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page 34, "Mr. Allen, Harold, Winston"
page 66, "The Parlor Picture"
page 93, "Lady Angel"
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Editor's Note:

All of the 62 writers in this issue—including 15 who are new to *Open 24 Hours*—were invited to submit work because they are affiliated with Brescia's creative writing program and because they are from this region or are writing in it. Some are current or former Brescia students, some have given workshops or readings at Brescia, and some have read at 3rd Tuesday Coffeehouse, which is produced by the Brescia Writers Group. The result is an assemblage of talented writers from Western Kentucky and Southwestern Indiana.

The policy of *Open 24 Hours* is to present work that is truthful, fresh, artful, provocative, and clear: work that—though it may be disturbing—deserves to be read.

D.B.

The views expressed in this journal are, of course, those of the writers. Address all correspondence to David Bartholomy, Brescia University, Owensboro, KY, 42301 or <david.bartholomy@brescia.edu>.

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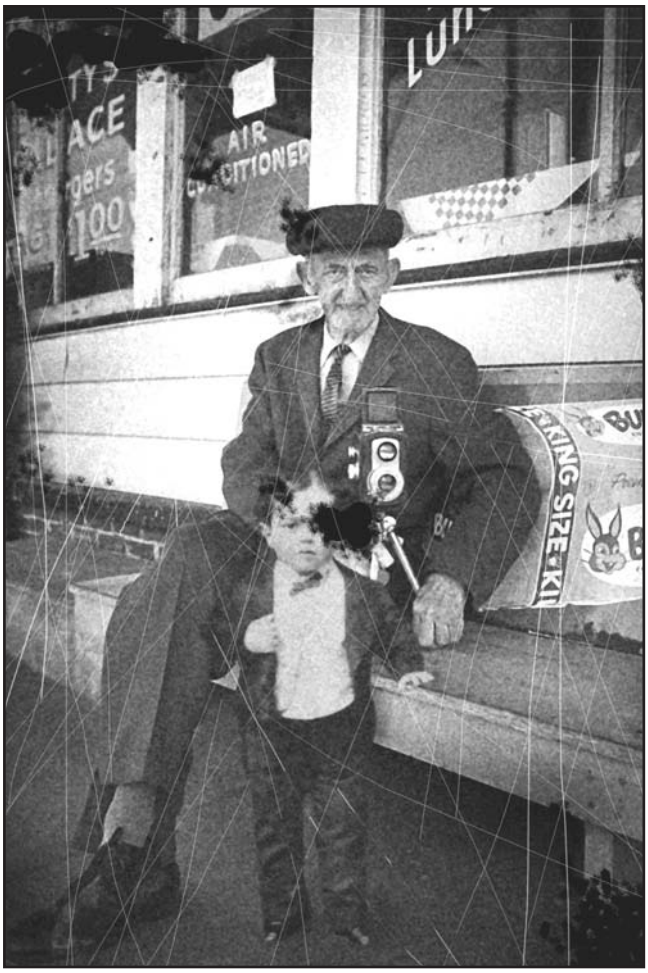


"And that's how Blue Gene remembered his father, as a man who was always on his way to another room."
Joey Goebel, p. 8

"How do you tell someone signing your checks that he is insane?"
Casey Aud, p. 20

Teresa Roy

Book Burning

The good writers touch life often.
The mediocre ones run a quick hand over her.
The bad ones rape her and leave her for the flies.
Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

Saved
from the humiliation of discard at a yard sale and mine for a dime:
The New Anthology of Modern Poets, 1971.
The op-art binding suggested *rebellion! protest!* and the poems—
laid out in difficult-to-read fonts that altered with each
day-of-reckoning fresh voice—underscored that first impression.
So
earlier tonight, I lay along the hearth of a winter's fire
and lumbered through the book of poems hoping to be shaken,
awed, redeemed or (at the least) engaged. Inspired, at last,
I lobbed the hardback in a perfect arc onto the lap of a blazing grate.
Well,
The New Anthology of Smug Little Posers landed
straddling a log, tidy and expectant as a saddle. I did not achieve
instant satisfaction, and there seemed no recognition
on the part of the book that paper meeting fire is a lethal mix.
Instead,
there was breathless hesitation and suspicion (on *my* part)
that the poets sat astride their mount with an insipid anticipation,
as if waiting for a coin to drop and the jolly ride to start.
I nudged at curling corners with the finger of a poker,
encouraging
a little air, a little *oxygen* to wend its way up narrow channels.
The paper tips pinked-up; flared and flamed across the ugly fonts
with alarming comprehension. Sometimes it needs to happen—
a con exposed,
a swagger tripped—
the pretentious and vainglorious reduced.
The book's spine shrinks and blackens, the title is the last to go
and in the end had nothing left to say.

Kathleen Driskell

With a Shiner, My Husband Enters the Flower Shop

I should be thinking about him and how
he could have lost an eye when
the malignant scaffolding collapsed and a 2

x 4 dropped through the air on the job
site the morning of our nineteenth anniversary, but
I'm considering her, the florist,

looking up from her table to see
him walking in sheepish, head-
bowed, ringing the bell as he enters.

I'm wondering how many times
she's arranged roses for the wounded,
the bruised, the stitched hungry male

who needs her help—*and fast*.
And I wonder if she imagines me,
black cast iron skillet

cocked in hand like a baseball bat,
as she pulls out the three stems
of delphinium, blue as a bruised

heart, and two full hydrangea,
pink petaled and soft as boxed
lingerie. There is not baby's breath,

I'm relieved to see, nor
the red lips of soft roses,
nor the ubiquitous and overly cheerful

mum. She knows, somehow, what
he does not—preoccupied with his day
today—that even a good long marriage holds

small hurts that barb and fester
near the skin, so she reaches
for the balm of calm sweep

of palm leaf, that healer of the unsaid
argument of morning, the rising blood,
as I watched him back out

in his truck, his having forgotten—once
again—this morning of all mornings—
to hang up the towel, curled

like a wet dog asleep on the bathroom
floor. A long marriage remembers
its youth as a roan, muscled horse rearing,

with nostrils flaring.

I accept this
bouquet for what I could have said
but didn't, and hold onto the thin

healing. I accept too, finally, that often
a long marriage is a donkey schlepping
across the desert. Tender-eyed, I attempt

to once again re-love husband as self,
to heal the wounded eye as one tries
to heal self. And accept the vase

on the table which stands to remind,
each day as I change its water,
that even this good marriage

is from time to time a sorry animal, in need,
and over burdened, but grateful for the hard
day it is about to close sore eyes against.

Kelly Moffett

Girls in Swimming Costumes

Sonia Delaunay

As if, as the title suggests, we are in some dramatic
scenario. A lost kerchief. A hand. A dangling strap.

We are all, at times, unfaithful. Most of me is like that.

Cold coffee, beauty. All the hardships compressed into one.
Like the day the church bells rang, and all I had inside was me.

No altar.

Joey Goebel

Commonwealth

Alone on a hill, the mansion stood in white-bricked, white-columned majesty, a quarter of a mile behind a black iron gate. Six miles outside the city limit, the house's inhabitants had no neighbors to contend with, the closest residencies being those in Vandalia Hills, the upscale neighborhood where Blue Gene's brother John lived, next to the Bashford Country Club. Elizabeth had made sure the gate was left open for Blue Gene, whose pick-up pulled into the long driveway at 5:50 p.m. At the end of the driveway was a little boy wearing khaki shorts and a light yellow Polo shirt. He was pretending to be a crossing guard, waving imaginary traffic past him while giving the halt signal with his other hand. When he saw Blue Gene's pick-up coming toward him, he gave it the halt signal. Blue Gene played along and waited until the boy allowed him to proceed down the drive and park in front of the four-car garage. He got out of his truck, and the little chub-by-cheeked, sandy-haired boy stood in front of him.

"Hey," said Blue Gene.

"Hello."

"How's the traffic today?"

"There's been nine wrecks."

"Dang. You're Arthur, I bet, ain't ya?"

"Yeah."

"I'm Blue Gene. I'm your uncle."

"I know. My mom and dad talked about you."

"What'd they say about me?"

"They said you had long hair."

"It's only long in the back. Does my name come up very often at your house?"

"No."

Blue Gene nodded. Because he didn't want to be inside the house any longer than he had to, he lit a cigarette and paced around the front lawn with its immaculate grass and shrubbery. He considered leaving but decided not to since his dad and John would think he was a coward if he didn't show.

Arthur watched Blue Gene smoke for a while.

"What's wrong with you?" Arthur finally asked.

"What do you mean?" Blue Gene prepared to explain his long hair or big mustache.

"Why don't you smile any?"

"Oh. Huh. I don't know."

"I found a dead snake once on the tennis court here, but it wasn't really dead."

"Yeah. I seen a few snakes around here myself. I used to live here, you

know."

"No you didn't."

"Yes, I did, too. Lived here from the time I was—what are you, five?"

"Yeah."

"Lived here from the time I was your age 'til I was twenty-one."

"You *did*?"

"Yes. I'm your dad's little brother. You do get that, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"Well, him and me lived here together, 'cept when he was off at school. See that tree over yonder?"

"Uh huh."

"We had a little dog. It was your daddy's dog. He named him Troubles. Our dad taught him to never beg for food. Anyway, one day your dad tied Troubles' leash to the bottom branch of that there tree, and long-story-short, your daddy was playin' with me and not payin' attention to what the dog was doin', and the leash got wrapped around a tree branch somehow, and the dog hung himself. We found him just a swingin' with his tongue hangin' out."

Arthur looked hurt.

"Hey now. I'm sorry. I don't know why I told you that—well, I told you 'cause I wanted to prove to you I lived here, 'cause you were actin' like I was makin' it up. Anyways, I'm just sayin', don't tie your doggie to a tree."

"Dad won't let me have a dog."

"Figures."

"But what's wrong?"

"What do you mean?"

"You won't smile."

"I don't know, man. I just don't feel well and I'm tired and nothing's good. That's the best answer I can come up with. Nothing is good. At least for the time being."

"Yeah huh."

"What's good, then?"

"Um, well, for one thing, sometimes there are toys."

"I sell toys. I'll give you a bunch of 'em if I see you again. But not all of 'em 'cause they're my livelihood at the moment."

"Okay."

Blue Gene flicked his cigarette butt at the lawn. "Well, Arthur, I reckon I better go on in. You go by Arthur or Art?"

"Arthur."

"I go by Blue Gene. You can call me Uncle Blue Gene, I guess."

"My nanny calls me Arty sometimes, but I like to be called Arthur better."

"Oh, so John got you a nanny. Who's raised you? Your nanny or your parents?"

"My parents. My nanny is Faye."

"Mine's name was Bernice. She practically raised me. You like *your* nanny?"

"Yeah. She is nice. She is *so* nice."

Blue Gene remembered that for a little kid, people were either nice or mean with no in-between. He looked at Arthur looking at him with his tattoos and his face that didn't smile.

"I reckon I got a few minutes. Would you want to show me how to be a crossing guard? You seem to have a pretty good handle on it."

$ $ $

After playing crossing guard with Arthur for ten minutes, Blue Gene rang the doorbell. A round little Mexican woman, the latest in a long line of ever-changing housekeepers, opened the door. His parents never seemed to keep their help long. Bernice Munly had been kept the longest by far, but she was many years gone.

"Hello. You are Mr. Mapother?"

"You can call me Blue Gene." Blue Gene stepped into the inviting whiteness of the massive foyer, and Arthur ran in past him and down the hall. "What's your name?"

"Roberta."

Elizabeth entered from a wide arched doorway underneath the curved double-staircases.

"Hello, Gene!" Her greeting echoed.

"Hey."

"So glad you could make it. Roberta, did you offer Blue Gene something to drink?"

"No, ma'am. I—"

"She didn't have a chance to. I just come in two seconds ago."

"I made sure we had your favorite," said Elizabeth. "Isn't Pabst Blue Ribbon your favorite?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Would you like one?"

"Okay. Thank you."

"Roberta, they're in the back of the refrigerator. And do you know what pilsner glasses are?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Serve it in one of those, please."

Roberta nodded and hurried off. Pabst Blue Ribbon was actually Blue Gene's third favorite beer, behind Miller High Life and Milwaukee's Best. He didn't correct his mother, not out of politeness, but because he was trying to figure out why she was being so hospitable toward him, especially in the way of alcoholic beverages. When he had lived at home, Elizabeth had nearly disowned him because of his two DUIs, both of which were made her problem by phone calls from jail at three in the morning. She had gone through similar ordeals with John.

"I'm sorry, but would you mind taking off your shoes?"

"Oh, yeah. Been so long, I forgot." Blue Gene slipped off his flops.

The Mapothers lived in a spacious, high-ceilinged house—about three trailers high—where the windows were never opened and the furniture never changed. So far, Blue Gene hadn't noticed anything different. He followed Elizabeth, who walked hurriedly under the arched doorway and into a corridor. He scanned the walls with their many framed photos, searching for one of himself, but there was only one or two of him because he was normally the one taking the pictures of his parents and John. Elizabeth led him to the parlor, one of the few rooms in the house with no TV. The Mapother house had eighteen televisions in all, and a few more on the grounds since there were two guest cottages.

On the parlor floor next to an antique gun cabinet, Arthur sat Indian-style with a pile of toys in front of him. His mother, an attractive woman with long blonde hair, sat cross-legged in her high heels by the fireplace.

"Hey, Abby."

"Hi, Gene." She got up and met Blue Gene halfway across the room. They hugged, Abby with her head turned away. "Your mustache sure has grown."

That she had to mention something about the way he looked annoyed Blue Gene, but he didn't know Abby well enough to argue with her. "Yeah, well, it's something interesting to touch."

Abby laughed politely and sat back down. "John sure has missed you."

"Is he here?"

"He called and said he'll be running a little late."

Blue Gene looked around the room, which was the same as he remembered it. He stared at a mounted deer head above the mantle, thinking about what it would be like to see John, wondering why he hadn't called if he had missed him so.

Arthur banged a couple of trucks together, and Blue Gene got down on the floor with him.

"Hey, you got Transformers. I used to play with them. Course, these are remakes of the old ones."

"I believe your father is in the den, if you want to go say hi," said Elizabeth.

"I'm gonna hang out with my nephew for a little bit."

"Would you like some wine, Abby?" asked Elizabeth as she took a seat.

"Oh, no, thank you."

"You sure? It's okay. You said John will still be a little while, right?"

"No, thanks."

"Okay, Arthur. Let's play," said Blue Gene. "You want to be the good guys or the bad guys?"

"Bad guys," said Arthur. Everyone laughed.

"I'm like you. I've always been partial to the bad guy wrestlers. Hey—you like wrestling?"

"No," said Arthur.

Blue Gene frowned and then shrugged his shoulders. "Okay, Arthur. Round up all the Decepticons."

"I'll go see what's taking her so long with your beer," said Elizabeth.

"It's okay. It don't matter."

But she was already up and out the door. Blue Gene proceeded to set up battles between the toys, flipping a penny to see which character would win each duel, which is how he used to play. Roberta brought Blue Gene a pilsner glass full of Pabst Blue Ribbon, though Elizabeth didn't return.

Blue Gene soon saw he could get a laugh out of Arthur by making up voices for the toys.

"Officer," he said in a squeaky girl's voice, holding up one of the Transformers. "I didn't mean for you to *arrest* him. I just wanted you to *talk* to him."

He held up another character. "Now you gonna have to bail me out," he replied in a deep, monstrous voice.

Arthur giggled, and before long Abby was laughing, too. It pleased Blue Gene to have a woman laughing at him. He had no feelings for Abby—she was all nostrils and teeth to him—but she had that Barbie-queen-blonde look that most men went for. And her kid was cool because he could have so much fun without the slightest buzz. Arthur struck Blue Gene as really having his stuff together.

With the beer and the company of his nephew, he passed through the next few moments feeling at peace on the plush white carpet.

"Hey, Arthur. Do you like monster trucks?"

"I don't know," said Arthur.

"I bet you would. There's gonna be a monster truck rally tomorrow night. Would you wanna go with me?"

"Yeah!"

"Would that be okay, Abby?"

"Actually, he's visiting his grandma tomorrow night—my mom. Sorry, but she's expecting us."

"Oh. That's a'ight."

Blue Gene absent-mindedly tinkered with one of the toys as he pictured himself sitting alone at the monster truck rally. He once again decided not to go.

$ $ $

Elizabeth eventually returned to the parlor and announced that they could at least go ahead and be seated at the dinner table. She led everyone into the dimly lit dining room where Henry Mapother sat stoically at the head of the table.

"Eugene." He stood.

"Hey, Dad," said Blue Gene, seeing no emotion in his father's eyes or lips, both of them small and scrunched, which along with his sharp nose made him hawk-like.

"How are you?" He and Blue Gene shook hands firmly.

"Can't complain. How 'bout yourself?"

"Outstanding."

Blue Gene took a slurp from his pilsner glass and looked down at his father's tan socks, then his light khakis with neat creases in the middle.

"Thanks for having me over."

"Glad you could make it." He spoke deeply with absolutely no accent. "Good to see you."

"Good to see *you*." He noticed his dad's hair was almost white now, but it still had that sporty, preppy look because of the way it swayed and swooped across his brow, which had a few fresh liver spots. He was as trim and tan as ever, though, especially impressive since he was pushing seventy.

"Have a seat." Henry motioned for Blue Gene to sit to his left, with Elizabeth next to him. On the opposite side sat Abby and Arthur, with a chair to Henry's right reserved for John. "Would you like another beer?" he asked after everyone was seated, himself included.

"Sure. Thank you."

Henry got up and left the room.

"So how did the rest of the day at the flea market go?" asked Elizabeth.

"Fine."

"Blue Gene sells toys at that flea market off of Story Boulevard," Elizabeth explained to Abby, who smiled and nodded. "You wouldn't believe how much I found there—mostly for church. It's a really neat place, in a kitschy sort of way."

"Is it really kitschy, though," asked Abby, "if it's not *meant* to be kitschy?"

Elizabeth laughed. "That's a very good point, Abby. Gene, I was wondering, how does one get involved in the flea market business?"

"You just go in there or call 'em and tell 'em you want to have a booth, and they charge you rent. That's all there is to it."

"So what inspired you to do that?"

"I don't know. Just something I always wanted to do. Bernice used to take me to flea markets and yard sales when I was little."

"Oh. Abby, did John tell you what time he'd be here?"

"No. He just said he had to run by home."

"We're all so excited for John," said Elizabeth. "We've already started renting out his campaign headquarters. It's the old J.C. Penney building downtown on Main Street. Of course, you're too young to remember that. The J.C. Penney *you* know is in the mall, isn't it? But used to, it was downtown. It was better then."

Henry returned with a fresh bottle of Pabst Blue Ribbon and poured it into Blue Gene's pilsner glass.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome." Henry sat down and sipped his wine. Everyone sipped their drinks as silence overtook the room. "Did you see that basketball game last night?" Henry finally asked.

"No. I pretty much stopped watching sports altogether."

"Why is that?" Henry's arched eyebrows lowered.

"My teams never seemed to win. So I just quit watchin' 'em."

"Even basketball?"

"Yeah. I swear, whatever team I'm rootin' for is gonna lose. And that gets old after a while. I still watch wrestling, though. Course you probably don't consider that a sport."

"That's true. I don't."

Elizabeth cleared her throat.

Henry checked his silver watch. "So is John going to make it or not?"

"He should be here any minute," said Abby.

"I'm going to have Roberta go ahead and serve the salads, then," he said, again leaving the room.

And that's how Blue Gene remembered his father, as a man who was always on his way to another room. This didn't really bother Blue Gene, though, since any time he was in the presence of his father, he had a strange feeling like he was doing something wrong just for being there.

(excerpt from chapter 2 of Commonwealth*)*

Matthew Weafer

I try . . .

I try to maintain a happy life
with my wife and family and friends
in the middle of this mad-crazy, wi-fi, high-speed, disconnected world
guided by madmen and fools
and hope that somehow we can all make it through life
without becoming those people
on the five o'clock news
that everyone looks at during a moment's break from dinner
to think, Man, that sucks; I'm glad it wasn't me,
when all we can really do is hope
that the millions of naive masses
are convinced they'll be happier
if they just do what the television commercials tell them to do:
buy this, buy that, starve yourself, wear this,
ignore these people, and above all
live your life according to the specific words of the Bible—
because you're not supposed to interpret the words
and anyone who does is a sinner possessed by the Devil
and is going straight to Hell,
but if you all just shut up and listen to your pastor

and your president, you'll all be rich and thin
and go straight to heaven—and all I can do
is toss my two cents into the trillion dollar pool of debt
and hope I either float to the top or fall through the cracks
and slip through the greasy fingers of these mindless lemmings
ruling the world without even a consideration
for the true middle Americans, the nine-to-five stiffs,
the broken-backed immigrants, the weakened souls
portrayed by the media as mongrels
who can barely even tread water
in this economic battlefield we call
the American Dream—
and all we can do is hope,
just hope that somewhere amid the hubbub and celebrity lifestyle updates
that the everyday Joe stops to realize that he might be happier,
or even a little slimmer, or even a little quicker in the mind
if he would just turn off the TV.

I try to control my anger, agitation and frustration
while I'm steaming milk for a cappuccino at work
and a stranger leans on the barista and explains to me
why even though he's 43 and has been rejected from the military
four times since his retirement 15 years ago, he'd love to get over there
kill some of them towel heads, maybe while he's at it he'll
knock off a few of them queers who sneaked their way
into the Army—"Who do they think they are, anyway?
This is God's country and God don't like fags,
says so in the Bible"—and he stands there grinning
thinking I must agree with him because I don't respond
but really my mind is convulsing like lightning
because not only is this guy an overbearing moron, but he stinks
of moldy mint chewing tobacco
and he won't stop staring at the 16-year-old girl working behind the
counter,
and he is what the Neocons consider a patriot
because he'd sacrifice his life for our country
and he'll damn sure screw a high school girl
and shoot a homo on his way down,
you'd better believe it because that's how God would've wanted it;
says so in the Bible, somewhere in between
"Love your neighbor" and "Treat others as you would have them treat you,"
but perhaps he'd like to be screwed by a 43-year-old smelly man
and then shot for being gay.

I try to open my mind and make sure
I'm not being self-righteous
make sure I didn't miss something at the last
How to Be a Good American convention
because it's possible;
I have a tendency to nod off during lectures
because of the monotone, rhythmic beating
of pontificating pomposity—

everyone is so sure that certain things are right and certain things are wrong,
and perhaps they're correct
in fact I'm certain they're correct
but I do believe despite popular belief
that the whole world has gone crazy and lost touch of reality
and somehow amid the media scramble to cover the most recent
celebrity divorce, America misconstrued right with wrong
and I'm not talking Biblical or moral,
I'm talking common sense:
it's wrong to beat/kill/sodomize your kids;
it's right to open your minds and put yourself in someone else's position
before deciding for God that He hates them;
but that's only a taste;
I could go on but won't because I'd be no better
than anyone else insisting their Self Help: How to Live Your Life to Be the Perfect
American: Rich, Thin and Better Than Everyone Else is the right way,
so I'll stop right there and simply say
I try
I try
I try but sometimes there's nothing I can do
to open someone's mind
so it's up to the world, this crazy, derelict world
and the individual subscribing to self righteousness
to step off the pedestal and perhaps give peace a chance.

Adria Nassim

How Young Love is Made in Brooklyn

This is how the black youth in Brooklyn
Make love on a Saturday afernoon.
They gather in the park—amid
Business people talking on cell phones
In fifteen languages and the drone
Of an airplane overhead—dressed
In Junco jeans and Fubu shirts,
Some wearing baseball caps sideways
Over their almond faces,
To dance to the rhythm of Chris Brown,
spinning on their heads like tops,
Kicking their feet in the air,
Doing back flips in the green grass,
Making love to the Brooklyn music
That flows through their veins.

Tom Raithel

The Globe

I had one of these things as a kid.
I'd sit on my desk, spinning, looking,
dreaming on it for hours.

See how the top half tilts to the light?
That means the bluebird sings in the orchard,
the sunflower smiles beside the red barn.

Now tilt it back and the calendar flips—
two crows sit on a bare, black branch
under a snow-gray sky.

Give it a turn and dawn rises golden
over the marsh. Mallards descend.
A bulldozer sleeps in the grass.

Turn it again and the sun steps down
the stairs of the skyline. Haze in the air
turns her scarf dark red.

This blue tract, this was the wild
the whales once ruled, their kingdoms
now cut off by circling ships.

And these little ridges stand for great mountains
rising into the ozone twilight—
a kind of heaven I guess we're losing.

The white spot's an island of ice and white bears,
but see how its edges turn green as its name,
how the bear looks off to a darkening sea?

These bright polygons jostling each other—
they more than jostle. They brutalize, burn.
They threaten to blast the sphere to a cinder.

So you see how experience has clouded this ball,
this figure of all our sunsets and dawns,
this mirror of memories and dreams?

Such perfect shape. Such flawless motion.
Such rich and resilient color.
Too bad it's no longer fit for kids.

Elizabeth Oakes

To Sappho

No one will forget you again,
you with your large heart,
like the drum of the daughters,
like the hum of the mothers
as they create the sound
the world makes

All the church fathers
and all the puritans
and all the patriarchs
and all the witch hunters
couldn't destroy you

Once there was a poet,
women told themselves
for centuries,
and she was female,
and she fell
into the ocean,
and she is falling always,
which is really
what flying is all about

Terri Whitehouse

Side Effects

There are none that we can think of.
Some women have reported infrequent
but painful tingling sensations
in their gullets, but this is quite rare
and often a result of neglecting
their own voices for long periods
of time. To avoid this we recommend:

Drinking at least seventy ounces of water
per day, as much as you can stand to hold—
heavy—in that rubber bladder of yours.
Also, don't yell! Instead, ring a bell
when you need attention. Finally, learn
to swallow your indignation, not in one gulp,
but in one hundred hushed sips.

Jesse Mountjoy

Shadow

Awake on and off through the night
I negotiate with the mice
Who carry the virus of insomnia.
I offer to sell them my shadow
With its passion for orchids.
In the end the terms are not acceptable.
I wander about the house
A movie extra without a script.
My shadow changes with each surface
On which it falls.
I become an unhung oil portrait.
Beneath the shadow of varnish are
Shadows of pigment
(White lead, copper green,
Sienna ochre, ultramarine).
Sometimes my thoughts
That were a thin volume of light,
Timid essays
Become a bold philosophic tome.
Or my shadow transforms
The simplest of my movements
Into some immortal gesture.
What we become we forget.
At daybreak
My shadow will be a Taoist
Eating only vegetables,
Refining cinnabar to show its aging,
With dreams of sprouting wings.

Casey Aud

Michael's Descent

Somewhere on planet Earth, where the great flying saucer freaks of the world take refuge, Michael was in his private studio, mixing tracks for his greatest ever and/or comeback album. The sun was rising outside the fortified, studio-palace, and the lamas and peacocks were shaking off their slumber. Two giant bug-eyes reflected on the studio glass separating the soundboard and the sound booth rooms.

"Michael, please," Keelan, Michael's primary producer, said as he folded his smooth, brown brow in his hand and released it to stretch himself a little thinner. His shoulders lurched forward, and his normally smoothed-out corn rows were looking more like busted bed springs. "We have got to get some rest. We have been mixing and re-mixing the same thirty seconds of the intro to your first song since nine o'clock last night. We're stale, the room is stale, and I think we all could benefit from some rest." Surrounding Keelan was the rest of Michael's exhausted entourage.

"Do what you think you need to do, Keelan," Michael said. "Some of us can find things more important than sleep right now. Do you know how many people out there are awaiting this album? Do you know how many people's lives will change as a result of this song alone?" Placing the headphones on his ears, Michael spidered his fingers over the dials on the soundboard as his crew filed out of the spongy, padded studio doors.

"Some day people will listen to my new album, and it will change the world," Michael mumbled to the empty room. "Some day I will change the world." Trumpets and angelic choirs pierced his eardrums as he played the hastily recorded track again. Hours later, he peeled himself out of euphoria, slid his roller chair over to his intercom system to the left of the giant soundboard, and pressed the call button with a creamy finger. "Tantina, are you awake, dear? I require some of my morning tea, an English muffin, and some of the ooey-gooey cheese that tastes so good on it. Tantina, are you up? Did you get all that?"

A rustling of covers filled the silence after his request, and a groggy, thick voice replied, "Yes, sir. I get the tea and muffins right away, sir."

"The cheese stuff, too, Tantina. Don't forget the cheese. Oh, yes, and good morning to you, Tantina."

Tantina, the resident chef and maid—and anything else she could do since the staff was cut back because of an ever growing debt—slid out of the bed's warmth. She wrapped herself in her robe and waddled off to the kitchen/dining room wing of the house as fast as her stubby old legs could move. She had bunions and a bad hip, the norm for someone who spent her life on her feet waiting on other people.

On her way through the corridor, she thought to raise the blinds but

refrained when she saw that the sun was not up. When she was young, her father had made her rise first in the morning to prepare breakfast. He instructed her to "wake the house up" by opening the blinds and turning on the radio. She hated the time of year when it was still dark in the morning and she had to open the blinds. She felt that the darkness was peeking in, watching her, as if the night was still hanging around to scare her. Because of this, Tantina now left the blinds closed in the morning. It was all the control she had over her life. Instead, she let the smell of fresh ground Colombian wake the residents.

