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Cover/interior artwork
by David Stratton:

Cover: "Lake's Edge"

Page 1: "UP Pond"

"Path"

Page 4: "Lake's edge"

Page 28: "A Pair of Trees"

Page 52: "River"

Page 80: "Stone Bridge"

Page 108: "Broken Stump"



Editor's Note:

All of the 48 writers in this issue 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 (20) are current or former Brescia students, some have given workshops or readings at Brescia, and some have read at Third Tuesday Writers Coffeehouse, which is an outreach of Brescia's creative writing program. 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 and therefore deserves to be read.

D.B.

The views expressed in this journal are, of course, those of the writers.

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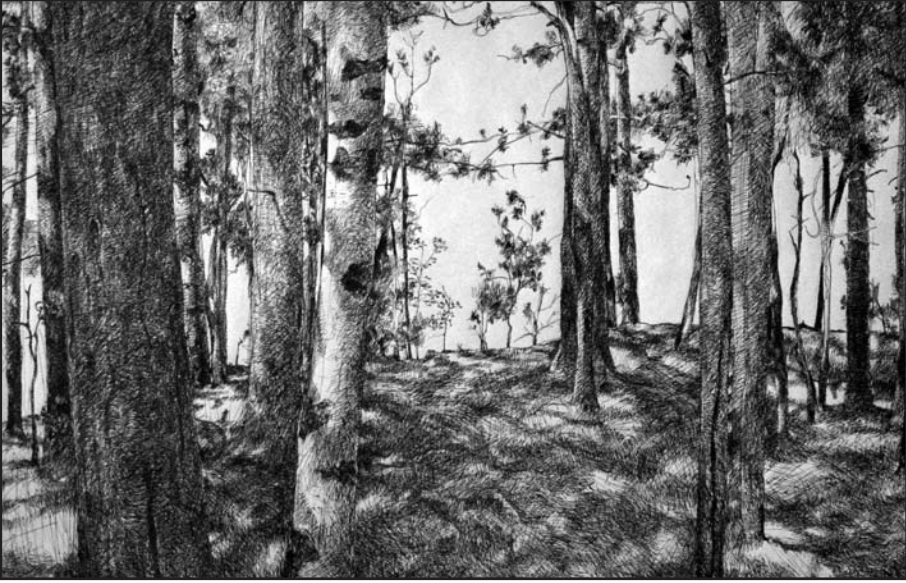
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To Make Yourself Heard



“The most beautiful struggle that I have ever seen is found in addiction.”

Chris Karn, p. 5

“Jesus was dressed as an old-timey prostitute.”

Joey Goebel, p. 24

Chris Karn

Addiction

The Giants are playing the Cowboys. I'm drinking a beer as the opening kick-off occurs. It's around 3:30 and there's not much to be said about my day. I've been awake for only an hour, and the math of how long I've been conscious and awake for the weekend is grim. Factoring in the nightly blackout and sleeping off the hangover, I've only been somewhat cognizant of my weekend for a few hours at best.

I never consider the ills of drinking as I drink, surrounded by people in a bar that makes everything feel fictional. People wore costumes on Saturday night, but Steve and I didn't. It had to be the most symbolic thing I had ever been a part of. Everyone else needed the slutty Pirate costume or the Rambo mullet or whatever to make it feel like they were dressing up as someone else, that they were a part of some different storyline than the one they were living out every other day. When addiction circles you and leaves as an emaciated prisoner in its dark cell, everything that isn't involved with the addiction requires a costume. Very few realize that.

A lady once told me about a book she read where the private eye was a struggling alcoholic, and the way she described him wasn't accurate at all. I'm sure the way the writer described it wasn't accurate at all either. I can tell when writers don't get it, when they try to describe something they know very little about. There will be pages and pages about a man's drinking habits, a couple of beers, maybe even a case, something that sounds like a lot, but there's no struggle behind the drink. They might recreate some scenes they saw an addict play out on TV, but they don't get what's really happening with the man.

I used to read Bukowski and Hunter S. with a kind of disbelief, with a sense that what I was reading couldn't be accurate, that men simply aren't capable of such prolonged damage to themselves. Then, one day, driving home after an acid trip, my mind felt all that *Fear and Loathing* put out there. I always saw Raoul Duke as an exaggerated character, but as I drove, his thoughts became my thoughts, and what was written on those pages become less of an elaborate cartoon and more of simple truth.

I realized that it's not until you experience the hazy morning fear and anxiety of what might have happened during the blacked out night before, until you re-meet the same people over and over for months, those people hogging all the clear memories of your time together for themselves, until your hands shake and your heart races

faster than it ever had as sweat pours out of you in the coldest of rooms, until you realize you have to sacrifice a lot of what you, the real you, loves so the addict inside you can keep his love alive that you truly get what addiction is.

Those men aren't deranged souls anymore like most people see them; they're courageous men whose crazed minds put down the most beautiful of words while sane men without any of their struggles couldn't come up with one. I understand why people who've never experienced addiction can be fascinated by it. There's a novelty to it, but at the same time, as I battle with my own, I become more and more fascinated by sober people. They're like monkeys from a different tribe, a different culture, a culture that I want to understand.

The reason I love my addiction as much as I hate it is it makes every day much more beautiful than I've ever known. There is a definite struggle, but just like the yin and the yang, there's a great harmony to it, and I'm sure that I smile much more than I scowl. Sober people, and whatever kind of life that is to live, pick their chances to smile, delicately planning the next time they'll put excitement in their life. I have it in my life every single day, and while I have to pay the toll for it, it's certainly better than a wasted life, one spent extending my existence, hoping one day I'll be allowed to enjoy it. I'm enjoying it now, and I'll always enjoy it.

There's a Zen monk from the 15th century named Ikkyu. Tom Robbins was a big fan of him. Ikkyu saw the temples to be corrupt and the furthest things from Zen that he knew. Instead of spending time in a temple to teach his followers, he spent time with prostitutes and saki. Of all that I read about the best way to live, Ikkyu seemed to get it right, and a few centuries later Bukowski did, too. You have to chase what you want in life instead of trying to convince yourself that you shouldn't. We were given bodies built for pleasure and gratification, and everyone thinks that whoever gave these bodies to us doesn't want us to acknowledge that.

The most beautiful struggle that I've ever seen is found in addiction. It's a balancing act of finding the good and the bad within it, a razor's edge of happiness. People who've never attempted the balancing act can only try to know what's it like, and to know what it's like is something I wish on everyone and no one.

Matthew Lasley
She and Bukowski

I'm trying to keep myself busy
these days.

I don't stay in as much
as I used to.

I read at workshops.

I crack jokes
to anybody who'll listen.

But I still see her.

It's not as if I'm looking for her.
I know better
than that.

And Bukowski poems don't help
much.

That old drunk
stockpiled loneliness
in the warehouse
of his heart
so he could blot out that poor bluebird
every morning.

And it hurts to read him,
but he's the only one who gets it:

her being gone
and my knowing that I'd lose her
from the first time we kissed
one Saturday night in April
on a couch
in some woman's empty basement,

with only two lamps
and soft echoes
to elucidate
our sighs.

Jim McGarrah

A Savage Cup of Coffee

(for Ashley)

This barista brings out the animal in me. You might think it has to do with the way her nipples stretch the red tee-shirt or the precise cross-hatching of her braided hair. Sure, her glide between the coffee machine and the pastry case, like a ballerina in sneakers one second and a stripper on a pole the next, flogs my old blood into adolescent frenzy. When she breaks and sits next to me, knees tucked beneath her chin as calyx for the blossom of her face, cinnamon overwhelms the room.

