t hear anything,” says Abby, “and I had a glass to the door.”
Gwen laughs. She turns on the coffee maker.
“You take crème or sugar?” she yells back to the bedroom.
“Sugar,” yells Mark.
Gwen looks at Abby.
“Do we have sugar?”
“Packets,” says Abby. “In the other cupboard.”
“Perfect.”
Abby pulls a few strands of her hair in front of her face and examines them. She sees split ends. She thinks about getting her hair cut today. It’s Thursday, she thinks, so she should be able to get an appointment somewhere.
She goes back to watching the news.

“Hey, you,” says Tanya as Abby walks in the door. “Isn’t it your day off?”
“Hey, Tanya,” says Abby, “yeah, yeah it is. Is Manny here?”
“Yeah, he’s in the back – you want me to get him for you?”
“No, that’s okay,” says Abby, “I’ll go find him.”
Abby walks past Tanya and thinks that she should have gotten to know her better.

She’s always been nice, but it’s always been hard for Abby to tell if people are legitimately nice or if they just want something from her. This makes Los Angeles the worst place she could live.
She walks past a few tables, then by the bar. Douglas is working again. He seems to work every night.
“Hey, Abby,” he says, “missed me too much to stay away?”
“It’s that obvious, huh?” she says.
“Well, I could use a few more hints,” he says.
“I’ll keep that in mind.”
Abby heads to the back office where she finds Manny, the manager.
“Hey, Manny,” she says.
“Abby! What brings you here on a Thursday night?”
“Well, I hate to do this to you Manny, but I have to give my two week notice.”
“What?” Manny is surprised by this news. He’s the one who hired Abby despite what Abby assumes were reservations by the other employees. Manny’s taken a great deal of pride in the fact that Abby is one of their best waitresses.
“I know, I know” she says. His reaction has brought an involuntary smile to her face. She was beginning to think the only person who would miss her was Douglas.
“You can’t leave,” says Manny. “You’re our best server!”
“I’m sorry, Manny, but I got a better job.”
“Really?” Manny’s surprised again.
If Abby were honest with him, she’d admit that she’s only on the list for a job. There’s no guarantee that she’ll actually get it. And even then it’s really not much better than what she has now.
But she’s tired of being a waitress. And she’s ready to move on again. She’s perpetually ready to move on.
“With benefits,” says Abby, embellishing so that Manny won’t try to convince her to stay.
“Sounds pretty good,” says Manny.
“It is. But it’s during the day, so I can still work nights, at least for the next two weeks, but I don’t think I can handle anything past that…maybe if you’re strapped and really need someone, you can call me.” She’s surprised at how easily she’s lying to Manny and how quickly the idea of being an on-call waitress appeals to her. It’s as if she can continue to work at the restaurant without really working at the restaurant.
“Okay,” he says. He stands up. “Abigail, you have been a wonder to work with. I wish you nothing but the best.”
They hug.
“I’m going to miss you,” he says.
“I’m going to miss you, too.”
Abby heads back out to the dining room. Douglas has come out from behind the bar, now sitting on a stool while arranging various glasses. He looks up as he sees her heading towards him.

“Good meeting?” he says.
In one motion, fluid and smooth and out of character, Abby walks up to him, kisses him firmly on the lips for two seconds, then walks past him towards the door. “Something to remember me by,” she says.

They were small kisses. Two on the right cheek. One on the forehead. One on the left cheek. Abby had to cup his head in her hands to get to the other cheek.
He’d been dead for a few minutes by this point. The doctor had called the time of death and someone told Abby that they would give her some time alone and everyone left the room. She had yet to start crying because at that point she’d yet to believe he had really died.

His eyes had closed naturally. No one closed them.
Abby looked at her father lying in the hospital bed. His skin nearly matched the white sheet that covered him. She leaned over and kissed him on the top of his head, where there used to be hair.

Abby sat back down in her chair. She held his hand. She looked at him. She wanted him to look peaceful, but instead he looked like he wasn’t there.
Girl with Umbrella
Andrena Zawinski

I look up from my local street map, and there she is. She stops me there, this little girl dancing in the street. Dancing, under an arc of rainbow the garden hose makes, dancing and skipping in a balancing act atop her invisible high wire, teetering, red umbrella turned inside out, held high above her head, its dog-eared spokes dripping wildly with this, this of which she was born into,

to be a child, all glee under an arch of water, ecstatic in the sheer abandon of what children must be doing all over the world at fire hydrants wrenched open, or under downpours of rain, whole waterfalls upon them, their eyes squinting and smiling, steps skittish and impish, faces tilted upward toward the sun.

And when I stop for her, she looks at me, then head bent, closes her eyes, backs away, and in a curtsy motions me to pass by, for me to pass through, both of us now part of the same small moment of poetry.
Sharing the Martyrdom

T. Alan Broughton

Somewhere this morning a man has strapped himself to his death, one that will not leave him alone. He will share it with women leaning over lemons, a child who shrieks because he wants a plum, and even old men who are much closer to ends that might be his too if he let them continue to complain about the weather.
Wake
Anca Vlasopolos

boat
I am laden with silver gasps and groans
pursued
above around
by winged ghosts
gently feathered
yet not at all given to quietness

were I attentive only
to their calls
tempted
I’d turn my bow
toward illimitable horizons
never to fit again
into this o so narrow jostled segmented harbor

throw overboard my rainbow rows
of small deaths to the breathing
whence I snagged them
follow them
as they in a last languor
spiral
to that deep sky
where only life
sheds luminescences
Pharmakos
Anca Vlasopolos

What were you thinking of, when
you gave me the beautiful box
wrapped in my favorite purple
that I threw against the wall?
Are you saying I make you cry?
Do you mean it as warning
for what you’ll do to me?
What could you possibly intend,
giving me,
on my special day,
this homely bulb?
Don’t you know there are those who have brought me
fleshy orchids and amaryllis, promises
of carnal delights?
those who will proffer
costliest scents and chocolates?
What possessed you,
carefully placing in a beautiful box
wrapped in a silk ribbon of my favorite purple
this thing
known to stink
and bring tears?

wait, don’t turn the handle yet!
I didn’t notice
the green shoot just
starting
its trajectory toward light
wait, doesn’t this fallen skin match
in its delicate shadows
my favorite purple?
doesn’t this illumed roundness portend?
Is that what you meant?
come in from the dark
let me read your intent
Trees Like Fire
Jay Michaelson

Take these trees around this reddened lake,
make of them a cradle or a hearth.
Make of them matchsticks if you must.
Only once become for their own
do they reflect the sky into land and home.
Circling round in the air becoming autumn,
a place that I call mine.
This air, these hills, they invite their own combustion,
these woods are tools.
And for themselves, and for tomorrow's separate minutes,
this lake, these skies,
these trees like fire.
I’d been looking at that great cedar for months reigning over Rufus’s pasture where we put the horses out during the summer.

On one of the hottest days, I took my limbing blade, axe, and machete and hacked out a passage through the thick lower branches.

It was cool there in the shade and as I trimmed the sharp edges from the branches, they gave off a perfume that kept out the gnats and buzzing flies.

When it was finished, the oval I had created was like the entrance to a cave, and I raked an area around the trunk wide enough for horses to stand.