Michael retired to his room only to freshen up before breakfast. One who was not familiar with his enormous room could get lost. His closet was the size of a normal extravagant person's closet, times three, and it was home to the most exceptional wardrobe, including an astronaut costume, Egyptian pharaoh headpiece, Peter Pan tights, full cliché Native American chief headdress, and rhinestone-covered everything. If the track lighting in the cavernous closet caught the glitzy garb just right, you ran the risk of being blinded. Tucked away in the bathroom were hidden passageways that Michael sneaked through, and which the other occupants of the house were supposed to pretend they knew nothing about. Michael pondered scurrying into one of his secret hideaways this morning for an hour or two but declined since there were no small children to indulge with. "I'm feeling alone and misunderstood today," he said to himself. "I think I'll wear my Phantom of the Opera costume." After dabbing white powder on his face, he donned the costume with mask and dashed into the kitchen.

"Tantina, what do you think?" Michael asked. "Is this not a magnificent outfit for a day like today, or what?"

"Yes, sir. I think it is a splendid day for such a suit." Tantina had learned to never disagree with her boss. She had to be fingerprinted by the FBI, have blood work done, and be questioned in an interview/interrogation room for practically two days just to work in the infamous house. She was not about to go through that process again with some other whacked out celebrity.

"In fact, you look darling, sir," Tantina added.

"But I don't want to look darling, Teenie," the Phantom replied solemnly. "I want to look lonely, misunderstood, and a little scary."

"Oh, I'm scared alright," she dutifully replied.

"Good. May I have my breakfast now?"

"Of course, dear. I was just waiting for my command."

"We're making a lot of progress in the studio, Teenie. I know that probably doesn't make all that much sense to you, but I'm so excited I have to tell someone."

"Well, great, sir. I'm ecstatic that things are going so well."

"This is going to be my comeback, you know? This is going to be the album to end all albums. I'm gonna change people's lives with this," he

said as wide-eyed as he could manage.

Michael picked at his English muffins and his 'ooey gooey' cheese like a child then leaped from his seat and hurried back to his command station at the soundboard. But then he couldn't remember which button to touch.

"Keelan?"he called into the intercom.

"Yes, sir?" a tired voice answered.

"Keelan, I'm in the studio. I'm confused: do I press the green switch on the top right of the central board or the green switch on the bottom left of the left flank of the board to warm things up?"

Sigh. "Neither, sir. It's the far right black dial next to the last of the looping draw bars." Sigh.

"It's the one that's next to the draw bars, or under it?"

Sigh. "Sir, I just need a couple of hours of sleep and then I can assist you in anything your heart desires."

"I desire to turn on the switchboard," Michael said as princely as possible.

"I'll be there in a second, sir. But then I must sleep a couple of hours or I'm no good."

Keelan dragged into the studio, straightening his mesh sleeping cap, flipped on the soundboard without looking at Michael, and left the room defeated. A girlish shrill erupted behind him, and he winced. He passed Tantina in the kitchen and rolled his eyes, the only dissension the indentured staff could practice without setting off their master. He rubbed his eyes, tugged at his wife beater, adjusted his platinum, diamond encrusted sneaker emblem, and yawned.

"Do you need anything, Keelan?" Tantina asked.

"Yes, sleep," he said. "Other than that, no."

"You poor baby. I know how hard it is keeping up with him. His energy sometimes is out of this world, huh?"

"That's one way to put it," Keelan said as he placed his hands over his mouth.

Since his last string of firings, Michael had instructed all staff to speak positively about everything while in the house. Any sign of negativity was grounds for termination. Thus the employees were constantly covering their mouths. They were under the impression that microphones and cameras were everywhere and that no place in the house was safe from Michael's eyes and ears. If you asked, Michael would tell you he was a kind and loving person. If you asked his employees, they would paint you a picture of a near-psychotic, paranoid megalomaniac. All of that information was confidential, of course. How do you tell someone signing your checks that he is insane?

Michael sat staring at the soundboard flinching with excitement, his ghostly hands perched over the dials, the blinking lights and the buttons with no idea what any of it was for. Over his career, he had been at the mercy of his producers for technical matters, but he still preferred to be

treated as someone who is comfortable at the wheel.

"I could lay some vocal tracks down and have them ready for everyone once they get up," he said to himself.

Through the giant studio windowpane, he sighted the lone vocal recording booth. It looks so scary in there right now, he thought. It's so dark, it's probably haunted. Since childhood he had given in to all the fantasies and illusions that swelled in his psyche. In his world, monsters existed in dark places, ghosts were everywhere, and leprechauns lived at the ends of rainbows.

"I know what: I'll write a song about that scary booth to make the ghost or monster go away. That way I can get some work done while everyone's asleep, too. Whew! I can already feel it; it's hot! It can be like a slow song, and I can put some perfectly placed dance beats in it, too."

As Michael's sanity crept further away, he wrote,

> There you are, ghost in the dark.
> Looking for my childhood heart.
> So many places where you wait.
> So many children I could save.
> Waiting, lurking, just to scare.
> And so I go. Do I dare?
> If you could only see, monster! What's in my heart!
> If you could only live, ghost, out of the dark!
> You wouldn't need to scare anymore!
> You'd never be lonely for sure!
> I'll just wait until you're ready.
> To come out and be my buddy.
> One day we'll play, and all will be right.
> Then all your darkness will turn to light.
> We'll fly around in a spaceship.
> And throw out candy to our new kids.

As the last few words left his lips, Michael looked out into the crowd and felt the heat of thousands of waving lighters on his face. He saw children crying, holding signs begging for him to touch them. He closed his eyes, drew back into the darkness behind them, and fell asleep on the hard, bumpy soundboard.

(*excerpt from* Dark Matter, *a novel-in-progress*)

Misha Feigin

Trapped

Do you think that any part of your
precious self can be wasted
after it passes the expiration date?
Where all those gazillion particles
and vibrations you so commonly call 'I'
are going to end?
Any form of annihilation is just
another link in the totality
of morphing energy, a switch
altering one wavelength
into another, so you are stuck
in this universe
until the next big un-bang
sucks everything it contains
into a singular black mole
on God's ass
that will stay unscratched
for a few eternities until
one night she will settle
with a dry martini and cigarette
on a tall stool in a local bar
looking for someone to share
a one-night communion,
and later, when she'll get lucky,
he will grab her ass
taken by passion
and scratch this mole
with a dirty fingernail
and we all will go again
to push for one more expansion
in a dash of universal blood.

Matthew Branham

Some Place in Central Kentucky

Seems when you think you're doing good
You're probably just screwing up

This is just something I'm going through

I'm standing in a grocery
The size of some small towns
Staring at a million versions of
Everything
I make a panicked call to God
But I can't get no signal in this place

I see a man walking
Along the road
Someplace in Central Kentucky
Empty baby carrier in his hand
Searching the roadside
For a sign sayin'

This is just something we're going through

The woman in the booth behind me said
"This is like something out of a movie"

I see a sky a Microsoft shade of blue
Horses standing against a backdrop of rolling plain
As cars whip by
Someplace in Central Kentucky

All lost in faraway conversation
The horses, like suicides
Swallow blades of grass one leaf at a time

This is all just something we're going through

I see a man and wife doing a weekend
At a local B&B
To get the old fire going
Neither can take their eyes off
The tender serving girls
Carrying trays so high
Like khaki ballerinas
All wishing they were a little thinner and
Some place besides Central Kentucky

Terry Bisson

BYOB FAQ

Where do you get your BOBs?
From you! Each and every BOB is unique, custom designed to order for each individual BYOB client. Your personal BOB, neurally mapped to your specs from an approved and tested BYOB blank, will be unique and like no other.

Are they really volunteers?
We wouldn't have it any other way. BYOB's program begins and ends with free choice, yours and his. BYOB's blanks are Asian and African males, ages 28-36, who have freely chosen to have their personalities erased and remapped (not just overwritten) in order to have a chance at a new life in the U.S. or Europe.

How are they selected?
With special care. BYOB accepts only healthy mature male blanks, HIV and STD clean, which are cosmetically and medically reconditioned before being neurally reconfigured to make a satisfactory boyfriend, life partner or husband if you so desire.

How do you know what kind of guy I'm looking for?
You tell us. Simply ENTER your own needs, desires, likes, dislikes and preferences into our proprietary matching database. That's all there is to it! Unlike older programs, which matched people imperfectly, based on guesswork and approximations, Build Your Own Boyfriend lets you choose *exactly* the qualities you want in a life-partner. And then delivers it.

What if I don't speak computer-ese?
No problem. Our Personal Profile Mentor (PPP) prompts you through each of the twelve major neural networks seamlessly. You just list your own preferences, in your own words: Sense of humor? Does he like cats? Camping? Movies? Bob Dylan or Yanni? Is he the kind of guy who likes to cuddle on Sunday mornings? Your call. You tell BYOB exactly what you want, in plain English, then leave the rest to us.

Will he remember his previous life?
Your BOB comes with a full generic set of memories that is chemically dimmed, giving him a feeling of completeness without the specificity of individual recollection. You and your BOB will begin immediately making your own memories. That's what relationships are all about!

What about criminal tendencies?
Relax. While it is true that many of our blanks come from penal or military points of origin (POOs), they have been completely erased, not just overwritten, before reconfiguration. There is no such thing as a "criminal type," and even if there were, such tendencies would not survive BYOB's "deep

cleansing" process. You can order a BOB with the full confidence that he will be a good citizen as well as a good companion.

What if he doesn't like me?
Unlikely, since your BOB is configured to like the same things you do—which includes yourself! And in the unlikely event that you are not satisfied (in every way) with your delivered BOB, you are free to return him at any time in the first six months after Reception, with only a nominal restocking fee and no questions asked. This happens in only a small percentage of cases.

What happens to rejected BOBs?
They are returned to inventory to be rewritten and reassigned. They have no memory of their reception. You have no responsibility for a returned blank.

Can I choose race or ethnicity?
Sorry. BYOB operates under strict non-discrimination laws. We guarantee only that your BOB will be healthy, pleasant looking with no disfigurements. Most are Asian or African, since EU restrictions prohibit European blanks at present.

Can I add Ls & Ds after delivery?
Of course! That's what relationships are all about. You and your BOB may discover birdwatching together, dabble in drag racing or explore the mysteries of tantric sex. Up to you! Your BOB's learning curve is matched to yours by our proprietary Neural Acquisition Protocol (NAP).

What if BYOB goes out of business?
Unlikely! Build Your Own Boyfriend has been providing life partners to busy career women for almost two decades, with a documented satisfaction rate of 92.54 percent. We stand behind our services.

What if I don't want a long-term relationship?
Then our service is not for you. To adopt a metaphor from the stock market, we are not day traders, nor do we short-sell. BYOB is for the career woman willing to make an investment in a long-time partner. Have we mentioned that our BOBs have been reconditioned medically, and are covered by our Comprehensive Health Insurance policy (CHI)? You can and should look forward to a long and satisfying relationship.

Men only? What's that about?
We do service select gay men, but our service is primarily for women seeking a long-time companion or partner. Current international sex-traffic ordinances prevent our acceptance or reconfiguration of female blanks.

Will I have to teach him English?
Not at all. Your Bob comes with mature language capabilities, which are independent of memory. He may be teaching you! Since our Syntax module





is based on the Webster-Chomsky proprietary syntax map. He will, however, be unable to read or write. Many clients regard this as a plus.

Why only English?
Most of our clients are from English speaking countries, for cultural and religious reasons. Language underlays for French, German, and Spanish are currently in development and are expected to be available soon.

What about accents?
Because our blanks are fully developed Asian and African men, they will come with accents ranging from slight to severe. Since intonation (accent) is muscular as well as neural, it diminishes after activation but never disappears entirely. Many women find this charming, and few find it an impediment to a lasting relationship.

What about citizenship?
Each BOB is awarded conditional citizenship six months after reception. It is among the many things he will be thankful to you for! And while BOBs cannot vote or own property, they have most of the rights of unconditional citizens. As an added attraction, Canadian or U.S. BYOB clients are granted an extra one-fifth vote. A similar concession is currently being negotiated with the British crown.

Will he long for his old life?
Certainly not. He will remember only that it was unpleasant and will be neurally incapable of remembering any specific incidents or people. His new life with you will be all that is of interest to him.

Will he know that he is a BOB?
Only if you tell him. He will know only that he has a past personality that he is disinclined (and indeed unable) to access. Many women find pleasure telling their BOBs that they have been especially designed to suit them. Many BOBs find comfort in the knowledge that they are "special" in this way. But again, it's your call.

Will he seek out other BOBs?
Probably not. Our studies show that BOBs in general have little interest in one another. His main interest will be in you, and he is configured to be more than satisfied with that.

What if I grow tired of him?
Why would you? Remember, your BOB wasn't just matched with you; he was made for you. But in the unlikely event that you wish to discard your BOB at any time after the initial BYOB warranty period, you can do so without legal prejudice by delivering him to Migration Control, since his citizenship is conditional and he is neurally mapped to go without resistance. Your responsibility then ends, and he is free to become blanked again, or be returned to his Point of Origin (POO).

What if I have further questions?
They can be submitted in confidence to our BYOB website at www.Bob.bio; or if you wish to speak to a live operator, 1.919.456.8999. Now, may we ask you a question?

What are you waiting for? Haven't you been lonely long enough? Share your life with a BOB who is designed to fit your life-style and unique personality. Send for our Profile Initiator today—

Patrick Reninger

What's That Smell?

Three faded tiles from my Frigidaire, you are greeted with the first whiff, one part garbage and two parts rot, grotesque as a turd on fine china.

Though I have doused all surfaces with chemicals, sniffed every piece of fruit and flooring, the smell has no source.

There is no moldy corned beef sandwich buried in the fridge, no skeletal remains of a field mouse resting along a row of canned peaches.

The aroma permeates the kitchen of this one bedroom walk up. It has burrowed deep within the walls, merged with concrete, drywall and wood.

There are days, however, even weeks when the odor goes away, when I crack open a window, let a fall breeze caress my forearms as I place bouquets in vases, fry bacon, bake chocolate, burn candles and surrender to the sublime sweetness.

But the odor returns more pungent than ever. Varying in intensity like a Mahler symphony, it follows me from the toilet to the bedroom, burning my nostril hairs.

Maybe the odor is in my mind, some fear, guilt, or incessant regret that has become so real it has its own stench.

Possibly it is a remnant of a tenant now deceased, the bad breath of the afterlife, or the bitter aroma of those lost souls whose only vengeance is to blow a warm wind of stink across recently upholstered furniture.

Or the smell could be something far more sinister, some skunk-like secretion from behind a floorboard that emits rank fumes when complacency poisons the calm.

Phoebe Athey

I Will Do Any Kind Of Honest Work

Between my junior and senior year at OHS, I announced to my surprised parents I would be seeking a summer job. Civics class had unduly influenced me out of my Southern indolence. Back then, though, there were no fast food restaurant chains, so there were very few jobs for teens.

I quickly learned the hardest part of any job was applying for one in the first place. I began by making "cold calls" at every shop up and down Main Street. It was too like begging. No shop owners perceived my future worth to their business. Then I heard there was something called the "employment office," which was in the business of getting people jobs.

My employment interview was conducted by an unenthusiastic, uninspired, gravely fatalistic older gentleman who seemed surprised to have a referral. He was equipped with a small box of index cards filed on his grey steel army surplus desk. Responding to my query, he admitted in a dull monotone, "Yes, we have jobs here." He didn't seem to think he had any jobs in the card file in which I would be interested, though, so I kept repeating, "I will do any kind of honest work." I had grown up in the land of Lincoln and had heard one rail-splitting, schoolwork-with-nasty-smudgy-charcoal-sticks-from-the-fireplace stories too many.

The employment counselor sighed at my determination and finally selected a dog-eared index card, and said, "Well, they need extra hands at the canning factory for the tomato season. But I don't think you would care for that."

I didn't see why not. My grandmother and aunts were always canning tomatoes and peaches out on the farm near Island and Livermore, and I had to help. Thus, despite my suburban middle class exterior, I was well qualified, uniquely experienced in the canning of tomatoes.

"Well, you would just be on the line," he cautioned.

"Don't worry. I am willing to work my way to the top!" I declared valiantly.

I showed up for work the first morning with my hair teased in a flip and dressed for success in a crisply ironed white cotton Bobbie Brooks blouse, Madras wrap-around skirt, and Bass Weejun penny loafers. Outside the factory, though, I noticed the other women, most of whom were near my mother's age, wearing housedresses, ratty old sweaters and men's house slippers. How did they expect to attract the attention of management dressed like that?

As soon as we arrived inside, we were issued hairnets and smock uniforms so that we all looked alike except perhaps me with my highly polished penny loafers. Generally, the only way we could be told apart was that there were also some Black women working there. The canning factory was probably the only integrated business facility in Owensboro, and I was proud to be on the front lines of the civil rights movement.

A white woman had been put in charge of me, and she was fearful that the acid of the tomato juice would ruin my shoes. I was not. I thought of them as sensible classics.

Then a buzzer sounded and the tomatoes came down a conveyor belt scalded so that we could quickly slip off the skins with our paring knives. We were supposed to allow the skins to accumulate under the conveyor belt, and I soon noticed that my shoes were losing their luster.

We also were authorized to cut away any obvious bruises. I am not normally of a frugal nature, but I had a hard time giving up on a tomato entirely. I would carefully carve and sculpt each bruise-afflicted tomato certain the great savings thereby generated would attract the attention of higher management. "I think you had better let that one go, honey," my patient immediate supervisor would sometimes advise observing my *garde de manger* culinary precision.

After three days, my mother was tired of getting up at 4:00 o'clock in the morning to make certain I had a hearty hot breakfast, tired of nervously driving me in her nightgown and bathrobe through a bad part of town before dawn to the tomato factory. So she overcame my stubborn loyalty to the tomato factory by asking a friend horrified by my career choice to secure an alternative position for me filing patients' charts in the records room at Daviess County Hospital. Did I know alphabetical order? I was a straight-A student. I would go the extra mile. I would *revise* the filing system, given the opportunity.

Michael Battram

Those Days When Not Much Matters

Long-time lovers roll over in bed,
open their eyes, and say,
"Oh, you again."

Your waitress brings you lukewarm coffee,
expecting no tip, then slouches away
in a fog of gracelessness.

The mailman is late, leaves nothing
but supermarket flyers,
a pocket calendar from your insurance agent.

Cops stick to the safest streets,
take an extra half-hour for lunch,
then round up all the usual suspects.

All day at home, the cat sprawls across
the back of the sofa, trying hard
not to feel so damned important.

Steven Skaggs

Syllogism Against Moments

Say there is a single moment
different in some respect from one prior and another later
(for how else could you distinguish it?)
and possessing in a uniform and comfortingly complete manner
wholeness of character
(for how else could it be a single moment?)
and in this moment there can be no movement
no action or time—just the purity of stasis
(a little frozen thing)
Such a moment could contain no words
or letters of the alphabet or even the spaces between
(but how else can we read?)
But language and poetry exist
sullied and particulate and endlessly regressive
(where can there be stillness in language?)

Then if there be a moment, it is not here in this poem.

Adria Nassim

Walking Through a Paper Shredder

I bite my lip and swallow blood.
As my fragile body tips forward
Headfirst into the blackness,
I become thin, useless
Strips of skin,
A paper doll.
No one cares that I am
Wearing red toenail polish
Or that I hoped I wouldn't
End up in a million pieces today.
My self-assurance and dignity
Have suddenly been stripped away
And tossed into the small black box
To wait for the garbage collector
later in the week.
I anticipate the light as many.
I can no longer anticipate it as one.

Mari Stanley

Going for Seconds

Don't think about where it goes
once the ice cream begins the course
from bowl to spoon to mouth,
the way your tongue cradles it,
melts it to milk, or it's cool
slide down your throat.

Don't think of the calories or count
the fat grams as you swallow, and don't
think of where they will land:
a spoonful under your chin rounding
your face, two bowlfuls in the seat
of your jeans, and soon a double-scoop
spilling over the waistband, a vanilla roll
you'll be ashamed to coat in coconut oil
and bare in a bikini by the pool.

Don't think about those models
in their single-digit dresses, indulging
in water and celery, with nothing
sticking to their ribs but bronzed skin.
You're not a model: you're breasts
too bulbous, hips too broad,
and when you thrust in panties and bra
in front of the mirror, you can't even find
your pelvic bone under all that flab.

And for God's sake, don't think
about that dress that used to fit,
or the way he used to stare
when you undressed for bed.

Just pile your bowl high—
fudge, nuts, cherry—the works.
And in the morning,
lie down
suck in
and zip.

Stepping into Peace

"Mommy, you've been acting weird. They always say daughters can't fool their mothers about having sex, but it might be even truer that mothers can't fool their daughters."
Mary Welp, p. 48

"You can't unsay words, even words you never meant.... They hover like phantoms between people."
Cat Wethington, p. 56

Dori Howard

Desperation Chicago

I'm willing to ditch this town and
I'm willing to let you help me do it
because it's been much too long
since I've seen semis
whipping night trees into a rushed frenzy
against an artificial night wind
and ages since I've heard the radio play
outdated 80s pop or conservative Christian talk
or static and I'm willing to let you change
the station when you notice the background sound
is more than your thoughts and I'm even willing
to let you think
I'm willing to claim your passenger seat
as my new home
until you roll into your comfort zone
and show me all the things I overlooked
at first glance as a transplant into your life.

Laurie Doctor

Euphony

Imagine you deserve his smile
the summer choir of cicadas
tree frogs and birds sighing,
water singing over stone.

In winter's night, open the far door
into the oneiric dark with your
slow uncertain hands, to that
place just out of reach.

Imagine that this steady unfastening
after years of wrong notes
that this all at onceness
is a song for you.

John Hay

Snowbound

At ease, he lolled against the lamppost under the yellow arc light. The street was shiny in the cold.

What was going on was not his business, he knew. His ease came from a deeper awareness consciously attained. His trim wool coat was dark and long and warm.

His hair was swept back by the wind. It was midnight on the iron clock. The fine bells echoed through the slivers of snow. A dozen protestors were rolling about on the sidewalk. They were beating each other with black and white signs on heavy sticks—neat letters, software drawn. Some signs said "NO" and the others "YES."

A tall woman in a black cocktail dress, open red sweater and pearls came out of the hotel. She stood near Johnny's side, very near his shoulder. They calmly watched a man lunge from the sidewalk into one of the women. She fell flat with her arms over her head, and the hearing aid she was wearing slid across the ice. Her glasses went cockeyed as she rolled off the low curb like a log. She scrambled to her feet and galloped blindly, headlong into a plump little man who was trying to stay out of it. Regaining his feet, he stepped back, hiked up his jeans, and brushed the slush from the "NO" on his sign.

Maybe the woman was a "YES," Johnny thought, and smiled.

Out of the dark, with the snow in the air around them, the police, men and women in blue, light on their feet, were running under the huge sycamore trees down the long, white, stone walk.

Johnny turned slightly toward the woman beside him, noticed the white string of pearls under her open coat, and spoke to her in a quiet voice: "Here they come, to protect people from each other."

The woman at his shoulder looked into Johnny's eyes and narrowed hers. With a slight wrinkle of her nose she seemed to say, "Don't waste my time."

The woman was now toying with her pearls. She was trim, as a woman might be who cared for herself, or a woman who, doing little good for herself, has the genes to hold on for a while. And there was power in that trimness. She had broad shoulders and fine, white teeth, and she held a slight smile at her lips. Standing there, she expressed a confidence, either inborn or forced on her by life. It didn't seem to Johnny that she was the type to slow down to court peace or to learn anything from books; everything had to come to her from the road. His feeling was that she didn't give a damn about many things, yet she was interested, very interested. He noticed she was holding an open beer hidden under the fold of her coat. He saw her body give slightly forward and slightly back, and he knew it wasn't only the wind.

"There's a mess," she said. "Yes and No going at it."

They stood together looking at what was before them. She obviously was passing by from a night of drinking. Johnny was passing by after five years secluded in the mountains. He had not yet driven out to his home, the nineteenth century farm among the trees. Not yet leaned against one of

the big white horses, or chatted softly with Deliberator, the blind thoroughbred stallion. Not yet looked up at the moon from the massive front porch, the moon of his youth. Not yet embraced his mother whom he had been told by phone was sleeping. He had just rolled in on the crowded highway in a battered, red Lincoln Continental and had been attracted by the crowd. Always ready to study a culture, he stopped.

He and the woman in the black dress stood together with similar attitudes of detachment, each of them with that inborn grasp of this human ignorance displayed on the ice before them, each of them with a healthy and truthful distance from it—the woman with a restless edge, an erratic inwardness ready to do its own damage somewhere else, and Johnny with a deeper presence, a state of being he had worked for.

I'm not going to engage this woman, Johnny thought. She looks at me for a few, long seconds. I don't look back. She wants something now, or maybe it is just the alcohol and the cold wind, too, and she gives with them. She gives with them as if giving in to alcohol and the wind is a relief for her, probably from standing firm in so much else that she has wrongly imagined she has fathomed.

The police wrestled fighters to the ground. Two young women in jeans and stylish boots from a hiking store were screaming at the police. The tall woman and Johnny were calm, interested and calm, but in very different ways. An earring slid across the ice to the tall woman's feet. She put a foot on it and slid it back across the ice between the legs of a man in a sweatshirt and brown toboggan cap. Johnny looked at her quickly to see if she smiled with satisfaction for having scored the goal. She did.

"This is boring," she said to Johnny. "Who are you?"

"I'm Johnny Talifer."

"Well, good for you," she quipped. "Who's he?"

"I grew up on a farm up the road."

"Well, good for you again," she said. She tried to focus her eyes in hard on him. "I'm the girl next door, who will never invite you over. Got a car?"

"Yeah, I have a car. Lots of windows, a few doors." Johnny had picked up her mood and was entering in.

"Right, cars have windows and doors," she shot back. "How about wheels?"

"Yeah, wheels," Johnny said.

"Well, Farm Boy, Johnny, whatever your name is, my truck left me with a son-of-a-bitch at the wheel. Thinks he rules the world. How about a ride to the Midland Tavern."

"Tavern?" Johnny knew the place.

"Wake up, Farm Boy. How many taverns are there in this ruin?"

"Oh yeah, that one. I know it. I can see it from the roof of my house over the trees."

"Over the trees? Must be a tall house."

"Midland Tavern. Used to pass it every day."

"Why pass it?" she said. "I'm Olivia. Where's your car?"

Johnny liked the woman very much. He knew she felt comfortable to be tough on him. He knew she felt safe because she had recognized his

extreme flexibility each time she pressed him, and she felt he would not hurt her feelings, did not really care to hurt her feelings.

The police quickly dispersed the protestors and were gone. A frail janitor with a wooden cane walked tentatively from the hotel into the silence. The cold made him shiver as he bent down and placed a container of plastic garbage bags on the iced pavement. Then he slowly began stacking the abandoned signs and picking up what the protestors had left on the ground: paper cups, cigarette butts, crushed doughnuts, a scattered cake, a lipstick, and the day's newspaper which, here and there, fluttered in the breeze.

Johnny moved in quickly and pulled a plastic bag from the box, and the woman came beside him and took one. He saw the woman work hard and quick at picking up the trash, unconcerned with the grime, and there was strength and capacity in her complete focus; there was a blessing hidden in her work.

The woman kicked red ice into the street where someone had bled profusely from the nose. "Good luck," she said to the absent owner of the blood. "You'll need it."

In five minutes the three of them had cleaned the area. They left the bags by the door where the janitor pointed. Still shivering, he thanked them without emotion. Side by side, focused and quiet, Johnny and the woman knelt at the curb and cleaned their hands in the fresh snow.

They walked together then in the direction of his car.

"You're an idiot," she told him. "Now, do you feel good about yourself, Garbage Man?

Johnny felt nothing about helping the man. He grew up on the farm, and there, with his family, you always lent a hand when called for. It was understood to do it and forget it, not to give credit to one's self.

"I needed the exercise," Johnny said. "I've been driving since early morning."

His red Lincoln was covered with snow. It was from a time gone by and battered from much time on the roads.

The woman brushed snow from the windshield and the hood with her bare hand. "You ever thought about fixing these dents?"

"Now and then," Johnny said.

She stepped back in the dark night under the white sycamore, and the snow fell around her. It was catching in her hair and eyelids, and she brushed it away from her face. She looked at Johnny, sizing him up again. All was still and quiet around them with the soft snow falling. She took a long drink from the beer can and said, "Naw," with a wry smile. She jerked twice at the door handle, cursed it and got in laughing.

She tossed the empty can to the floorboard, gave it a kick, pulled a fresh one from her coat pocket. She popped the top, and the beer spewed on her and the car seat. She ignored it. Her fingers were long and restless. In the car's dome light, her eyes were emerald green.

"What the hell do you do?" she asked, laughing. She brushed the beer from her chest and buttoned her low-cut red sweater, which read, "I'm in Love With Spider Man." And on it was a heart and Spider Man smoothly swinging in his web of red and gold glitter. All of that and pearls, too, Johnny thought, pure, white, simple, beautiful, a symbol, a reminder.

"Nothing," he told her.

"Liar," she shot back. "But hell, it doesn't matter who does what. 'Nothing' is fine. Something, nothing, then you die." She looked out the window and rolled it slowly down to look at the new moon setting like a sliver of ice.

She lit a cigarette. "Nice night," she said softly.

"Yeah," Johnny said. "It is." He spoke tenderly, as she had spoken.

Yet then something else came through, as if she could not stand that ease of feeling, the ease of the moon and the snow and all she saw and felt in the romance of the night out the frosty window.

"That son-of-a-bitch would stomp on the moon if he could, after he screwed it," she said.