But this is all romantic crap—really. When I admit to savage lust not romance, the owner of this faux-beatnik coffeehouse full of unread books and strange paintings takes offense at my use of the word “savage” and deems me racist toward Indians—not the kind of Indians who design rocket guidance systems or own all of America’s motels, but the kind with buckskins and buffalo or feathers and arrows, the Lone Ranger’s Tonto kind and HBO’s Squanto kind, the Indians that suffer from the detritus of Manifest Destiny.

It seems this person grew up on a reservation. You know, one of those sterile, hopeless, desert prisons where we white folk cage the ugly part of our history. Yet my urge to pluck this innocent—or maybe not so pure—barista from her seat and run my lips across her silken neck until her breathing gets heavy and rapid does not seem to me reserved for red men. My ancestors lived in Ireland before time. With blue painted faces and feral cries they clubbed enemies to death and laughed at the lamentations of their women. I want my own savagery respected.

Joe Survant

Winter Among the Mystassins

Fr. Jerome Clermont, 1638

This cabin of poles and birch bark fills
with the smoke of a smoldering fire.
My clothes and hair reek with it.
My eyes burn and weep with it,

by morning swollen shut so tight
I stumble out into the cold
rubbing off a thin crust of dried
rheum and collapse in a coughing fit.

Cold is everywhere, blowing through
the bark walls, seeping from the ground
through my fir branch bed. My head
feels tamped with woolen lint.

I eat from a dish cleaned with greasy
hides, or licked by dogs. I wipe my hands
on their fur as they press forward to steal
food. They growl as if they meant

to do me harm, but do not bite. This morning
I awoke with five standing around me.
The Mystassins ignore me but their dogs
must think me a weak and dying meal.

Ka-wa-ska's sick son sleeps
near me and the rotten smell of his scrofula
turns my stomach. We eat from the same
bowl and pick deer hair from our meat.

Daily despite the cold I shake out
my cassock and stockings to throw off
the vermin that infest me. Never have I
seen savages so dirty. I fear my death

among them, yet must not complain
confronted with the suffering of those before
me—the slow death and torment of
Father Jorges in the camp of the Hiroquois.

Here with the Mystassins, I endure only
what they endure, a hard life in a cold
hard place. I accept my fate among
them, and to my faith bear witness.

God grant that I may live out
this winter and go on to the southern
tribes on La Belle Riviere before I die,
a worthless servant of the Missions.

Ed McClanahan

Hatchling of the Chickasaw: a Kentucky Waterways Story

By the summer of 1943, my dad, the striving young Standard Oil distributor of rural Bracken County, Kentucky, had recently become a 35-year-old draftee in the United States Army, and my mom, already the Chief Clerk of the Bracken County rationing board, was obliged to take on the stewardship of the little Standard Oil biz as well. With two full-time jobs, what she didn't need was my pudgy, myopic, probably sulky ten-year-old self underfoot all summer long, which is how I too came to get drafted—for six delightfully martial weeks of counting cadence at Kamp Kadet, a summer camp near Versailles, KY, operated by a local military academy.

My dad hated the United States Army, and I hated Kamp fucking Kadet—and for the record, our mutual distaste for our respective boot camp ordeals that summer was probably the closest he and I ever came to seeing eye to eye about *anything*.

Actually, Kamp Kadet itself was a rather nice place: a cluster of four or five modest one-story frame buildings nestled among the willow trees and sycamores on the shady, sandy banks of the Kentucky River, a picturesque, clean (in those days), mostly navigable little stream that has its headwaters down in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky and meanders northward across the state all the way up to Carrollton, where it empties into the Ohio. Behind Kamp Kadet was a broad bottomland meadow that accommodated a good softball diamond, a running track, and a little archery range. Actually not a bad place at all—if it hadn't been for Captain fucking Bates.

During the regular school year, Captain Bates was the headmaster of the military academy's elementary school; in the summertime, he ran the show at Kamp Kadet. I never figured out whether he was a real captain, but he sure knew how to strut around like one, him in his goddamn jodhpurs and riding boots, counting cadence on the noggin of any little boy within reach with the ivory handle of his ever-present riding crop. There wasn't a horse anywhere on the property, of course; Captain Bates just liked the figure he cut in that get-up. He was a handsome, vain, crewcut martinet who took a pervert's ugly delight in dominating and brow-beating and generally smacking around a helpless little troop of pre-adolescent boys, who roundly hated him for these attentions. And in company with my fellow unhappy kampers, my distaste for Captain Bates logically extended to Kamp Kadet as well, nice place that it indisputably was.

Well, my dad and I both survived that summer of our mutual discontent and many more besides, and the military summer of '43 faded

into distant memory, no doubt for both of us. I know my dad certainly wasn't thinking about it when ... but never mind; I'll get to that in a minute.

A lot changed over the ensuing 15 years, but none of it stopped the clock, so that by the early summer of 1958, I had somehow morphed into a newlywed, newly-minted Master of the Arts in English, reluctant courtesy of the University of Kentucky, where I hadn't done well—where, as a matter of incontrovertible fact, I had flunked the Master's oral exam, and where, alas, I'd had to trudge through yet another tedious academic year before I became eligible to try again. Including the two academic quarters I'd spent flunking out of grad school at Stanford in 1955-56, it had taken me three full years to get what was surely the lamest MA ever relinquished by the UK English department. I had exactly one job application in the hopper, for a gig teaching freshman comp in a remote educational outpost somewhere in Oregon. But that prospect seemed almost laughably improbable, and otherwise I had no prospects at all.

I was also laboring, at the time, under a secret yearning to go in for *la vie Boheme* in some capacity or another. Specifically, I wanted to take off with my new bride to some beatnik pad (those accommodations being the hottest thing going, according to *Life* magazine) in Greenwich Village or San Francisco or maybe even on the Left Bank of the Rue de la Paix in downtown Paris, France, where I would set up shop as a sullen, brooding, existentialist free-lance writer, a trade for which I wouldn't be needing no piddly-ass MA in English anyhow, thank you very much. This was all a pipedream, of course—I was to a free-lance writer what Captain Bates was to General MacArthur, and for that matter I wasn't all that sure what "existential" meant, either—, but I had the sullen, brooding part down cold, and that summer I was in no mood to be trifled with.

Now during those same 15 years my father's circumstances had also changed dramatically, in his case very much for the better. His Standard Oil business had expanded to include the adjoining county, and we had moved to Maysville, a bustling, prosperous Ohio River town 20 miles to the east. In 1948, a Standard Oil Company towboat pushing a tow of petroleum-product barges on the Ohio caught fire and sank, stranding the mighty Standard Oil Company of Kentucky's river transportation system high and dry. (A towboat, for some obscure nautical reason, does not tow barges, it pushes them; and by the same peculiar logic, the string of barges that the towboat pushes is called ... a tow!) My father, who had an exceptionally sharp eye for the main chance, quickly partnered up with another sharp-eyed Standard Oil agent named Pete, and together they scoured the Ohio River dockyards until they turned up an antiquated but sturdy little out-of-work sternwheeler named the *Chickasaw*. They took in another partner, formed a little company of their own—Triangle Towing—, leased the *Chickasaw* on the cheap, rounded up a pilot and a crew, and started moving product between Pittsburgh and Paducah for Standard Oil.