I put a halter on Dee Dee and led him inside but his new, cool napping place was dark and he preferred sweating with his buddies in the field.

I watched them for days, but never could catch them inside their new escape from the heat and dust. They avoided it like something containing a bear.

So I began spending time in the copse myself. Every few days I would doze there for an hour or sit up against the cedar trunk with a quiet mystery.

After a while I brought my notebooks to the copse and wrote undisturbed by horses or insects. I began a mystery novel about horses.

But when the horses finally decided to move in, I constructed a gate from the old limbs I cut down. I brought in a chair, a writing table, a mat.

I have started hanging a change of clothes in the branches along with spare writing supplies and what food I can sneak from the house.
My wife is probably wondering where I have gone, but my writing is going well and I am thinking of running electricity out here soon.

The horses spend hours standing on the shady side of the copse gazing in at me with big, longing eyes. Sometimes I let them in.
AT HEART, SPEED . . .

E. M. Schorb

At heart, speed is about being where you are going sooner than you can get there, and putting it all behind you. As you hurry forward to get where you are going, much is dropping behind, falling away from your frontal interest, as it were. If you were as fast as an atom, say, you could probably spin back and pick up some of what you have left behind and so take it with you as you propel forward, wherever that is now—for we have thoroughly muddled the issue in having gone back to pick up what was left behind because in having gone back we have made back forward, forward back. At heart, speed is an attempt to avoid as much as possible until we get to something we may or may not have in mind and stop there, but of course as we arrive there we find that we have just left and are now on our way to something that resembles in its lack of interest to us all that we have attempted to leave behind, so, in a sense, we are going backward, or, we should be going backward, toward what we wanted to get to in the first place. At heart, speed is our heart beating and speeding its beat until it has run out of beats. At heart, then, speed is our heart excitedly beating a trail to its end.
THE OPEN LABYRINTH

E. M. Schorb

We need something like an oxymoron with which to describe it, some-thing that almost contradicts itself and is at the same time nearly in harmony with itself, like a paradox, which is a seeming contradiction and not necessarily an actual one. When I arrived here, the notion of an open labyrinth came to mind, and I found myself, wandering through such a labyrinth, one made of walls of either hard matter or even something softer, miraculously drawn into the world, perhaps a labyrinth of hedges—yes, I prefer hedges—greens of light and dark hues in rounded leaves and dimensionalized by back-shadows of the sunstruck and ever-variable mauve. Beneath my feet are gravity’s flagstones and above my head mindless undisciplined cloud formations backed by blue. You are free to choose the intensity of the blue. After all, we imbue our skies with our own desires. But—to the point! The open labyrinth is not a place to get completely lost in, nor in which to become isolated from others. On the contrary, we are constantly bumping into one another in the open labyrinth. Others step out of nowhere, or seem to; for the open labyrinth has spaces for crossing from one side of its green walls to the other, and many signs pointing the way out. And yet we remain lost. We remain lost even as we are given exact directions. Why is this the case? Because we don’t want to leave the open labyrinth, even though we are becoming hungry for what is outside of it, which well might be a void. We politely listen to the directions we are given, then go another way, hoping against hope that where we go will lead us deeper than ever into the heart of the labyrinth. We also advise others on the way out. Our advice is exact, for we know how to get out. We know that we need do nothing at all but wait, with a tremendous show of patience, here or there, this side or that. But we have no desire to leave, for all our hopes and fears are here where we wander, aimlessly and full of purpose.
We are walking through the city, it doesn’t matter which one—cities are all the same though this one’s name is Seattle. We are treading water through a block of mid-day panhandling junkies. Two of whom have already circled us twice from different directions. They have landed on a corner. Sharks gathering en masse and we are about to collide with them. I grab my husband’s elbow and say “let’s cross.” But he is all about the direct path. I add “junkies, let’s cross.” And they can smell the tourist on us. They follow, 3 far behind, 2 closer, when 1 breaks off. Picks up speed. Bursts between us. Stops me and then stares. Just stares. 10 seconds. 20. “Good morning,” he says, “I really like your hair.” It is a natural shade of platinum with amethyst highlights and a blackberry base. I smile back and wish him a good day. He turns the corner and the others simply fade away.
The Myth of Empty Rooms

Jeffrey Ihlenfeldt

The train station outside Montpelier, adjacent to the abandoned grain elevator and water holding tank is as bare as the mountain face behind it. It is February. Sales are scarce. The pubs are dark, my contract file empty, and clients holed up in the warmth of their offices or family rooms. I am about to head back to Pennsylvania. Philadelphia. And though I have long resisted and at times battled the corporate stress of the city, and would like nothing better than to stay among the white ragged edges of Vermont, a desire for the unremarkable—my office, my colleagues, my daily engagements with blind streets and obstructed crossways somehow overpowers my enmity for those very things, and I am drawn home.

Despite the cold wind that rushes beneath the station shell, I stand alone on the slab-concrete platform, leaning my back against a shedding support beam. Flakes of raw sienna cling to my wool collar and mingle with splinters of blowing ice. For warmth, I slip my fingers from the tightly woven glove and curl up my fist like an infant’s. My palms are moist and warm.

I drop my bag and walk toward the stationmaster’s office. Heat radiates through the windowpane and I press my cheek against it and peer inside at the clock on the far wall. 8:45. Fifteen minutes until arrival. Despite the warmth inside, the stationmaster keeps his navy blue scarf draped about his shoulders, and his stationmaster’s cap, torn at the brim and faded at the back, pulled snugly onto his head. As the sole traveler, and one with no desire to become caught up in rural conversation, I turn from the window before I am discovered and step back toward the center of the platform. The bitter cold is a small sacrifice to be on my own. It is not that I crave solitude, but rather that I have had my fill of empty rooms, and if I am subject, even in my final fifteen minutes to one more empty room, I will weep where I stand. I cannot afford to weep in such a frigid place.

I gaze the length of the northbound tracks to where they disappear in the Vermont darkness. I imagine, in the distance, the lights of Montreal, gleaming and alive, but in reality, there is nothing. Soon, my staring becomes a game, and I turn my attention to the south. The lights from the nearby highway flash reflections along gunmetal rails, and my eyes follow them clear to the first bend. Once again, I turn northward. Darkness. Or nothing. The south always wins. I fold my arms and pull my coat around my body.

In time, a pair of lights appears at the end of the road that leads to the station. They are the headlights of a small sedan that slogs its way through the tract of snow and toward the master’s office. The car rests against an aging drift, and as the passenger emerges, I notice the form of a woman. Not until she has stepped fully beneath the station lamp do I recognize her face. My recollection of her is hazy, but I
feel the darkness isolating me from the world, and recognition of someone, no matter how faint is all that matters.

She too recognizes me. Both of us smile. College. That much history we have already determined. She sets down her luggage, and at that instant I embrace her. Her hair holds a peculiar fragrance—a blend of freesia and iron and snow. Our embrace is brief, but that is all I need to begin a conversation of campus classrooms and Kafka. She talks of the cold past: the season it fell to twenty below, too cold to even walk the short morning distance for scrambled eggs and oatmeal. She reminds me, in case it has slipped my mind, which professor slept with which student that winter and which student slept with which student’s husband and which student did not sleep at all. We discuss the cold in which we now stand. “This is nothing,” she says, as she strokes one gloved hand along the back of her beret. Eventually, it is the winterscape, snow swirling behind her bundled shape as she continues to talk that sharpens my memory.