Johnny sensed that they were on their way to find her truck and the son-of-a-bitch. "Do you want to find him," he asked calmly.

"Yeah, we'll find him. Hang a right. Quick. There! What's wrong, still learning to drive?" She laughed happily and took a drink from the can.

They drove through a dark neighborhood with very small brick houses and a few young trees and a few old ones now and then in a yard. The houses had low porches and small back yards with iron swings and storage buildings and tethered dogs.

"Stop," she said. "Hold this." She handed Johnny her cigarette and her can of beer, got out and slammed the big door of the Lincoln and swept up to the small picture window of the little brick house. She peered in, then pushed herself back from the glass with both hands, spun away and stepped on the low porch and tried the door. Locked. She slammed the storm door with a hard backhand, and the glass cracked and shattered to the floor of the porch.

There was a small, concrete urn sitting on a stand by the sidewalk. Gargoyles decorated its edges. She turned smoothly and with one leg straight out, in a move which spoke of training, tipped it with a flick of her foot, like picking a flower, and it crashed to the sidewalk and broke into three pieces.

She slammed the door of the Lincoln, then she carefully removed the beer and the cigarette from Johnny's hands, took a long drink and spoke calmly. "He wasn't home. Let's go."

Johnny was not moved one way or the other by her anger. He had spent too much time within to be impressed. He was learning about her. He lifted a water bottle from the seat and took a long drink.

She watched him. "You want a drink of my beer?" she asked in a sincere, warm voice. "Sorry. I was rude not to offer sooner." She meant it.

Johnny spoke gently: "No thanks."

Johnny began to think of Deya' as he drove. The snow had stopped. The night was clear and dark and friendly feeling, and they had seen only one other car in the curves of the back roads. Deya', a village in the mountains on the island of Mallorca, was not a place to return to, yet a place to remember with affection. He thought about the sea there, the Mediterranean, and going to the sea with Carolina, a swimming place, more beautiful it is said than any in Greece.

She would pack for them a breakfast of fruit and bread and cheese, and

they would go early before the sunrise to watch the day begin over the sea. It was at these times they would see Robert Graves, the English poet, known also as the author of *The White Goddess*, a history Johnny thought fine but never followed. Robert befriended them and took them walking about and meeting people in the little mountain village. He was old, yet young in strength and brightness. Those mornings he would appear high above the sea on a rounded rock. Out of courtesy, she and Johnny would seem not to notice him, nor he them. Robert knew they were there, but in the early morning he was doing something of his own. At sunrise, he would dive from the rock into the sea, climb from the water across the low rocks, dress, and walk again home to his study, his work. He was a seeker after what is true, and Johnny studied him as one would study a rare bird in a jungle, a human bird, singing.

"Do you like to swim?" Johnny asked Olivia. He wanted her to talk about herself, to know her better.

"I can swim," she said. "Why? Do you think I would look good in a bathing suit?"

Johnny knew that her thoughts about her truck and the son-of-a-bitch were mixing into her conversation with him, her emotions clinging to their talk. "No," he said. "I was thinking of a place I used to swim."

"Where was it?"

"In a calla in the Mediterranean."

"Speak English," she said sharply. "Life is short."

"A cove."

"Good for you; you know what a cove is. Maybe you do have a life somewhere." Then her voice became warmer, more at ease. "We have a cove on the river," she said, "a good place to lay out, to get sun. Quiet there. Sometimes I do swim. Yet it doesn't seem fresh and clean enough for me. It is missing something."

"Missing something?"

"Wake up, Farm Boy. Missing means that something that should be there is not. Get it?"

Johnny knew she didn't want an answer. She was in constant movement looking into the woods and dark side roads and watching. She was watching for her truck.

"No tracks in the snow," she said. "Yet…that is. If that bastard pulled off on one of his favorite parking places, I will see the tracks. Slow down."

She scanned the dark empty yard of a small farm. "The little bitch isn't home either. If I find them together, he's finished."

Johnny was listening to her carefully, and he would remember. And he knew much of what her words represented, yet he had seen in the space between the words, in her movements, in the timber of her voice, something else of great importance.

Something in the night with her, driving the back roads of Kentucky, made him think of Christmas morning, in Deya' again, on Mallorca. Outside of the roomy sandstone house, the mountains were covered in mist. The olive trees on the terraces were at ease. It was cold and overcast, and Carolina and Johnny were sitting close against the open fire—burning olive wood—with a tea of island flowers and dark chocolate. Robert Graves

walked in the front door without knocking, as he always walked in, and called out in his English accent, as always, "Anybody home? Kentuckians?" his words singing sweetly, like phrases from one of his ancient songs of strength and hope that he had sung for them standing by their fire. He carried a Christmas gift, a book for them, signed to them with love, his book of Omar Khayaam's Rubaiyyat, which he had rendered into English verse. Johnny remembered a quatrain of his own, inspired by Khayaam, while Olivia was taken up with watching for fresh tracks of a son-of-a-bitch in the snow.

Oh, my Love, the Burning Stars are bright.
All we could ever wish to Know has made that Night.
Court gently now the Wine hidden in the Rose.
And Forever will strum for you its Song of Light.

They drove into a tiny community that surrounded an empty crossroad—a few white houses and a wooden grocery where an antique gas pump stood like a robot with a golden face, erect in the falling snow. The houses were dark, the people in them sleeping. It was a four-way stop. In the emptiness of the dampness and the snow edging the road, the motor rumbled. Then, out of the dark curve a red pick-up truck appeared, moving slowly, and it came to a stop in the road to the right of Johnny's red Lincoln.

Johnny accelerated slowly out into the center of the intersection.

The woman grabbed his arm with a grip like a steel vise. "Stop the car," she said. "Stop the damn car."

The Lincoln, shining in the streetlights with melted snow, slowly came to a stop dead center, blocking the cross of the roads. Olivia jumped out and bounded across the blacktop. With a calm sideways jerk of her hand she splashed beer from the can onto the windshield of the truck. A gold bracelet at her wrist flashed. The wipers came on, a quick joke from the man inside. She jerked open the door and grabbed the man by the arm and tried to pull him from the truck. She was cursing. She was talking fast, and Johnny rolled down his window to hear.

"Never again, you piece of nothing," she said. "Get out. Get out, both of you."

The young man resisted, and Johnny could see him in the lights smiling at her contemptuously. She drew back and swung with a level fist, another hint of her training, but the man caught her fist in midair. She jerked away, walked quickly around the hood of the truck, snapped open the passenger door and told the girl to get out. The young woman got out quickly. She wore jeans and a tight green t-shirt and a necklace with a green stone that flashed in the headlights. Her coat was in her hand. Almost as tall as Olivia in her high heeled cowboy boots, she stood easy on the ice as she looked about.

Olivia held the woman gently by the arm and pointed to Johnny in the Lincoln. The Lincoln and the Dodge truck stood idling, rumbling heavily in the quiet night, both drivers waiting, yet differently, in the wings for a cue.

The girl stepped away from the truck. She seemed confused about what she should do, maybe afraid. She looked toward Johnny's car. Olivia swung into the truck like a dancer. The truck sat for a moment with its engine rac-

ing, and then with squealing tires it fishtailed through the intersection and was gone.

A light went on in a nearby house, a door opened. "What's going on out there?"

The girl, who had been standing frozen under the intersection's arc light, ran to Johnny's car. She slipped once in the high boots, caught herself with ease, and slid to a stop in the wet gravel. Johnny leaned across the seat, pushed open the door for her, and she flowed gracefully in.

"Hello," Johnny said in a quiet, welcoming voice, smiling at her.

"Sorry to intrude," she said. "When you are left at an intersection, there are not many choices."

She introduced herself as Jenna. Then she was quiet. Johnny eased the car out of the intersection and turned right. He didn't know where he was, and when Jenna said nothing, he thought it must be a way back to town.

"Are you upset?" he asked.

"Not really," she said, matter-of-factly. "Why be upset? That was Olivia. I know her. I know her ways. You don't mind taking me to my car, do you? It's at the Midland Tavern."

Again, Johnny thought. Two women in the same night in some sort of detachment. Jenna quiet in hers, Olivia in action. Both from the Midland Tavern.

"What kind of car is this?" Jenna asked.

"I thought you were going to ask who I am or why I was with your friend."

"You'll tell me, or I'll find out soon enough. Olivia told me just now that you are all right. She knows."

"It's a Lincoln."

"Oh really? My mother is kin to Abraham Lincoln. I tell this story now and then whenever I see a Lincoln. First one I've ridden in. Great, great, great, something great. He was a nice guy, I hear. He was funny. He was at a formal diplomatic dinner and everyone was waiting for him to take the first bite. He put a piece of steaming hot potato in his mouth, spit it back into his plate with gusto, then calmly looked up at the visiting dignitaries and said, "Some damn fool would have swallowed that." My mother has told me that story all my life. She says the story should put me at ease, and help me remember not to assume, and not to believe everything I hear. Kind of a rough connection, but it works. Who are you?"

"On my way home from a long trip. I live out in Jett, the farm with a little fishing pond out front."

"I know who you are," she said brightly, turning to him. "My Father did some carpentry work for your mother out there. He took me with him when I was a little girl so I would see the house. Your home is very old and very beautiful. I remember being there as if it were yesterday. Your mother gave me a woven Indian bracelet, red and green and sky blue, and I still wear it and think it good luck, and she played for me on the piano and sang for me a happy old song, "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," and encouraged me to dance, and I was not afraid or shy with her, so I danced. I've been dancing ever since. She was a mysterious person, loving. How is she? Tell her hello."

"She's very sick. They say she is dying, but not for a while. I'm on my

way home. I called and spoke with a night nurse. She's sleeping."

"I'm sorry she's not well. Maybe she'll be okay. That day I was with her she took me for a walk around your beautiful and peaceful home, and when we went up the long, high staircase, I asked if there were ghosts there. She laughed and said, 'Only Ghost Toasties.' And my fear went away. You are lucky to have such a mother."

"I appreciate very much hearing about her tonight, from you, your true memory. You saw her as I have always seen her. Thank you."

Suddenly, bursts of fire, red and blue and white flashed sharply in the mirror and spread light, and a police cruiser nosed down and rocked on its springs behind them. The two officers were out in seconds on both sides of the car, flashlights blazing.

The officer on Jenna's side called out, "Relax, it's Jenna."

The other officer asked Johnny for his license. She read it and said, "Johnny Talifer. New Mexico. What were you doing out here parked in the middle of an intersection?"

Jenna leaned into Johnny and said, "We were…."

"Let him talk," the officer said. She was a young woman of medium height with a smooth, youthful face.

"Well," Johnny said, "there was this woman I had never met who asked me for a ride."

Jenna interrupted again. She scooted across the seat up against Johnny, her left arm around his shoulders. She leaned across the steering wheel so that Johnny had to lift his head back. Her hair smelled of hyacinths. "Yeah, Judy," Jenna said. "Olivia and I were going to see a movie, and I had borrowed her truck and we lost touch with each other and this man was giving her a ride to look for me. We saw each other at the intersection, and it's late, and she took her truck to go home, and he is going to drive me to my car at the tavern."

"Why didn't you go on with Olivia?"

"Well, I used to know Johnny's mother, so I stayed with him to talk."

"How was Olivia?" the officer called Judy asked, probing. "Was she okay?"

"She was fine. Okay. She is turning over a new leaf." Jenna's voice wavered. She touched her hair.

"Then why was she pouring beer on her truck and taking a swing at the driver. Was that Rick? Neighbors called in. Did you see drugs?"

"Let me talk to her," the other officer said without emotion. He opened the passenger door and sat on the edge of the seat. Jenna turned and remained pressed against Johnny. Calmly the officer looked Jenna in the eyes. The red and blue and white lights from the big, white cruiser flashed on their faces and made them look exotic and wise and other worldly, as if they were dressed finely in the costumes of actors in a mystical play. Yet a different theatre, a grand and limitless school, Johnny thought, the stage everywhere—of the moment.

The policeman spoke quietly. He was at ease and very polite, as if talking to a child.

"Olivia is no good now, Jenna," the officer said. "She is going to die or go to jail, and I don't want you with her when she does. Don't excuse her. All people like her have an excuse. Someone pulls them down. They pull

someone down. On and on. All in the same hole. I can't help you if you are with her when she goes, or if you take up her habits."

Jenna turned her head to Johnny, very close, and met his eyes as if to find comfort there. She quickly turned back to the officer. "Shut up, Jimmy," she said.

The officer was quiet for a moment, then he said, "Do you know this man?"

"We just met. Dad knows his family."

"Get out of the car, Jenna," he said. "I'm driving you home."

"Okay, I will, but I'm aware that I don't have to. Give me a minute to tell him goodbye."

The other officer handed Johnny's license to him, looking at him carefully. "Haven't seen this car around," she said.

Johnny spoke politely: "I've been away studying."

The officers went back to their car. Johnny watched them in his mirror. The flashing lights went dark. And again the peace and silence of a winter night. Flakes of snow drifting in the headlights.

"Goodbye," Jenna said. "Thank you. Sorry for…."

"Why do you protect Olivia?" Johnny spoke quietly and with familiarity, as if he and Jenna were long-time friends, speaking in that depth.

"I like her," Jenna said. "I want her to live."

"Yeah," Johnny said, and he studied her eyes. "And why is that policeman taking you home?"

"He's my brother," she said.

Into Johnny's thoughts came London, Memphis, Asia, the slow drizzle of the Mediterranean, this small town, everywhere, people dying and half dying because they have no knowledge.

"I want Olivia to live, too," Johnny said.

"You don't know her," Jenna said.

"Yes, I do. I know her." His voice was clear, direct, final.

Jenna clicked the door shut, and in moments the big cruiser made a long, quiet u-turn across the empty blacktop garlanded with cedars, dusted with snow, the cedars turning on and then off again green in the headlights, and was gone.

Johnny sat alone. For a while he watched the snow falling again across the headlights, the silhouettes of the trees rocking back and forth against the sky. He leaned back and smiled. His mother, Olivia, Jenna, Rick and Lincoln, the frail janitor and the officers, all in one thought, as if they were mixed in one room happily laughing and talking. As if they were gifted with perception so deep that they understood themselves, and so all of humanity—as if they had sought and touched the keeper of awareness. He remembered Omar Khayaam from hundreds of years gone by:

The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes,
And He that tossed you down into the Field,
He knows about it all—He knows—He knows!

(excerpt from a novel-in-progress)

Lynnell Edwards

My Lover in the Kitchen, Singing

"The sound of the pans bumping against each other, the smell of the almonds browning in the griddle, the sound of Tita's melodious voice, singing as she cooked...." Like Water for Chocolate

I hear her low-throated
lament of midnight loss,
chromatic, difficult; ballad
of lovers'ships crashed on the rocks,
pitched strange in dives and flights;
thin descant of a four-bar hymn
twisting to her pale, sweet Jesus
hanging in his sky, of sin
and who she's with tonight
miles from me. I see her
standing, hand on hip, surveying
counter, sink, stacked bowls,
face flushed in the steam.
She bites her lip, waits for the boil,
then bends to bring knife to block
through smooth-skinned
orb. I feel it yield and split,
stream seeded to the floor. She
muddles bitter leaf, thick root
with pepper's oily burn, touches
her lips and thinks of me. Soon
yellow light slips to grey;
tower bells chime evening prayers.
She grinds with heavy pestle
dark alchemy of powder, vine,
lets loose with last refrain
our sorrowed song of salt and bone.

Louise M. Halsey

Vermont Summer Morning

In early morning light, warmed by sunshine
as cricket sounds rise from goldenrod,
a hummingbird hovers, then zooms.
Deep sighs swell from beyond the horizon;
winds like ocean waves come one atop another.
Leaves dance and flutter soundlessly.
A pale pink lily, its petals arcing back,
receives the hummingbird's visit.
Such a gentle interplay of need and desire.

Alice Driver

Early Morning: China Beach, Vietnam

We awoke at 3:45 a.m. and walked out into the clear night, stars bewitchingly bright and unhindered by city lights. Wisps of clouds floated between the night sky and land, somehow neither here nor there. The moon was a thin crescent, but brilliant, turning the waves silver as they curled and broke neatly on the beach. Some men were gathered around a pile of embers glowing red in the night, a pinpoint on the dark beach. My husband, Isaac, and I sat facing the water to await the appearance of Anh Taht, a fisherman we had befriended.

Around 4:30 a.m., Isaac spotted the dark form of Anh Taht and approached him to ask in Vietnamese if he could go out fishing with him in his teacup-shaped bamboo boat, a question he had been practicing as we waited. I sat on the beach as Isaac helped the man drag the surprisingly heavy boat into the water. Then they stepped in and paddled away into the darkness. I tried to take a picture of their departure, but the digital screen reflected only the darkness of night and the faint outlines of a wave washing up on shore.

The fisherman's tiny wife walked over, squatted beside me, and nestled into my side like a small child. I was surprised by the close physical contact, but also warmed. She began talking excitedly after I said a few words in Vietnamese, and so began our sing-song conversation about our husbands at sea, broken with lots of gestures and laughter. After 15 minutes, she motioned to me that she was going back to sleep, her hands clasped like a pillow beside her head. She told me she would return at 6:30 a.m.

Light was beginning to streak across the sea horizon, but the moon still shone above my head, keeping its hold on the night. Soon, men came out to swim, jumping into the waves to be consumed by the frothy sea, and the volleyball court quickly filled with adults and children yelling and laughing. In that pre-dawn light, the beach had come alive.

As I turned to watch the volleyball game, a bevy of fast walking, middle-aged women came down the beach for their morning exercise. One of them grabbed my arm, laughing and motioning for me to join the group. Her grip was firm, pulling me out of the sand. I accepted her joyful invitation and joined the women on their walk. The tiny, plump woman who had pulled me up began excitedly talking to me, her English about as good as my Vietnamese, a few words on each side.

She motioned to me energetically, laughing at my height and her shortness and patting my stomach as if to give her seal of approval. She took hold of my hands and guided me to pump my arms like a power-walker. Periodically she would shout "Numbah one!" happily, as if to say something nice about me or about us as a whole. We walked for a good 40 minutes before turning around. On the way back, all the women stopped and sat in the sand, motioning for me to join them. These small, plump ladies in flowered hats and shirts then began all manner of exercises: sit-ups with legs thrown in the air, headstands and stretches. I sat and watched the sun rise. My friend was to the left of me lying down and throwing her legs into the

air. She pointed to her abdominals as if they needed work, and then motioned for me to join her.

After the exercises, we got up to finish the walk, and the women gathered around me and talked rapidly, my friend asking me in English, "Why husband?" I thought she meant to ask where my husband was, so I told her he was out in a boat. My friend said, "No, no. *Why* husband?"

As we walked, my friends continued to look at me and say "Numbah one!" I laughed with glee. These ladies were full of joy, and I felt lucky to have been picked up off the beach and included in their morning ritual. As we approached the end of the walk, the teacup bamboo boats were sailing in, washing up on the beach in twos and threes. By now the sun was up, and the sky was flecked with orange and pink clouds that seemed close enough to pull down and eat like cotton candy.

The women invited me to join them again the next day, and as they walked away smiling and giggling, I turned to the water and saw Isaac and Anh Taht approaching shore. When they landed, they lifted the waterlogged boat with some struggle. Anh Taht had caught only about 30 tiny fish in his large net, some as small as minnows. They looked insignificant, shining in the sunlight.

Erin Barnhill

Field Study

Like a secret behind beauty
leading to fields—
tobacco fields after harvest,
corn fields,
fields of brown and gold—
they stand at intervals on the hill,
a herd of them blended
into the light brown hide of earth.
We look from the barn,
two noticers of things,
to see what's different about the world,
count three, four, five,
another imperceptably there.
When what is not there notices us,
it stops and stares, very still,
then it springs up
and the deer follow,
white tails brushing high,
arcing hooves knowing air,
into a field
a moving field
and away.

Mary Welp

The Artificial Heart

Hanging up the phone, I heard some kind of commotion down in the basement, so I tiptoed into the kitchen to grab a frying pan, as it has always been a dearly-held fantasy of mine to channel Lucille Ball at her most maniacal and conk a bandit on the head, mid-act. But to my surprise, I heard my daughter Reta giggling. I opened the basement door to find her stumbling up the steps with the Aryan Youth Rhinebeck's right hand inside one of her back pockets and his left arm around her waist. How the girl could walk, let alone walk up the steps, like this was beyond comprehension. More to the point, how could someone who appeared to be as Luftwaffe-ish as Rhinebeck manufacture this much affection?

"What in the world?"

"Mommy!" Reta shouted. "You're supposed to be at work!"

"And you're supposed to be at school!"

Rhinebeck was not the sort to pull the Eddie Haskell flattery routine with someone's mother. Instead, without saying a word, he removed his hand from Reta's pants and saluted me.

"You need to leave," I said.

"We're going," Reta said. "We were just working on a project."

"Not you," I said. "Him. He needs to go. You're staying."

Rhinebeck saluted me again, saluted Reta too, and made his exit. I had not yet once heard the boy say a word.

As soon as the door closed behind him, I said, "Reta, what are you doing with this boy?"

"I could ask you the same thing, Mommy," she said in a sing-song voice, plucking a banana from the fruit bowl on the counter.

"What?"

She peeled the banana slowly, studying it as if discovering bananas for the first time in her life. She looked at it lovingly, refusing to meet my eyes and said, "Do you think I don't know that you're sleeping with your boss?"

"And that gives you the right to sleep with a neo-Nazi?"

"He is not a neo-Nazi. I am not sleeping with him. And you are avoiding the subject." She took a huge, Linda Lovelace-style bite from the peeled half of the banana.

"You're not?"

"Of course I'm not. If you sleep with them, they only fuck you over." She finished the rest of the banana in a gulp. "Oops, sorry."

"No," I insisted. "Tell me more."

"About which part?" she said, opening the refrigerator. "Are we out of milk again?"

"We might be. I'm going to the store later. Or you can. So tell me."

"I know you're sleeping with that guy, Sloane, because I've seen his name too many times on the caller ID when it was no time of day or night anyone's boss would be calling. And besides, Mommy, you've been acting weird. They always say daughters can't fool their mothers about having sex,

but it might be even truer that mothers can't fool their daughters."

"Acting weird, how?"

"Like right now. What are you doing home in the middle of the day?"

"Spoken like a real truant."

"Now we're just going around in circles." She sank to the floor in front of the refrigerator and proceeded to use her fingers to enumerate points. "First, there was your disappearance the night of Charlie's birthday party. Then there was the thing about how insistent you were on getting everyone out of the house for that camping trip. Next you ran off to Grandmother's house, where you never, ever go to stay overnight. And also I know you're seeing a shrink."

I stared at her. Everyone liked to think that Reta was in a constant state of oblivion, brought on by being her father's daughter and exacerbated by the hormonal haze that had seemed to surround her since the onset of puberty, but in fact she had always possessed an underlying sharpness that was almost scientific in nature. I wondered if she also knew about Max Lomax, though I took comfort in the fact that she had not yet brought him up. Given recent events, however, I would not put it past my mother to have conferred with Reta on the subject.

"Reta, let's get back to you," I said, "before that principal phones wondering where you are. What's the story with Rhinebeck?"

"We really are working on a lab project together, and he can write better than I can, but I can *think* better than he can, so, you know. Collaboration."

"In the basement? With his hand down your pants?"

"Pants *pocket*, Mommy. Not my actual pants. You've got no license here. Rhinebeck and I are peers." She narrowed her eyes at me. "It's not like I'm sleeping with my teacher."

"So you are sleeping with him?"

She slid back up the refrigerator. "I am not sleeping with him," she said. "Don't you get it? When you sleep with them, they freak out and don't know what to do with you. Or themselves. When you don't sleep with them, the only thing they're freaking out about is how to get you to sleep with them."

Is this what they were teaching now at Planned Parenthood? I did not say it aloud because of course I was glad that she was not sleeping with Rhinebeck. Or…anyone? At the same time, it bothered me enormously, for it was the oldest story in the book, older than the Victorians, older than Joan of Arc. Keep them guessing by not sleeping with them. What then became of female sexual satisfaction, mutual sexual pleasure? When did it become legitimate? But I couldn't bite my tongue forever. I had to know. "Do you *want* to sleep with him?"

She shrugged her shoulders and tried to hide a smile, a gleam in her eye. "I don't know," she said. "It might be kind of fun to see such an uptight, straight-laced guy completely lose control."

"Reta!"

"You asked!"

She had no idea how much she sounded like her father.

"I did," I admitted. "So who is Rhinebeck? What's his story?"

She said he had grown up on a commune until his parents divorced when he was twelve. His mother's name was Rebecca, and his father's last name was Rhinehart, so they combined the two names to come up with a single name that fit him. Rhinebeck. He currently lived with his grandmother, who shared the boy's contempt for hippies and unconventional lifestyles.

"Have you met the grandmother?" I asked.

"Yes. She's a lunatic. She believes that communists live in her attic, but only at night. She thinks they came and replaced the bodies of her son and daughter-in-law with imposters. There's even a name for it: Capgras Delusion."

"Capgras! And Rhinebeck finds this preferable to living with his parents."

"He would rather live in a concentration camp, he says, than live with his parents."

"And this is why he dresses like a Hitler youth."

"Look, Mommy. I just feel kind of sorry for him. And he does know how to write. And we need to get through this semester. I'm not going to marry him. I don't want to have his babies. We just need to finish building our distillation tower. Okay? Now if it's all right with you, I'm going back to school. What about you? Are you going back to work?"

(excerpt from The Artificial Heart*)*

Katie Beyke

First Kill

I propped my feet on the dash as my sister pulled out of the parking lot. The windows were rolled down to let in the cold, December air while the heat was cranked up and we were bundled in layer after layer of hand-knitted sweaters.

I love this feeling. It's a hot apple pie with ice cream kind of feeling. You don't know whether you're freezing or burning up. It's all jumbled together and confused, like everything else in my life.

"If we hit something," my sister said, "your knees are going to shoot straight through your face." She can sound just like her mom sometimes.

"We're all going to die sometime," I replied, "so why let the fear of death keep us from doing the things we want?"

"I didn't say it would kill you. It'll just fracture your skull in a dozen places."

I waited a moment before subtly shifting my feet to the floor. I didn't want her to think she had won.

The radio blasted out her boyfriend's demo tape. She sang along with the scratchy vocals, and her fingers traced the guitar chords on the steering wheel. I did my part by tapping the drum beats on the door.

The smoke from her cigarette drifted lazily through the car. It coiled around my memories and pulled them from where they were hiding: the summer she started smoking, the smell of the vanilla perfume she thought would hide the smell of the smoke, the first time she let me take a drag off of one. Those cheap cigarettes had held us together when everything else fell apart.

The song ended, and she turned the volume down while steering with her knee. "How'd I sound tonight?" She sounded then like my mother, constantly in need of reassurance.

"The amp was a little too loud."

"That's what I told Ricky, but he never listens."

"You sounded good, though."

"What were people saying? Did they like it?"

"Mostly they were talking about their deadbeat ex-husbands or their druggie kids, but they didn't say anything bad about you."

She took one last drag of the cigarette before tossing it out the window. I watched the trail of sparks on the pavement in the rearview mirror.

"You hungry?" she asked as we passed a Denny's billboard.

"Sure."

We parked under a light that looked like it could die at any moment. The flickering would drive an epileptic mad. Before we went inside, my sister pulled her makeup bag from the glove compartment and easily traced her eyes with an inky-blue pencil. I've always admired the way she can put on makeup without even looking.

The restaurant was empty except for two drunks talking loudly in the corner. We sat ourselves in a booth with crumbling leather seats.

"Breakfast or dinner?" I asked.

"Breakfast."

"Let me guess: pancakes and bacon."

"Am I always this predictable?" she asked, but I didn't get a chance to answer. The waiter stood beside the table, his hair falling into his face. His arms were laced with tattoos. Piercings adorned everything from his ears to his lips. He's the kind of guy I pine after and my sister attracts with no trouble.

"Hi, I'm Nick," he said, "and I'll be your server for the evening." He handed each of us the menus, but his eyes never left my sister's face.

"Hi, Nick." Her voice had dropped an octave and was instantly alluring.

"Can I get you ladies anything to drink?" he asked only her, as if I didn't exist.

"Two cokes, no ice," she said, her voice dripping with charm.

"Coming right up." He winked as he walked back to the kitchen.

"You've got a boyfriend," I reminded her.

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm saying, don't go all girly on him. You have a boyfriend."

"I'm not going all girly on him. I ordered drinks."

"And batted your eyelashes, and leaned forward so he could see down your shirt, and practically jumped into his pants."

"I did not."

We didn't talk much during the meal. She sulked on her side of the booth, and I sat in jealous judgment on mine. You could have built a wall between us and neither of us would have noticed.

After paying for our food, we walked silently to the car. The doors were all unlocked, though her guitar was lying on the backseat. She's always been too trusting of people.

"I didn't mean it," I said. It was as close to an apology as she was going to get from me.

"What?"

"What I said about you and the waiter."

She didn't say anything back, but I knew I was forgiven. She lit another cigarette and passed it over to me. I inhaled deeply and returned it to her outstretched hand. That was the rule: one drag per cigarette. She didn't want to feel like she was corrupting me.

"Does your mom know you smoke?" she asked.

"I'm sure she does, but she never says anything."

"I'm surprised she hasn't called me to chew me out about it."

"She doesn't hate you," I said.

"She doesn't like me either." She was right. My mom called her a "bad influence." She thought if I hung out with her too often, I'd drop out of high school to pursue a career in music.

She turned the music up again and faded into her thoughts.