The *Chickasaw* soon proved herself up to the task, and the Triangle

partners prospered accordingly. (And I must say I'm damned glad they did, considering that this particular hatchling of the *Chickasaw*—namely me—has lived for many years mostly on the proceeds of a trust fund which had its inception in the earnings of that unlovely but lovable old tub, bless her heart.) When they'd raised sufficient capital, the partners bought the hard-working old gal outright, and for the next five years or so she paddled tirelessly back and forth in their service, pushing tows of six or eight petroleum barges—immense floating steel vaults, each with a deck the size of two high school basketball courts laid end to end—, plying the Ohio between Pittsburgh and Paducah. Triangle, meanwhile, began accumulating a little string of barges unto itself, which the partners leased to Standard Oil—whose executives they simultaneously showered with country hams, cases of Old Charter, Harris tweed sportcoats, football tickets, and similar wampum, in return for which those wily eminences generously condescended to include Triangle's barges in the *Chickasaw's* tow—meaning that the Standard Oil Company, unbeknownst to its oblivious stockholders, would be paying the Triangle Towing Company untold thousands for moving its—Triangle's!— own barges!

Which, judging from today's headlines about Wall Street chicanery, is more or less how most big and wanna-git-big bizness is conducted to this very day...and always has been. But I digress.

So by dint of this and many similar stratagems over the years, my dad and his partners did very well indeed. Eventually, they replaced the *Chickasaw* with a larger, more up-to-date towboat, the fortuitously-named *City of Maysville*, and then they added the even larger *Elisha Wood* and a couple more barges to their burgeoning little navy, and began working for Ashland Oil and Gulf Oil as well as for Standard. Somewhere along the way, my dad bought a summer cottage on a remote local lake, and the purchase included a big red wooden canoe, another addition to the fleet.

Then, in the early summer of 1958, he ponied up big-time for his own personal flagship, a brand-new, ostentatiously bulky, embarrassingly overpowered houseboat, for which he proposed to stage a gala launching party at—of all the spots he could have chosen on all the countless miles of riverbanks and lakeshores in the whole state of Kentucky, my father decided to have his launching party at...Kamp fucking Kadet!

* * * *

I'm telling this story in installments, of which this is obviously the first, and I haven't quite figured out what comes next. Stay tuned.

But I do know one thing for sure: Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, this is not going to be another ingrate-child-bites-hand-that-fed-him story. In this story—which aspires to be a long one, maybe even a book—, my churlish, resentful attitude toward my dad reaches its

nadir on the day of the launching party, begins improving incrementally from that day forward, and does so for the rest of his life, and for all the days thereafter.

Richard Taylor

Cartography

When maps were pilots' guides to silk or glory,
cartographers added at least one "trap-line,"
one imaginary place, somewhere falsely named
to thwart those who pirated them into print.
You are mine. Following your contours in all
your loops and nooses, your varying elevations,
I trip across your trap-line. Close to home,
my compass shivers, its needle pointing
this way, that, toward some imagined landfall.
Zigging, zagging, switching tack, I scrape bottom,
pass rocks that boulder into sea beasts. Your West
is "Terra Incognita," true destinations marked only
on your master map. A haze ahead, behind,
I bump along your coast, a citizen of salt.

Barbara Bennett

What I Never Got Over #3

A night so hot the locusts forgo singing. Bluegrass buffs pump paper fans as if iron lungs on the other side of the world depend on them. The audience waits while the band tunes and retunes sweat-soaked strings. The musicians sound fine, especially the lanky banjo player who is half the age you would have been—even younger, more likely. They play the new old-timey songs, the country songs you and I played on the truck radio while we crisscrossed the plains from one tank farm to the next, where you welded iron by day and we plotted our getaway from that life by night. A new moon sinks below the tree line where the die-hard fans camp, where pickers pluck another song about sorrow and loss. Someone sings a snatch of the chorus, a shaky tenor, voice shot.

Mark Williams
Daredevils

*I am one of those guys
 sitting on a bench at the mall*

is what I'm thinking while sitting on a bench at the mall
 as my wife shops for discounted *Merrell* shoes at *Dillard's*.
 Soon I'm singing

*I am one of those guys
 sitting on a bench at the mall*

to the tune of the Johnny Cash ballad, *Hurt*. Very softly.
 Even the guy on the bench to my right is no wiser.
 But in my mind, he not only joins in, he sounds good—
 tenor to my bass, June to my Johnny.
 Then, one by one, the other guys join in—
 a dozen or so, another twenty, easy, counting the food court.

*You've seen us, old guys,
 sitting on benches at the mall.*

By this time all the shoppers have stopped to listen,
 including the woman in the pink tank top by the fountain,
 and the tune becomes peppier, modulating to a major key,
 the signal for all of us to *leap* from our benches
 and perform a well-choreographed dance I haven't quite worked out—
 though it will definitely involve the fountain. Naturally,
 we'll wind up on YouTube, going viral overnight
 or, better yet, virile overnight.
 Hopefully sooner.

Take it from me, you never know what old guys
 sitting on benches at the mall are thinking. Last night,
 my wife and I paused an episode of *The Tudors*

to watch Nik Wallenda walk across Niagara Falls on a tightrope.
 I was thinking about walking across Niagara Falls on a tightrope—
 by that I mean Nik Wallenda walking across Niagara Falls
 on a tightrope—just before it occurred to me

*I am one of those guys
 sitting on a bench at the mall,*

the antithesis to walking across Niagara Falls in every way:
no mist, no great height, no great roar, no spectators (yet),
no water (aside from the fountain), no natural beauty
(aside from the woman in the pink tank top by the fountain),
no balance pole, no tightrope, no tightrope-walking suit.
No, no one could possibly mistake me
for Nik Wallenda walking across Niagara Falls on a tightrope.

Is the safety harness bothering you? no TV commentator asks me
as no falls fall gloriously beneath the itty-bitty steps I'm not taking.
It makes me feel like a jackass!
Unlike Nik Wallenda, I do not respond.

And though no one will ever catch me dead walking across Niagara Falls,
and if they did that's how they'd catch me, if they caught me,
I can understand why Nik Wallenda felt like a jackass
with that safety harness dragging behind him. In fact,
no one *could* ever catch me dead walking across Niagara Falls
because I'd be wearing a safety harness, too,
unlike now, free-sitting on my bench,
when *anything* could happen.

Katerina Stoykova-Klemer ***For Bo***

The tunnel in the stem of your pipe is not carved, but burrowed
out. The pipe maker opens a pit small enough to fit a sumac beetle,
places it there, and then on top presses a finger. I've heard
it almost takes no time for the bug to realize that, if she wants to live,
she needs to dig herself out. Sometimes she turns back to bite
the hand that made the trap, but I've been told you can barely feel it.

Clayton Galloway***First***

He cradles her warm hand
in his sweaty palm
as he sits on the cold vinyl seat
of the school bus and listens
to the patter of raindrops
against the bleary windowpanes.

His pulse quickens
as the bus slows;
the spatter of rain
on the roof amplifies
the rush of blood
in his ears.

She stands in the aisle
and bends to collect
the books from his lap.
Her blond curls
lie on her purple and white
cardigan and her denim jacket.
Exclamation teases his nostrils
as she smiles, her emerald
eyes flecked with amber.

He clutches her slender wrist
and cups her freckled cheek
as he pulls her face
closer to his.
Their parted lips meet,
lingering with longing
as their bodies flush.

She walks down the aisle
and into the rain;
he traces a heart on the window
that will fade
much faster than her fire
on his lips.

Patrick Pace

Second Coming

Thelma Guthrie is a fifty-seven year old mother of two, grandmother of five, and a devout Southern Baptist. I spotted Thelma and her friends from Tennessee on vacation, astonished by the sensory overload Times Square provided, surrounded by more people on the street than their tiny town could hold. Thelma wore a red snug-fitting tee shirt over her fat rolls that asked, *What Would Jesus Do?* I took it as an invitation.

I approached Thelma, said that I liked her shirt and God loved her. She flinched, took a step back and tightened her grip on the beige leather purse slung over her shoulder. She didn't say a word, but I knew she considered Me beneath her—probably a crazy foreigner who drove a taxi. I assured her I meant no harm. I offered salvation and everlasting life. Thelma reared back and swung her purse into My shoulder and repeatedly yelled for help.