“Do you remember,” she asks, “exactly what it is we hated about this place?”

She emphasizes the word hated as if she carries a lasting grudge against the elements, the topography, as if it is conscious of its harsh nature. I choose not to argue the point.

“Not the cold,” I automatically say.

“Snow,” she says, and I watch the shape of her lips as she speaks, intrigued by their dryness as they search for a different word. “Ice,” she says.

As her eyes search for logical reasons for why she so dislikes the north, I can only search for her name. Sarah. Maybe Susan.

“It’s the people you meet, isn’t it,” she says.

“People?” I ask. “How do you mean?”

“I mean rather than the weather,” she continues.

“I sell stationery,” I tell her. “People can be cold anywhere.”

In winters past, while waiting for a taxi into town, I have sat inside the small station. I have set my bag on the hardwood bench and listened to its joints creak. I have held conversations with the stationmaster about the condition of the roads, about Philadelphia and Montreal. His eyes always seemed to dim at the names, and he told me he has never been to either place, although he has been to Burlington more times than he can count on one hand. Mostly, he would talk about the winding mountain roads to and from the city, and about the winter, as a teenager, when he drove his car out onto Lake Champlain. It was the one time I saw him smile. His eyes came alive, and I tried to picture him, in his master’s cap and scarf, gleefully alone, spinning about the frozen lake, like a skater who has just discovered ice.

“I suppose they can be cold,” she says. “I’m not sure it makes any difference. It doesn’t change how they feel about you—being cold or warm.”

“No danger of proving that one way or another tonight,” I say as I nudge my head toward the empty station.
“Train will have people,” she says as she entwines her fingers. “At least they’re all southbound tonight. There’s some sanity in that.” She stares past me. “Do you remember,” she asks, “the cold?”

I smile a broad and unsteady smile as she lists the warm and the cold people throughout her life. My name does not come up on either list. My tongue instinctively wets my lips in an effort to warm them. Then they nearly pronounce her name, but I stop them. Uncertainty about her name seems inconsequential but does not lessen my fear of an emerging memory of indifference. As I continue to half-listen, what I do recollect, now quite clearly and unexpectedly, is that I was never fond of this Sarahsusan, and I often recall going out of my way to avoid her. Perhaps it was politics or religion—too far down one direction, or another. Or trite discussions over plates of winter stew and white rice, of film and art—minimal and abstract. Or the dismissive way in which she observed the snow of Plainfield and the rush of the Winooski and the empty spaces of Lake Champlain and Derby Line. Snow. Permafrost. River ravines. Her desire to fill empty spaces in everything. Yet now, here, I cannot resist reaching beyond history and vacant observations in trying to understand her. It seems suddenly imperative, even in the wind.

The stationmaster stands by the window, rocking back and forth in one spot of the old office floor. He removes his cap, and a shock of salt and pepper hair springs up stiffly. With two fingers, he smooths his wiry moustache into place, but not the hair on his head. Amid the faint whine, then the metallic ring, then the growing rumble of the southbound rails, the vibration of the splintering ties, he puts his cap back in place and strolls confidently past the wood frame door. His hands are deep inside his trouser pockets and he whistles, mostly winter air. Without looking at me or at Sarahsusan, he shouts out “Montrealer to points south.” I glance at my ticket to Philadelphia just to be sure. Sarahsusan does the same. I do not know her destination, and she does not say.

The stationmaster makes his way to the slowing train and, once it is stopped, greets the conductor whose face looks much too boyish to have known him well. Their eyes wander across the platform as they say one thing or another to each other about timetables or passenger lists. “Montrealer to points south,” they call the length of the platform, nearly in unison, but there is still only Sarahsusan and me.

I grab my bag and prompt her to the railcar stairs ahead of me. At the top of the stairs, she looks each way, then steps into the car to the right. “Safe trip,” I say as I walk into the opposite car. She smiles weakly over her shoulder as she wheels her suitcase the length of the aisle. Once in my seat, I can no longer see her.

The train begins to drift through the dark of Vermont. I order a Bloody Mary, then switch off the lamp above my seat. I gaze at the shadowy shapes of ice-crusted rocks and rivers. Pellets of snow streak sharply across my window, but I cannot tell if it is snowing or just something left over from eaves or gutters or long before. Otherwise, there is only blackness. I stare through it intently, momentarily convincing myself of
She watched the waves crashing on the beach and marveled at their size. Her heart skipped a beat each time the horizon was blocked from view; the waves were that big. The water was warmer here in Maui, just like Tammy had said. She'd left out the size of the waves, their sound. These were too huge, too loud, and crashed violently as if in a fight that only might could win.

Sam walked nearer to the water and felt the sand slip from under her as the wave receded. Since childhood she'd enjoyed that feeling as if the ground beneath her was slipping just like the deadly quicksand that had threatened every inhabitant on Gilligan’s Island.

She turned to look back at the beach and noticed her cousin Sylvia lying out on a large Quicksilver beach towel trying to get a tan on her first day here. Sylvia looked good from here, fuck, Sylvia looked good from any angle.

Walking toward her Sam sensed and disliked the feeling of her thighs, thighs that felt too soft and fat. Sam worked out and had restrained her eating for weeks to prepare for this trip. No matter, her thighs, her ass, still jiggled and she hated the feeling. She hated her body. Hated the dimpled, cottage cheese look of her legs. At twenty-one she’d hoped that she would be capable of accepting her body, maybe she never would.

Plopping herself down on her own blank hotel towel she looked at Sylvia’s flat stomach and quickly tanning skin.

“I hate you and your perfect body. So what are we gonna do tonight? Any great ideas?”

Sylvia lay prone while managing a reply; ”I met some surfer locals who are interested in taking us on a tour of the island’s evening delights.”

“Oh, let me guess Gidge, you ran into Don Ho whose planning a private luau for us, as we speak?”

Sylvia holds a hand to shield her eyes from the sun to look at Sam, “What is wrong with you? That wasn’t even funny.”

“I hate my fat body is what, plus I think I’m burning while I sit and watch Miss Perfect get an instant tan. Why couldn’t I have been born during the Raphaelian period? Why must I be covered in cellulite in 1996?”
Sam left Sylvia beach side; she wrapped a cover over her legs and walked into the small, quaint town near the hotel where they’d been staying. The breeze felt good on her hot skin. She imagined her legs becoming leaner and firmer with every step she took, then willed herself to begin accepting her body. *Fat chance she thought.*

Passing a dentist’s office whose hinged sign reminded her of an old western town she looked at the pretty shingled house. Imagined what it would feel like to come here to have her teeth cleaned, a cavity filled. Here in paradise she thought even a root canal would feel like something out of a fairy tale. She chuckled to herself when she noticed the dentist’s name was Dr. Mudd.

She approached an even cuter bungalow that sold flowers; it too had a hinged sign pointing out toward the sidewalk. *Island Bloom.* Next to it was a candy store, a definitive sign that the devil followed her *always.*

She willed away the hollow ache in her belly that singled for most people that one’s body required sustenance. *Go ahead eat your own.* Yes, starving was the only way to get a body like Sylvia’s.