I saw it first. It wasn't a big deer, but it was big enough. She hit the brakes, but we were going just a little too fast to miss it. We hit it right across the flank.

It amazed me how calm my sister was until we finally stopped. She never lost control of the car. She got us to the side of the road, put the car in park, and collapsed on the steering wheel crying.

I'd never seen my sister cry. Not even at Dad's funeral. I didn't know what to do at first. Usually she's the strong one. Usually it's me crying on her shoulder.

"I've never killed anything before," she managed to whisper between sobs.

I pulled her over to me and let thirteen years of tears soak through my sweater.

Brett Ralph

Great Horned Visitation

For a long time, I close my eyes
And listen for its call

For others calling back in kind
Across equivocal distance

A sound so deep it just might be
Clinging to my curtain

So deep I shiver as I did
That time I watched a red-tail hawk

Beneath a neighbor's tree, slowly
Disembowel a dove

Because I need to see the thing
I snatch the flashlight by my bed

Inched to porch's edge, I shine
My light among the limbs

I pad barefoot in wet grass
'Til I've crept underneath the pine

Right outside my room—I glimpse
Barred wings wider than wings should be

A sound like breath expiring
In a private sigh—and once

from a roadside ditch, a ghostly blur
rose and crossed my hood to glance

without a sound against my windshield
In the weeds I found it easily

I held it, unmarred
And mollified, so tiny in my hands

I know what it's called, but what are we
That such exquisite creatures have to die

Before they'll let us touch them

Chris Tiahrt

Without

This is a day without dance.
It is the belly of a hungry wolf,
the empty caw of a lone crow.
It trudges on heavy feet beside the bed,
floods all space in grey light,
drags just enough cold to soak bones,
but not to tickle noses or perk ears.
It is a day that hides hope 'til the morrow.

This is an arm on a day without dance.
Fingers curl, flex, furl—a fist!
but no passion to raise it.
This arm might hold a hammer,
a pen, a basket, a baby. But today,
it bears a shovel for a dead bunny;
it aches from the weight of grey light,
and waits for the danceless night.

Courtney Campbell

Mother's Heart/Stopwatch

I used to carry in the groceries
and sit on the floor,
and sometimes Heather would blow spit bubbles,
holding them on the tip of her tongue
until they popped.
Of course mother would proceed to cringe,
and usually drop the carrots
and go screaming
about how she was glad they weren't eggs.

Except mother never screamed.

She'd stare at the vegetables on the floor
and stare at my sister,
and the vegetables and my sister,
and wait for father to pick up a remote
and chuck it at the wall.

And sometimes it changed the channel,
and sometimes it didn't.

Then we'd scurry in machine-like efficiency
and wrap the chicken in plastic
and tuck the vegetables in their vegetable drawers.
Sometimes I'd wrap my sister in foil
and she'd stand on the counter and wait
for the aliens to come.
But father had strict rules
about feet on the counter,
so she'd sit instead,
and stare at the kitchen tiles
and mumble to me about how one day
she'd take all the light bulbs out
and set them up for the aliens to land.

She really believed in them then,
so I didn't have the heart to tell her

that the light bulbs wouldn't work without a current,
without something to attach them
to an outlet
and back out to the electrical lines.

We'd stare at the empty grocery bags on the floor,
but I was still too young
to worry that they weren't paper.
So, we'd put them over our mouths
and blow
convinced they'd become balloons
if we tried hard enough.
And we'd laugh,
and point at how blue our faces
turned.

But mother would always come in
raving mad
and ruin our fun,
rip the bags from our heads
and stare at her children
with something like fear in her eyes.

Cat Wethington

Scream

To stand on the fire escape, Paulie first has to remove ginger ale cans lined atop the lower window sash. He then detaches the board screwed into the upper frame. Jerry rigged this to keep drunks from climbing in.

Paulie watches his brother cross the street, weaving through stalled traffic. Antelope. Lately, when he writes, Paulie identifies his characters with animals. His father is a bear, his mother a parrot, his sister a wolverine. Jerry must be something quick, something whose only defense is flight. As he steps in front of it, a car inches forward, and Jerry smacks the hood. He pivots and walks backward mouthing to the driver, a woman with eyes locked forward, windows up, doors probably locked. There's a fury in him that used to not be there.

An hour later, Paulie is sitting on the bed, flicking ashes onto a saucer. Jerry doesn't own an ashtray. He doesn't own anything, not even the art books he once cherished. He has dumped each drawer in his bedroom onto the bed, picked up each item and tossed it back in. Now he's starting over. Paulie has watched their mother execute the same procedure, searching for some small thing she can never find. "What're you looking for?" he asks.

"Cufflinks," Jerry says. "Those cufflinks Diane gave me. I told Matt he could borrow them."

"Diane ever call you?"

"Yeah."

"You guys okay now?"

Jerry glances at him, then half-shrugs. "Sure. We're fine."

Paulie knows his sister and brother will never be like they were. You can't unsay words, even words you never meant. You can apologize, but once said, the words are there. They hover like phantoms between people.

"Maybe they're in the kitchen," Paulie says, thinking maybe Jerry pawned them and doesn't remember.

"Why would they be in the kitchen?"

"I don't know. Things have a way of migrating. Maybe that's where you took them off last time you wore them."

Jerry scoops up letters, condoms, play bills, ticket stubs, half-squeezed tubes of ointment, a cheap silver cross on a broken chain and all those other little things Paulie would have tossed long ago. He dumps it all into the drawer and disappears into the next room. Paulie gathers the things he missed, replaces the drawer in the dresser, then resettles on the bed.

The apartment is gloomy. There are no pictures or curtains. Dirt-colored walls are marred by puckering drywall seams, discolorations and a zillion nail holes for which Paulie can divine no purpose. Overhead, a crack runs like a river from the window to a bare light fixture that hangs askew as if it's been knocked around a few times. A water stain outlines the crack-markings on a map describing an alluvial plain, now dried up because the water's gone. He hopes. The air conditioner is running—a concession to his visit, Paulie figures. It's an old model and not very effective,

but that's fine. What he minds is the constant noise—the incessant hum and the little clicking adjustments it makes every few minutes. And it blocks light this room desperately needs. Even seeing him here, Paulie can't imagine Jerry living here.

Jerry returns with a drawer and dumps it.

"Have you even priced other places?" Paulie asks.

"Took me three months to find this place. And it doesn't matter. I'm not taking money from you."

"Think of it as a loan. Pay me back when you're rich and famous."

"I'll be too busy paying back David and Ryan. Anyway, what am I supposed to do next month?"

Paulie lights a fresh cigarette from his first. They've been brothers twenty-five years, but their relationship is new, six...seven months old. He'd like to razz Jerry but thinks better of it. Their dad used to say, "Don't borrow from friends. You can't lose your family," but... Turns out that's a lie. He stubs out the old smoke. "Come home then."

"And do what? Work for Dad?"

"Hatfield," Paulie says. "Said he'd be glad to take you on."

"I'm not a finish carpenter."

"He thinks you're trainable."

"Hell, if I wanted to be a carpenter, I'd have just stayed home in the first place."

"Not forever, Jer. Just 'til you get on your feet."

"I'm on my feet. Anyway, I'm sure that'd work out great. Those guys work the *n* word into every other sentence. I'm sure they don't know that *q* word."

"Jim's not gonna let guys razz you."

"What'm I supposed to do? Run crying to my boss, 'Somebody's hurt my feelings'?"

"Tell *me*."

"Not running to my brother, either. What're you going to do about it, anyway?" He tosses a bouquet of candles then swipes at debris on the sheet. "They'd still be thinking it. You can crack their skulls open, it won't change them. You can't change anybody. So what's the point?" He carries the drawer into the kitchen.

What does anyone care what someone else thinks? By Paulie's calculation, what any person thinks is about 90% wrong to begin with. And that shoots up to 98% when you're nosing into business that ain't your own. Jerry's right that you can't change an idiot's mind, but who wants to. Just shut them up is all.

Jerry dumps another drawer.

"Then get a job in Cincinnati."

"What? Bartending?"

"There're other jobs. There's the museum. Galleries. Don't they have a theater group?"

"They have all those things in New York. You see me working at any of them?"

"Any job. It'd be temporary. Just 'til you get some money saved up."

Jerry rattles a film cannister, peers into it, then drops it in the drawer.

"You don't have to make much," Paulie says. "Cincinnati's not that far. You could still live with me. Commute. Put away about everything you make."

Jerry draws himself up and fixes him with a stare every bit as potent and impenetrable as their dad's. "Why? The real reason. Why are you trying to get me back home?"

Paulie taps his smoke on the saucer's rim then takes a long drag. "I worry about you."

Jerry squats and sorts through little hardware bits—nuts and things—collecting them in his palm.

"Peggy says you seem depressed a lot of the time."

"I'm not depressed," Jerry says. "And anyway, what would Peggy know about it? I hardly ever see her anymore."

"You don't?"

"She's got this thing going with David. Supposed to be some big secret. Like I'm blind. Like I care." He sighs and glances at Paulie. "I'm too cranky. Maybe she just doesn't like me anymore. I don't know. She won't tell me anything. Just says everything's fine. When I know damned well it's not."

She looked pregnant when Paulie saw her. Maybe she has some reason for not wanting to tell Jerry.

"I'm not depressed." Jerry stands. Bolts, nuts, nails, washers and screws pour like a hard rain from the tips of his fingers. "Just a little ticked off. I'll deal with it."

"It's not just that."

"What?"

Paulie scratches his cheek. He's about three hours past needing a shave. Staring toward the window, he sucks on his cigarette then forces himself to make and hold eye-contact.

"You want to talk about my sex-life, Paulie?"

Paulie responds through smoke, "Keep it clinical."

The screwdriver and wrench land together in the drawer. "Well, clinically speaking, you're going to die of lung cancer before I contract AIDS. I thought you quit those things."

"Did. Twice. Quit again when I get home."

"Why not now?"

Because then there'll be two cranky-ass Molinas in this room. Paulie takes one last draw then snuffs out the cigarette.

"I'm not depressed," Jerry says. "Furious. Furious is what I am." A hammer clanks atop the wrench, and all the little metal things jump. "They're supposed to love me. That's their job. You have kids, that's the deal." He takes a deep breath. "You remember that dog the Greene's had?"

"Bono? The German shepherd?"

"Yeah. Had it about six months then found out it had that problem with his nose."

The dog needed a six-hundred-dollar operation. The breeder offered to give them a new puppy and take Bono back, have him put down. The Greenes were indignant.

"I expected that much. What you'd give a dog. I knew it'd be hard, but I figured after a month or two, they'd say, 'Oh, well, too late now. We already

love the damned thing. '" He slams a corkscrew on top of the tools. "Where do they get off! Twenty-five years, and they can't even talk to me? Can't even answer the goddamned phone?" He stands silent a moment then walks out.

Paulie gathers the stuff off the bed and pitches it in with the tools. He carries the drawer into the kitchen and slides it into place. He squeezes his brother's shoulder then sits adjacent.

Jerry is sitting with his thumbs hooked under his chin, his palms together in front of his face. "I'm so angry," he says. He lowers his hands and flattens his palms against the vinyl tablecloth. "If I could get them to answer the phone, I'd say everything I hope I never say to them."

Paulie reaches for his cigarettes but then tosses them on the table with the lighter on top.

Jerry slumps back, and his hands slide into his lap. "If I start screaming right now," he says, "I won't ever stop."

Outside, across the street, a young man stands on the fire escape yelling to someone below. Five floors up, Paulie wonders if anyone can hear him.

Joe Survant

The Attraction of Opposites

Arms reach out
from vines.
Human lips
belly, breasts
among the leaves.
Only the thighs
recede into stalk,
flesh fibrous and brown.
Despite fear
he embraces
hair, shoulders,
forgets the wooden husk
flourishing strangely
on the forest floor.

Once joined,
arms become vines,
fingers sprout.
The embrace hardens
lips to lips,
vine to vine.
Eyes go blank
with the rich red
taste of wine.

Clayton Galloway

The One That Didn't Get Away

Napping in the swing on the sun porch at the back of the house, I dangled my feet off one side and shielded my face from the afternoon sun with the crook of my left arm. Thanksgiving dinner sat heavily in my stomach, and a gentle breeze rocked me as a mother rocks her baby.

Gradually I sensed that I wasn't alone on the porch; I shammed sleep and waited, fighting an urge to be pissed for being disturbed from my nap.

"Is Daddy asleep, Mommy?" Kayla, my four year old angel, whispered.

"I think so, baby," Sara said. Kayla giggled, thrilled with the anticipation of mischief. "Be quiet, or you'll wake him up!" Sara said.

"What are you ladies up to?" I asked, turning to see Sara smiling at me behind her digital camera and Kayla peeking out from behind her mother's legs, covering her mouth with both hands to stifle her giggles.

The flash of the camera blinded me; red and yellow dots ran across the back of my eyelids as I lay with my eyes closed and waited to regain my sight.

"As soon as I can see you, I'm coming to get you, Kayla!" I said.

Kayla shrieked with delight and ran from the porch, her blond pigtails flashing briefly in the sunlight before she disappeared through the doorway.

Sara stood next to the swing and reached for my hand; as our fingers entwined, she smiled and studied my face, trying to gauge my irritation. I felt my anger break under the steady gaze of her blue eyes, and I returned her smile.

"Don't be mad, sleepyhead," she said. She squatted next to the swing and pressed her lips firmly against mine. Her perfume filled my nose, and her brown, shoulder-length hair fell across my face. The warmth of her hand and lips roused me completely from my nap.

"I'm not mad," I said. I stroked one of her freckled cheeks with the back of my free hand. "But we're going to delete that picture you just took."

"Are we now?" she asked. She kissed me again and stood. "By the way, I think Scott wants your help."

"Your brother? He doesn't even like me," I said. "What does he want?"

"He likes everyone when he's drinking," she said. "He said he'll be up to get you in a bit, so I thought I'd better wake you." She turned in the doorway as she left the porch and blew a kiss. "Be nice," she warned.

I sat up on the swing and ran a hand across my scruffy face as I yawned and reached for my pack of Camels. I lit up and inhaled deeply, and then I turned and looked through the window screen. The back yard ran down a hill and ended in a clearing next to a pond, and several of Sara's nieces and nephews were playing tag. I spotted Kayla's head bobbing through the crowd as she tried to catch the older kids. Absorbed in their game, I didn't hear Scott enter the porch.

"There you are, you lazy bastard!" Scott said.

I shifted to face my wife's only brother. His curly, black hair jutted beneath a tattered NASCAR cap, and his full, grizzly beard glistened around his mouth from tobacco spit. His jeans were faded and ripped in

several places, and his hands and clothes—including a nice Metallica t-shirt—were stained with what appeared to be blood. He swayed slightly as he stared at me with what appeared to be contempt.

"Hey, man, what's happening?" I asked.

"What the hell you think? I been down there dressing deer all morning while everybody's been eating and sleeping," he said. "Dad helped with the first two, now it's your turn."

"My turn for what?" I asked.

"Your turn to get your ass down there and help!" he said. "Come on."

"Scott, I've never even hunted, much less any of that shit," I said. "Besides, I don't like to get my hands dirty. You should know that, as much as you like to make fun of it."

"Well, you could at least be sociable," he said. He left the porch and paused in the kitchen to grab a couple of beers from the refrigerator. "Come on, man," he yelled over his shoulder, and he walked through the kitchen and out the garage door.

I pulled my boots on and walked to the bar in the kitchen. As I poured a stiff Crown and Sprite, I could hear Sara's dad in the living room recounting the glory of the morning's hunt for whoever cared to listen. I finished my drink in three gulps and poured another, then I lit another smoke and headed to the back yard.

As I squinted in the sunlight, I noticed Scott's battered green Dodge squatting in the yard. A leaking water hose lay on the ground near the open tailgate, where stacks of white butcher paper and rolls of clear tape were lined up. The muddy earth sucked at my boot heels as I walked to the passenger side of the truck. Blood covered everything: the bed and side of the truck, the spare tire in the bed, even the hose. Its coppery scent tingled my nose.

Scott was hunkered in the bed of the truck beside a deer carcass that lay beneath the back window against the cab. He glanced up when he heard my approach. "Decided to help after all, huh?" he asked.

"Nah, just being sociable," I said, hoping he might postpone the cleaning until he could get help from someone else.

"Suit yourself," he said. To my dismay, he grabbed the forelegs and pulled them over the side of the bed. He jumped down beside me and tried to yank the animal out of the bed. Its head lolled against the side, blood trickling from its nose and mouth. I avoided its eyes.

Realizing the deer was too heavy for him to pull over the side by himself, he stopped and stared at me, but I drew on my cigarette and made no move to help him. "God damn it," he muttered as he climbed back onto the bed. He grasped its hind legs and with enormous effort threw them over the side, causing the deer to flip through the air and thud to the ground with a sickening wet smack. He jumped down beside it and dragged it to a porch post. His careless handling of the animal turned my stomach.

Because the house sat atop a hill, the back porch extended several feet above us. A thick chain wrapped around one of the corner posts of the porch, and both ends, a hook on each one, dangled near my head.

Scott used a blood-rusted knife to make slits between the bones of both hind legs. Then he said, "I'll lift her up, and you put the hooks in."

Before I could protest, he heaved her in the air, his neck and arm muscles bulging, his face turning red. Fighting nausea, I grabbed the right hook and the deer's left hind leg. Her hide was soft, but her joints had stiffened. I struggled with the hook, partly because I was helping to hold her up, partly because the leg was so rigid, and partly because I didn't want any part of her to touch my clothes. I finally managed to secure the leg, and I hurried to the other side to hook her right leg. When I was finished, she hung upside down with her back to us, her nose just touching the ground. I was disgusted; a small smear of blood marked my right hand.

I stood back as Scott sprayed the deer. Bloody water gushed from her empty chest cavity where they had gutted her in the field. The stench was overpowering; I leaned against a tree, closed my eyes, and held my breath for several seconds until I was sure I could keep my lunch down.

Next, Scott cut around both hind legs, preparing incisions that he could slip his fingers into. He then began to skin her, cutting fat when necessary. As he pulled the skin, separating it from the muscle and fat, each jerk of his arms sounded like ripping Velcro soaked in baby oil. The chain rattled against the post as he worked, and the deer's nose drew lines in the mud. After several cuts and hard yanks, he had the skin bunched around her head like a sweater that wouldn't come off. I could see the holes and torn muscle in her flank where the buckshot had caught her.

Scott turned to me and offered the knife. I would have run from him if my legs hadn't been weak and shaky. The whiskey I had drunk wasn't helping to calm my nerves or prevent the nausea that threatened to overwhelm me.

"You ready to have some fun?" he asked. He didn't try to mask the mockery in his eyes. "It's time to cut her up."

"No, thanks," I managed through a forced smile.

"Well, how the hell you ever gonna learn?" he asked.

"I'm not," I said.

Sara and the kids appeared over the crest of the hill; Sara trudged behind them, winded from playing tag and climbing the hill. I didn't want Kayla to see the carnage; luckily the truck blocked most of her view. I hurried around the truck and called her to me; she bounced across the yard and jumped into my open arms. I spun around with her and stopped so that she had her back to the mess.

"Are you having fun, sweetheart?" I asked, tickling her cheek with my stubble.

Kayla laughed and squirmed against my chest. "Yeah, Mommy has been chasing us!"

"Did you let her catch you?" I asked.

"No, she was too fast!"

I hugged my daughter close as my wife approached. "Those brats have worn me out!"

"Honey, you should take Kayla inside for a while," I said.

"No, Daddy, I wanna play outside!" Kayla said.

"Why?" Sara asked. "It's warm out here. She'll be okay."

"Please, just take her inside," I said. "Don't go through the garage; walk her around the side of the house."

Sara glanced toward the garage and noticed the deer hanging from the porch. "Come on, baby," she said as she accepted Kayla from my arms.

"You can come back out later."

"No, it's not fair!" Kayla cried. "Who am I gonna play with?"

"I'll play with you, honey," Sara said.

I followed them until we reached the corner of the house, and I kissed them before they disappeared around the corner. I walked back through the mud and stopped in front of Scott who was sprawled in a lawn chair watching our exchange as he took a beer break.

"That's fucking sad, man," he said.

"Fuck you. She's *my* daughter," I said.

Scott jumped to his feet and staggered a couple of steps in my direction. "Yeah? Well, she's my fucking niece!" he said. "You're a smartass, you know that?"

"I don't give a fuck what you think, Scott," I said. "Now, do you want me to help you finish, or not?"

My question caught him off guard as I had intended; most of the boys were within earshot by now, and they were gathering under the porch to watch. Under different circumstances, I would have welcomed an opportunity to kick his ass, but because he was drunk and wielding a hunting knife, I didn't want to roll in the mud with him, especially in front of the kids.

Scott drained his beer and threw the can toward his truck bed; he missed by a foot or two. "You want to help now?" he asked.

I closed the gap between us and extended my hand. "Give me the knife," I said.

He searched my face for a moment, possibly trying to decide if I was going to use the knife on the deer or him. He shrugged and pushed the handle against my palm. "All right, let's see what you can do," he said.

I advanced on the carcass and gathered my courage. "Tell me what to do," I said.

Under Scott's supervision, I stripped most of the meat from her hind quarters and flanks. Trying to not think too much about what I was doing, I focused on Scott's voice and guided my hands as he instructed me in cutting strips and slabs of various lengths and sizes. I had handled raw meat before—ground beef, steaks, etc.—and I told myself this was no different. By the end, my arms trembled with exhaustion from all of the cutting and pulling, my fingers ached from my death grip on the knife, and blood crusted on my hands and beneath my fingernails.

After we had wrapped the doe's meat, we dislodged the hooks from her legs and dragged the rest of her body down the hill. Swinging her between us, we discarded her remains in a small thatch of woods near the pond.

"Damn it, man, if I didn't know better, I'd say you enjoyed it," Scott said. "You did a fine job."

"Thanks," I said. "You need anything else?"

"No, you've done plenty," he said. "I'll clean up the rest."

I walked up the hill and stopped at the hose to wash some of the blood from my hands; inside the house, I scrubbed them vigorously with dish soap and hot water.

Sara walked up behind me and wrapped her arms around my waist. "You okay, babe?"

"No, I don't think I am," I said. "Where's Kayla?"

"She's taking a nap," she said. "You want a drink?"

"I *need* a drink," I said. "And we're doing Thanksgiving with *my* family next year."

Cheston Hoover

To Live Is To Die

My daughter's feet
prance up and
down
like a clumsy
colt, gaining speed
from the living room
to the kitchen,
accelerating with an
anxious grin,
until she
plunks forward.

Granddaddy grasps the edges
of the couch and
steadies his gait into
the kitchen—knuckles
white and fingers curled
under the table's edge,
ignoring the cane
on the couch.

One year old, she
exudes energy
from each pore
as step after
step
she grasps for the ottoman,
loses her balance,
falls on her beach ball
stands
and reaches for things
she can never grasp.

At 91 only a few things
scare him—hospital linens
and tubes and nurses that
wipe asses and poke skin.
Like a pugilist in the ninth
he falls,
his hand missing the couch,
the ceiling fan blades
spinning a ten count.

Tears roll from her eyes, and
a goose-egg swells on her forehead.

The corner cabinet hurts
and she clings to her mother,
comforted by wild strains of sweater
hair that tickle her nose.
Pain is too quickly entering
her world, and Momma and Daddy
cannot protect her from every fall,
but persistence is paramount in her
sensory quest.

Dizzyheaded he sits in his chair,
lights his pipe, sore
and nauseous. Humphrey Bogart
talks to him through a black
and white screen, and
by next spring he knows he
will be no more. Like dust
he yearns to hover
and fall to the fields
with dignity and solitude,
quietly stepping into peace.

Energetic and fearless, her
rowdy footsteps slap the
hardwood floor,
out of control,
avoiding the bedtime
chase, eternity
embracing her
like a blanket.

Alison Baumann

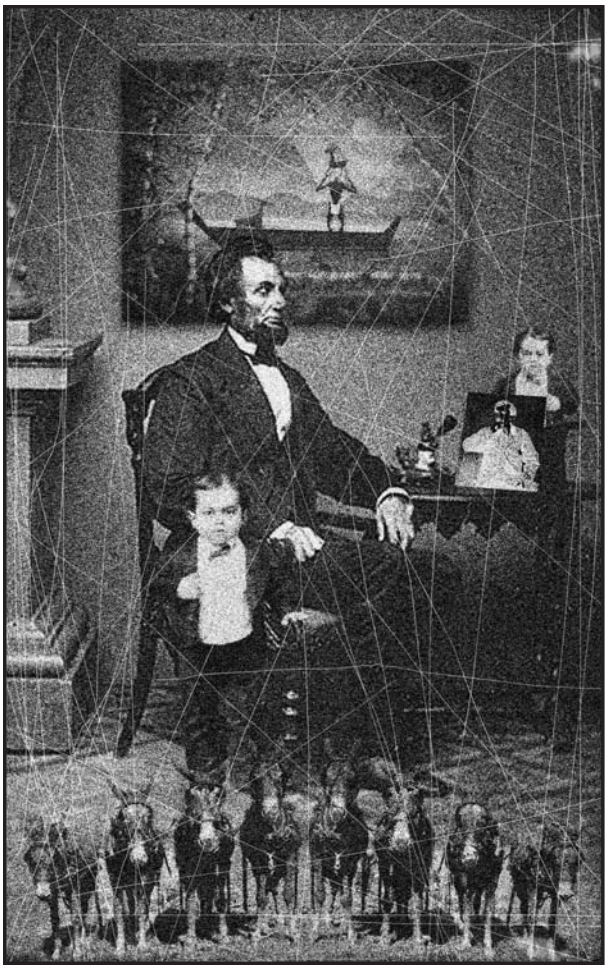
What I Do

The poets grow old and write
about nothing but dying. And I—

in the long dusk of solstice I kneel
tucking frail slips of lambs ear

into the toe of the slope—
my back rounded to the sky
like a stone.

Thinnest Hours



"Oh, I give him nine kinds of hell, but he ain't ever listened. Ain't ever going to listen, to talk anyway."
Todd Autry, p. 83

" Baby Jesus' robe was stained with nicotine...his crown lost in a move...but for years this pathetic piece of broken porcelain held my attention as my parents destroyed themselves. "
Sagan Sette, p. 85

Brent Fisk

The Missing Girl

Seconds pulse deep in the wrist,
snare drum of the hours, your face mummified,
a phone's silence abrasive as wind-blown sand.

Volunteers probe dumpsters behind schools
and sinkholes where farmers scrape away
the bones of fallen cattle, the old washtubs
pierced by light.

Neighbors tack flyers to phone poles,
snapshots of a girl with waifish hair.
Tell us what she wore when last you saw her.
Tell us what you used to call her.

The deals with God are yours to keep,
but what of those pleas in the thinnest hours,
windows black to the world? The devil tries to strike
his bargain, that eavesdropper, his inbred
sort of hope, dark hummingbird
deep in the throat.

The tight bed, the dry and clutching sheet,
the mind restless in a closed off room.
You call to your daughter from the fuzz of sleep.
The rush of cars on a busy road,
a digging in the underbrush, breathing shallow
as a grave, a stray dog licks your hand in dreams.
Your daughter's name like a nest-fallen egg on the walk.
You wake to the storm windows rattling, uneasy
quiet, the light rising in the east
soft and wrong.

Jason Chaffin

Something Special (Something Awful)

***

Here is a portrait of something special. Here is a portrait of something awful.

***

"Sing me a song!" the little girl said. Her voice had a squeal to it that was almost cartoonish. Even her clothes, a blue-and-white little milkmaid getup, were so bright that they seemed to blur with their surroundings. When she moved, skipped, a haze followed like fumes.

Everything today was pastel, dreamlike. The little girl froliced around a single apple tree atop an impossibly pointy hill. The sky seemed made up of lush waves, with a thickly textured sun as if God had hired Van Gogh for the job.

If bluebirds brought her ribbons and bunnies thumped to her, it wouldn't come as a surprise. If deer came to say hello, if doves migrated across the state in the middle of winter, it wouldn't be a shock.

Could her cheeks be any more cherry? Could her violet pigtails be any more symmetrical? Her clothes miraculously devoid of sweat, grass stains, and wrinkles?

"Sing me a song!" she squealed again, twirling around the tree. "Seraphim!" Then she stopped and, huffing, threw her arms up. "Seraphim! To me!"

The tree quivered. Leaves flaked off the canopy against an oily white sky and changed into butterflies that soon fluttered to this portrait's vanishing point. Apples fell in droves and splattered like tomatoes when they hit the ground. A branch snapped, a shout followed, and thunk crunch snap, limb after limb, a man in a crisp vanilla ice cream suit plummeted to the ground. When he landed, the back of his head smacked a jutting root. He groaned and massaged his skull, his bright red face wincing as he lay there.

The Polychrome Girl stood over him and tapped her feet impatiently on the grass. She crossed her arms and scowled. "You *fell*," she said. "You weren't supposed to fall, Dad. Angels don't *fall*."

"On the contrary," the man in white said, hissing as he rubbed his noggin. "I happen to know quite a few who did."

She stomped her foot in the grass and pointed back up at the tree. "Get back up there! You *have* to reach the top, Dad! For Eden's sake!"

"I know, I know! Methinks this tree is off kilter!" Then he stood, towering over his daughter. He stopped rubbing his head and proceeded to brush himself off. "It's obvious this tree is a falsification! It's evil and we must avoid it at all costs! With shouts!"

"*The evil tree will die!*" the Polychrome Girl said, spitting. "Stay here while—"

"Angel, no!" he interrupted.