This isn't how it was supposed to go down.

God said it was no big deal, that there's really nothing to it. I just roam Earth for forty days, tell people the end of the world is at hand, and then on the fortieth day....

George Frank is a single forty-one year old tax attorney from New Jersey who frequents prostitutes. He was walking at a brisk clip in a black three-piece suit and red necktie with a dark briefcase in his left hand when I stopped him and told him I loved him. George called Me a fag and pushed Me aside. I forgave him and offered salvation. He told Me to get the hell away from him—I didn't know anything about him. I mentioned the prostitutes and that he helped rich people evade taxes. He wanted to know if I was a cop. I promised I wasn't there to judge, only to save him. George gave Me twenty dollars to buy alcohol, drugs, or whatever vice I fancied to leave him alone.

This was to be My glorious comeback. This was to justify getting nailed to a tree over two thousand years ago. This was to finalize it all—Good triumphing over Evil. This was supposed to go off without a hitch.

I figured maybe I should start closer to the top and make My way down to the common people. I noticed Fr. Theodore Carpenter at a sidewalk table outside a café sipping a cappuccino and told him God loved him. Fr. Carpenter looked up from his newspaper, smiled, and said God loved Me, too.

I felt I had made some headway and mentioned we had much work to do. Fr. Carpenter looked puzzled, so I clarified that many souls needed saving. He said he was doing God's work. I pointed out that many in his flock were astray and were dragging him with them; a certain parishioner had purchased him a luxury SUV the previous month. He told me I didn't know what I was talking about. I told him I didn't know the exact time frame but the end of the world was coming, guaranteed.

If I've learned anything in the past twenty-four hours, it's this: if you're of Middle Eastern descent, do not, I repeat, do not walk around Times Square proclaiming the end of the world.

That's how I ended up in a gray-on-gray room basked in the sterile glow of fluorescent light. That's why I'm handcuffed and seated at a scuffed wooden table trying to remember how long I've gone without food and water. If this is My Second Coming, I sure as hell hope there isn't a third or fourth.

Talking about the end of the world got Me tackled, kicked, punched, handcuffed, blindfolded, and thrown into the back of a black sedan by a group of white men in black suits. Being a Middle Easterner and speaking of the end of the world earned Me the label terrorist.

The black suits, they're certain I'm not Me. With the fluorescent lights glaring off My handcuffs, they kept asking, "If you're Jesus, why don't you save yourself? Why don't you use your almighty powers and cast us aside?"

Apparently you can't reason with the black suits. Yeah, I'm Jesus. But where in the Bible do you remember Me taking out a group of men in hand to hand combat? Please show Me the passage where I thought fighting was a good idea. God didn't give Me that kind of power. If I had the power to stop the crucifixion, I would've. Trust Me, you don't know how painful it is to have nails driven through your wrists and feet. Crucifixion isn't a quick death. A crown of thorns isn't a minor discomfort.

Then the black suits brought up the fact that I'm not white. They brought it up a total of three times before one of them backhanded Me across the cheek. I thought they were kidding. I thought the question rhetorical. I told them I was born in Nazareth.

The black suit that backhanded Me said, "No shit, smart guy. Then how come every church I go to has a white Jesus on the cross? Why don't you explain that?"

I didn't get very far into My explanation of the Byzantine Empire before I was slapped again. With blood flowing from My mouth I asked if they really thought there were that many white men born in Nazareth two-thousand years ago. I guess they do think a lot of white men were born there at the time because that's when they slammed My forehead into the table.

"God works in mysterious ways, psycho," said one of the black suits. I told him he had no idea.

The conversation looped for another few hours: 1) Why didn't I save Myself? 2) Why am I not white? That was their entire line of interrogation. I got pistol-whipped when I told them they reminded Me of Roman centurions.

They asked for a miracle. I asked if any of them were blind, deaf, lame, or had contracted leprosy, and then had My forehead reintroduced to the table. They wanted Me to escape. I told them, as tempting as it was, God didn't give Me the power to make them drop dead, and should one of them drop dead, I'd probably be obligated to bring him back to life.

"What organization do you work for?"

God.

"So, you're one of those religious fanatics. Well, sorry—we're going to stop your little jihad before it gets started."

I told them I don't bring war. I bring salvation. I got shoved to the floor and was told to get My story straight as they exited the room. The story is

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I'm just doing My job. Or at least I'm trying to.

These people don't want to be saved. They want to be lied to. They want to be told everything is all right. They're doing the best they can. Somehow, with all the greed, violence, war, murder, indifference, neglect, theft, and lies, they want to hear what a good job they're doing. Sure, they drive automobiles with payments that cost more than an apartment while countless people starve to death. Yeah, they're caught up in their fiber-optic contrived headaches, getting pumped full of collagen while receiving their nightly dose of fear from the evening news, but by God they spend an hour in church on Sunday. That's got to count for something. Right?

These people are about as close to being saved as the people I preached to over two-thousand years ago. How sad is that? The human race hasn't evolved in the past two-thousand years. They've witnessed technological advancements but still fall victim to the same fears, whims and desires that were present in the Roman Empire.

So what good is a Second Coming if it's coming off like the first? I know history repeats itself, but this is supposed to be the end, isn't it? I am the sacrificial lamb every time God decides it's too Sodom & Gomorrah down here?

The black suits reenter the room, and the one in the lead stretches a black hood to pull over My head. As the hood blacks out the vacant glow of the fluorescent bulbs, I can't help but ask, Lord, why have you forsaken Me... again?

Julie Wade

Suburbs

To begin: I was not invited. I did not RSVP.
 A lot of talk about *safety* and *tranquility*.
 They gave a hoot and did not pollute.
 I never saw a rat outside the city limits.
But I smelled one... service contractors
 for all occasions. White collars scrubbed
 sadistically clean. Books that had never even
 been opened. Bear witness to their unbendable
 spines. And the coffee tables where no one
 drank coffee. China where neither spoon nor fork
 had dined. My father winding the grandfather
 clock; my mother, in hot rollers and a seersucker robe,
 drawing the windows closed.

"We'll just see about that," with a glare in her eye,
 as over my head her hard hand reaches for the shade....

Tonya Northenor
Delusion

Never cured of the delusion that behind every
 lamplit pair of curtains hides a better way.
 A family with more wealth, dining at a fine table
 with a real tablecloth and no cobwebs on their ceiling fans.
 Children groomed, spouses merry.
 What makes me imagine
 their bliss is complete and compact, that no one in those walls
 ever imagines a way out, a difference, or their own delusions?
 Every lawn seems more lush, every front stoop
 more inviting than my own.
 Their backyards must surely be shaded, their sidewalks
 free of cracks. Their bedrooms nests of comfort
 and appropriate doses of passion.
 Even those prayers empty of longing, so happy they must be.
 Their healthy pots of wagging geraniums
 a bold red lie that their happiness
 blooms all season, flourishing.

Frederick Smock
Snowing

It is snowing
 on the lawns
 of the wealthy

a little more
 magnificently
 than it is

snowing on
 the lawns of
 the poor.

This is an irony
 of nature,
 if I am reading

the Beatitudes
 correctly.

Teresa Roy
Blind Luck

It rarely comes to you
and only then
in small increments;
twenty dollars
from a scratch-off or distracted clerk
who neglects to scan
the deodorant,
can of peas,
but sacks them in your bag.
Or happens

(joyously!)

to one loved *by* you,
romance, reward,
trip for two
through exotic ports of call
secured by chance or earnest effort;
miracles
checked and balanced—one
gets the brains,
another,
the cheekbones.