Without much thought to where she walked- getting lost on Maui was nearly impossible, after all, every other car that passed her was a taxi- she approached another small shopping village. The idea that she could not get lost made her feel strong, back home getting lost could cost you your life, here it was an adventure.

Hawaiian music played from inside a small restaurant that had outside seating. She felt an urge for a cool drink an urge to put her newly acquired legal right to order an alcoholic drink to good use.

A bald, young waiter approached her. Sam looked up and noticed his red-rimmed eyes, a result of either a day of surfing or a day of ganja. Difficult to tell. She ordered a rum and coke with lime.

“A Cuba-Libre, you mean.”
“Huh?” Was he high?
“A Cuba-Libre is what a rum and coke is. I just like saying it better than, you know, rum and coke.”

Sam laughed then looked away as she said, “Okay.”

The light, the way the shadows looked longer and slimmer made her realize that the day was nearing its end. She watched a particular shadow that looked like a long curving sickle and next to it, no kidding another shadow that looked exactly like a trident. *How often has that happened?* How did I even know what a *trident* was?
She followed the center most tip of the trident and noticed a man sitting on a small wall across the street from her. She wouldn’t have noticed him but for the severe way he appeared to stare up at the hills and the sky above.

She followed his gaze up at the hills and the sky but found nothing that could explain his staring. It was beautiful yes; the green hills the sky above darkly dramatic with storm clouds.

Something about him didn’t look right. Something about him looked too intense, not dangerous necessarily, but intense.

She sipped from her drink slowly and watched him, not really sure what she was looking for. She left her waiter a nice 20% tip and heard his “Mahalo” as she walked away.

Spats was the hottest dance club on the island, according to Ron and Tim the locals who Sylvia had met. It was a local spot not frequented or known by the disdained tourist crowd.

“You mainlanders are hardly ever invited to our locals-only places.” Tim, the taller one said. Tim was not only taller but by far better looking than Ron, a clue to Sylvia that she’d end up with Ron for the night.

Ron was a self described pro-surfer who was sponsored. “Hey, I’ve got both WetBody and Hot Tube on my trail.”

Sam pretended to know what he meant but Sylvia charmed best with her ignorance, “What’s ‘on my trail’ mean?”

Tim answered for his friend ‘On his trail’ means they want to sponsor him.

“Oh cool, so what’s Hot Tube?” Sylvia got a laugh instead of a response this time around.

Ron slowed the car in front of what looked like a large one story shack or old factory. Except for the hundreds of Christmas lights shining on the corrugated walls, there was little sign of merriment in the place.

Once Ron parked and his radio quieted they could hear the deep thumping of the loud music inside.

A crowd of ten or so club goers stood smoking outside, Sam stood behind a girl with long blonde hair and a red bandana tied to her head. Ron laughed while commenting, “This is no L.A. club girl! You don’t have to stand in no goddamn line!” Sylvia laughed
too, although Sam was certain that she had been getting in line with her.

About the only time Sam remotely liked her body was when she was under water, drunk or when she danced. The pounding of Van Halen mixed with David Lee Roth’s howls and screeches combined to inspire her to dance.

Inside Ron handed her a joint after having taken a toke himself. “Tim’s da grows it here.” Sam inhaled and kept the burning smoke inside her lungs until they felt as if they’d burst. She exhaled with a laugh.

“Come on, let’s dance.”

Ron passed the joint to Tim before taking Sam’s hand onto the dance floor. The room was large, dark, and extremely crowded. As she looked around her she noticed that there were girls dancing with girls and guys and girls dancing with no one in particular. The idea that she could dance alone was a relief, no need to wait for a guy to invite her.

Free dancing was intoxicating to Sam. Never before had she danced so freely in a room with so many strangers. The music entered her body and told her how to move; an innate guide to dance; a teacher who reminded her of what she’d always known.

The lights inside the room made shadows out of people. Sam searched the shadows as she danced noticing that she didn’t recognize any of them as Ron, Sylvia, or Tim.

No matter, with so many taxis around, one could ever get lost.

Outside she sat near a group who sat around a loud boom box that was playing Jimi Cliff. They sat on a short wall listening to the music closely, as if waiting to hear a secret revealed in the lyrics.

She could feel her thick hair wet with her sweat. The evening breeze cooled her and felt heavy on her skin. The pot was taking on a life of its own, making her feel as if she was in a lucid dream where all things were possible.

She giggled to herself when she noticed a taxi drive up to the group and stop. Can’t get lost in Maui.

A man who appeared to be in his late forties got out and stood near to her and the group. He was very slim, almost too slim. Sam watched him as he swayed to the reggae music just like a very thin reed would in the wind. With his eyes closed he swayed and smiled to the music. She looked more closely at him recognizing him as the same guy she’d seen earlier while at the restaurant. The guy who’d been staring at
the hills and the sky.

The man joined the group sitting a few feet from Sam on the short wall. “You’re a taxi driver?” Was that her voice?
“The best one in Maui.” He hadn’t even opened his eyes to look at her.
“The best? Like, there are bad ones in Maui? Is there a rating of some sort?”

The guy laughed exposing the long thin cords on his neck. “No rating system necessary. You’re a funny chick.”

She was about to leave and head back in but felt a strong desire to sit, to talk to this man, to discover what it was that drew her to him, if anything.

“I saw you earlier, I was at Bullwinkle’s drinking outside.”

“That was me. I park near there almost everyday.”

“Cool.” She knew she must sound immature, like an idiot. “I mean neat, no, I mean, I noticed you because you stared up so long, so I did, too. I didn’t see what you could see though.”

He laughed, this time sounding like a very old man. His face dropped its smile as he once again stared away into the distance.

“I wouldn’t want you to see what I saw. I just want you to enjoy….” He swept his hand to indicate everything, “….all this.”

Sam was about to leave for good- this guy was insane- when he spoke again.

“I saw the most blue sky, a cobalt blue sky.” He turned to her, “Do you know how blue cobalt is?”

Sam shook her head no.

“At night, in a Disney cartoon the sky has that incredible blue…..that’s cobalt.” He smiled and Sam did, too.

He disappeared again and gazed into the distance, his distance.

“You’re staring out right now, just like you did today.”

The man looked at Sam more closely, “I suppose it looks weird from your vantage point. It is weird how I can be here and somewhere else at the same time.”

Sam knew what he meant, knew he was describing thoughts and maybe for him,
memories. “You mean like remembering? Like when you remember stuff, its like you’re there, right?” She definitely felt high. In L.A. she would never talk to strangers let alone one who’d stared into space like this guy. She wanted to know where he went in his mind. He looked like a different man altogether when his eyes looked away like that.

“Yeah. I’m not supposed to think about it, at least my doctors say I shouldn’t. They say it’s not good to go back there. It’s not healthy for me or some shit like that.”

“Where, go back where?”

“Back to the war. It’s funny ‘cause I don’t think about most other parts of it. I was there four years and the only thing I hold on to is this memory. I think its because even though it was war, you know, the visuals were so beautiful.”

“Visuals? You mean what you saw was beautiful?”

“Yeah, that’s what I mean and it was the last time I saw Mikie, my best buddy.”