"Yes!" the girl insisted. "Stay here while I climb to the top of this tree and proclaim my dominican!"

"Dominance, love," the seraphim said as he stood. The little girl jumped and grabbed the first branch, pulled herself up, and within seconds, weaved through the multitude of limbs.

Branches snapped and leaves rustled. The seraphim watched as her ascension came to a halt—the Polychrome Girl, a multi-colored beacon resting amid streaks of brown and splotches of green.

Inside his suit pocket, his phone vibrated. He ignored it, and cursed himself for not turning it off before they set out for this hill. It was Friday, and he was out of the office on Fridays. His patients knew not to call on his days off, but that didn't stop them.

The phone vibrated again in his pocket. Annoyed, he pulled it out to see who it was.

Andy, he thought. Rolling his eyes, he flipped the phone open. "Hello, Andrew."

"She left me." Andy's voice was rigid. "She really did it this time."

"And you're upset," the seraphim said. With the tip of his bright white shoe, he drew lines in the grass.

"Of course I'm upset! I loved her! *She was supposed to love me back*!" Andy's breathing escalated, and the seraphim wondered if this time he'd hyperventilate again. The irritated part of him prayed *Yes! Yes! Yes!* while the more calm, professional aspect of him tried to gather sympathy for the sad sack. Instead, he appeased the dichotomies in his weary mind by wiping his face, pretending that the motion would somehow translate over the phone and Andrew Holbrook would just *go away and move on, or go away and die.*

Or, if not die, if not move on, then find another shrink.

"Two weeks," the seraphim said. "Andrew, you've only been together two weeks. We've discussed this before. No one is ever in love in two weeks. It's purely idealistic."

"Two years!" Andy countered in a trembling voice.

"No, you were *friends* for two years. *Co-workers*, Andy. Evelyn was your associate. We've had this discussion! Why are you calling me on my day off?"

"Then why'd she say we were something special?" Andy asked.

"Don't friends sometimes say that?"

"Cocktease." Andy's voice filtered through static. "That's not fair. She *shared* with me."

"And you with me," the seraphim said. "That doesn't mean we're lovers, Andrew."

"*She said she liked me! I proposed to her!*"

"Ugh." The seraphim started pacing now. In the apple tree, the Polychrome Girl was complaining about the tree's unwillingness to...something. Andy's manic meltdown flooded the rest of her presence from his ear.

"We were going to move in. I bought us a van, some furniture, a blender. I bought a dog. She bought a ferret. We named them together. She dyed her hair for me—"

"Calm down," the seraphim said. "Easy there, Andrew."

"—cooked for each other, met each other's parents, I got a tattoo, made her a video—"

"Andrew, Andrew, Andrew. I need you to stop. Can you do that for me?"

Andy did as he was told. On the other end of the phone, he was gasping for breath.

"Where are you now?" the seraphim asked.

"In Hell," Andy responded.

"I meant physically."

"Hell's doormat."

The seraphim rolled his eyes, wiped his face, and composed himself again. "How old are you, Andrew?"

"Thirty-one."

"When was the last time you had a girlfriend, Andrew?"

"About eight months ago."

"How long did that last, Andrew?"

"Two months."

"And how did that end, Andrew?"

Andrew's breathing cracked on the phone. The seraphim could hear the man grinding his teeth, trying to remain steady.

"Andy," he said, looking up. The sky swirled as though an invisible brush swam through the colors. The sun bulged in the center with a darkening color as though something within was trying to burst through. Then, like an overflowing paint bucket, thick waves of yellow and amber waterfalled the horizon.

From the right, a white dot emerged. Like a comet, it arched across the blue swirls, passed through the sun and, pulling some of the sun's color with it, finished its streak and disappeared. More of the sun dripped now in the direction of the comet, and some of it touched the tree. The combined colors made faint green streaks that gleamed, giving the tree an aura of faded yellow.

The Polychrome Girl voiced her disapproval of this color change and once again moved through the branches. Then she stopped, let out a battle cry, and through a series of *hiyas* and *take thats* and *thises*, took up the task of actually fighting the tree.

The seraphim smiled, wondering when the moment would come that she realized she was in no place to win right now. However, if she wasn't to be the victor, then the armies of the sky may: the amount of colors that had smeared onto the tree made it look like globbed confetti over a dim light bulb.

"Dr. Raw?" Andy asked. "Sheridan? You there? Hello?"

"Yes, Andy," the seraphim said. "Listen. We went over this. You have to let a relationship grow. You have to stop assuming. *Like* and *love* are a bit different. Listen to what you just told me, Andy. You bought this, set up this, you did that...but what did *she* do? What, are you trying to buy her? That makes her seem like a prostitute, Andy." *Louse*, he thought.

Andy was silent. His breathing had calmed, but the seraphim could

sense the man's fragile mind wrapping itself around a potential anger streak. *Spoilsport,* he thought.

"Andy," he said. "Have I told you how special you are to me? I'm only saying this because I know you can do it: Leave her alone. Move on. Smoke like crazy."

"What? I don't see—"

"Think of it as a start. Also—"

Behind him, far away, there was a shrill cry mingled with a tumult of snapped twigs. "*Dad*!"

Turning around, he realized to his horror that, while talking to Andrew, he had paced much farther from the tree than he had anticipated.

Something happened—leaves were flying from the top of the tree like birds that had given wing, and there, at the same spot where he fell a while ago, was the Polychrome Girl, motionless, her head lying on the root like it was a pillow.

When he ran up to her, snapping his phone shut, her eyes were closed. Her dress was torn and stained with green and brown splotches. Her left cheek had a scratch, and her hair was scattered.

"Polychrome!" he said, patting her cheek and shaking her gently. She was still breathing, but her eyes failed to open. In his pocket, his phone vibrated again.

"Polychrome! Wake up!"

There was motion behind her eyelids, and to his delight, they fluttered open. She looked to be in a state of shock, and she didn't move. She just lay there, breathing gently, staring. When she spoke, it was just two words. "Tree. Won."

The tree's brightness dimmed. The sky took on a duller shade of blue; the sun backed away. In the seraphim's pocket, the phone vibrated again.

"Polychrome?" he asked, taking her hands in his. "You okay?"

Her expression flickered, and she noticed him. "I fell," she said, matter of factly.

"Aye," he responded. "I told you. Angels fall."

"Tree cheated," she said weakly. "I heard you...talking to it."

"Huh?"

"Saw you...walking away. Holding your ear."

The seraphim's chest felt like it had filled with concrete. His tongue turned to sandpaper, and his head drained of thoughts, filled with fire.

"Yeah," he whispered, shakily. "Tree got me. Right in the ear."

"Took...my protection," the Polychrome Girl whispered. Every word she made caused her to shudder, as though it took the entirety of her physical being to muster sound.

Then he saw blood, leaking from behind her head and darkening the stump. She continued to just lie and breathe, her placid stare broken by the occasional blink. He held her hand, frozen, afraid to lift her for fear of disturbing whatever head wound she had sustained.

In his pocket, the phone vibrated again.

"Seraphim?" she whispered. Her voice was faint.

"I'm here," he said.

"I saw," she said, "Eve's folly. Such a...bad tree...."

"We shoulda left her alone, aye," he said.

She began to speak, but once she drew breath, she trembled. After the convulsion passed, she spoke. This time, there was more strength to her words. Her eyes, however, grew weaker.

"Dad?" she asked.

"Yeah, love?"

"It hurts."

"I know."

"But it's not...*the* hurt, is it?"

"I don't think so," he said. "I think it's just the sleepy hurt. Remember when I told you about that car wreck, and how when it happened, I went to sleep for a couple of hours?"

It wasn't much, but she nodded once, slowly. "Then...if it's sleepy...."

"Yeah?"

"Sing me...a song?"

He swallowed and nodded, wishing that he was a healer of the flesh rather than the psyche. He added, to the mountain of previous moments in his lifespan, another check of anger toward God. Thankfully, the blood had stopped pooling behind her head, and it wasn't as thick as it had originally looked. Still, she was in shock—limp as a sheet, and pale as snow.

Stroking a stray hair out of her face, he began humming. When she closed her eyes, as he knew she would, he started to sing.

"Where is Dessy...? Where is Dessy...?"

"*Here*," the Polychrome Girl whispered, aiming for a pitch but falling short of one. Her squeal filtered through, despite her weakened breath.

"All alone and no one here. Where oh where is my Dessy dear?"

"'*Ere I am*," she whispered.

"*There her is*," the seraphim sang. *"Where oh where could Dessy be?"*

"Right here, right here...can't...you...see...?"

"Right here, right here, in front of me!"

A thin smile formed on her lips. He tried to match it with one of his own, but when his phone vibrated again in his pocket, he grimaced instead.

I hate my job, he thought as the Polychrome Girl shut her eyes. His own began to water.

When the phone stopped vibrating, he pulled it from his pocket and dialed 911.

As he traded information with the operator, tolling bells vibrated from the horizon. Glancing up, it appeared that the sun itself seemed to shimmer. Bright beads of light, like tiny droplets, came down as though shaken off the ball itself. When they landed, illuminating the seraphim and the sleeper, the operator was informing him that help was on the way.

When he finished, he placed the phone back in his pocket (and again, Andy buzzed). Then he placed a gentle kiss on the Polychrome Girl's forehead as she slept. More light came from above, erasing the color of the world. Soon, all the seraphim could see was the girl and the tree.

Help arrived quicker than he'd thought, and he followed the flashing

lights to a place of healing, where people came and went—some busy and angry, others sad or impatient—as though it were a civilization unto its own. By nightfall, they were alone again, in a white room with one door and one window. The Polychrome Girl slept in a box of plastic, and the healers wouldn't tell him why.

He wasn't allowed to touch her, and they wouldn't tell him why.

Days crawled by, and the sun burned through the window like a voyeur. Nights were slower and starless.

He wasn't allowed to hold her, and they wouldn't tell him why.

The food was terrible, and hers was given through a tube shoved down her throat. He had to leave the room when the nurses did this. They wore yellow body suits, and they were rude. Standing outside the door, he heard whimpering. He knew it was her, but the door handle wouldn't turn, no matter how hard he tried, which was odd because there was no lock on it.

When the nurses were finished, and when he had returned to the Polychrome Girl's bedside, she was asleep again. Her face was flushed.

He wasn't allowed to open the plastic box, and they wouldn't tell him why. Not that he could, though—there was only one zipper, and it was secured by a lock. Curiosity led him to test the structural integrity of the plastic, and he pressed in on it as hard as he could.

Three nurses stormed the room as though he had somehow triggered the alarm. It took nearly an hour for him to convince them that he wouldn't touch the plastic again.

It's a prison, he thought. *What kind of hospital is this?*

On the seventh day, the Polychrome Girl woke, but the healers wouldn't let her out of the box. She cried, she pleaded, she fitted. Sheridan tried holding her hand through the plastic.

The silent alarm triggered itself again. The nurses came again.

Yellow gas filled the plastic prison, and the Polychrome Girl choked. She grabbed her tube and ripped it from her throat. Flakes of grit decorated the plastic wall.

She screamed for her daddy. She screamed that she dreamt of the sun, and that it was coming to get her, and that she wanted to go home.

And when they dragged the seraphim out of the room for attacking the healers—knocking one unconscious, breaking another's nose—they wouldn't tell him why. When he broke free of his captors and fled down the hall, weaving around obstacles to get back to the Polychrome Girl, a dozen guards formed a wall in front of her door.

Mace was sprayed. He was hit by clubs. He dodged a taser. But still, they won, and four of the guards carried him away. Two held his arms, and two held his legs.

In a stairwell, one of the guards that held his feet slipped. The seraphim kicked hard, and all five of them stumbled down the steps.

He was the first to get up. He was agile enough to evade their clutches. He managed to find his way back to the Polychrome Girl's room.

The door was locked again, but he kicked and kicked, shouldered and hit, and then with a splintering crack, the lock broke.

He had just begun to open the door when the guards tackled him. His head smacked against the tile floor, and he felt the sensation of something breaking behind his ears. Splintering sounds filled his ears, and strings of light divided his vision as though the world had snapped in two. Fire brewed behind his eyes, and it burned as he tried to focus, see what was going on.

He moaned, "Why?" Then he whispered it as everything went dark.

Far away, he heard a door slam. Again, he heard the sounds of splinters, of more of the world cracking as though it wasn't real but an object breaking apart, its purpose no longer served. In the dark he waited for the cracking to stop, and it did lessen for a moment, just a moment, before rising again. Then it lowered; then it raised. Back and forth.

In pitch. In song. The damn world wasn't breaking apart. It was singing praise from a gullet spread wide.

The seraphim felt something cold and slippery coil around his ankles, like a tentacle. It pulled him across the floor through the singing, splintering emptiness with ease. Soon, the floor ended, and he dangled upside-down at the mercy of the thing that held him.

A tongue, no less.

And down the gullet he went.

***

How easy it is to confuse a sigh; how easy it is to mistake a whimper.
Here is where angels say goodbye; here is where angels fear to tread.

(excerpt from a novel in progress)

Bernd Sauermann

Paper Cut

Paper lately shapes the days in which her absence assumes the voice of the moon and the days in which her absence assumes the voice of the sun giving in to the sea and the voice of lapping waves who titter about light, the way it flits across my ceiling early in the morning, sudden end to the trailing curve of night. It assumes the voice of coffee's steam, voice of the quick songs of blue birds outside my window, voice of the cracked spines of books, of dog-eared pages of magazines dropped beside the bed, and it assumes the shining voice of thighs perfecting lines on sheets, the voice of words spilled like wine to the slender rhythm of hips, the voice of the white scent of fresh paper, the voice of vowels, the voice of the pause at the end of this meager list: sharper now than the edge of the blank page I draw quickly through the crease between my thumb and finger.

Jonathan Mattingly

Happy Travels

Sand swept over the body as the desert wind whispered. Bright crimson blood spurted out of the jagged exit wound in the front of the young Arab's neck. As the seconds wore on, the small geyser subsided into a slow trickle. Small shards of toothed shrapnel embedded in the boy's skin oozed. His eyes stared blankly into the sky; a glaze cloaked his dark brown pupils.

The boy's father, Hamil, lay next to him, sobs wracking his body. His hatred for the American Marines walking beside him grew with each agonizing second. His other two sons breathed heavily on the ground next to him.

Then his younger son cried to Allah as the Marines stood him up and searched him. Fearing the fate of his older brother, the boy desperately tried to hug and kiss the Americans as a sign of his innocence. Finding nothing, the Marines laid the boy back down next to his father.

The father's hatred turned to shame. He had been caught, and now his family was paying the consequences. His job was simple: load as many explosives into his taxi as possible before the patrolling Americans spotted him. Once he had the explosives, he was to deliver them to the insurgents in the city to emplace as roadside bombs. He was a go-between.

Hamil was not new to this mission. The insurgents had often employed him and his taxi to go into this restricted area and gather their deadly materials. He and his sons were paid fifty dollars for each successful trip. He loathed the Americans, but he was no fighter. His old frame could no longer run through the streets with the rest of the revolutionary forces. He would've given anything to be a younger man and purge the infidels from his country. But he was old and a taxi cab driver. His adolescent sons were too young to be combatants, and these deliveries were his only means to fight back at the Americans.

Now his oldest son was dead, and it was his fault. He knew he should've waited until the cover of night to hide his activities. Why had he come in the middle of the day?

Hamil needed money. Ever since the Americans started patrolling the streets of his city, his cab business had declined. Everyone was afraid of the Marines and their guns. The infidels' vehicles ruled the roads, and the locals' daily travel had been disrupted. To support his family and do his share in the fight, Hamil accepted the offers of the local insurgents to go into the abandoned Iraqi Army munitions dump outside of town.

There, old ordnance not used by the military was scattered all over the open desert. A small American force patrolled the area to disrupt looters from stealing the still-live explosives, but a person could slip in and out without being detected.

Hamil had done this on many occasions, becoming a professional at it. He knew how to get in, where to look for the ordnance, and what could be used and what couldn't. He had trained his sons in this work, as well. His family's side business was turning out to be profitable.

Today should've been like every other. Before he and his sons climbed in the taxi that morning, however, a horrible premonition invaded his subconscious.

"Something's not right," he said as his oldest son slumped into the passenger seat.

"Come on, Father, you worry too much," the boy said. "Allah will protect us. We are doing this for Him."

Hamil slid into the driver's seat and placed his hands on the wheel. He cranked the ignition of the old orange and white car that had been his livelihood for many years. Again, though, apprehension pricked his heart.

"Maybe…."

"Father," his son interrupted, "we need the money. Let's go."

Hamil aimed the car to the horizon and sped off. He glanced into the rear view mirror and saw his two youngest sons gazing out of the back windows. He loved their innocence. It was a shame they had grown into teenagers in such chaos. He wanted better for his children, but violence was the world they lived in. There would always be fighting and bloodshed. No one could stop it; the only thing to do was fight back.

After driving through the outskirts of town, Hamil turned down an ancient dirt road that seemed to lead nowhere. After a twenty minute ride down this desolate path, the bombed-out munitions dump came into sight.

"All right, boys, let's make this one quick today."

Hamil recognized some rusty artillery shells resting next to the skeleton of an old bunker. He drove up next to the ordnance and popped open his trunk.

The older son retrieved his father's .45 caliber pistol from the glove box. He smiled to his father. "Just in case."

Hamil abhorred the weapon, but a good Iraqi was an armed Iraqi. It was foolishness to not have some kind of protection. His other sons slipped out of the back seat and jogged to the explosives. Careful not to be bitten by their own work, they loaded the artillery rounds into the trunk one by one. Hamil and his eldest son watched the horizon for any sign of the Americans.

Suddenly, two hazy smudges appeared in the distance. The distinctive drone of diesel engines played into Hamil's ears. He didn't need to see the vehicles to know they were American humvees.

"Boys! Down!" he shrieked.

Oh, Allah. Please don't let them see us, he thought. The drones grew louder. His breathing almost stopped. The engines sounded like they were headed right for them. Panic raced through Hamil's body.

They see us. Oh, Allah. They see us.

"Boys! In the car! Now!"

The family jumped to their feet and rushed into the car, and the trunk flapped open as they careened off.

"Go, Father! Go!"

Hamil noticed his son fumbling with the gun trying to load more ammunition.

"Achmed, throw out that pistol!"

"But, Father…."

"Do it! If they see you with it, they will shoot you on sight!"

The eldest son obeyed his father and chucked it out of the window. Suddenly, explosions ripped around the vehicle.

"Father, they are firing at us!"

More blasts surrounded the vehicle. Hamil knew it was only a matter of time before the Americans scored a direct hit. He rammed his foot on the brakes, slamming his passengers into each other.

"Just do what I do!" he ordered his children. He burst out of his door and extended his hands to the heavens. His trembling legs carried him to the back of the car. His sons followed their father's lead. They congregated by the open trunk and faced their pursuers.

The humvees pulled to within fifty yards of the family. Hamil looked over to his oldest son, Achmed, and observed him clutching his midsection; blood soaked his sweatshirt. He had been hit by one of the explosions.

The Americans had exited their vehicles and were advancing on them. They shouted something in English. Hamil turned his gaze from Achmed to the camouflaged figures; their weapons were pointed directly at him. He did not understand a word, but the armed men's body movements were obvious as they pointed toward the ground.

Hamil and his sons dropped to the earth belly down. The Americans approached slowly. Hamil looked across the sand at Achmed. Their eyes locked.

An American boot broke their stare. In botched Arabic, one of the Marines yelled for them not to move or they would be shot. Hamil watched as Achmed tried to reposition his body off of his wounds. He wanted to scream at the boy not to move, but it was too late.

A shot rang out; Achmed was still. The Americans were shouting to each other in English. Two of them grabbed the boy and flipped him over. Hamil saw blood shoot up from Achmed's neck. He forced his eyes shut from the gore.

Oh, Allah! This is not happening! This is not happening!

Sergeant Johnson walked up to the Marine standing over the body and placed a hand on his shoulder. "You okay, Mattingly?"

"What? Oh, yeah. Yeah. I'm fine," he said. "I didn't find a pistol on him, but when I saw all of that loose ammo laying around him, I could've sworn he was reaching for a gun. Looks like he was just trying to grab his guts."

"They must have ditched it out the car before they stopped. We'll find

it," Johnson said. "You did the right thing, by the way. He might've had the gun. You didn't know, and you did what you were supposed to do. At least these bastards can't blow us up anymore."

"I guess."

"Hey, did you see the bumper sticker on the window of that taxi cab?"

"No. What does it say?"

"The damn thing says 'Happy Travels' on it. Ironic, ain't it?"

Mattingly glanced at the corpse lying at his feet and forced a smile. Then he walked to the taxi and kicked the door hard. Another insurgent dead, another day gone, and another tale to live in his dreams.

Martha Greenwald

Quarterly Meeting: Late Arrival in a Southern City

for Art

The suitcase tows you, an obedient pet;
creaky-wheeled, old black leatherette
companion whose innards tangled in the dim

cargo hold somewhere between here & home.
Faithful, it rallies to shepherd you down
stark airport corridors, infallible though slow.

Governed by halogens, the Hertz lot is a twilit
grove of Bradford pears & just-washed white
sedans. Snow-tree blossoms—the sinuses

remember, inflame. Inside, this week's Taurus
smells of cherry cough drops, french fries, smoke.
From a dream, one month dead, your mother spoke

while you'd drowsed mid-flight, her lips ulcered,
sprouting weeds, these same roadside ochre
stalks whose pollen hovers above the macadam

in eddies. But as a boy, on every December's
car trip south, wasn't this precisely the juncture
that woke you—bare oaks to elms, winter

recedes in the rear window—pines to green palms,
their air sulfurous. Father drives, asleep it seems,
the station wagon set adrift. If you ask mother

for sandwiches, her face glances backward over
the passenger seat, arms amputated as she reaches
down to retrieve bread from the red ice chest.

Richard Taylor

Home Life

Not all Lincoln's civil wars reduced to blue and
gray, nor all his nights to blitheness by the fire.
To certify she was no backwoods tyro, Mary
overspent on crystal, rugs, Limoge, French curtains.
"Flubdubs" Lincoln called them, who scraped to
blanket soldiers in the field. Herself as centerpiece,
she swanked in jewels and flounces so florid, lush,
one looker-on described her as "a garden in motion."
While the band for her grand soiree struck up
"The Mary Lincoln Polka," young Willie lay abed
upstairs, victim of the city's fetid water. Hellcat,
Mrs. President, The Rebel in the White House
she was called, yet she held the man together,
every strand and fiber, as their world unraveled.

Richard Taylor

Assassin

How long Booth had it in for Lincoln isn't clear,
but there were signs and sightings long before
the final act. For months obsession gripped him,
first to kidnap as a bargaining chip to end the war,
then to simply do him in. Off stage and on, the man
was charismatic, a compass whose needle, though
it swung erratic, always targeted north. "He makes
me thrill,"said son Tad, who'd heard and seen him
strut—to whom the actor presented a rose in tribute.
At the inaugural, a close-up of the crowd reveals
a madman in a top hat within spitting distance
of the speaker's stand. His father's middle name
was Brutus, the Roman who killed that other Caesar.

Alison Baumann

The Long Time Before Dying

(A Poem for Two Voices)

And did you know, then, that she was going to die?

They told us, yes, they told us
a long time ago.

It took a long time, did it, the dying?

No, not the dying. The living.
She took a long time to live.

Tell me how it went for her, from living to dying.

I cannot tell you how it was for her.
What she knew. At first, we watched for signs.

And did you find any—signs?

Maybe the way she watched the leaves
that autumn. The last gold of the forsythia
by the drive. As if she knew how cells give way.
She slept so hard, her mouth flung open, the pillow wet
under her cheek. But then—

The first signs were deceptive?

It was the forsythias again. In February,
she was still alive. I cut a handful
of branches and set them in a blue glass vase
on her dresser, beside the bleached sheets.
Every bud unfolded. It was so bright, it hurt your eyes.
She slept hard. She talked to things.

Did she seem to dream, talk in her sleep?

No, she was awake when she talked.
She talked to that swallow and to the dog—
not in the high, silly way you talk to animals
but in the serious way you talk to people.

What swallow?

It was a terrible summer for drought.
The corn shriveled, and beans
hardly set in the fields. There was no harvest
to speak of. We watched a clutch of swallows
nested on the porch beam. One day they were all
squirming in their pink skins and yellow beaks,
then the mother pushed them out over the edge
of the nest, one by one.

And did you question her about this, the talking I mean?

They were closer to the earth, was all she said.
We had to leave the windows open in her room,
even in storms and terrible heat. Pollen
and dust sifted in through the screens
and settled on her face—
first she was pale gold, glowing
against the sheets,
then brown.

Wasn't there someone to bathe her?

It didn't wash off. It settled into her.

So it was fall again when it finally happened?

Nothing happened. It wasn't something
that happened to her. It was something
that she did. By late August, her skin was dark.
She was very thin, but she lay
heavy in her bed, as if she were giving
herself to gravity. One day we sensed
that she had gone over.
We felt she was in a high square room
with old-time music playing.

Are you saying you could hear heavenly music,
the music of the spheres, perhaps?

I wouldn't claim that. I didn't hear a thing.
And I couldn't tell you what she heard or didn't hear.
All I'm saying is she closed her eyes
and went quiet. Sometimes she'd nod, or twitch,
or you'd notice a little smile or a catch in her breath.
We thought she was standing near the entrance door
trying to pick up the beat—

Preparing herself to meet her maker?

I don't know about that. Finally the drought
broke. It was a rainy morning early in October.
She took quick shallow breaths,
like a puppy, or a woman in childbirth,
then she stopped.

You might say at that point she joined the heavenly choir,
she was dancing with the angels?

There are a lot of things you might say.
The leaves on the forsythia began to turn again,
would be another thing.

Rey Ford

The Call

This morning
sun's breath settles
on dust.

No rain
to speak of except
in that negative way

you talk about others
that never call
or stop by anymore.

For days
you sit
by the phone
while the sun
keeps talking
in circles—
warm words seducing
moisture
from the soil.

You wait for clouds
to darken
and that blue white flash
the size of the sky
so you can hear
that sound,
loud as any phone,
more comforting
than any voice.

Todd Autry

Poker Holler

"I'm sick of it, Jean," Rona Blackwood said into the phone. Her four-month-old was cradled in her other arm. "I know he's your brother, but he's my husband."

She wiped the child's nose and walked through the house into the kitchen. "He loses every last cent a money I save. I hide it, and he finds it." She shifted the baby to her other arm and clutched the phone between her shoulder and jaw. Slick with sweat, it slid out and dropped to the floor. She picked it up and placed it back. "Jean, I don't care if all the men around here do it. Decent ones don't. Why can't Harry be one a them?"

Rona paused, listening, and nodded, "Oh, I give him nine kinds a hell, but he ain't ever listened. Ain't ever going to listen, to talk anyway." She pulled a rolling pin from the dishrack.

The baby threw up. "Hold on," Rona said as she wiped the puke away. The baby did it again, and Rona wiped it away again. She went on talking. "It's Gracy…yeah, the same stuff we've all had except Harry. He can't catch nothing because he ain't ever here to catch it. I've had it, Jean."

The baby cried, and Rona shifted it to her shoulder and rubbed its back. A younger child ran into the kitchen and sneezed. Rona wiped the child's nose. "I have to let you go, Jean. These kids."

Harry Blackwood folded his cards. A pair of nines left with no help again. He punched out a cigarette and exhaled smoke that rose and swirled into a cloud around a coal-oil lamp that hung low over the table. From his coveralls he pulled a pint bottle of whiskey. He held the bottle out to the others.
At the far end of the table, Lester Simms shook his head. "Rot gut," he said.

"It's all the man had," Harry said, and he cut the seal with a fingernail. The whiskey went down hard, and Harry inhaled through clenched teeth and whitened lips. It sounded like a whistle. He screwed the cap back and tucked the bottle away. It was his turn to deal.

"Ante up," he said. "Eight-twenty-eight's the game." Harry slid a quarter to the center of the table and leaned into the deal. He ignored the others glaring at him, annoyed by his choosing a "wild game." Cards dealt, he looked up to see Dwight Iler still locked onto him.

"Problem?" Harry asked

"We're playing poker here," Dwight said.

"I need a change."

"Maybe you need to play somewhere else."

"Maybe."

Dwight and Joe split the pot. The ten spade put Harry three over at thirty-one.

"Serves you right," Dwight said.

The deal went to Dwight's brother Roger, who called straight five card, jacks or better to open. Harry folded again.

Against lore, he counted up. Five crumpled dollar bills and another dollar in change. Rona's twenty was still folded neatly in his shirt pocket. He'd found it inside the back cover of the radio, not the first time she'd hid it there.

The door to the shanty opened, and Harry's brother Alan walked in. "Got room for one more I see." He scooted a chair up to the right of Harry. His hand dug into a pocket and came out with a wad of bills and some change. He sat and leaned over to Harry.

"Just talked to Jean. She said Rona's redhot mad."

"Yeah."

"Maybe you ought to go check on her."

"Maybe."

Rona sat at the back door on the phone again. "Jean, it'll be dark soon." She listened. "If you don't come watch these kids, I'm taking them to that holler with me. You want them in it?" Down the hall her children watched TV in the living room. "You think I care if women ain't allowed? I've had it, Jean." She listened. "Ten minutes. If you're not here in ten minutes, we're gone."

She hung up the phone and went to her closet for boots and flashlight. She reached in and saw the stock of Harry's hunting rifle. If he wasn't off to the holler playing cards, he was out hunting. Year round. She grabbed the boots and flashlight.