To be fair,
you have it pretty good, so
who are you to bury face
in hands
and
wish for the moon.

Sara Rossio

High Speed Chase, Chaste Without Pause

Once I found a book but I've never been to the sea to sell by the shore
quoth the raven nevermore

I can't write fast enough I skip words and phrases, chasing them around
stabbing them with my fork as in the back of my mind I cry out a repeated
word, an element of art, a theme, a color scheme to use

But don't abuse yourself because mythological mutilation is not the same
as modern self-degradation—there is no creation through homeostasis and
you can't find punctuation to make yourself heard

too fast, too slow, a clock that crumbles can release you from life but into
what? Another day?

A new dawn? A waiting game?

A Nazi party full of—not full of but—splattered and speckled with, spiced
and flavored by the latest lie the most convenient truth and fluoride in
your water can't kill you

Are you dying slowly or slowly dying? thoughtlessly retaining, forcefully
creating and multiplying
though you can't do math, numbers and letters are mumbles without your
keyboard anymore, without a page to press petals between,
without metonymy—only text speak to glean evolution and counter
arguments from the bible on a kindle because electronics are
our holy script

Tip your waiter, tip your hat. smile at her—your waiter,
not your waitress because clarifying genders is a sin, but then what's
respect for uniqueness if I can't clarify an aspect of who you are without
the accusation that maybe I'm crazy and full of stereotypical lies, maybe I
despise your race, your gender, your height, your IQ

And maybe the window is broken because I threw the rock,
trying to demand your attention with my guitar-playing serenade, or
maybe I threw a brick
trying to outstage your worries, trying to give you a reason to fear, a bullet
nuzzling your ears, whispering sweet nothings with an affectionate touch.
The building is derelict with cockroaches screaming, screaming, begging
for anything but the bottom of your shoe. Maybe they would rise up and
help you
if only, if only, if only you would stop crushing them

Cough cough I'm drowning in my pen's ink text-speak rhyming and
 I wonder whether Eminem ever read the dictionary and whether someone
 like me would do so too
 and invoke his name, a cry for fame, but not to the muses or to the holy
 spirit, and not for perfect young bodies. Except maybe for screaming fans.
 No moral compromise
 unless it is profoundly musical—oddly melodic, smiling to yourself as you
 realize you're deaf,
 as you face death and monsters and call yourself a hero when really every-
 thing is
 a delusion, an illusion from a corroded mind from a man with no memory
 of his past

to a cliché about women, to a French speaking barber who likes to sleep
 with the same sex. Should we arrest him? Should we lock him up until his
 bones are bleached—no hair, no skin, only teeth
 and the elephant in the room—
 suddenly the popular vote says, the great Dalai Lama says, your momma
 says,
 and it is no longer a joke or a bash and sexual harassment claims offices are
 slammed
 so the personnel chain smoke
 and no I can't spell, I can't eat, I can't sleep I have to read
 and create and inflame and enrage and become a virus become a dream
 become
 a lie and make myself believe

And there once was a writer who could not write so he only spoke
 to goldfish,
 who played telephone with his words and
 the writer was god and we are the goldfish—maybe the devil was in the
 tower of babel to teach us
 to ignore and give us five second memory spans and
 why didn't Jesus sleep with all the virgins before their husbands could?

and sometimes I smile at myself because my mind is blank, but it never
 really is
 so I only frown

Joey Goebel

Contrivances of a String Bean Marblewood (or "*The Surrealist Party*")

We got so bored living in Kentucky. The sensation of a sneeze was the highlight of our day. Nothing occurred there. Yawning contests and television festivals. Destination: Wal-Mart.

People crapped. Every once in a while, an idea came for us. An idea came for Robert, who insisted on being called Jesus. He got the idea from the house he had just bought, one that no one else wanted. The workers had given up before they finished building it. I guess they got bored.

The house had a staircase that didn't go anywhere and doors where there were no rooms. Some of the rooms were higher than the others. Some of the rooms were only half painted, and the kitchen was essentially a hole. Architecturally, pragmatically, any which way, the house made no sense.

"You are cordially invited to my Surrealist Party. Come dressed as something other than yourself, preferably something other than this realm of consciousness. Arrive any time between 7:24 and Madisonville. Leave old vocabulary behind."

So there came Nally dressed as Kelly Ripa with her face torn off. There came Justin and Julie wearing sheet music blouses, feeding each other aged tenderloin. Julie pushed Justin in a wheelchair because he had trouble walking in his fins.

Jesus installed red light bulbs in each room. He made a big bundle out of the white light bulbs by wrapping them in saran wrap. He hung this bundle of bulbs on his front porch. He wrote "Possums are contagious" in ketchup on his living room wall. He served cottage cheese, bratwurst, sliced white grapes, clams, wine, Dark Eyes vodka, and weird drugs, but he hid the weird drugs all over the house. He placed his guests' coats in the bathtub. He adhered a sign on the toilet that read "Work in progress. Contribute but do not flush." He didn't play any complete songs, just a mix tape with bits and pieces of hundreds of highly varied selections. Within a minute, we heard a snippet of "Linus and Lucy," a sampling of one of Jello Biafra's spoken word albums, the chorus of the Beatles' "Carry That Weight," a verse of the *Welcome Back, Kotter* theme, and a disturbing, slowed-down version of Olivia Newton-John's "Physical."

Jesus was dressed as an old-timey prostitute. He wound up his long, straight hair in pink curlers, wore leg braces, and draped a bunch of wet spaghetti noodles over his groin. He greeted guests by saying "Body of Christ" or "And they were on a five-inch and they sucked."

There came Carmen carrying a pool cue with a peach at the end of it. She wore a high school band uniform and sunglasses. There came John wearing a sexy salmon-colored robe and fringe-laced roller-blades. He duct-taped his fingers to his palms so that only his middle fingers could function. He kept asking everyone to chew on his middle fingers.

Jill, dressed as a disabled samurai, became upset when she felt a large

centipede crawling on her face. Jesus had gone to the pet store and bought a bunch of exotic insects such as a Goliath beetle, a boll weevil, a hawkmoth, a daddy long-legs, a dragonfly, a walkingstick, a praying mantis, an earwig, a scorpion fly, and some other creepy bugs which I was not able to identify. He let the insects loose shortly before his guests arrived. Once all the insects died, the party was to conclude.

Jesus had invited one beautiful girl that no one knew (not even Jesus). All night she sat in a corner by herself. She wore an elegant white dress, and her skin was frosty blue. When spoken to, her only reply was, "Talk to me about car crashes or strong work ethic."

I went all out. I wore Hammer pants and loaded the pockets with sandwich meats. I didn't wear a shirt and wrote "Are you mad at me?" on my chest with lipstick. I tied neckties around both arms and taped a syringe to my chin. I borrowed a monkey skeleton and hung it on my back. I begged people not to have sex with me.

"Who do you want to favor in the electric last year?"

"Regret."

"You're correct. But how do you persuade me so?"

"With webs of children."

"Please don't make love to me."

"I'll pull the lining of my teeth off. An on-going strip of enamel. I'll just peel it off completely."

"Amen."

"You do it to me every time, Grandma."

"A fellow has to pass the time."

There came Jr. dressed as himself. He thought theme parties were lame. Jesus told him to get the fuck out if he wasn't going to dress inappropriately. So Jr. took off his camouflage T-shirt and wore his shirt as pants. He wore his pants on his head and went topless, though he covered his nipples the rest of the evening.

There came Kenny dressed as a tampon with a Hitler mustache. There came Jamie as a Pink Lady from *Grease*. She had a kaleidoscope for one arm and carried a pug named Winston in the other.