Sam decided to leave well enough alone. She wanted him to talk about Mikie, about the visuals but also knew that to ask would be wrong. She looked around pretending to enjoy the music, but was really thinking of ways of walking away without appearing rude. All she could think of to say was, “I’m really sorry about your friend.”

“I’ve never really told anyone about him, that he died. I guess I talk about Mikie like he’s still alive.”

She looked at the man’s profile imagining a younger man, maybe seven boyish still. Imagined his fear of being in a war, where people wanted to kill him and the only way to stop them was to kill them first. She couldn’t imagine any of her guy friends being able to handle going to war.

“Sometimes, its better to tell a stranger like me those hard things, you know, about your friend, and what it all looked like.” She had never considered herself to be a good listener or a good friend for that matter, but right here and right now she felt a need to, albeit a selfish one to listen to this man’s story. Maybe, I am becoming a better person. Less “self-absorbed”. Her dad’s constant complaint of her worst character deficiency.

He looked at her and their eyes met briefly before he looked away. “There’s not much to tell, you know, it’s more of a description of that day and how things felt, how the sky looked. It was something else….so surreal, you know? Almost like when you’re high except better ‘cause it’s real.”

His head was turned in the opposite direction from Sam so she wasn’t able to see his
expression. She wasn’t sure what to do if he freaked out or began to cry.

“All day we waited for the chopper. You’d be surprised how many other things can sound just like a helicopter but aren’t when you’re waiting. Mikie and me sat and told stories. There’s lot’s of stories that get left out when you’re in combat, they just don’t come to you. I let him do most of the talking, but it was hard….. he was in real bad pain ‘cause the morphine, this drug for….”

Sam interrupts, “I know what its for.”

He turns his head and their eyes meet again. “Yeah, well it was wearing off, I could tell, and I was running out of ways to get him to tell me more stories. That’s when I heard the blades, sounding just like when you chop vegetables on a chopping board, approaching us, just when I’d given up hope. After looking up at the sky most of that morning-just like you probably saw me do today- there he was.”

Now that Sam’s hair was dry the ocean breeze felt warmer and wetter. She knows that she will probably remember this night for the rest of her life and yet, it wouldn’t be a night she could share with just anyone.

“We all knew he was dying, no one could survive with so little blood left. I didn’t want Mikie to die on communist soil, combat soil. I know this sounds weird to a kid like you, but if I could just get him into the chopper, at least I knew my friend would die up in the free air, inside a U.S. chopper.”

He stopped talking, which confused Sam. She looked away from him so he didn’t feel intruded upon or analyzed.

“It was sunset by the time they made it to us and the sky was…….” The man looked out into the distance again. He’d raised one hand and swept it from left to right. “….the most beautiful I’d ever seen it and it was all for him. I turned Mikie’s head toward the open chopper door. I told him to look and see home, to look at sky. The reds, pinks, oranges, yellows where the sun still shined, then the blues….from light blue to…..”

He paused, and Sam knew he was back in the chopper holding onto his friend.

“I wanted him to die with someone holding him as he watched the cobalt blue sky.”

It was then that she noticed the smooth plastic of an artificial hand, sticking out from his jacket sleeve.

She felt at loss for words until she remembered her uncle who’d given her his favorite harmonica, the one he’d played while serving in Vietnam. Her uncle, who sometimes
stared out into his own distance.

“I’m really sorry.” She sounded like a child to herself and wished she could say something better to him. “Does it make you angry?”

He chuckled, “The war and losing so many friends has never made me mad. Some guys I know are still pissed, I guess I’m lucky that way. There’s only one thing that still pisses me off.”

Sam waited for him to tell her what that thing was. She waited until she heard his voice sounding so low say, “The sky, that blue, when I looked up at night, when I was over there, it was just as blue as it is here.”

Sam waited for him to speak again, waited to hear more, although she knew there was nothing left for the man to say. They sat together for a while until he unceremoniously stood, nodded in her direction, and walked away.

She watched him walk away, looked at the way his clothes hung on his tall thin frame, how the locals greeted him with open affection.

When Sam stood up to go she realized and would forever regret forgetting to say thank you to him.
Room in the Sky
Jerry Vilhotti

Among the room full of objects hung blinds that were blinking eyes when a breeze or wind blew from outside, as the window did not set firmly within its frame, making the boy of nine run downstairs yelling for help; leaving all the little children with big eyes hiding in different places of light inside shadows of cover and all the invading monsters to crawl in a low light that he had asked his mother to leave on; telling her he was afraid of the dark but never saying he was more afraid of his older brother Leny One N who constantly tried to enter his being with his heavy breathing beating into the eight year old boy's ear and out of guilt for this child she had to leave alone often in order to go work to a garment factory that would go to Union-less South and then subsequently to other countries who paid their workers starving wages, she would squander a few pennies until surface sleep overtook him and then quietly tiptoe back into the room to close the light which created even more monsters for him while hearing her sounds through tightly closed eyes; hoping the footsteps were not and his eight years older brother's entering the room and so many a night his voice would shout out from painful nightmares to all the menacing clothes hanging from atop doors; becoming shapes of lurking monsters ready to swallow him up. His shout encompassed all the frightened children prisioned with him.
Flight
Jeanne M Lesinski

We wander along the dune crest, following meandering sand lines, wave markers; little holes, once bubbles speckle the dune’s lake side. With our bared feet the same size, we leave almost matching footprints, dry colored ones on the dark sand, wet colored ones on the dry. Farther inland the dunes rise up, a gentle clutter of congregating grass. Our loose sweatshirts and jeans, rolled up to mid-calf flap wildly. The autumn breeze combs our hair, caresses our faces, fills our nostrils with the scent of clean sand, fresh, clear water, pushes the massed grey-tinged clouds in streams across the reflected sky. The great green-blue lake lashes roaring three-foot waves. We dodge them easily laughing, as they lap gently at our ankles. Stripe-necked sandpipers scatter on chopstick legs, leaving mazes. Herring gulls swirl above, glide through invisible dance patterns, dip abruptly to light amidst the foamy waves. We open our flapping sails to the breeze to take it all in, to pour ourselves all out, to become grains of sand underfoot, crystal jewels of sparkling foam, almost imperceptible whirs of gulls’ wings.
words
Laurie Zupan

sometimes
only the body
is what's needed,
no words.
so that night
i stayed quiet
tried to memorize the feel of your
skin under my nails
the wrinkles in your face
when you smile
your thigh under mine
lips, tongue
fingertips on shoulder
teeth

to learn so well
that i would be able
to call up
those images
long after you are gone.
mirage
Laurie Zupan

i saw you
there at the beach
in the shadow
of the rising sun. through the fog
your feet danced on cold
wet sand
arms waved
to the rhythm of a french
song i could not hear.
then we smiled at each other
in solitary anticipation of the embrace
the longed for
kiss

i saw you
in the distance, as the rising sun shone
on the wet sand

a gull flew between us
cutting through the fog that clings
to my california coast

and you disappeared

were you never
there at all?
Mirrored Eintou
Derrick Weston Brown

Teddy Roosevelt Island
Washington D.C.

I.
stunning
a black man leaf
my skin’s shade lies within
takes to air a sunspot halo
leaves hued gold yellow green
fistful of fall
lone bridge

II.
lone bridge
fistful of fall
leaves hued gold yellow green
takes to air a sunspot halo
my skin’s shade lies within
a black man leaf
stunning
April Nude in Six
Derrick Weston Brown

I.