She glanced at her watch on the way down the hall. "Let's go, kids. Five minutes. Jackets on." In the living room she turned off the TV and picked up the infant. She dressed it, rounded up the other three, and led them outside to the street.

Rona pushed the infant in its stroller and began to sweat. The other kids followed her down the street toward the tracks a block away. A northbound train clamored through town, and the older kids pointed and squeaked. The infant bawled. Rona stopped, and like a hen she gathered her kids around her. She backed away from the train. Behind her a car horn blew. It was Jean.

Harry folded again. There was enough drink and money in his pockets for a few more hands, depending on the cards and his betting. If he didn't rake a pot soon, he would go home to Rona's lashing empty-handed again. It was enough to muddle his head.

He stood. "Be right back." He walked outside where night had fallen. He lit a cigarette. The humidity closed in around him. He looked up, not a cloud in sight and half a moon lighting the woods. The creek that ran close by had dried to a narrow, trickling runnel. He stepped to the bank, unzipped, and relieved himself.

Over the ridge in the next holler a pack of coyotes took up yipping to one another.

Harry thought about his family. His life so far. Never should have married. Never should have got Rona pregnant. Too bad Alan hadn't stayed with her. Too bad Alan got the brains in the family. Maybe so, Harry told himself, but at least he had brains enough to figure the time to move on was coming soon. Real soon. He wasn't a family man. He was a fish out of water, a drifter who couldn't drift, and because of that he was no good for anyone, for sure no good for a family.

He looked up. Even the stars were unmoved. He found the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper right where they always were, stuck.

Rona left the gravel road that ran alongside the tracks below town and started south into the holler toward the tarpapered poker shanty a half mile away. She'd never seen it. Nor had any other woman she knew of. Alan would be there. And Harry. The brothers never did anything lest the other was in. Harry hadn't even courted her until after she and Alan had split up. "Worst years a my life," she mumbled. "Wasted on Blackwood brothers."

The worn path to the shanty snaked through honeysuckle thickets that towered over Rona and took on dark, giant shapes like sentinels guarding the realm of men she was entering. She shined the light up at the vines. They hung like curtains, and their sweet blooms perfumed the night air. The flashlight faded. She tossed it aside and moved on through the heavy night toward her husband.

Her eyes adjusted to moonlight, and she eased her way along, grabbing hold of saplings as she went. The path ran straight across the east side of the wide holler, midway between holler bottom and ridge top, and was pocked by sideholler gullies eroded down to mossy stone that cracked and skinned her ankles as she hobbled ahead.

And then she was there.

She squatted behind a tree and peered at the shanty planted a hundred yards below at the bottom of the holler. She heard voices. Crouching, she moved closer, circling to her left. At twenty yards, she saw hanging crooked by the door a weathered sign with flaked, white letters. NO WOMEN ALLOWED.

Through a window she saw the men laughing. She crept closer. In one way or another she knew them all. None better than Harry, though, who sat grimfaced, holding a cigarette, studying his cards.

Harry folded, smashed out a cigarette and swigged hard on the drink. Joe had them in a game of three card bluff. The pot had been matched so many times it had swelled into the richest of the night. Joe dealt three cards down. Harry swigged again and lit another cigarette. He lifted his cards, two black nines and an eight, then turned up the bottle and drained it empty.

Under the table Alan eased his boot over and tapped Harry's. Harry knew the rare sign. It was a negative one that said, *Don't go, don't bet, don't raise. Don't do what you're about to do.*

"I'll go," Harry said. Alan cleared his throat.

"Count me out," Roger said and folded.

Around the table the others folded in turn until Alan was left. "Guess I'll go."

Harry's eyes widened and he sat up. "Let's see 'em, Brother."

Alan turned up two red queens and a black four. Harry blowholed, and Alan raked the pot. Harry came out with the twenty and tossed it to the middle of the table.

"Is that Rona's?" Alan asked.

Harry nodded.

"Liquor's gone to your head," Alan added.

"She don't need it." Harry started the long process of standing.

"You got change comin' from that twenty, Harry," Joe said.

"You got that right," Harry said. He walked to the door with the bill still on the table. In shadow, the poker shanty lanterns cast him as lanky, stooped and deformed. He looked at his brother. "I'm done," he said and left.

The night was hotter still and sticky. And hard breathing. Harry saw himself as a massive fish slung up out of the river onto the bank, left to suck air and dry to bone. He lit a cigarette and stepped to the creek bank. He was thinking of change when a dull thud at the back of his head crumpled him to the ground.

Harry came to on his back, drymouthed and blinking. His head throbbed. Above him, through a gap in the trees he saw a night sky black as a spade covered with stars that moved. He watched as they darted above him. And then they began to remake their random motion and slowly draw themselves inward toward a central something, an obscure image hovering above. His head inert and leaden, Harry licked his lips and forced his bleary eyes to focus. Spellbound, he watched as the image became a perfect likeness of his wife's face. She floated far away like a fresh-formed, newfound constellation, mesmerizing in its perfection.

Harry reached for the image and was surprised when his fingers touched it. He traced his fingers along the soft lines of the perfect image of his wife's face. He smiled and moved his lips soundlessly, trying to speak to his wife's likeness. He was straining to make a sound when the image quivered and shook and then disappeared. He stretched his hand to find her again, but she was gone.

Annette Allen

Exhibit of Van Gogh in Blues and Greens

An open book *Van Gogh In Farben* on my desk
and across my heart, a memory. A New York
afternoon when I wasn't sure if our love could come
again, I studied the dark blue of Van Gogh's *Iris*.

Piercing stalks of green jutted between, some
had fallen down. A bronzed table caught them,
holding the vase upright as I was held before the paint.

I would faint, I knew. Only these flowers,
the blues in skies, grass, kept me walking
through the exhibit, pain wadded in pockets,
circling my eyes like his stars and moons.

This morning I see color blaze across this page
under a brilliant yellow haze where *The Sower*
spreads life-bursting seeds in whites, greens.

Linda Neal Reising

No. 7 and Other Heroes

My father went to school with Mickey Mantle,
A fact I once used to score points with men.
I wanted them to imagine my father,
Sixteen and sable-haired, winding up,
His biceps bulging like baseballs,
Sailing a pitch across the plate,
Where The Mick waited,
All blondeness, buck-toothed and freckled,
Still shiny, before he drank away his liver—twice.
I hoped to paint an image of dark and light,
And just this once darkness triumphs.
As the ball curves over the bag,
Mickey twists his body,
Forces the swing, too filled with his need to leave
These chatpiles, to escape Oklahoma,
To become *The Commerce Comet*,
Blazing his way across sports page headlines.
He waits for the smack of leather on wood,
But hears, instead, Mr. Mustain, principal/ump,
Yelling, "Strike three!"
And for once, my father is the winner.

My father went to school with Mickey Mantle,
But he did not play baseball.
At nine, when Mantle was just learning to hit,
My father stood hunched over a cobbler's bench,
Like a dark elf in a children's book,
Hammering home nails into boot soles.
At twelve, when Mickey was playing catch
In a neighbor's backyard, my father was tossing
Freight into boxcars at the rail yard.
At fourteen, while the Mick was already practicing his autograph,
Dad hauled bricks in a wheelbarrow,
Watching as the mason sculpted the mortar
With flicking wrist, teaching my father his signature.

And while my father stood on an army base
In God-forsaken, Alabama, holding his breath
As a sergeant barked the names
Of those who would enter the arena in Korea,
Teams of young men who would sacrifice,
Whose names would be forgotten
Because they were not baseball heroes,
Number 7, exempt from one draft,
Pumped his "bad" leg around major league bases,
Came in sliding, and made it home safe.

Sagan Sette

Resident Evil

Sometimes people ask me about my life. I have an infinite number of anecdotes and comedy bits. I have stories and good memories. But the first nine years of my life aren't so funny. My parents fought a lot. No. I guess I should say my dad knocked my mom around a lot.

My dad was a military man, and there were only two constants in our nomadic lifestyle. My parents would fight, and there would be Catholic memorabilia in every room of the house. And nearly everyday of my life was affected by these things.

My mom had this nasty habit of provoking my dad. If she saw that he was getting tense, she would do something to set him off. I used to think my mom was a bitch. That she deserved what she got half the time. I now know my mom was "taking one for the team." Every time Dad hit her it was one less time he hit my brother or me.

So, we'd be at breakfast and inevitably something would be said or something would spill or a telemarketer would call, and my dad would get tense. Then Mom would ask for money. Or say she was going out for the day. Or ask him to do the dishes. And Dad would attack. They would start arguing and then cursing. They would scream and throw food and silverware, and I would go to the front door. It was all part of the routine.

My brother and I would wait for our cues. My dad would say, "Go to your room," and my brother would disappear into the world of Nintendo. My mom would say, "Go outside," and I would find myself a magical world under the deck or in some sandbox. I would listen to screams, shouts, destruction, and curses and wait by the front door.

No matter which house it was, which state, or which town, all the front doors had one thing in common. On some bookcase or side table facing the front door stood our statue of baby Jesus. I would watch him from my mark and wait for the line.

Baby Jesus' robe was stained with nicotine, his blue cape was dingy and fraying. His crown had been lost in a move, and his hand had been lost in a fight. But for years this pathetic piece of broken porcelain held my attention as my parents destroyed themselves.

The only time my routine ever altered was when the weather was too cold or too rainy. It was too cold on January second, my brother's eleventh birthday. I'm not sure how this fight started. I remember Dad telling us to go to our rooms and my brother shutting his door. But I just stood in the narrow hallway of the post housing.

I don't think my mom provoked my dad that day. I remember she was trying to leave, and Dad grabbed her wrist and she spun around. Her foot tipped over the antique side table by the front door. Crystal knick-knacks flew into bits all over the front room and into the attached kitchen. Glass from the picture frames that lined the table shattered, and the table itself splintered. Baby Jesus fell with a heavy thud onto the tile floor. I watched his head snap off.

My mom grabbed the front door. My dad grabbed the purse from her shoulder. His jerk knocked her to the floor. The contents of her purse joined the rest of the debris. Make-up and loose change and a bottle of prescription pills mixed with glass and family photos. My mom wavered past me on her way to the kitchen. My dad was already in there. He had one hand on a drawer. My mom put one hand on the phone.

Dad yanked the drawer from the cabinet and sprinted across the kitchen. He yanked the phone from the wall. The kitchen was now besieged with drywall, gadgetry, and knives.

My dad had Mom by the hair and was dragging her to the living room. I just stood there inching into the kitchen. I watched the knives on the floor. I had never thought my dad would cut her. But why else had he waited by that drawer.

I studied those knives. I thought of every cut I had ever received and how much it hurt. I thought about Kaysea Campbell, across the street, and the three stitches she had in her thumb. I just knew any minute those knives would come to life and kill me.

I thought about running away, leaving through the front door, and never coming back. I thought I was going to die simply because there were knives in front of me. My whole body ached from invisible stab wounds. I could picture myself looking like a victim on *Cops* or *America's Most Wanted*. As I backed away from the cutlery and turned to the hall, as I prepared to run away, I assumed knives were the worst thing in the world. But when I reached the front door and saw the coat closet where we kept our guns, I knew I was dead wrong.

I heard a slam. It made the whole house shake, and the shock shook my fears away. It was the only thing that stopped me from opening the front door. I staggered over the knives and into the living room with a façade of valor. Like I was going to stop my dad as he threw my mom on the couch.

The bang was the Christmas tree that now lay on the floor. The lights and ornaments glittered all over. Our dog was barking and charging at the glass doors that separated the living room and back yard. Every knock from our dog made the back of the house shake violently. I thought he would come bounding in at any minute and save my mom. Like Underdog, only 170 pounds of foaming jaws and sharp teeth instead of a cape and catch phrase.

I realized my mom wasn't screaming. The only noise was my dad's animalistic grunts and the scratching the couch made against the tile floor. I saw him with both hands around my mom's neck. I saw her clawing his face.

I had never watched before, and I don't know why I stayed to watch that day. Maybe it was the crystal bits in the hallway, or maybe it was because of the broken baby Jesus statue. Maybe it was the way the metal knives teased in the kitchen, or the snarling dog that drew me farther into the living room. Maybe it was the broken ornaments that one week ago made up a perfect Christmas memory, or maybe I stayed because today was my brother's birthday and I couldn't believe they were doing this.

I don't know why I was watching. But when I saw my dad lift my mom's upper body off the couch and wrench her back down, when I saw her lying

perfectly still, I had seen enough.

I ran through the kitchen, down the hall, and shut myself in my parents' room. I had run through the glass. I stared down at my feet as I stood just within the master bedroom. I could still hear my dad's voice, and I could feel the wall around me shake. I heard my mom scream, and I felt relieved.

I looked up. Over the door was the same thing that was over every door in my house, a crucifix. I watched Jesus on that cross; he was beaten and broken. I stared at the nails through his hands and his bleeding feet. I blocked out the fear of the knives and the crashing of my world falling around me. I watched Jesus' tear stained face, and I tried with all my seven-year-old might not to cry.

I heard a voice. It was calm and confident. It was a woman, and she said, "9-1-1. What is your emergency?" And I suddenly felt the receiver on my ear and my own hand holding it there.

"My mommy and daddy are fighting."

I don't remember calling, and I can't remember if I said anything else. But my mom came rushing in. She took the phone from me and hurriedly packed a bag. She took my brother and me away before the MPs came.

My dad just stood on the front steps like a distant relative seeing off his holiday guests. I even think he waved as Mom's old Mercury pulled away. I can't remember a lot of January. But before the month was over, my parents were divorced, and my life got a lot funnier.

Irene Mosvold

schizophrenia

small black voices whispered around the edge of her mind
never quite coming fully forward but bothering her all the same
small black voices skittered over her like spiders, biting here
and there, leaving raised welts of worry and concern, blisters
of sting and burn, growing hives no touch relieved, no balm,
small black voices burrowed into her breakfast routine
ruining even the bowl of cornflakes and milk waiting
on the table, meshing all the typeface in her morning paper,
dotting the bowl of sugar with crystal clumps of fear
small black voices followed her onto the plane
where she swatted them like flies, sprayed them
with lemon water, hoping gentle insecticide
would do the trick, do them in, once and for all,
silence their effervescence, their sulphurous intent
small black voices multiplied.

Chris Tiahrt

Wonders and Signs

The cattle are lowing; all else is still. Despite night's dark, I see the stable down the alley, the stable where the young bride gave birth, where the angels sang and the shepherds visited. We even dared a glimpse ourselves, I, my wife, little Habbuk nestled inside my cloak. I remember the camels, the three odd men from the East, the late night hubbub, and the silence after. Had only they spoken to us!

Mostly, I remember the silence. Then the soldiers, blades dripping blood, with orders from the mad king. Parents wailing. I remember little Habbuk: his wisps of dark hair, his deep eyes, his perfect little fingers cradling my heart. My helplessness.

The prophets tell us this is not the whole story, that the story's just begun. But now, outside at night, railing at God, all I know are heavens dim—the star gone.

Norman Minnick

Pickle

Halfway between third base and home
we sat on a wooden bench that curved upward
holding us there. We drew maps
in the dirt of places
we would have to travel.

And gods whose names
we never learned
stood around us shaking their heads, taking notes,
our parents calling to the boy in left field
who was blowing on dandelion puffs
watching the tiny seeds drift up

and away.

Writing With No Ink

"This is what happens when people have to live in one life while they belong in another." **Jim McGarrah**, p. 110

"Dad threw the china cabinet to the floor; Mom burned his clothing.... Dad weed-whacked the Zinnias; Mom ran over the cable wire...hours before...the World Series."
Katherine Pearl, p. 119

Mari Stanley

The Piercing

My mother with her frosted hair
and her tapered jeans, the kind
that shape her body like an inverted pear,
with her big plastic earrings that I held to my face as a five-year-old
and begged her to pierce my ears so I could wear them.
My mother with her loose discretion who took me
to Wal-mart where a round lady with big blonde hair
and a striped sweater that wrapped her tight
as a mummy put a shiny silver gun to my head,
shot two golden hearts into my ears, and I wailed.
My mother with her hand over my mouth, muffling
my cries, with her apologies to the round lady
and the other housewives in slacks and cardigans
stopped mid-aisle with shopping carts of apples and carrots.
My mother with our basket of cookies, potato chips,
and Spam, with me squirming and wailing still,
all the way back to the bakery where she finally lifted
her hand from my mouth and shoved a cookie in its place.
My mother with her high heels clicking en route
to the meat counter where a handsome butcher bursts
through the double doors, addresses my mother's red lips
and plunging neckline with a bloody white coat and greasy smile.
My mother with her fuchsia fingernails tugging at her necklace
with the charm my father gave her dangling between her breasts,
orders a slab of pork, white with fat, for my father.
My mother fingers her plump bottom lip, scribbles our number
on a Kleenex, whispers for the butcher to let her know
when he gets in some good fresh meat, and he raises a dark brow.
My mother with her naked face at the dinner table,
My father with his warm smile after the taste of fried pork,
I, with my throbbing red ears, flatten a slice of bread with my palm,
stab a fork into tough meat, try not to hear her silence.
My mother with her cold gray eyes at the opposite end,
hardly touches her plate,
hardly looks at us.

Barbara Bennett

What You Gave Me by Accident: Memphis Music Memories

Saturday morning, I'm cracking eggs for an omelet and listening to the radio. An interviewer plays a cut of Jimmy Reed singing "Big Boss Man" to demonstrate why two white baby boomers cut a tribute album to him. Reed is the real deal. You can hear a little Mississippi juke joint and a lot of Chicago blues in his music. A persistent guitar thump plays the beat beneath the song.

I try to pinpoint when I heard that thump. It's like remembering when I ate gravy. The thump resounds through rock music. Reed and his sidekick Eddie Taylor invented it. The rockers appropriated it.

When the interviewer asks the old white guys what it was like growing up in Mississippi listening to Reed who was born there, I feel cranky. I'm old and I'm white, but I can't relate to this question. There's no way I could have heard music like that when I was kid.

I grew up on the same Illinois prairie where my dad marched in his high school band. He and my mom listened to Tommy Dorsey and Benny Goodman's big bands and to crooners like Vaughn Monroe on the radio. The only live music I heard was in church or at home when Dad practiced his trombone.

Then Reed's guitar thump finds a wormhole in my memory.

The onions and peppers I am sautéing for the omelet merge into a memory of bacon and eggs frying in the black iron skillet on Mom's gas range. Mornings, she tuned the brown plastic Philco radio in the kitchen to a station that broadcast weather and farm reports to the Arkansas delta. The announcer played records between the reports. I first heard Bob Wills' western swing, Hank Williams' lovesick blues, and Johnny Cash's rockabilly on that radio.

Mom and Dad liked the romantic and patriotic music of the thirties and forties. The music revolution taking place in the 1950s was beyond them. But they couldn't hold it at bay, anymore than they could reverse the course of the twentieth century, although they seemed to try.

When my parents were born at the end of World War I, half the United States population lived on farms. By the time Dad graduated from the University of Illinois and married my mother, three-fourths of Illinois' population had moved to town. Despite his degree in animal husbandry, Dad was not one to follow the herd. He wanted his own farm.

To get one, he was willing to leave the community where his family had farmed for 100 years. He quit smoking to save money and to show my mother he was serious. He found two investors and cheap land in Arkansas, a state where two thirds of the population was still rural. Early one February morning he packed up his 1952 teal blue Studebaker and bid farewell to the snow drifted fields he had rented. He drove his wife and five children south to a thousand acre expanse of red dirt and red oaks in the Arkansas delta.

Dad was a risk taker, an entrepreneur, and a hard driving farmer who had staked his life savings and his family's livelihood on Red Oak Ranch. My mother was a homemaker with five children, a one acre garden and rattlesnakes crawling around her front yard. They had zero interest in the music that was making history 100 miles away in Memphis. There, Sun Records was recording Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis, Howlin' Wolf, and BB King.

Dad's quest produced a pretty odd family task list. While he was learning to raise cotton, my sisters were learning to chop it. My mom was learning to shoot to kill rattlesnakes. My five year old brother's job was to behave while Mom drove to the field with meals for Dad, the field hands and my sisters. I was supposed to be working, too, watching my baby sister Charlene. What I was really doing was reading *Little Women, Little Men, Jo's Boys, Heidi, Heidi Grows Up, Heidi's Children, Raggedy Ann and Andy, The Marcella Stories, The Adventures of Toby Tyler or Three Weeks at the Circus*, and *The Bobbsey Twins at the Seashore*. It is a stone miracle that Char lived past the age of two, but to this day I can remember the books I read before her third birthday.

Dad was supposed to be living his dream, but he had a hard time adjusting to Arkansas. Some people believe the 1950s was about conforming. The only conforming taking place on Red Oak Ranch was my sisters, my brother and me complying with Charles Bennett's Class of '39 Illini standards.

Those standards were clear, if not easy to follow. We were to talk like he did because Southerners used bad grammar. We were never to say nigger because the proper term was Negro. We were to work as hard as he did because Southerners worked too slowly, which was why the South was so backward. At least once a month, he reminded us that we were Baptist by creed, not geography, and he assured us it was a matter of time until the Southern Baptists went the way of Dixie. At least once a year, his mother and father left their farm to visit our ranch and to remind us that our family fought for the Union and each of us had been born in the Land of Lincoln.

These lessons were defining, but not particularly useful. What I needed were tips on how to fit into our new community. What I got was practice in being an outsider who didn't think, talk or act like anyone I knew or ever would know.

Life in Arkansas wasn't all work and no play. My folks started a 4-H club. At the beginning of each meeting, we sang songs: "You are My Sunshine," "Red River Valley," and "She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain," songs from their youth.

The neighbors sometimes invited us to play parties at which a string band would play. Southern Baptists didn't dance, but it was okay to play party. My sisters and I thought play partying looked a whole lot like dancing.

On Saturday nights we joined our parents in the living room to watch Lawrence Welk on TV. Dad thought his four girls looked like the Lennon Sisters. I was Janet, the third one.

I learned the words to "Heart of My Heart" for the 4-H talent show. I didn't know it, of course, but at the same time Jack Kerouac was trying to

get his manuscript of *On the Road* published. Hipsters were smoking pot in Greenwich Village. Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, and Charles Mingus were blowing minds and brewing a different kind of music revolution on Central Avenue in Los Angeles.

Despite the family filter, the music got through. My aunt in California probably worried we were a little out of touch. She sent us a subscription to *Life* magazine. It carried stories about Elvis and Miles. My older sisters had a radio in their bedroom, and we listened after dark to clear channel stations in Memphis, New Orleans and Chicago that had licenses to broadcast after dark and signals powerful enough to reach several states.

During the four years I lived in Arkansas, the music on the kitchen radio changed. The weather reports didn't. Arkansas suffered relentless droughts in the 1950s. It was a terrible time to start farming.

Dad would take a risk, but he would not throw good money after bad. He wrote to his college friends and learned about a job with an aluminum company that was buying subsistence farms and the coal under them along the Green River in Kentucky. The owners needed someone to manage the farms until they mined them. He went after the job and got it.

On a searingly hot August day without a cloud in sight, my family piled into a green and white 1956 Plymouth and headed north to Kentucky. It was the year before President Eisenhower sent the national guard to Little Rock's Central High School to enforce integration. It was the year before Stax Records began pressing the soul recordings of Otis Redding, Sam & Dave and Isaac Hayes.

It was the end of the beginning of my getting rhythm and blues.

Teresa Roy

Poverty Winter

The basement window was cracked
and its iron casement so stubbornly warped
that it never quite closed. Even
a bale of straw shoved against the gap
could not stem a breach of frigid air.
The pipes froze every night for weeks.

I could have done a better job
keeping the leaky house warm,
the wolves at bay, but there is a
learning curve for the *nouveau* poor.

That December, when temperatures fell
to fifteen-below, I had no job, a broken leg,
three kids trusting Santa could still pull it off
despite the ugly pine crouched
in our living room like a festooned dwarf.

But what I held to from that winter
was the long drive home through a
black-skied Christmas Eve—how ice frosted
the windshield from inside and

bald tires struggled to hold their own
against snow-packed country roads. I remember
how my children softened into sleep, cocooned
like moths in the huddle of their coats—I
remember the *huh-huh* sounds of their breath

dreaming us forward.

Kelly Lee

A Simple Illusion

We sit, strangers with 1000 pieces
Of the New York City skyline spread before us.
We begin with the edges,
Lay the flat sides out in rows.
We make the obvious cardboard connections
Over allusions to the brokenness that brought her to me.

Days pass while the fractured city waits
For the hour each week when we come together
Huddled over the coffee table,
Trying to mend the pieces.

Great skyscrapers are assembled
As she speaks about the family
That seems to have forgotten her—
A mother who passed her along to anyone else,
A father whose name she never heard,
Brothers and sisters, older, younger
Only occasionally known.

We sift through the past
As hours build up shining city blocks, goals and plans for her,
The idea of a future less encumbered by the past.
We press the last bits into place,
Complete the city's reflection on the Hudson.

What we've created is not a solution
But a simple illusion
That could never hold up outside this room
Where our jagged, awkward edges
Seldom find their counterparts.

Ed McClanahan

The Indelible Kiss

On Labor Day weekend of 1948, my parents and I moved from Brooksville, Kentucky, population 700, twenty miles east to the Ohio River town of Maysville, population 7000. I had arrived at last in the Celestial City.

I was just a month shy of sixteen, an about-to-be sophomore at my new school, Maysville High. I stood six feet two inches tall—a considerable height in them days, kids—and weighed 147 pounds; a year and a half ago, I'd been five-feet-five—and weighed 147 pounds. It was rumored, quite incorrectly, that I was gonna be a helluva basketball player. Secretly, I was afraid of my new height; it gave me vertigo.

During the first week of school, when I was also at the dizzying height of New Kid popularity, I made friends with a junior named Gene Manley, a jittery, bespectacled, round-chinned little guy who I thought was just unutterably cool. Well, damn, he was unutterably cool; he played drums in the school band, he dated cheerleaders, and best of all, he drove this nifty little '32 Ford roadster, a mustard-yellow ragtop with painted-on crimson flames blazing back from the radiator, a rumble seat, foxtails, ah-oo-gah horn … a flivver straight out of *Archie and Jughead*. Talk about cool! On the Friday night of my very first week in Maysville, when I somehow insinuated myself into Gene's rumble seat—up front, riding shotgun, was an equally cool trumpet player named Johnny Gantley (think Ray Anthony! think *Young Man With a Horn*!)—, I was, oh my, elevated beyond imagination.

Now I was already familiar with Maysville's many ornamental features, and the one that had always most impressed me was the bridge, that lacey, graceful, mile-long silver arc with twin silver spires spanning the broad Ohio to the little community of Aberdeen, which, according to my information, consisted solely of roadhouses, beer joints, and similar wholesome attractions. Over the next few years, I would become as intimate with that bridge and the interesting diversions at its other end as I am, nowadays, with the route to my refrigerator. That first night, though, I knew only that every time Gene and Johnny and I putt-putted along East Third Street in Gene's flivver, past the sign pointing to Ohio, I experienced an unsettling little premonition that if I ever crossed that bridge for real, there might be no coming back.

Along about ten o'clock, on our umpty-umpth tour of East Third Street, we discovered that the entry to the bridge was blocked by a fire engine and two police cars—the entire fleet, basically, of Maysville's emergency-response rolling stock—, all with their spotlights trained on the near spire of the bridge.

What was going on, it turned out, had begun one night exactly a month

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"The Indelible Kiss" is an excerpt from Dog Loves Ellie, *which will appear in* O The Clear Moment, *a gathering of McClanahan's autobiographical stories to be published by Counterpoint Press in the fall of 2008.*

ago, when a notorious Maysville bon vivant named Wild Bill Dugan had clambered drunkenly but intrepidly up—and up, and up—the swooping catwalk to the very peak of the spire, a hundred and fifty vertiginous feet or so above the murky waters, before the cops and firemen hauled him down. They gave him thirty days for public drunkenness and disorderly conduct—and tonight, the minute they let him out, he had scurried straight back up, to finish off the remains of the fifth of gin he'd stashed up there … exactly one month ago.

But that was actually my second introduction to the high life that awaited me in cosmopolitan, metropolitan Maysville, home of the famous Browning Manufacturing Company—which was merely the World's Largest Pulley Factory, if you please—and the soon-to-be-famous Rosemary Clooney and the already famous Maysville High basketball team, the Bulldogs.

Having started life in Brooksville, where hatred for Bulldogs was like mother's milk, I grew up a loyal Brooksville Polar Bear. (Hey, I made the junior high team! I averaged eight points … a season!) In small-town Kentucky in those years, high school basketball was assumed to be one of the pillars of Western Civilization—or perhaps it was the other way around. The Polar Bears came by their name honestly, the original Brooksville teams having played their first few seasons in an unheated tobacco warehouse. Later, in the early 1920s, the heyday of girls' basketball, my own mother and several of her sisters were star Polar Bears in Brooksville High's brand new basketball palace, a modest little brick outbuilding with a playing court hardly bigger than a ping-pong table, the same gym I too would play in, utterly without distinction, twenty years hence. Girls' basketball, stifled by the imposition of a plethora of dispiriting rules intended to "effeminize" (or, if you will, "demasculinize") the sport, had by the 1940s been dropped by most Kentucky schools, including Brooksville High. Meanwhile, the boys' version of the game had become more popular than God, and the Polar Bears, despite their meager home-court circumstances, had an honorable—indeed a glorious—history: In 1939, led by Mooney and Marvin Cooper, top guns of the sixteen(!) fabled Cooper brothers, they won the state championship, a Cinderella accomplishment of *Hoosiers* proportions; and subsequent Coopers and Cooper cousins beyond number—Earl, Clyde, Dale, John Foster, the Yelton boys, et al—had kept the Polar Bears in contention in the Tenth Region ever since.