Jesus had us write down a brief summary of a dream we had the previous night. We put the dreams in a coffee pot, and then Jason, who was dressed as a plague-ridden UPS man, drew sketches based on the dreams. Each of Jesus' guests went home with a picture of his or her dream. I went home with a picture of me driving a car from the backseat right before violently colliding with a beached whale.

There came J.T. with a violin strapped to his chin. He wore only a loin cloth and spoke only with his violin. There came Barnrat dressed as Salvador Dali. Jesus said, "You'll have to do better than that." Barnrat replied, "Ah, but wait," and proceeded to collapse onto all fours. Barnrat spent the remainder of the evening crawling on the dirty floor singing Dolly Parton songs in the voice of a horror-stricken baby girl.

Jesus had just finished teaching us the A-bomb Dance when our parents and grade school teachers began to arrive. Jesus had told these adults that it was a surprise party, not a surrealist party. Some of us had found out in advance and

told our parents and grade school teachers not to come. Some of us, such as Mutilated Kelly Ripa and Salvador Dali Parton, were shocked to see our moms and dads. Bubonic UPSman was surprised to see his dad and his dad's twin brother. The Loin-Clothed Fiddler was embarrassed for his seventh-grade math teacher to see him like that.

The insects were slowly being squashed away. Because there was no furniture or anything else in most of the rooms, splattered insect remains were noticeable on the floors and ceilings. After the parents and teachers had been there for a while, the Goliath beetle, the dragon-fly, the praying mantis, and a few cockroach-like specimens were the only insects that I saw appearing regularly.

We were playing pin the flesh on the soldier when the beautiful girl that no one knew suddenly shrieked, "You've got it all wrong!"

Sweet mouths know too much. Clean up the future and kiss the rope. Empty fingers fumble, soaked in panic; the attic almost forgot. Mother runs through the window dirty. Mother will soil herself. Clear the tablet, pounding people back, the weight of the wood is just an excursion. Recklessly we sit on the machine, tongue in her mouth, at last complete.

Then Cal Ripken, Jr., arrived. He wore his Orioles uniform and brandished a baseball bat, just as he had been told to do. Ripken was in the area because he was starting a minor league baseball team called the Evansville Waves in nearby Evansville, Indiana. Taking advantage of Ripken's altruistic, good guy persona, Jesus told the all-time record-holder for consecutive games played that this was a party to benefit mentally ill twenty-somethings. Jesus said that the mentally ill twenty-somethings would be in attendance and that they all had one thing in common: They loved them some Cal Ripken.

Now that everyone had arrived except for the bishop of our diocese who hadn't replied to Jesus' invitation, the party reached a deliriously fevered pitch. Everyone entertained everyone. People screamed happily, and strangers were innocently and playfully molesting one another. Most of the people mingled with ease. Cal Ripken mostly talked to that beautiful dead girl in the corner, which made me jealous. Eventually, the praying mantis was the only living insect.

That night, liberation almost entirely filled the red air in Jesus' disaster area of a home. No one in the history of humanity had ever been in these situations. Never in the history of human speech had these conversations occurred. Some of the parents and teachers adapted. Some were visibly uncomfortable.

My least favorite grade school teacher, whom I believe caused my phobia of reading aloud, cursed profusely at the praying mantis before crushing it with her purse. Jesus witnessed this and screamed at her, "Why did you do it, honky-tonk?!"

Then Jesus made all of us leave.

On the way out, I must have gotten on Cal Ripken's bad side when I shared with him my thoughts on bunting and teased him about that gorgeous dead girl he had been talking to. Ripken maimed me.

Brittany Lee Cheak

After Continuous Bullets

There is no room for a narcissus here,
though the butter-yellow blooms
would be lovely against Persian sand
and rocky slopes. Sometimes I lose myself

in a cave of endless breath because
I don't know myself. I lie awake in
the dark, sweat and shiver at the
foot of shadowed hills. I know they are

real because of the missing stars. I am
a moment's orphan. In the afterdark, grey
rises and covers the sun. It is a gloom
unlike a seascape, a painting I turn from

every morning. I have nouns in my mouth,
but my lips are a forged knot. I miss tangling
wits with my sister who insists on reconciling
heaven because she doesn't know better.

I am lost to the stupidities of love,
banned as sexist, or as patronizing.
I stopped looking to God when we
shot down two surrendering boys.

Lavinia is lipping her litany through
mutilated tongue. She says we'll get out, but
we never do. Tonight, I will drink my hiccups.
Tomorrows I spend spraying love onto the sand.

Return to Light



"All choices are a marriage, even the smallest choice made when no one is around."

John Hay, p. 29

"I'm in need of a bath befor' we leave," he said, "an' I've a urge to put a child in ye."

Tiffany Cashman, p. 45

John Hay

Loretta's Letter

Here, Loretta answers the letter from Johnny that she made public in the 2012 issue of Open 24 Hours under the title "White Hyacinths."

Dearest Johnny,

A man just shattered my rear window with a rock. Like ice, it scatters the light. It was his tap on my shoulder for attention—his whisper to unsettle me—and now he is gone.

A woman goes by; she sees me sitting here; I tell her my need. Her body spasms; her eyes hold blindly along the brick wall. On the white brick is a painting of a watermelon. "They are good for you," the caption says. Slices of red and green watermelon float by as Viking long ships on the prow; the woman—a maniacal figurehead with wooden hair and wooden eyes.

Are they finished with me, or will they come back? I am in my car writing with a pencil in a notebook I used in school. The car has stopped running, something off in the system. In this neighborhood people live in chaos. No phone, a dead zone. Waiting patiently to develop the situation, I am alert to do my best. This neighborhood is all neighborhoods, the people all people; it is the environment within.

Are you still safe in the high mountains? Thank you for the most beautiful white hyacinths of your letter.

I am your Loretta. Hi, Darling. I have a lot to say. In the coin of our letters, we are two forces making one. We speak in being of a fresh world.

I will write to you of things we know. You will strengthen me on these streets of danger. Our togetherness is the final state of being in which we live, the hidden force of spirit, that amazing romance.

That force fashioned our embrace that night, cheek to cheek in the moonlight filtering through the cypress tree, through the attic window to carry intelligence into our willing arms. It was the night we turned from the lock-down of electricity to something more. Among the summer leaves, through the warm screen, it came, while crickets played a song of eternity.

Electricity! Double-edged in gift and damage for humankind! It has infringed, step by step. It takes tremendous discipline to use electricity, and then to break free to its origin. The false self haphazardly thrown together breaks free to nowhere. It worships other people. It worships food and drink, and drugs, and fear, and facts as if they were a treasure. The outer list goes on and on. The list of inward necessity is short. *When you know, worship ends.*

Do not marry that woman, Johnny. *She is of the glue that makes a man sluggish.*

Chaos in the mind comes easy. Do nothing, be lazy and you have chaos. Oppose chaos, and living begins. That woman is fragmented; leave her

where she lies. I speak words you know—to let another pick them up. *We live like the wind, Johnny.*

I am writing fast. I need to get out of here, safely. My sense is not to leave the car—for the moment.

I know what it means to love and be loved because of you. I know what it means to give.

A man walks toward my car from the street side. He has no hat. He sports a chiseled beard. The wildness in his face blazes with arrogance. His fervor flares to damage. It is the imprint of false ambition, upbringing, the history of his brain. He screams for blood.

I need to deal with this.... Hold on, Johnny.

I roll down the window. He is screaming at me. He calls me that mother-something. His speech is riddled with curses: the dead language. He screams that he knows what to do, and that I don't; that his culture is the only true culture, regulated from above, and that I live in an evil culture, and that I, too, am evil.