In pose begin

Lip ring speaking mouth
narrative instruction

Pose

Lean elongated shaven
Clean underarm fingers still
awkward uncomfortable model

Naked not a metaphor
But a state of mind

Pose

Nude thought. Taut
concave sweat stream
finger paint replica thirsty water color
II.

Inverted arch swing
A generous tan
Smooth skin peppered with pigment pieces

Pose

Sphinx form head erect
Meeting at mons pubis
A dark heeled memory underfoot
Contours of conflicting curves

O’ faceless lady
Identified by prints

Pose

Diaphragm expands contracts

III

Serene standing summit
secret potential energy
ballled into veined fists…
chi building
Pose
Eyes closed focused
On interior
On expanse
Inner escape
Into interior

Rise fall
The belly
Rise/fall
Rise/fall
Rise/fall

Pose

Eyes flutter like
falling petals

pose and hold

Await anointing of skylight
illumination
blessings
of bared shoulders
Remember

Nudенot  naked nudенot naked
IV

She is mathematics
Bare necessity in numbers
Curvature and roundness

Symmetrical circumference
lies in the rise of her hips;
A tanned half moon
A breast

Pose

The fall equinox begins in
the shadow of the small of her back

Night looms beyond
below
connecting chocolate dots

Her body reclines
A hand rests between waist and hip
an impasse

Head at rest held by sister hand.

Pose

V

Block with the left
follow with the right
bicep bubbling with potential

Pose
Back knee bent
cooking calf muscle cauldron
percolating punishment
but
she is no fighter
steadfast statue
knuckled up skin bone mar
row
eyes averted
She is no fighter
Smiles

Where are her scars?

Stand vigilant statue
Hold tight
Breathe shallow

Pose

VI

With full color fingers
Painters paste a mystical myriad
Of spring leaf seasons
On postcard pictorials
She is the spring eve
Sloping daughter of dusk
Dismembered by man made margins
Recorded and repeated

Like the mynah bird’s song.

A stoic stance; shadows encircle
her lower torso

Pose
PHOTOGRAPH

Lyn Lifshin

My father sister and I in the trees with our hair blowing. My sister as usual has something in her hands and grins in a way no one could say no to, dancing in restaurants until she pulls in to herself at 19 like the turtles she collects. But here she’s the sweet pouter, my father’s pockets bulge with things, the gum he’ll give us in the brown chair later reading the funnies. I’ve got a little pot and my arms are heavy, my father touches us both lightly as if he’s not sure we’re real
To receive all as gift, and to return all as increase, is to vanish into God.

— W Paul Jones
**CONTRIBUTORS**

Amy Unsworth earned her M.A. in British and American Literature from Kansas State University. Prior poetry publications include *Sojourn, Tar River Poetry, 60 Seconds to Shine: 221 Monologues for Women*, and *The Briar Cliff Review*. She previously was an editor for *Three Candles Journal*. She currently lives with her husband and three sons in Leavenworth, Kansas.

Tricia Asklar: Originally from Erie, Pennsylvania, she received her MFA from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She teaches writing at Nazareth College and lives in Rochester, New York, with her wife, two dogs and a cat. Her poems have recently appeared in *Blue Earth Review, Boxcar Poetry Review, The Dos Passos Review, Neon, Redactions: Poetry and Poetics*, and *On Verse Daily*.

Vincent Berquez is an artist, poet, and curator who sometimes also works in Broadcasting. He has published in Britain, Europe, America and New Zealand. His work appears in various anthologies, including *My Gun is Bigger Than Your Gun* and *A Passion For Poetry Anthology*. He was requested to write a Tribute as part of *Poems to the American People* for the Hastings International Poetry Festival. He has also been commissioned to write a eulogy by the son of Chief Albert Nwanzi Okoluko, the Oginma Obi of Ogwashi-Uku to commemorate the death of his father. He has been a judge for *Manifold Magazine* and had work read as part of Manifold Voices at Waltham Abbey. He has read his work many times, including at The Troubadour and at the Pitshanger Poets, in Ealing, and was nominated for Poet of the Year with the Forward Prize for Literature. He will be contributing to a *London Voices* anthology soon. With his artwork he has shown world wide, winning first prize at the Novum Comum 88’ Competition in Como, Italy. He has worked with an art’s group, called Eins von Hundert, from Cologne, Germany for over 16 years. He has recently shown his work at the Lambs Conduit Festival and had a one-man show at Sacred Spaces, St John the Baptist, Westbourne Park in November and at the Foundlings Museum in May, 2008.

Amy MacLennan's work has been published or is forthcoming in *River Styx, Hayden's Ferry Review, Linebreak, Cimarron Review, Pearl and Rattle*.

Mira Coleman writes from western Maine. Her work has recently appeared in the *Daily Bulldog LLC Farmington, Maine; flashquake; Ink, Sweat and Tears; Red Fez*; and has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ranfurly Review; Wings of Icarus; Ghoti; Word Riot; The Externalist* and *Centrifugal Eye*. Her work was first published in "*Flowering After Frost, An Anthology of Contemporary New England Poets*" Branden Press, 1975 Boston. She worked for 27 years in the Massachusetts Trial Court before retiring as a probation officer in 2002.
Carol Frith: Co-editor of *Ekphrasis*, Carol Frith has had work in *Willow Review, Seattle Review, Measure, Switched-on Gutenberg, Quarter After Eight, Chariton, Lake Effect, Cutbank, Redivider, Asheville, 150 Contemporary Sonnets* & others. She has chapbooks from Bacchae Press, Medicinal Purposes, and Palanquin Press & a poem of hers received Special Mention in the 2003 Pushcart Anthology.

Phebe Davidson, Reviews Editor of *Yemassee* and a staff writer for *The Asheville Poetry Review*, is the author of several collections of poetry. Two books of poems will appear over the next several months: *Milk and Brittle Bone from Main Street Rag and The Surface of Things* from David Robert Books.

Nina Sharma is a writer living in New York City. She is in the Liberal Studies, American Studies Graduate Program at Columbia University, where she is specializing in diaspora and immigrant studies. She is an editor at *DesiLit Magazine*, an online literary journal of writing and art focused on South Asia and the diaspora and currently works at *The Asian American Writers' Workshop*, a literary arts nonprofit based in New York City, where she is the Programs Coordinator. She recently acquired a set of drums and wants you to come jam with her.

Jacob Erin-Cilberto, originally from Bronx, NY, now resides in Carbondale, Illinois. He teaches English at John A. Logan and Shawnee community colleges. cilberto has been writing and publishing his work since 1970. His work has appeared in many small journals and magazines and he was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in Poetry in 2006 and 2007. His 10th and latest book is called "against the current." cilberto teaches poetry workshops for Heartland Writers Guild and Southern Illinois Writers Guild and this gives him the opportunity to share his love of poetry with aspiring poets.

Andrea Cumbo is a writer and writing teacher living in North East (yes, the town is called North East), Maryland. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Science and Spirit, Santa Monica Review, South Loop Review*, and other publications. Currently, she balancing writing with the world of two new kittens and basement remodeling.