But Maysville strode the Tenth like a very Yao Ming throughout the 1940s, and the Bulldogs were in the state tournament almost every year; in '47 they won it all, and in '48, just six months before we moved to town, they were runners-up. I, meanwhile, had largely been a plump, bespectacled little meatball plugging along in Brooksville, twenty miles down the road, striving with all my pudgy, ineffectual might to hang onto my seat at the far end of the junior high team bench—until, in the summer before my freshman year, the growth spurt struck me like Captain Marvel's transmogrifying bolt of lightning, and suddenly, unaccountably, I was looking down on people I'd long been in the habit of looking up to.

This flabbergasting development assured me of a spot in the junior high

Polar Bears' starting line-up—I was, after all, the tallest kid on the team—, but did little to enhance my skills: I started every game that season … and barely eked out my annual eight points.

The truth is, Brooksville was deeply conflicted about Maysville, which boasted, just a short Long Dog ride away, all too many of the amenities we rustics hardly dared to dream of, such as a public swimming pool worthy of Esther Williams and a dimestore and the White Light nickel-burger stand and Schine's Russell Theatre (a gorgeous arabesque fantasy with a statuette of a semi-nude houri in the lobby) and Kilgus's Drugstore (where, if you were quick about it, you could sneak a peek at an astonishing little *Readers' Digest*-sized periodical called *Sexology*, in whose pages were displayed such pornopological images as a close-up photo of a certain primitive work of female body-sculpting called the Hottentot Apron—an image so arresting that it vividly endures in my memory even now, six decades later). There was even, rumor had it, a real live two-dollar lady of the night, if you knew how to find her. It was enough to turn many a Brooksville boy's head … and mine was already swiveling like a klieg light.

From the Brooksville point of view, Maysville would've been the fabled City on the Hill, were it not that, topographically speaking, it was the other way around. Brooksville stands at the highest point of ground in Bracken County—its courthouse clock and water tower (both of which I have scaled, by the way) are visible for miles around—, whereas Maysville crawls along the banks of the Ohio, three miles long and only six streets deep. River Rats, we called 'em, masking our envy with disdain. In Brooksville, we knew for a fact that the wily Maysville coach Earle Jones, Evil Genius of the Hardwood, had snatched the great Kenny Reeves, one of the best players in the state during the mid-1940s, away from humble circumstances over in Ohio somewhere, and was paying him untold sums of money to play for Maysville, just so those mangy Bulldogs could routinely have their way with our Polar Bears three times a year.

For the '47-48 season, my freshman year, Brooksville retaliated by importing a hulking, menacing center named Tony Maloney, a quasi-legal transplant from an upstate orphanage whose play was brutish enough to have left at least one opposing center in tears. But not even Tony could roll back the annual tide of humiliation; Maysville had dispatched us handily, as usual, in the regional, and then almost won the state championship for the second straight time.

Now my mom and dad were just as whacked out about basketball as everyone else was (and is) in our enlightened state, so every year they took me with them to Louisville for the Sweet Sixteen (as the state tournament was inevitably called), which meant that every year I was allowed, on the grounds of cultural enrichment, to cut three days of school and have my own room in the Brown Hotel and run around loose in downtown Louisville and watch a lot of great high school basketball. And every year the Bulldogs, having once again eliminated the hapless Polar Bears in the regional tournament, showed up in Louisville with the classiest teams and the most fetching cheerleaders in the Commonwealth—so that, over time, my favorite quadrupeds and secret heroes (don't breathe a word of this in

Brooksville) had become not Polar Bears but Bulldogs—Kenny Reeves and Buddy Gilvin and Buddy Shoemaker and Gus Stergeos and Elza Whalen and Emery Lacey and the Tolle brothers, Fats and Shotsie, and most of all, in the '47 Sweet Sixteen, a pair of eighth-graders the sportswriters had nicknamed Dog and Como, who were just my age and were already, at least in my personal pantheon of demigods, international celebrities.

So Labor Day of 1948, the day my folks and I moved to Maysville, was a watershed in my life. That very day I changed my name, for ever and ever, from "Sonny," the diminutive cognomen by which I'd been known (if at all) in Brooksville, to the relatively Brobdignagian "Eddie," as befit my new height; and that very evening a nice old lady of our acquaintance fixed Tall Eddie up with Carla Browning, of the Browning Pulley Works Brownings, and Carla and I went to a movie at the Russell Theatre and then to Kilgus's Drugstore for Cokes, and right there on Kilgus's corner, Carla introduced me to … omigawd, it's … Dog and Como!

My apostasy was complete. Go Bulldogs!

A few months earlier I couldn't have dreamed that these two paladins of the hardwood (I myself was an aspiring sportswriter, and that sort of language was my soul's own music) would soon become not just my classmates but also my running mates and even, for one brief, inglorious season, my teammates, fellow Bulldogs.

Como was a handsome guy—some imaginative scribe had fancied, not unreasonably, that his profile resembled the redoubtable Perry's—, a fiery, red-faced demon on the basketball court but, off it, as sweet—and about as thick—as a Kilgus chocolate malt.

Dog, on the other hand, was significantly less handsome but appealing nonetheless, a stocky, eager little ball-handler and ball-hawk—the sports pages had dubbed him "Bulldog" not because they identified him with the team but just for his relentless tenacity on the floor—with deep, fawning brown eyes resembling a beagle's more than a bulldog's and an earnest, almost imploring manner that made him hard to resist when he asked you for "butts" on your current cigarette (meaning he got to smoke the last half of it) or wanted to copy your math homework or mooch a dime for the pinball machine at the White Light or even, on the basketball court, any time you had the ball and he didn't, a circumstance likely to reverse itself in your next heartbeat. When he turned those great, pleading brown eyes on you, he could steal the ball or your smoke or your homework or your dime—or, as I would find out all too soon, your heart's delight—with no more conscience than a stockbroker.

I believe I mentioned, a few pages back, something about my familiarity with the ornamental features of Maysville, and how the bridge to Aberdeen was my favorite—but that was before I'd seen Ellie Chadwick.

Ellie was—and she remains—the loveliest 15-year-old who's ever bedazzled my unworthy eyes. (I exclude from this equation, of course, my own three lovely daughters, each of whom was once fifteen.) Inside my head I've been humming wordless paeans to Elinora Chadwick's beauty for almost sixty years, but now that I'm obliged, at last, to attempt an actual description of her, words fail me, and I find myself grasping at the stalest of

clichés: flaxen hair shimmering like a sun-struck field of … well, damn, of flax, I guess, eyes as blue as cornflowers, peaches-and-cream complexion, a smile to rival the lights of Broadway, a lilting voice, a figure wonderfully, sumptuously voluptuous yet at the same time as lissome as a willow switch, a girl fairly born to drive schoolboys to distraction, to inhabit their dreams both waking and sleeping, as though she'd been atomized and then dispersed all at once like a swarm of tiny Tinkerbells into the fevered imaginations of a multitude of Maysville's Lost Boys. So it was comforting—sort of—to know that at least I had company, plenty of it, legions of hopeless juvenile devotees just like me, all worshipping at the same shrine.

There was, however, one brief moment when I was not amongst that wretched number, one mortal instant in the measureless history of love when I alone of all the others stood before Ellie beneath a harvest moon and placed my trembling hands upon her perfect cashmere-sweatered shoulders and gently drew her to me and …

But I precede myself. Like every other schoolboy in Maysville, I fell for Ellie on sight, in my case in Miss Wallingford's English class on the first morning of school in the fall of '48, only twelve hours or so after Carla Browning had introduced me to Dog and Como. Carla, a very pretty girl who, unfortunately for whatever dreams I may have harbored overnight of becoming the premier tycoon of the pulley empire, went off to some fancy girls' school somewhere the very next morning after our bogus date and basically disappeared from my life forever. But Carla was no sooner beyond the city limits on that memorable morning when, downtown at MHS, just as the late bell began to jangle, the door to Miss Wallingford's ten o'clock English class opened and into my life stepped—be still, my heart!—Ellie Chadwick!

All that semester in English class, she sat in the row to the left of mine, one seat ahead, so that for fifty minutes every morning her immaculate profile was before me, a lovely, enigmatic ivory cameo. In homage to its alabaster perfection, I taught myself to write "Ellie" in the margins of my grammar workbook (the ever-popular *Keys to Good Language*) in fat, overlapping letters resembling nothing so much as a handful of amorous caterpillars at the height of the mating season.

Still, smitten and stricken beyond salvation though I inconsolably was, during those first few weeks at Maysville High I became, as a Bulldog of far greater repute in prospect than I would ever be in retrospect, the Wild Bill Dugan of MHS society, scaling hitherto-unimagined heights of popular regard. Which brings us—almost—to that tremendous moment beneath that tremendous harvest moon. But first, a little scene-setting:

From the time I was old enough to pay attention to the funny papers, my favorite had been the strip called "Li'l Abner," by Al Capp. Abner, as everyone of my dwindling generation will recall, was a strapping, handsome young hillbilly, sweet but none too bright (not unlike my new friend Como), as evidenced by the fact that he preferred, unaccountably, the company of his pet pig Salome to that of his girlfriend Daisy Mae, a scantily clad, impossibly curvaceous cartoon rendition of … Ellie Chadwick! It was true! Daisy Mae really did look just like Ellie!

Okay, right, I need to take a deep breath here. But Daisy Mae was a dish, just as Abner was a dope, and therefore every year she pursued him, relentlessly but fruitlessly, in the annual autumnal Sadie Hawkins Day chase, wherein if a gal caught a fella, he had to marry her. And so popular was the strip that every autumn, on a certain Friday evening in practically every high school gymnasium throughout the land, there would be a Sadie Hawkins Day girl-take-boy dance, the only event of the year when the ladies were afforded the opportunity to select their escorts. And one morning in the autumn of 1948, only a couple of weeks before fall basketball practice would be exposing me (I didn't exactly know this yet, but I deeply feared it) for the fraud I certainly was, who do you think Ellie Chadwick invited to the Sadie Hawkins Day Dance? Not Li'l Abner, not Dog or even Como, but Tall Eddie Clammerham, the Future of the Bulldogs!

It was, I think, the closest call I've ever had with immortality. I was just arriving at the door of Miss Wallingford's English class when Ellie approached me, her books clutched to her bosom in the protective manner favored by schoolgirls in those pre-backpack days, and looked up at me with those dazzling blue eyes and smiled her dazzling smile and asked, so sweetly that I could almost feel my blood sugar level soar, if she could take me to the dance next week.

Take me? cried my inner juvenile delinquent. *O god yes, take me anywhere, and use me horribly!* Meanwhile, my candy-assed outer post-adolescent, his knees knocking like castanets as he shuffled his great cumbrous feet somewhere way down there at the bottom of his interminable legs, stammered, "Um, um, um … "

Somehow, we arranged it: I would be Ellie Chadwick's date for the Sadie Hawkins dance. Within the closely-guarded ranks of post-adolescent boys in those days—and doubtless in these days as well—it was the practice to trumpet one's conquests to the heavens ("I got bare braw!" an erstwhile Polar Bear teammate of mine had once proclaimed ecstatically after an away-game ride home on the team bus, with the cheerleaders aboard), yet as best I could determine by discreetly inquiring amongst my peers, Ellie had never yielded so much as the first kiss. Indeed, it was said that, due to her conservative parents' restrictions, she'd never even had a date! To borrow Li'l Abner's favorite exultation, O happy day!

There was, however, one small problem: I couldn't dance. In Brooksville, girls would sometimes dance with each other, but—perhaps for that very reason—Brooksville boys generally ranked the terpsichorean arts somewhere down around needlepoint. Whereas in Maysville, many of my new friends, boys and girls alike, had matriculated at Mrs. Brown's School of the Dance when they were in the sixth or seventh grade, and by the time they got to high school they had all the moves down cold, and could dip and twirl like Fred and Ginger and jitterbug like Archie and Veronica. Making matters worse, those who hadn't gone to Mrs. Brown's had learned from those who had, so that every kid in Maysville would be dancing circles around the Bracken County bumpkin, laughing and pointing and belittling—the latter being, I feared, the aspersion of choice. My new manhood, my vaunted Eddie-ness, would be puckered to the merest trifle before I'd

danced a single step.

During those first few weeks of school, I'd made friends with a junior named Darrell Henson, who owned a huge, boxy, Capone-era Hudson sedan that some dead uncle had left him, and who was dating another of my pretty classmates, Lucia Traxel, who happened to live in my neighborhood. So I proposed to Darrell that we double-date for the Sadie Hawkins Day ordeal, and to Lucia that she undertake, in the scant seven days remaining to us, to teach me how to tango.

Or at any rate how to do the box-step, which, despite dear Lucia's best efforts, proved to be the very maximum that she could accomplish in those seven desperate evenings of stumbling about with me in the Traxel family's basement rec room to the dreamy airs of Guy Lumbago and His Royal Pains issuing from an ancient wind-up Victrola. As its name suggests, the box-step—one step forward, one step right, one step back, one step left, one step forward … —is a stiff, plodding, robotic sort of business, the ballroom equivalent to marching in place, performed largely in disregard or defiance of whatever music actually happens to be playing at the moment. If that lonely old blind man who taught Dr. Frankenstein's creation how to smoke had also undertaken to teach the monster how to dance, rest assured they would've done the box-step.

It probably didn't help that, on the eve of Sadie Hawkins Day, I had used my sixteenth-birthday money to buy myself what I'd imagined would be the coolest footwear on the dance floor, a pair of blue suede Thom McCanns with two-inch-thick crepe soles, cosmic clod-hoppers that weighed about eight pounds apiece and rendered me even taller and gawkier than I'd been in my old penny-loafers, and my lumbering box-step even clumsier and more Frankenstinian than it had been in Lucia Traxel's basement. The music, once again, was recorded; I seem to recall that the first number was "A Slow Boat to China," and being torn between the dreamy escapism of the song ("I'd love to get you … on a slow boat to China … all to myself, a-lo-o-o-one … ") and the more immediate exigency of somehow escaping the agonies of the moment at hand. Ellie was as supple and lissome and light on her feet as a forest nymph, but I was steering her on a herky-jerky forced march to nowhere, and as we lurched about inside our invisible little box, I could detect, through the agency of the hand that now rested ever-so-tentatively at the (sigh) small of her back, a tiny, involuntary wince—call it a shudder—at every misstep (and there were many) of those monstrous blue suede concrete blocks I was wearing. The slow boat to China hadn't even left the harbor, yet already it was sinking like a stone, and its cabin boy—that kid with the concrete feet—was well on his way to becoming a hat-rack for the fishes.

They must've played a couple more slow numbers in the early going, but hey, I was *dancing*, folks, I didn't have *time* to listen to music! I had been given to understand, I guess from movie musicals, that I was expected to initiate bright, scintillating conversation as we danced, but I was dumbstruck. Incapable of thinking and talking and dancing all at the same time—multitasking, as we so charmingly call it nowadays—, I mindlessly, mutely propelled poor Ellie from invisible pillar to invisible post as, suffer-

ing like a penitente and sweating like a stevedore, I trod on her no doubt lovely little toes as though I were stomping slugs in the garden—or the graveyard—of my hopes and dreams.

That unhappy phase of my extremity ended—and another began—when someone put Glen Miller's "Chattanooga Choo-Choo" on the turntable, which of course required one—or, rather, two—to jitterbug, and in turn required me to confess to Ellie, shamefacedly, that jitterbugging was utterly beyond my powers. I got through that mortification somehow, but as I steered Ellie toward the bleachers to sit this one out, who should pop up before us but that devilishly cool rascal Gene Manley, eager to boogie. Ellie graced me with a quick, apologetic smile, and then the choo-choo jitterbugged on down the line and left me standing in the station with the other wallflowers, in a sort of penumbra of commingled resentment and relief.

Gene, who was such a tightly wound little bundle of nervous energy that he had no patience for slow dancing, delivered Ellie back to me when "Chattanooga Choo-Choo" gave way to some less invigorating tune, but we had barely made it back onto the dance floor when Johnny Gantley tapped me on the shoulder, cutting in. Johnny clung to the advantage for a couple of numbers until I.Jay Weaver, a smooth-talking senior, cut in on him, and then the ever-dangerous Como cut in on I.Jay, and then I myself, Eddie the Unready, swung boldly into action and cut in on Como, but before Ellie and I had managed even one full turn around the narrow confines of the little rectangular plot of hardwood I'd staked out, Dog—him and his big, beseeching brown eyes and his ingratiating goddamn ways—he cut in on *me*, that dirty Dog, and away they waltzed!

Well, it was that kind of evening. The enemy was legion, and He was everywhere, in the persons of Gene and Johnny and I.Jay and Como and most of all the omnipresent, indefatigable Dog. There were, of course, a host of other interlopers as well, but none with so much staying power, such aggravating perseverance, such … dare I say it? … such sheer doggone *doggedness*. By eleven o'clock, when whoever was "spinning the platters" (an infelicitous locution which I sincerely hope turned into library paste in the mouth of the very first deejay who ever uttered it) signaled that the dance was over by putting Ray Noble's oleaginous "Good Night, Sweetheart" on the turntable, Dog had danced with Ellie about twice as many times as I had. Indeed, in order to dance the last dance with my own date, I had to cut in on *him*—and as he reluctantly released her to my custody (temporarily, as it turned out), he turned those great beseeching eyes on *me* … and hit me for a cigarette!

I'm pretty sure that after the dance, Darrell and Lucia and Ellie and I would've piled into Darrell's giant Hudson shoebox (a few months later, Darrel would put that old Hudson right through the front wall of some poor citizen's living room) and mo-gated up East Second Street to Mrs. Hedges' East End Café for carbonated aperitifs, and logistics would've dictated that we take Ellie home first. Most of that has drifted away, though, into the mists of teen-age history. But I do recall, luminously, that when Ellie and I arrived at her front door, that luminous harvest moon was looking down, and Ellie's luminously lovely face was looking up, and …

I'm tempted to describe our kiss as having been as tender and delicate and fleeting as a butterfly taking sweetness from a flower, except that I was certainly no butterfly. Nonetheless, with uncharacteristic courage, I wordlessly claimed the kiss and, to my astonishment, was granted it. Afterward, butterfly-like for once in my life despite that dead-weight ballast of blue suede brogans, I floated off Ellie's front porch and back to Darrell's car in a perfect transport of delight. I could've plucked that harvest moon from the sky and put it in my pocket for a keepsake.

The next day, a Saturday, still all a-flutter, I came crashing back to earth when I called Ellie and asked if I could take her to the Sunday night movies at the Russell, and she apologized (not very sincerely, I must say, although she tried to be kind) for the fact that she already had a date: Dog, of course. I didn't even need to ask; I knew when I was whupped.

From that Sunday evening forward for the next three years, Ellie and Dog were as one, and to my knowledge Ellie never strayed. True love was true love, after all, and the Maysville High ladies generally kept things strictly on the up-and-up, and did but rarely go a-roaming. They were, by and large, Nice Girls, and in those days Nice Girls just didn't do that sort of thing. Despite that one delicious, indelible kiss, Ellie Chadwick, a very nice girl if ever there was one, would be, alas, forever out of reach, at least for me.

Dog, on the other hand, ran with the pack (of which I was a panting, slavering member), and on many an evening, after we had taken whatever minimal liberties were allowed us by the Nice Girls and had (metaphorically) put those vestal virgins to bed, we—the pack—were ourselves at liberty to go on the prowl, perpetrating all manner of after-hours outrages and indignities upon the public weal. Lured by those beckoning beer-joint signs, neon lodestars in the night, we crossed that stupendous bridge to Aberdeen and found our way to the Pennington Club and the Terrace Club and Danny Boone's Tavern and the Hi-Hat, and discovered that, as far as Buckeye bartenders were concerned, we were all absolutely eighteen years old, and legally entitled to drink all the three-point-two beer we required. After last call for alcohol at those accommodating venues, we were as likely as not to arrive, eventually, back in Maysville at the address of that even more accommodating—and even less discriminating—two-dollar lady down on Front Street. More often than not, Dog was an enthusiastic party to these revels, while Ellie, all unknowing, slept the untroubled sleep of the innocent.

Frederick Smock

Untaming the Shrew

I see a woman may be made a fool
if she had not a spirit to resist
III. ii.

i.
To see my wife on stage, as Kate, was to recognize
and not recognize her. What did I know?
The mouth rounded in surpise. Her musical voice.
The pratfalls (when she got the part,
she tripped over the dog in her haste to tell me,
bruising her girlish knees). What did I not know?
An ability to feign submission.

ii.
Later, she told me about the praying mantis,
nearly a foot long—a stick with large red eyes
that shadowed her throughout opening night.
At first, she felt frightened. Later, by Act Three,
she felt a strange comfort—she had come to believe
the insect might be the reincarnation of her father,
who died long ago, too long ago ever to see his daughter
on the stage. His eyes at the ends of those long
stalks, looking about. So—she played to the insect.

iii.
We were gathered on a hillside, under the stars,
a plywood Padua arrayed before us. A café,
a balcony, a city square, a silver Airstream trailer
(eccentric touch of the American director)
—this was Kate's honeymoon bower,
and where she munched kashi bars between
scenes, listening for her cues—this Kate's an ironist
and a vegan. Her Petruchio's a clown, but,
more shrew than she, he frees her
into her loving nature, which well I recognized.

iv.
Kate claims, *A woman mov'd is like a fountain troubled,*
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty….
But by the stars that ring my head
I know this to be not so,
not of *my* Kate,
for I have seen this girl moved
to love
with my own eyes,
and 'tis a thing of beauty.

Dori Howard

To the Letter

She can't hold onto him after
he escapes her words the way
she can't hold onto her words after
they've escaped her lips
And she thought that if she wrote them down
her words and his name
bound together in a letter with permanent ink
she could hold onto them both
so she writes with a bold black pen
transcribes from her emotions
a cursive outline
of her unabridged fascination with him
curling the ends of the lines of the letters
with as much attention as she gives his face, his hands
barely lifting her pen from the paper,
frightened that lack of contact will disconnect everything
the ink trailing the tip of the pen
trailing like the tail of a bobbing black
kite against the whitest lined sky
trailing like the heavier footed partner
of a couple ballroom dancing, a white pinstripe
tuxedo, a thick black evening gown
And the trail grows fainter
fading finally into a mere imprint on the page
And she presses harder,
forcing, trying to make her words stand out
but she's writing with no ink,
speaking with no voice,
longing with rawest intent.

Rey Ford

Joy

When he was younger,
when happiness
was only happiness,
he never hesitated;
instead, he moved always
toward sunlight and the music
clouds sing.

But now,
he sits awake
in darkness
hoping to slow
the bright approach of morning
and listens hard
for all that is not said,
working to hold off all goodness

because lately
it is the sadness
that joy brings
that is so hard.

Erin Keane

In Defense of Humidity

Our second skins soaked, thin cotton
clinging to chests thrilled with each
silent jab of lightning, there we were
on the edge of leaf-heavy summer,
storm crashing like an anvil dangled
by one slim thread above a cartoon
sidewalk, struck dumb in thrall, ink
spreading our names across the sky—
wait, it happened like this: cool dark
of the beer cave, so many turncoat
soldiers lined against a wall, nervous
laugh at the door's click, quite final,
as if thirst could be this illicit, as if
they wouldn't find us come morning,
icicled mouths frozen scant inches
from their marks—look, no, let me
try again: loose embers Morse code
all secrets around us, charcoal seeping
into flyaway hair, stinging citronella
eyes, what can it mean at the end
of such a season—what we read into,
what is left behind? Tell me before I
write it down wrong, drenched before
we knew it was raining, preserved
in place, still sitting in this spot, waiting
for nothing and everything to begin.

Jim McGarrah

Landscapes from Socket Wrenches and Engine Blocks

It wasn't until I approached the age of sixty and happened to be studying the etymology of certain words that I discovered the root meaning of art was found in the ability to skillfully join or fit things together. That epiphany held no real surprise for me, however, because I instantly thought of Joe Whitehouse and the smells of spilled motor oil soaked in sawdust, along with carburetor jets dipped in grease-cutting solvent rising around me as I dribbled a new official Wilson leather basketball.

I recently had celebrated my eleventh birthday and confessed to my father that, when I grew up, I wanted to work as an automobile mechanic. My father, who knew me very well, realized I had a brain given to abstract problem solving and day dreaming, while my abilities with practical matters and hand-held tools lay somewhere beyond my ability to fly. "You could tear up a fucking anvil with a wrench," he claimed on his gin-drinking days. Consequently, he hung a basketball goal from the rafters in the huge shop area of his successful Dodge dealership. In these back bays, mechanics labored over warranty claims and oil changes while I shot free throws.

My father's plan performed brilliantly, and I was distracted enough through the early nineteen-sixties to make the high school basketball team and go on to college rather than toil away with a closet full of grease-stained clothes and fingernails that never came clean. But it wasn't so much the idea that sports trumped auto mechanics as it was the realization that I could never do what Joe Whitehouse did the way he did it. This is the lesson I learned on the particular Saturday in January when I received my new basketball and dribbled it while Joe prepared to tune up a Dodge Coronet with a 318 cubic inch engine.

First, he poured a mound of Velvet tobacco onto a small white paper as thin as a new blister. He licked the glued paper and lit the cigarette with a wooden match, striking it against the concrete floor as he knelt to contemplate the morass of sick metal before him. I quit dribbling, tucked the ball under my arm and approached the car.

"Hand me that wrench, boy," Joe said and stood, uncoiling his six-foot-four-inch frame until he towered above me. At first, I thought of my mother's favorite fable, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, granting Joe giant status. But as I look back on the scene now, I realize he more closely resembled the stalk with a huge flat head flowering from his calyx of a neck. Blue smoke spiraled from the cigarette between his lips. "Goddamnit, where's my wrench?"

I looked at the open drawer of his red Snap-On tool box only to find a cluster of various sized, shiny wrenches. I had no idea which one he wanted, and I was afraid to ask.

"You deaf, boy?" he roared.

"Which one, Joe?"

"Huh. Good question." His voice softened as he removed the cigarette from his mouth and flicked a long ash onto the floor. "Let's start with a 9/16th."

Having no idea what the numbers meant, I tore through the drawer, rattling and clanging wrenches till I saw the magic numbers on one. Placing the cold metal in his palm, I watched in awe as it, and the other tools he used over the course of that morning, came alive. The engine, trembling beneath his soft touch, spread itself open and exposed the mystic properties of its internal combustion soul. I had never witnessed a thing this remarkable. I had seen puppies born, rain fall with the sun shining, movies appear in a square wooden box my father brought home from the appliance store, but never a whole engine come undone into so many seemingly unrelated pieces, and so quickly. Joe seemed to know what tool he needed and what it was needed for by instinct alone. He never faltered, never hesitated, and never quit till—like a jigsaw puzzle shaken and poured from a box—bolts, nuts, plugs, gaskets, bearings, plates, relays, and wires lay strewn across the metal tabletop behind him in no particular order. How could anyone return it to its original majesty? More than that, how could it become greater than the sum of these insignificant parts and work right again?

"Was your dad a real Indian, Joe?"

"Cherokee. I ain't as lucky as you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, he gave me a love for expensive cars and cheap whiskey, and that's all he ever done for me. Your dad does a lot more for you. Hell, I ain't never had a basketball."

"My dad can't fix a car."

"No, he can't. He don't know the first thing about fixing cars, but he sure can sell 'em." Joe set the wrench on the fender and leaned back against the metal table to roll another smoke. "See, every man can do at least one thing real good with his mind, and every man can do at least one thing good with his hands. But if that one thing is the same thing, and he puts his whole heart into it, then he maybe gets to be an artist at it. For me, it was fixing these hunks of metal. For your dad, it was baseball. Problem is, after he come home from the war, he didn't have his heart in sports no more. But that don't mean you get to disrespect him 'cause he put his heart into making a living for his family and raising you kids right."

I'd like to say that Joe's words elevated my admiration for my dad and I carried that respect through adolescence. However, truth be told, I had begun to enter that phase of life where sons recognize the flaws of their fathers. Our relationship over the next decade can be described as *turbulent* at best.

At noon, my father barked over the intercom and ordered me out of the shop area and into his office at the back of the showroom floor. It was lunch time. Joe kept cleaning parts and lubricating various fittings while Dad and

I drove two blocks up Prince Street to Dick Clark's Drive-In and bought a bag full of DC burgers and chocolate shakes. I ate mine as we drove back to the dealership. I wanted another but didn't ask because I knew they were for Joe and the rest of the crew.

While the mechanics ate their burgers, Dad and I spoke briefly about how to focus on shooting free throws. I sat in his office, and he spoke across the huge desk as if I were a customer buying a new Dodge.

"When you're in the middle of a game, any game, you can't let the crowd distract you. You can't let the other players distract you. You have to shut out everything but the task at hand. You can't hear the noise or see the cheerleaders. Put a letter or a number in your mind. When I pitched, I always used the number 8. I put it right in the middle of the catcher's mitt. *You* need to put it right over the rim of the basket and then hit it with the ball. Except for the number 8, your mind should be totally blank."