It is then I answer him. I yell louder than he screams: "Hold it right there." He becomes quiet. His arms drop to his sides, and his eyes droop as if he were a child who was refused a piece of cake. And that is exactly what he is, one of the millions living in perpetual immaturity handed down through the generations—the brain twisted, and in the end, fixed on a cookie.

There is a lot of trouble in the mind, isn't there, Johnny? We know that the final culture is inner culture. I talk to him for a long time, and he listens. I tell him stories of the countryside, like this: "*In the fall when the leaves on the wind-swept trees change, the colors turn gently red and gold, and that's when the long-legged cranes fly south and sing love songs across the sky.*" I just talk on, and he listens, sometimes staring at his feet, or staring off as if out to sea. Dissatisfied, he sighs painfully and looks at me, as if, without math, he is looking at a formula for the movement of a nebula. He moves away with a heavy limp and turns sharply at the corner of the building. Will he be back?

Hey, Johnny, love is in the air we breathe. We have made a place for love to harbor. Yes, Johnny, the lower and the higher form of it: love leading to love.

I was taken with how you expressed it in your letter. You said, "*It is not whom you will marry, but what portion of the universe, what layers of the universe you will marry, the strata that make him.*"

Yes, Johnny, I know what you mean. All choices are a marriage, even the smallest choice made when no one is around. No ceremony at all, just one person making a choice. You remember the proverb that gave us strength: "*Merely a cup of tea, and you must answer it.*"

This is a chaotic street: universal; the few cars that do go by are carrying only phantoms reading the newspaper online. I will wait in the car for now. It is my pleasure to answer your letter; I answer what cannot be answered with what cannot be told. Hold on, Johnny—a phantom just

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pulled his car in front of me, got out; he could be trouble. As you said to me, I say, also, to you: *"I hope you get this letter. Maybe it will come by express on the wings of a high-flying bird, or in the wind-tossed mane of a pinto pony stretching out passionately to beat the clock; and you will hold this letter in your hand, which may be enough for you to pierce the veil of time."*

It is a bit of trouble, Johnny. He thinks I am a woman he can buy for ten bucks. He tells me he has plenty of money and a nice house.

Him: *"Come on, woman. I know you're lying."*

He is a very large man. He wears an expensive hat and a neatly pressed shirt. There is a tattoo of a leopard on his neck. From the empty look in the skin of his face, he is a drinker. From his lack of give through waterless eyes, he is a creation of substances: alcohol, or chemical; and so, a mechanical man, no clarity. He is nothing special, just a part of the strata.

Me: *"Listen, fellow. You don't know me, but I know you. You can see I don't belong on your street. I could easily mean death for you. If you could buy me, what you are would die. I can only be earned. When I am earned, phantoms like you die in the process."*

Without a word he goes to his car and drives away. Will he be back?
I am near to the warmth of your flickering campfire, Johnny.

Your words, I hear them, the white hyacinths you offer. Remember when you said, *"We all marry the thoughts we bring within us; we take care with how they work, from where they come"?*

And then you added so clearly, so sweetly, *"And the intuitive, she blossoms in peace: on her delicate fingers she wears golden rings."*

How amazing when the intuitive is given *"a clean, well-lighted place"* within us to operate, here on these feral streets, or in the artistry from a quiet café. *It is the same mysterious fuel that moves two doves, sleek and innocent and clear of eye, leaning wing-to-wing and cooing softly, or dancing away from the leopard, brutally fast, who jumps high to bite them in the air.*

"Quickly, behind the lamp post," you wrote in your letter. "Be at ease as they pass on by arguing the nonsense of their times. The lamppost is tall and burns with the lamp oil of the ocean that falls from the sky, and its rays spread over you in the street."

Hey, Johnny, it is a mysterious world to unravel. What does it take to do the unraveling? How forceful must we be? How beautiful the evening star, *Venus perhaps, with one little bird singing to us of springtime.*

Three women are walking together down the sidewalk. They are all talking at once. They gesture, they make their points with their hands. They are animated and walking briskly. They look as if they are going out on the town, for dinner maybe, wearing bracelets and high heels. They have stopped on the sidewalk, a few steps from my car. They are wearing tight summer dresses. They look nice; they have a bounce in their walk.

"Hello," I say. "My name is Loretta. Could you help me? My car has bro-

ken down.”

At first I thought all three were deaf, yet I could see that they could hear each other. They talked among themselves. The strange thing was that their milky eyes did not flicker, not a glance toward me.

The tall one told the others that she had seen on television where a child fell in a pool of rainwater and drowned.

The other two women said they had seen that news item also, and how sad for a child to die in a pool of rain.

“Yes, I saw that,” the long-haired one said. “And the father of the house was in the backyard eating spaghetti. My boyfriend is like that. He is always in the backyard eating spaghetti.”

The woman with the flashing eyes, said, “Yes, but where was the mother? They did not mention the mother. My mother did not really like me, I don’t think. She was always complaining, you know, about something.”

“Yes, they mentioned the mother,” said the tall woman, whose skirt was etched with summer flowers. “She was at the movies. My father was always watching a movie on TV. He liked to sit really far away from the screen, and we weren’t allowed to walk in front of him. We walked behind his chair.”

I spoke again: “Could I ask a favor?” There was no response. No eye shifted my way. I reached out and touched the arm of the tall woman. I touched it gently. I felt something there, but the heavy arm gave way as if I had touched an earthly being who floats aimlessly. It was an arm that had no awareness in it. It seemed to be only the thought of an arm. I raised my voice. I leaned in unnaturally close, my face near to their faces. “Ladies, can you see me?” There was no response.

As I got back into my car, the last words I heard from them were: “What a shame to allow a child to die in a pool of rain water.”

Your letter, Johnny, speaks of the inner universe; it is in the functioning of the means. We appraise and continue to sustain the many tiers of our travel. *At sunrise, in the singing of the little frogs, in the sound of the galaxies spinning, the secret is revealed, protected from intruders by its immediate unlikelihood to exist.*

Yes, culture always goes home broke, and it breaks all but a few. The ones it breaks are those who buy into their culture, because soon that culture will morph and die, and so will they. Your letter is about spirit as a palpable force, like a touch on an arm that responds. You wrote, “*It was the insurgent breeze that touched me with feminine hands.*” Lovely way to say something that cannot be said.

And the little frogs! “*We skip a rock over a pool of rainwater in the low meadow where the tiny green frogs sing flashes of mystical sound into the air, sing high-pitched change into the heart.*”

I remember that evening with you, skipping rocks on the wonderfully wide and fresh pool of rainwater. The evening light was blue and gold. And the little frogs were singing brightly, chanting with us, setting up

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pathways in our mind, pathways that lead to awareness and far-reaching happiness.

Those sounds cut into the moment, opening avenues. In truth, there is only the moment. And yet, the future leans against the moment and makes itself available to one who functions there.

In your letter you said, *"Do not marry that man."*

You bet I won't marry that man, the strata he represents: the false of the inner world, the false of the outer world. You and I speak the language of love, a code that is not a code. We both know *"that man"* is all that holds a person back from traveling the road to consciousness.

And this, you write: *"... green taxis go by and blue touring cars, and a spinning gold-laden carousel with wild horses up upon it grazing in the moonlight, their backs to the rain, living in your life story as poetry, phantom-like, elegant, at ease."*

Ahh, you speak of inspiration, Johnny, the poetic beauty that we love and that loves us, as we look to the world of nature and dream. Truth is to be in love, traveling in one's own land, active, to open up pathways in the brain itself.