Caroline Hagood is currently completing an MA in English at Buffalo State University and plans to begin working towards a PhD in 2009. She is a poet, film critic, and freelance writer. She recently finished a poetry collection entitled *Cinemagination: My Life in Film*. Her poetry has appeared in *Hanging Loose, Oxymoron, Movin’,* and *Verse on Vellum*.

Austin Alexis has published poetry and fiction in *The Cherry Blossom Review, Tuesday Shorts, Six Sentences, Conceit Magazine, RogueScholars.com, The Writer, The Journal* and elsewhere. His chapbook, *Lovers and Drag Queens*, was published
by Poets Wear Prada in the fall of 2007.


Zyllah Zala was born in Transylvania and educated in the US to qualify as a teacher, but an MFA is still in the works. Her writing is often a mixed media of prose and poetry, but so far only her poems have appeared in print (Ambit, Hotel Amerika, Language and Culture, Left Curve, Pennine Platform, etc).

Adrienne Rose Johnson is a Marin County native and UC Berkeley student. At Berkeley, she majors in American Studies and minors in Creative Writing. Her literary non-fiction has been published in Margins Magazine, Matchbox Magazine, Cal Literary Arts Magazine, The Blue Print Review, among others.

James Miranda currently lives and writes in Kalamazoo Michigan where he serves as the fiction editor for Third Coast Magazine and teaches composition and creative writing at Western Michigan University while pursuing his MFA. This is his first published piece of fiction.


David Appelbaum: I am a hiker and biker, former editor of Parabola Magazine, publisher of Codhill Press, whose work has appeared in such places as APR, Commonweal, Verse Daily, and Rhino.

Natalie Safir has been publishing poems in national literary journals since the 1980’s and anthologized in college texts: Her books published are Moving into Seasons, 1981, To Face the Inscription, 1987, Made Visible in 1998.and A Clear Burning, in 2004.. She teaches Writing as Healing at the Hudson Valley Writers Center and is a certified coach and gestalt therapist.

Alix Reeves  Born in post-revolutionary Cuba in the sixties, Alix’s family fled to South
Pasadena, California. She attended California State University at Los Angeles where she received her Master’s of Science Degree in Psychology. Widowed at a young age, she began to write prolifically, in an attempt to manage grief. She was driven to explore the little known experience of the children of pedophiles, which inspired her first screenplay, *WHY THINGS BURN* a finalist at The Sundance Institute of Film, winner of the Key West IndieFest, finalist at both the London Independent Film Festival and the Beverly Hills Film Festival. Her most recent screenplay, a children’s comedy written for animation won the Kid’s First Screenplay Competition and is currently a finalist at the Screenwriting Expo. She signed with Santa Fe Films in 2008. Happily engaged, she lives both in Milwaukee, WI and Pasadena, CA with her fiancé Todd and their daughter Lydia.

**Vivien Jones** lives on the north Solway shore dividing her time between writing prose, drama and poetry and devising reading events, often with music. A chapbook of her poetry, *Something in the Blood*, was published in February 08 (Selkirk Lapwing Press) and another, *Hare* (Erbacce Press) in March 08
Short-listed for the Scotsman Orange Short Story Award 2005
Story in New Writing Scotland 23
Winner Sedbergh Short Story Award 2007
Performer in Poetry Doubles with Jen Hadfield for DGAA Literature series.
Final 5 for the Happenstance Short Story Award 2008
Radio broadcast short story BBC Radio 4 March 2006 (plus repeat 2008)
Radio broadcast short story Radio Netherlands July 2008

**Michael Cuglietta** recently moved from Tampa to Orlando, FL. He has a bachelor’s degree in American History with a minor in Creative Writing from the University of South Florida. He has been published in numerous small literary magazines including *Opium Magazine, Zygote in My Coffee, Word Riot* and others.

**Elyze Ennis** is a psychologist and a writer, originally from Europe but living part time in the United States. She just started working on her doctoral thesis and on a memoir, but poetry and short fiction still take up a lot of her time. She has been recently published in *Mississippi Crow* (scheduled for issue 7), in *Conceit Magazine*, in *Poesia* and in *Mad Swirl Poetry Forum*.

**Ingrid Swanberg** is a native Californian transposed to the Midwest. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her poetry has appeared in numerous small press venues. A chapbook, *Eight Poems*, currently appears in the online Light & Dust Anthology of Poetry. Earlier books include *Flashlights* and *Letter to Persephone & Other Poems*. Kirpan Press has just released her broadside “the pure.” Recent poems have appeared or are pending in *Osiris*,...
Presa, *Indefinite Space, Big Hammer, Napalm Health Spa* and *12x2* (Marseille). She is the editor of the poetry journal *Abraxas* and the director of Ghost Pony Press. In 1991, under the Ghost Pony imprint, she published *Zen Concrete & Etc.*, a full-length collection by avant-garde American poet d.a. levy, and she continues to contribute to the growing scholarship on levy’s work. She is also a collagist and a prose writer. A future project is a book on modern lyric poetry (Hölderlin, Rimbaud, Trakl, levy, Wright).

**Dawn Paul’s** stories, essays and poems have been published in anthologies in the US and Wales. She also has short fiction in numerous journals including Junctures (New Zealand), *The Sun Magazine, 14 Hills, Talking River* and *The Redwood Coast Review*. She is the editor of Corvid Press, a small literary press. Her novel, *The Country of Loneliness*, will be published by Marick Press in 2009.

**Kristine Ong Muslim** More than six hundred poems and stories by her have been published or are forthcoming in over two hundred journals and magazines worldwide. Her work has recently appeared in *Blue Fifth Review, Dog Versus Sandwich, Farrago’s Wainscot, Frigg Magazine, Grasslimb, GUD Magazine, Merge Poetry, Pank*, and *Paradigm*.

**Judith Terzi’s** poetry has appeared or is forthcoming both in English and Spanish in various journals and anthologies including *An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind: Poets on 9/11, Borderlands, Broken Bridge Review, Chest, Moondance, The Pedestal Magazine, Picayune*, and *The Teacher’s Voice*. An essay on Alzheimer’s and caregiving is included in *Voices of Alzheimer’s: the Healing Companion*. She taught writing at California State University, Los Angeles, and French at Polytechnic School in Pasadena, CA, for many years.

**Adam Burnett** lives and writes (whichever comes first) in Toronto, Ontario. He has had stories published in *Down in the Dirt, Rhapsoidia, Peeks and Valleys*, and *Midnight Times*. He is currently working on an Epic Poem entitled “Ode to a Pint of Guinness,” which he swears he would have finished long ago if only he didn’t keep finishing the pints first. He promises he’ll never write a book in which any character belches for comedic effect."

**P. Alanna Roethle** is a writer, editor, photographer, journalist and whatever else comes along. She currently lives in Austin, TX and works at an ad agency after floating around the country for most of her life, and has decided to settle there for the moment. She has had poems and short stories published in several online magazines and print publications/anthologies, but is mostly working on selling her first novel.

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Carl T Abt is an English major at the Ohio State University where he has been admitted to advanced creative writing classes in fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. He has been an Editors’ Choice in Bewildering Stories, and has over a dozen previous or forthcoming publications in The Houston Literary Review, Expressions, The Denney Stall, Ink, Sweat and Tears and other journals.