Sports seemed to be the only topic he was willing to cover. Whether he thought it was the only thing I needed to know at eleven years old or whether it was the only subject he felt safe talking about, I never figured out until I spent a year in Vietnam and learned about the fear of intimacy and the other strange emotions that burden combat survivors for the rest of their lives. I just listened and returned to the shop area to practice his advice. At one point during the afternoon as Joe reassembled the engine, I hit thirty-seven consecutive free throws. I might have gone on infinitely, but then Joe started the engine he had been overhauling. The starter whirred just as the ball left my fingers. I missed, distracted by the odd sound, and hung my head in shame. I had lost my focus. Had my father been there to see it happen, he would have shaken his head and granted me failure status. The remarkable thirty-seven free throws I had hit beforehand would simply have been what he expected from *his* son.

"Missed one, did ya, boy?" said Joe.

"The noise…."

"Yeah, the starter solenoid's got a burr on it. It'll go out one of these days, but not today. My work order here says fix the engine, and that's what I did."

"I made over thirty shots before I missed one."

"What would your dad say?" Joe smiled, baring a wide row of caramel colored teeth, and rolling another cigarette.

"He'd say, 'If you were half as good as you thought you were, you'd be twice as good as you are,' and then he'd tell me to remember what I did wrong when I missed."

"That's 'cause we learn from our mistakes."

"That's because he wants me to be perfect."

"No, he don't want you to be perfect. He just knows the world's a tough place and he wants you to be better than him so it don't weigh you down so much."

All the time we were talking, Joe leaned over the car fender and cocked his head in toward the engine, which idled so smoothly it seemed to be

turned off.

"Hear that?"

I confessed to hearing nothing. Joe told me to close my eyes, and then he walked me to the car, lifting me and setting me like a bag of groceries on the fender.

"Now what do you hear?"

Putting the number 8 in my mind as if I were on the free throw line, I focused on the smooth hum of the cylinders, the rods, the lifters, and the bearings. They all worked in perfect unison so that the engine sound seemed part of the natural world, indistinct from everything around it.

"Nothing," I said.

"Keep your eyes closed and just listen to the engine, nothing else."

Somewhere deep within the bowels of its metal body, a slight ticking sound clicked against the even hum of everything else.

"I hear it, Joe. It sounds like a cricket."

He laughed and reached behind him into the red toolbox. Taking a long screwdriver from a drawer, he leaned into the engine and adjusted a tiny screw somewhere underneath the carburetor. The tick disappeared, and I witnessed the creation of something perfect, something that had grown as a whole to have a life of its own way beyond the simple re-ordering of its parts.

Not long after that day, on another Saturday afternoon when the shop had been shut down for the weekend, Dad gathered all the salesmen, bookkeepers, mechanics, and me together for a good-bye party in Joe's honor. The tall Cherokee had taken the job as chief mechanic in the local coal mine fixing the big draglines and motors that mined the coal. The pay scale and retirement were way beyond my father's means. Even though Joe's first love was automobiles, he needed the job for his family's sake. It was the right thing for him to do. Joe knew it, and my father accepted it gracefully. I remember the party well because it was the last time I saw Joe. Within a few short years, his heart exploded. The whiskey he drank and the cigarettes he constantly smoked got all the blame, but I never accepted that diagnosis.

At the party, Joe sipped my father's Canadian Club from a paper cup and told me about a newspaper article he had read that very morning. It concerned a man in Louisville, Kentucky, who went to sleep one night and awoke the next morning speaking French, a language he had never heard. The story said there were only twelve cases of this phenomenon ever reported in the world. But Joe focused on the man's words rather than the miracle of the man's new language: "*Je suis perdu et seul*," which translated means "I am lost and alone."

"This is what happens when people have to live in one life while they belong in another," Joe said. Then he told me of a vision he'd had once as a young boy. His father had taken him to an old fashioned sweat lodge on a reservation out West someplace, and during the ritual of cleansing Joe went through, a dream came to him. In the dream, he painted winter wheat as it roiled and bubbled, trees at the moment they became forests, dawn as it

drained starlight from lakes, and autumn as it spun leaves into kaleidoscopes of color.

"I put that dream into my life with a set of tools instead of brushes," Joe said. "My canvas has always been an engine block, and I've always been happy. Now I'm gonna work on huge monster machines, chunks of metal with no feeling and no finesse just to make more money. I hope I don't end up like the guy from Louisville who can't remember who he is or where he's from."

"Why do it, then?"

"The same reason your dad sells cars, so my son might get the chance to grow up and paint those pictures I always dreamed about painting but never got to. You promise me you'll always respect your dad for trying to make your life better than his. There's a real art to that sacrifice."

I kept my promise to Joe. Over the next forty years, until my father died in 1998, we fought a lot, misunderstood each other's intentions, weathered my excesses with drugs and women, and finally got past his stubborn insistence that his way was the only way for me to become a good man. But no matter how tenuous the bonds of our relationship, I never doubted and always respected the sacrifices he made to be the best father he could be. During our last decade together, he realized his prominence as a successful artist in his own right. I'm sure of it. I could see it in his smile as his grandkids grew into happy, healthy young adults.

Today, I thought of Joe and my dad as I stood in an auto repair shop watching a boy named Bob tune up my Dodge. He plugged sensors, diodes, lasers, pulsars, and several colored wires into batteries, relays, resisters, and injection ports. Computer screens blipped blue lights, bells rang, and buzzers buzzed ominously.

"You got a bad problem here," said Bob.

"Can you fix it?"

"I think so, but I'm no artist."

Jason Ward

How Abigail Made Mom Smile

In 2003 my brother goes off and gets married by
a justice of the peace. He becomes a
stepdad to three kids. He works hard to
support them.

In 1985 I lose the spelling bee to Amy. The word
is 'when,' but I spell it 'win.' I did not ask
for a definition, or for the word to be used
in a sentence. I cry.

In 1990 I go to the public high school. There are 400 incoming freshmen. I went to grade school with a class of about 20. I have my first anxiety attack.

In 2000 I leave town and move 120 miles away. I do not stay in contact with family. I do a lot of sinning. I was raised Catholic. I have fun.

In 2001 my best friend, Andy, goes nuts. Way too many substances or just a bad mix. He thinks I dug a tunnel under his house to his room and am stealing baseball cards. I miss Andy.

In 1989 my big sister puts her fist through the window of the front door. My brother and I are playing Frisbee in the front yard. Her boyfriend is coming over.

In 1984 Mrs. Rearden says my brother is too far behind in reading and writing. She suggests to my parents that he go to a public school. He excels at math and goes on to graduate high school.

In 1992 I am playing outside my parents' home with our dog, Scooter. I am 15 years old and watching the cars go by. It's early fall. My sister dies in an auto accident later that night.

In 1983 we move from the trailer court. My mom says she needs to get us out of there. We move the trailer to the country. I get to play in the woods.

In 1981 my Mom meets Dennis. He visits my Mom and he brings me orange juice and a package of Reese's peanut butter cups. He becomes my stepfather.

In 2004 my little sister gives birth to Abigail, Mom's first grandchild. I had not seen Mom smile like that since the summer of 1992.

George Fillingham

Butterfly Sutra

"Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!"
Herman Melville

My youngest boy enjoyed long walks with me.
We often took the back way to the park

Now closed to visitors because the vandals
Wrecked the toilets and the ball fields.

Oh it was nice to have the park alone,
To walk the roads or wade the creek

With no one to disturb us as we talked;
And he was such a chatter box at 5.

I remember he once found the tail feather from
A red-tailed hawk. He later wore it in his hair

At Halloween. He was Tecumseh, Chief
Of the Shawnee. He carried a flintlock rifle.

But this is not about my memories so much.
I do remember, though, that he would bring

Me things he'd found, like fossils, bugs,
A special leaf; or he would shout,

"Daddy, look at this!" And there would be
Perhaps a cluster of ripe blackberries

That we'd eat together, or he would find
A hidden bird nest we would peek into.

But once he took me by surprise.
He bent down, then handed me

The dried remains of a monarch butterfly.
We looked at it a while and talked about how

Beautiful it was, how bright the wings.
He wanted me to keep it, but I said,

"Why should we now? It's dead."
He said, "If we don't collect these butterflies,

Nobody will." I still collect dead butterflies,
For Psyche's sake, if not for Man's,

For to recover one's soul (or any soul)
Is nothing short of life itself.

Mark Williams

A Normal Day

for Dee Gee

One day, when I am a very old man
and you are a very old woman, our wrinkled hands
smoothing creases from the morning paper
spread across a white-oak kitchen table
criss-crossed with scratches from cats long dead,
I will remind you of today, a normal day.
You sipped herbal tea. I drank strong coffee,
a bitter world fanned across a white-oak kitchen table
that we shared with Red Bud, Spring and Little Pie.
Outside our sliding door, squirrels ignored cobs of corn
and scrambled up the squirrel-proof feeder,
competing with blue jays, goldfinches, cardinals.
At our feet, two dogs, Sophie and Keeper,
waited for occasional bits of cereal from my bowl.

On that day, many years from now,
surrounded by the spirits of animals we have loved,
as you turn your head to watch brightly colored birds,
you will feel my hand rest lightly on your hand,

like today, when your hand settled onto mine.

Jessica Weafer

Cradling a Pillow

She rises from bed at night,
her eyes barely open, her body limp
and drags her feet to the kitchen.
Out of habit, she pulls a glass from the cupboard,
fills it with ice and dry gin.
The first sip awakens her senses, the second
awakens her despair.
Retracing her steps to bed,
she begins to cry, remembering
how they used to lie—his butt against her bladder,
her breasts against his back, feet and arms tangled.
She fits herself into her oversized bed,
cradling a pillow,
rocking to the motion of the body
that used to lie beside her.

Katherine Pearl

Fatal Potential

I found my brother Gregg sitting on the concrete patio, still wearing his dress slacks and crisp white dress shirt. I braced myself for some complaint about the unauthorized field trip, but that's not where his mind was.

"I understand Dad and Melissa," he said.

"What?"

"Joshua," he said. "She and Dad agreed they weren't going to have kids before they got married, and now there's Joshua."

"But Dad was ecstatic when Josh was born," I said, sitting down next to him.

"It's hard not to be excited about a baby, but trying to raise one at his age, it's got to be overwhelming," Gregg said.

I shrugged. "What did you say earlier that got you into so much trouble?" I asked.

Gregg groaned. "Melissa said she didn't know what she was going to do with Joshua during the day, and I told her I was sure Dad would keep taking care of him. He's not just going to walk away from his son."

"I said something like that earlier. Why the hell are we defending him? And how do we even know it's true?"

"I can't imagine him shirking his responsibilities," Gregg said. "You remember how good he was after he and Mom divorced."

"Yeah, *after* he and Mom divorced," I said.

Gregg gave me a severe look and then nodded. My brother and I aren't twins–he's thirty-seven and I'm thirty-two–and I've never thought of us as having any kind of psychic connection, but at that moment I knew both our minds were churning up the memories of the last time we'd seen our parents behave this irrationally.

There was the time that Mom (unknowingly?) gave away a bottle of wine that Dad had been saving for his fortieth birthday. He responded by pouring their entire collection, close to fifty bottles that Mom later claimed were worth thousands, down the kitchen sink. Mom was at a Tupperware party, but Gregg and I were at home. When Gregg figured out what Dad was up to, he ushered me to my room before retreating to his own. I came back out to watch. Dad uncorked them one by one and poured gracefully like a waiter in a commercial. He was methodical, never pausing for a drink or to examine any of the labels. When he was finished, he lined up the bottles on the kitchen table and counters, creating battalions of clear, amber, and green glass.

Mom didn't say anything when she got home that night, but the bottles had all disappeared by morning. A couple of weeks later, after some slight from Dad concerning her new hair color, she found the keys to the 1962 Mustang convertible he had been slowly but surely restoring. The car barely ran and the engine died several times even though the pond was just a mile

away. I don't remember where Gregg was, but I was seven which means he was twelve, so probably some kind of sports team practice. At the top of the bank, Mom told me to get out and stand back. She rode down the incline with the driver's side door open, and she jumped out just before it hit the water. She watched the vehicle partially submerge, then brushed the leaves off her sweater, and the two of us walked home. Dad didn't even notice the car was missing until the police showed up. He glared at Mom who shrugged her shoulders and looked at the ceiling. Dad told the officer some kids must have broken into the garage and stolen it.

There were other, less elaborate, incidents. Dad threw the china cabinet to the floor. Mom burned his clothing, including his beloved college letterman jacket, in a pit she dug in the backyard. She and I roasted marshmallows. Gregg refused to participate. Dad weed-whacked the Zinnias Mom had planted in the hopes of getting noticed by the garden club. Mom ran over the cable wire with the lawnmower hours before Dad and his friends were supposed to watch the World Series on the big screen TV he'd purchased.

Despite their appetite for destruction, they never hit each other. They seemed to have established some unspoken, but always abided, three-foot rule when they were fighting. They did yell threats, though, and accusations and curses for hours at a time. I remember trying to stop them once, shrieking at the top of my lungs for them to shut up. They didn't even look at me. I grabbed a dinner plate and flung it to the floor, but the damn thing was melamine so it didn't break. I gave up after that. Eventually, I preferred the times when they were yelling to the quiet times when I all I could do was worry what would set them off next.

They tried to fix things occasionally. They'd apologize to each other, promise Gregg and me that things were going to be better, kiss each other goodbye in the morning, and coo pet names at the dinner table. They'd read books about new ways to communicate, which resulted in them yelling phrases like, "You're failing to recognize my need for self-actualization, you son of a bitch." They went to a therapist once, but after three sessions, he told them to separate. None of their attempts to reconcile lasted more than a couple of weeks.

I never knew what finally ended it. Dad just disappeared for three days, and when he came back they sat us down in the living room and announced their plans to divorce. I was relieved, not just that they were splitting up, but that Dad was still alive. Even though I was only ten years old, I'd begun to see the fatal potential of their relationship, and I'd been worried the police were going to fish Dad out of the pond this time.

"If they'd stayed together another year, they would have killed each other," Gregg said, staying in perfect synch with my train of thought. I nodded, but couldn't think of anything to add.

(excerpt from Blended*, a novel-in-progress)*

Tonya Northenor

Difference

I expected to love you, to recognize myself
in your face, to smile when you clenched
a finger in your fist, to pretend it was already an embrace.
What was surprising was how wide your eyes would be,

absorbing everything. So we learn to watch what is
there to see. How eager those hands to cling and to let go.
How much the rest of the world changed.
Overnight the globe grew full of mothers,

others who knew the quiet charm of a feathery head
tucked into that space between chin and chest.
And that fathers, or potential fathers, were among those
in the ticker-tape numbers falling back from war.

Tragedies no longer mere numbers, but faces and hands.
Everything suddenly, shockingly non-objective.
The news occupied by sons' and daughters' stories –
succeeding or failing at each fragile life.

Every stranger a potential blessing or threat
to this tiny being snoring in his cradle.
That meager draw of breath
the universe waits so silently to hear.

Danielle Ryle

Rabbit Woman

The midwife never caught her hiding the round things
beneath her long skirt, eyes and hands anxious,
counting blankets, the heated water, constellations,
not wondering at the sweet vegetable smell.
The rabbits fleeing her body, too warm,
thumping long feet at the midwife.
She did not, of course, truly give birth to rabbits,
and neither did I, but I like to imagine myself
with fur inside, the long ears listening through my body:
born wet and running.

Annette Allen, director of the humanities doctoral program at U. of L., has authored two poetry collections, *Country of Light (1996),* for which she received the Witte Award, and *What Vanishes (2006).* She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her sixth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Phoebe Athey, an Owensboro native, often tries in her writing to describe the Rip van Winkle effect of 30 years of change: overall, nothing is better or worse. Her satire is a popular feature at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her fourth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Casey Aud is a 2007 Brescia grad with a degree in psychology. He received Brescia's 2007 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing, and he is cracking his knuckles while finishing his first novel. He also performs at 3rd Tuesday.

Todd Autry teaches English and creative writing at Ohio County Middle School. He has three children, he is preparing his *Monroe Country, Volume II* manuscript for publication, and he reads at 3rd Tuesday. This is his second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Erin Barnhill works as a technical editor in Lexington. Besides writing poetry, she enjoys making pottery. She has read at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her fourth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Michael Battram lives in Evansville, works in Henderson, and writes in his car. His writing appears in many publications, including upcoming issues of *Abbey, Blue Unicorn,* and *Pearl*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his tenth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Alison Baumann graduated from UC Berkeley in the early 70s, lives on a small farm at the end of a lane in Posey County, IN, and still dreams of having voice and soul enough to be heard among the poets of Telegraph Avenue. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her seventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Barbara Bennett joined the Brescia creative writing program in 1994. She has worked in public relations, newspapers, and television, and she is studying writing in Spalding U's MFA program. She and her husband live in Owensboro, and this is her eleventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Katie Beyke, from Carterville, IL, is a freshman at Brescia majoring in English/professional writing and math. She aspires to be a professional playwright and lifetime employee of McDonald's.

Terry Bisson is the author of a dozen or so SF books, most recently *Greetings* and *Numbers Don't Lie.* He hails from Owensboro, when he hails at all, and he is a frequent contributor to *Open 24 Hours*.

Matthew Branham teaches at OCTC and is married to his grad school sweetheart and is the proud father of a little boy who makes each day brighter. He writes poems, stories, and songs; he reads at 3rd Tuesday; and this is his third appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Courtney Campbell lives in Mortons Gap, KY, and attends Madisonville C.C. She was a jaded, science-minded, unsentimental poet before becoming a teacher at a daycare center. Now she is a fairytale, and she reads at 3rd Tuesday.

Jason Chaffin, a writer of fantastical fiction, is majoring in English/professional writing at Brescia, and he is the recipient of Brescia's 2008 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing. He is toiling over his first novel and hopes to prevent mankind's self-destruction with his writing—or at least win a Pulitzer.

John Dawson graduated from Brescia in 1973 and is an artist/photographer in Evansville who works in pencil, paint, air, and digital. This is the third issue of *Open 24 Hours* for which he has provided the art.

Laurie Doctor, a painter and calligrapher whose work is based on language and contemplative practice, teaches at Naropa U. and offers workshops and lectures internationally. She lives in Louisville, and she has read at 3rd Tuesday.

Kathleen Driskell is the associate program director of Spalding U's MFA in writing program. Her second book of poems, *Seed Across Snow*, is forthcoming from Red Hen Press. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her eighth appearance in *Open 24 Hours.*

Alice Driver graduated from Berea with majors in English and Spanish. She has studied in Spain, Mexico, and Costa Rica, she is working on an MA in Hispanic studies at U.K., and she has read at 3rd Tuesday.

Lynnell Edwards has published two collections of poetry and has new work forthcoming in such journals as *Poems & Plays* and *Dos Passos Review*. She teaches at U. of L., is associate director of InKY, Inc., and reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Misha Feigin, a musician and writer, emigrated from Moscow in 1990, is the author of two books, has a master's in electronics, won the Thomas Merton Prize in 2000, and has read at 3rd Tuesday.

George Fillingham is, as Yeats put it, torn between the life and the work (predominately poetry). He is a Thomas Merton Catholic Zen sort of fellow who tries to love and respect everything. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Brent Fisk is a writer from Bowling Green, KY, whose work has appeared in over 150 publications including *Prairie Schooner* and *Fugue.* A former Pushcart nominee, he won last year's Sam Ragan Prize and the Willow Award, and he has read at 3rd Tuesday.

Rey Ford, from Owensboro, lives with his wife, Laura Minks, in Longmont, Colorado, and has taken up oil painting. He received Brescia's 1989 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing, and his poetry appears annually in *Open 24 Hours.*

Clayton Galloway, a divorced father of two daughters, works in IT at Texas Gas and is studying creative writing at Brescia. He wants happiness and publication but will settle for the latter.

Joey Goebel is a 2002 Brescia graduate and recipient of Brescia's 2002 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing. His first two novels have been published in ten languages, and his third novel, *Commonwealth*, will be released in 2008. This is his eighth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Martha Greenwald has poems in numerous journals including *Poetry* and *Shenandoah*. A former Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford, she lives in Louisville, and she has read at 3rd Tuesday. This is her second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Louise Halsey, an emcee at 3rd Tuesday, has called herself a weaver most of her life but finds that too limiting. Now she aspires to perform using words as part of how she weaves. She and her potter husband, Stephen Driver, live in Owensboro, and this is her second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

John Hay lives in Frankfort on Scotland Farm. His stories that first appeared in *Open 24 Hours* have been reprinted in *The Kentucky Anthology,* the *KY Humanities Council Magazine*, and *The Legal Studies Forum*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his seventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Cheston Hoover received Brescia's 2002 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing. He teaches English at Ohio Co. High School, he has a two-year-old daughter, Xanthe, and he is doing post-graduate work at WKU. This is his eighth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Dori Howard received Brescia's 2006 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing. She writes poetry between practicing Beatle worship and trying to remember what she was going to say. This is her fourth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Erin Keane is the author of the poetry collection *The Gravity Soundtrack*, and her poems, essays, and reviews have appeared in many publications including *Nimrod* and *Louisville Magazine*. She directs the InKY Reading Series in Louisville, she reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her fourth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Kelly Lee teaches theology at Presentation Academy in Louisville where she also serves as campus minister. She received Brescia's 2004 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing, and this is her seventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jonathan Mattingly retired from the Marines as a sergeant after serving in the infantry in Iraq in 2003 and again in 2004-2005. He is from Owensboro where he lives with his wife, Laura, and is a freshman at Brescia preparing to teach high school history.

Ed McClanahan is the author of *The Natural Man*, *Famous People I Have Known* and other books. He and his wife, Hilda, live in Lexington. He has performed at Brescia and 3rd Tuesday, and this is his tenth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jim McGarrah teaches at Wilkes Honors College in Florida. His poems, essays, and stories have appeared in many journals, and he has published an anthology of essays and memoirs, a novel, a collection of poems, and a Vietnam memoir. He is a frequent reader at 3rd Tuesday and contributor to *Open 24 Hours*.

Norman Minnick was born in Louisville. His book, *To Taste the Water*, won the First Series Award in poetry from Mid-List Press, and he has edited an anthology that will be published in 2009. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours.*

Kelly Moffett teaches writing at Kentucky Wesleyan, and she directs Kentucky's Retreat for Women Writers each July in Owensboro. Her work has appeared in many publications, and her first book of poems was released in 2008. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her fourth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Irene Mosvold won the 2005 Fool for Poetry international chapbook competition in Cork, Ireland, and she has received two professional arts awards from the KY Arts Council for nonfiction. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jesse Mountjoy is a lawyer whose writing has appeared in many publications, including *The Legal Studies Forum*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and *Exquisite Corpse*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his tenth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Adria Nassim is a junior at Brescia majoring in English/professional writing. She has grown up with various disabilities and disorders, including Asperger's Syndrome, and she writes poetry and fiction for children with special needs. She is the recipient of Brescia's 2008 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing.

Tonya Northenor teaches English at OCTC, and her poetry has been published in various journals. Last year she became a new mom and a Pushcart nominee and had a poem published in *From the Other World: Poems in Memory of James Wright*. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours.*

Elizabeth Oakes teaches at WKU. Her book, *The Farmgirl Poems*, won the 2004 Pearl Poetry Prize, and in 2008 Wind Press will publish *The Luminescence of All Things Emily*, a volume of poems about Emily Dickenson and her friends and family. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her third appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Katherine Pearl is the recipient of Brescia's 1998-1999 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing. A native of Kentucky, she is pursuing an MFA in creative writing at North Carolina State U., and this is her eighth appearance in *Open 24 Hours.*

Tom Raithel and his wife, Theresa, live in Evansville with two vivacious dogs. He recently retired from a 30 year career as a newspaper reporter, and he reads at 3rd Tuesday.

Brett Eugene Ralph has published in many journals, and his collection, *Black Sabbatical*, will be published by Sarabande Books in 2009. His namesake rock ensemble, Kentucky Chrome Revue, can be heard in seedy dives throughout the South. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his eleventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Linda Neal Reising teaches 8th grade English. Her poetry and fiction have been published in *Southern Indiana Review*, in *Comstock Review*, in *Know This Place: Poetry of Indiana*, and in *Fruitflesh*, a book for women writers. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her fourth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Patrick Reninger earned a degree in English from Brescia in 1987. He lives on the Northwest Side of Chicago, works in a call center for an Internet based retailer, and plays harmonica in a Chicago-based band. This is his fourth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Teresa Roy lives in Evansville and comprises 1/6th of the First Mondays Writers Group, and she hopes you will like her even though her voice is changing. She has been reading at Brescia's 3rd Tuesday Coffeehouse since the first year the event was "divined," and this is her eleventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Ashley Danielle Ryle studies creative writing at Kentucky Wesleyan College and graduates in 2008. She believes in the short, lyric poem and the image; she plans to pursue an MFA; and she reads at 3rd Tuesday Coffeehouse.

Bernd Sauermann teaches at Hopkinsville C.C. and lives in Cadiz, KY, with his wife and three children, all of whom remind him that he is an infinitesimally small speck which is nowhere near the center of the universe. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his seventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Sagan Sette, from Elizabethtown, KY, is a freshman at Brescia majoring in English/professional writing. She aspires to be a stand-up comedienne or have a ranch for the developmentally disabled with whom she would just play all day.

Steven Skaggs is a typographer and calligrapher and native of Louisville, where he teaches design at the Hite Art Institute at U. of L. His first collection, *Poems from Elsewhere*, was published by Arable Press in 2006. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Frederick Smock is poet-in-residence at Bellarmine U. He has published three volumes of poetry with Larkspur Press, and his newest book is *Craft-Talk:On Writing Poetry* (Wind). He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Mari Stanley recently earned an MFA in writing from Spalding and is teaching at OCTC. She is from Muhlenberg County but lives in Owensboro with her husband. Her poems have appeared in *Words*, *Xavier Review*, and other publications, and she reads at 3rd Tuesday.

Joe Survant, Kentucky Poet Laureate from 2002-2004, has authored four collections of poems and has recent publications in *Nimrod* and *The Louisville Review*. He retired in 2007 from teaching at WKU, and he reads at 3rd Tuesday. This is his eleventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Richard Taylor was Kentucky Poet Laureate from 1999-2001. The magazine *Back Home in Kentucky* devoted a spring 2008 issue to his "Kentucky's Lincoln," part of a series which explores the relationship between Lincoln and Kentucky. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his eighth appearance in *Open 24 Hours.*

Chris Tiahrt, Brescia mathematics professor, learning from his two year old daughter, has supplanted language with urgent gestures and occasional wails. He has appeared in *Open 24 Hours* since 1993.

Jason Ward is an education major at Brescia who plans to teach middle school English and science. He writes when he finds the time but reads even when he doesn't have the time.

Jessica Weafer is a 2006 Brescia graduate with a major in English/professional writing. This is her third year as an assistant editor and her third appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Matthew Weafer, a 2006 Brescia graduate with a major in English/professional writing, received Brescia's 2006 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing. He works as a freelance writer and is seeking a publisher for his first poetry collection. This is his fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Mary Welp, a 1979 Brescia graduate, is the author of the novel *The Triangle Pose.* She lives with her husband and son in Louisville where she writes monthly food and wine columns for *Louisville Magazine* and is the book page editor of *LEO*. Her second novel, *The Artificial Heart*, will be published soon, and her writing appears regularly in *Open 24 Hours*.

Cat Wethington graduated from Brescia in 1987 as an art major. She lives with too many dogs in a suburb of Pellville (formerly Bucksnort), KY. This is her fourth recent appearance in *Open 24 Hours*, for which she is an associate editor.

Terri Whitehouse completed her MFA in writing at Spalding in 2007. She writes for DM-KY.com, plays drums in a two-piece band, and aspires to be a judge at her hometown's International BBQ festival. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Mark Williams is in the real estate business in Evansville. His writing has appeared in *Hudson Review*, *Indiana Review*, and *Southern Review*, and online at *Able Muse*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Creative Writing at Brescia

Creative Writing at Brescia is much more than classes; it is a far-reaching program that includes a regional writers group, a monthly coffeehouse, visiting writers, opportunities for publication, workshops, scholarships, and more.

Creative Writing has been a part of the English program at Brescia since 1968. The University uses writing talent scholarships to recruit promising high school writers, but all facets of the program are open to any interested student or non-student. The result is a rich mix of active writers.

The Brescia Writers Group, which includes anyone who is in any way affiliated with the Creative Writing program, is a multi-purpose organization that offers a variety of activities and opportunities. Some members of the Writers Group meet to critique each other's writing. Other members produce the monthly Third Tuesday Writers Coffeehouse at a downtown Owensboro cafe. Still others present creative writing workshops in the schools and for community groups as well as on the Brescia campus. The Brescia Writers Group also publishes the annual edition of *Open 24 Hours*, and it produces "After Hours," the creative writing page of Brescia's weekly student newspaper, *The Broadcast*.

Over the years, numerous nationally known writers have visited Brescia and worked with the creative writing students. The list includes Robert Bly, Stephen Mooney, William Stafford, Ruth Whitman, Sandra McPherson, Mark Harris, Sena Naslund, X.J. Kennedy, William Matthews, Jim Wayne Miller, Gurney Norman, Ed McClanahan, Terry Bisson, Joe Survant, Kathleen Driskell, and Brescia graduates Mary Welp and Joey Goebel.

In addition to Creative Writing, Brescia offers an English major and minor with an emphasis in professional writing. The curriculum includes journalism, professional and technical writing, creative writing, and practicums. The major prepares students for careers in journalism, public relations, and communications. The minor is designed to prepare students for graduate school and to complement other career emphases, from business to science.

For more information, contact Dr. Craig Barrette, Coordinator of the English program, or David Bartholomy, Director of Creative Writing.