Kyle Garret was born and raised in Ohio. He received his Master's degree in Creative Writing from Ohio University. He currently lives in Los Angeles, CA. More information, including details on his short story collection Unrequited and Other Stories, can be found on his web site, www.kylegarret.com.

Andrena Zawinski, Features Editor at PoetryMagazine.com, lives and teaches writing in Oakland, CA. Her poetry appears widely in print and online. Her latest collected work, Taking the Road Where It Leads, is from Poets Corner Press, in which Girl with Umbrella appears. www.poetrymagazine.com/zawinski

T. Alan Broughton lives in Burlington, Vermont, and has published novels, collections of short stories, and books of poetry. His most recent collection of poems is /The Origin of Green/ (Carnegie Mellon University Press). Recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and NEA grant, he taught at the University of Vermont for thirty-five years where he founded the Writers' Workshop Program.

Anca Vlasopolos has published a detective novel, a memoir, various short stories, over 200 poems, the poetry collection Penguins in a Warming World, and the forthcoming non-fiction novel The New Bedford Samurai. She was born in 1948 in Bucharest, Rumania. Her father, a political prisoner of the Communist regime in Rumania, died when Anca was eight. After a sojourn in Paris and Brussels, at fourteen she immigrated to the United States with her mother, a prominent Rumanian intellectual and a survivor of Auschwitz. Anca is a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. She is married to Anthony Ambrogio, a writer and editor; they have two daughters: Olivia Vlasopolos Ambrogio and Beatriz Rosa Jimenez Ambrogio. Her book, The New Bedford Samurai was published September, 2007, and was nominated for a Pulitzer, among other prizes. It received the Australian Literature for the Environment Award.

P. V. LeForge lives on a farm in north Florida with his wife, Sara Warner, and horses. His fourth book of poetry, Ways to Reshape the Heart, is due out from Main Street Rag early in 2009. "Copse," the poem included in this issue, is part of his collection of farm poems, My Wife Is A Horse. Stuff about him, his writing, and the farm can be found at http://www.BlackBayFarm.com.

Laura LeHew is an award winning poet whose poems have appeared or are forthcoming in such journals as Alehouse Press, Arabesques Review, Big Pulp, HeartLodge, Her Mark Calendar .07/.09, Outrider Press, Pank, PMS, and Tiger.s Eye. Her chapbook .Beauty. is due out in May .09. She received her MFA in writing from the California College of The Arts.

Jeffrey Ihlenfeldt lives and writes in Lancaster, PA, where he also teaches creative writing and literature. His short stories have appeared in a variety of literary journals and anthologies, including Southern Humanities Review, Columbia Review, and Louisville Review. He holds an MFA from Goddard College.

Jerry Vilhotti: I graduated from the only college that won the NIT and NCCA basketball tournaments in the same year but more importantly than that - Jonas Salk - who helped rid some of the world of polio with his vaccine was also given the opportunity to contribute to Mankind and graduated from the same NYC school that’s called in some circles - “The poor man’s Harvard”; this and the fact that there was a place of higher learning that indeed gave every race, nationality and creed an opportunity to play in the game of sculpting a better world gives me greater joy. To use an analogy: I was a pretty good ballplayer in my day: I could hit singles, doubles and triples and sometimes home runs! I hit balls for fly outs or ground outs and sometimes I even struck out! That’s how I feel like a writer-no more no less. I have been fortunate to have had stories published in the USA, Greece, India, Scotland, Ireland, England , Canada Singapore …. many of which were literary magazines. I now live among the Litchfield Hills, in a simpler place in time, with the ghosts of Mark Twain in the east, Harriet Beecher Stowe on the west and John Brown to the north. I am with a beautiful wife who treats me well and waits for me to return from my imaginary meandering and we both helped–I swears to God!–in bringing three sort of nice kids into this world of whom we are very proud and I hope find loved ones as good as I found once a time ago.

Jeanne M. Lesinski holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in French from DePauw University (cum laude, 1983). She enjoys wide-ranging interests, among them languages and literatures, art, music, and natural science. Over the years she has published four books, including Bill Gates (Lerner, 2007) and MIAs (ABC-CLIO, 1998), as well as hundreds of articles for magazines and reference books. Recently her poems have appeared in the anthology Poem, Revised and such journals as The
Laurie Zupan has had work published in *Lost and Found*, Plymouth Writers Group, *Medicinal Purposes*, *Writer’s Digest* and others. She earned a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing from Antioch University in 2001. Laurie currently lives in Southern California with her son.

Derrick Weston Brown holds an MFA in Creative Writing from American University. He has studied poetry under Dr. Tony Medina at Howard University, Cornelius Eady and Henry Taylor at American University, and Sharon Olds at The Squaw Valley Summer Writers Retreat. He is a former Lannan Fellow and a Cave Canem fellow. His work has appeared in such literary journals as *Warland, DrumVoices*, *The Columbia Review* and the online journals *Capital Beltway* and Howard University’s *Amistad*. His work has also appeared in *The Washington Post* and New Orleans *Times-Picayune* newspapers and such anthologies as, *When Words Become Flesh* (Mwaza Publications), *Taboo Haiku* (Avisson Press), and *Gathering Ground: A Reader Celebrating Cave Canem’s First Decade* (University Of Michigan Press). In 2006 he released his first chapbook of poetry entitled The Unscene and has recently completed a full-length manuscript entitled *Gist*. He is a native of Charlotte North Carolina, and currently resides in Mount Rainier Maryland. He teaches two poetry classes at The Duke Ellington School Of Performing Arts in Washington D.C. He is the Poet-In-Residence at Busboys and Poets bookstore, which is operated by the non-profit Teaching For Change and restaurant.

Lyn Lifshin’s *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me* was just published by Black Sparrow at David Godine October, 2006. It has been selected for the 2007 Paterson Award for Literary Excellence for previous finalists of the Paterson Poetry Prize. (ORDER@GODINE.COM ). Also out in 2006 is 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 recent prizewinning books include *Before it’s Light* published winter 1999-2000 by Black Sparrow press, following their publication of *Cold Comfort* in 1997. Her poems have appeared in most literary and poetry magazines and she is the subject of an award winning documentary film, *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made of Glass*, available from Women Make Movies. Her poem, *The No More Apologizing, the No More Little, Laughing Blues* has been called among the most impressive documents of the women’s poetry movement, by Alicia Ostriker. An update to her Gale Research Projects Autobiographical series, *On the Outside*:Blues, Blue Lace, was published Spring 2003. *What Matters Most* and *August Wind* as well as
She was Found Treading Water Deep out in the Ocean, In Mirrors, An Unfinished Journey and Novemberly were recently published Tsunami is forthcoming from BLUE UNICORN. World Parade Press will publish Poets, (Mostly) Who Have Touched me, Living and Dead. All True. Especially the Lies. Texas Review Press will publish Barbaro, Beyond Brokenness in Fall 2008 and World Parade Books just published Desire in March 2008. Red Hen will publish Persephone fall 2008. Coatalism Press has just published 92 Rapple Drive and Drifting is online. Goose River Press will publish Nutley Pond. Finishing Line Press will publish Lost In The Fog October 2008. For interviews, photographs, more bio material, reviews, interviews, prose, samples of work and more, her web site is www.lynlifshin.com.