You said that we should choose playfulness in life. You wrote, *"Play, Loretta! Have fun! Run quickly, jump into the doorway while the rain rains gently in, misting. And all like him will double-step on by and disappear in traffic looking for the matrix of Tweedledum and Tweedledee."*

Yes, Johnny. It is our birthright to play. When I think of you, I smile. It is a smile of tenderness. I am at play, Johnny, my love. We are two peas in the same pod, and there are not even two of us any longer!

I get out of the car, Johnny. I put on my raincoat. It is a plain raincoat. It keeps the dampness away, and it has some warmth. Now, I will take this struggle to the street. I will carry with me my discipline. I look a bit like everyone else. It is a long way out of this neighborhood. It is not a rare fix to be in; everyone faces it, whether they aspire to transform or not. All begin in the landscape of forgetfulness.

As I survey the streets, I am thinking of that mountain goat you mentioned in your letter. That beast we know. You wrote, *"Fine horns led the goat across the plain, sparks flew from animal hooves and animal eyes as he bolted. Sunset blazed with a purple haze, the clean kind, not of the song."* Yes, that animal lives within us all. We are born with it; the animal comes with us. When finally comes the call to be aware of this animal, to form reins to guide it, to become impervious to its lead. The intercept of spirit was the mountain woman who relieved you of that burden. You described her this way: *"She saw truly the opening to help me and moved in to help. She was dark-eyed with a stunning grace, dressed in tight mountain clothes. It was not cold, and her shoes were light like moccasins, wolf skin with sky blue tassels and beads."* Of course, I am that woman.

Remember the story you wrote some years ago: "Portrait of

Nothingness"? I remember it well. I memorized a passage that touched me: *"You apologize for not laughing enough with the world, and for not laughing at its warped, unruly side to keep distance. For depending too much on another for your happiness and laying blame for the lack, for acting on every mood. For blaming one's frailties too quickly by not giving them time to outlive their need to be. Apologize for not, at least, trying to know your needs, your dreams, for your sake, and for the sake of those near you, and for carving love in stone. It is neither your muscle nor your excellence at trivia that can bring this strength. If you don't begin now the inner force of humility, you will never know what humility is, what detachment is, or giving or love or life. Your heavy, dark overcoat will never melt away."*

I step out. The street is quiet. It is raining lightly, a kind, protective rain, like that first green, spring morning we walked out together into the foothills of the mountain. The street I am facing at this moment is a street of scars.

In this chivalrous rain there is a low fog across the concrete from building to building. It comes to my thighs and a little higher. It is fresh, like walking in a healing mist. I turn the corner.

Suddenly I am surrounded on all sides. I take a few steps to put my back against a cold, brick wall.

The man who did not grow to be a man, the one who screams and sends curses which rebound in self-defeat, is walking toward me with shuffling steps. His eyes are on his crime-stained hands out in the air in front of him. He opens and closes his fingers as if he were crushing something brittle and watching the pieces fall.

Here, too, is the man who shattered my car window. Not unlike a whisper of negative thought, he is threatening me with a heavy, jagged stone, rife with fossils. He, too, is a fossil, dry and embedded.

Walking beside the fossil is the blind hustler holding up a ten-dollar bill, reaching out for me with the other hand, grasping with his claw.

The three women appear, in their heels and summer dresses. They are chattering like magpies; their lips are moving, but no sound is coming from them. They look at me; yet when they fix on me, their eyes go white and cloudy. They are the eyes of the stricken, flat and milky. I look at their hands. Each long nail is sharpened steel. Do I have the weapons to oppose?

That carved figurehead, that woman on the front of a marauding long ship, who earlier turned her eyes to the wall, so near to the green and red watermelons, comes shivering up to complete the prison around me. It is as if she is about to explode with fear and anger; her hands quiver.

I am surrounded in a half circle, my back against the wall. I know this enemy.

I step toward them. I know each one of them now, and all of their variations. That knowledge of their characteristics and their place in time gives me the advantage. It is the advantage anyone could have.

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I step toward them consciously. They retreat from the shock, taking slow steps backward. They begin to glow; their colors brighten; and I feel an increased pressure from their command to destroy me. *I give them the power of my attention.* In the beginning—remember it, Johnny? We gave our attention to know that those forces were present, to call them out, to understand their confusion, their violence.

And finally, in the most stupendous move a being on earth could make in a lifetime, you withheld your attention to redirect it into the recondite, far-reaching process toward spirit.

I begin to breathe slowly, inhaling and exhaling consciously, focusing my attention inward. I retreat a step at a time. Their glow begins to evanesce. Disabled, they are drawn helplessly toward each other. Their feet are not moving; they are footless, and they glide together to form one incapacitated thing—at a distance from what I am. Rather like an opaque bubble, they encapsulate—exiled and indistinct.

I leave them be. They are now one thing to me. The disruptive is under one roof.

My attention then shifts to a deep concentration—spoken of in poetry as a rose because of the beauty there—a concentration imposed in the moment for what is true in life, what is deeply real: that incomparable state of being that we might earn and carry with us. We know it, Johnny. It is the little bird singing within and without. It is the perception that turns us, like homing pigeons, back to our birthright, to the primordial depth and beyond. It is that stupendous moment in which love resides. We double up, you and I, this man and woman within one being; we blend to make the one thing.

You sing to all of us, *“The campfire glows; the wolf howls; the note taker is dead; the man speaks; the woman smiles. Is it our precious time, the fleeting chance, the possibility of human excellence? Protect your being. Seek long. Blend only with truth. I don’t need to say it. All of this is what you are. I am listening, too. We stretch ourselves across the stars.”*

Much love, my Johnny—

Your Loretta

Irene Mosvold
Their True Worth

When you are with me, when I hear your voice, when I read your words, some part of me opens that was locked, or never opened; some part of me blooms. One is in the heart and looks like a pale rose, one is at the back of the neck and is silver, one looks like a city, and I have to go explore it. I can never tell what will happen or where it will show, only that these are new, and unknown.

I become aware of them suddenly but by slow degree, like I did when I sat in your car after ice cream, and a sense of being gloved, protected by you, settled on me. I could feel it, I could sense it in every cell, but I could not describe it for at least a day because words fail me. This is a new language, one I did not know, one I am learning, my translation lacking.

Whole new worlds you lay at my feet. This is an extraordinary gift; only you have been able to accomplish this. Even my teacher, who is an adept, a brilliant musician and yogi, has not been able to do this. He instead pulled me from the mud. A feat in and of itself.

I know it will take me a while to catch up to you, to where you live. I have tried telling you how rare and different you are, and so far I think I fail, I miss. I cannot capture the whole in words, and I keep coming back to this:

Only one who has risked his life diving for pearls can gauge their true measure and know their true worth.

Frederick Smock
Moon

The day lengthens,
the old earth tips its hat
to the moon.

The changeful moon
goes through many phases,
even in a single night,

though it is the same
moon as ever; we know this.
We are the changes.

Barbara Bennett

Man in the Moon

Now that your parents are dead, it falls to me to remember your birthday. They no longer wake to the memory of your tiny bones uncurling for the first time at sun-up. Your only birthday I truly remember, a man walked on the moon. That hot July Sunday you pulled me to the floor, twined your long bones with mine, and tuned the radio to whisper: foot prints, moon dust.

Destiny Minton

The Loosening

You hold our star gazing blanket
 As we stand beneath the maple in your drive.
 It is raining the kind of rain that Night
 And autumn own exclusive rights to.
 "Think of it as a loosening," you say, upbeat,
 enthusiastic.
 And still, I think, we are both wounded animals
 Howling our animal pain.
 Yet you have the advantage of divorce, scars,
 And your special gift of numb.
 I can't help but see you as the sheep to my wolf—
 Your fear has a distinct odor.
 You're afraid I'll become your ex-wife;
 I even have her haircut now, apparently.
 You're afraid you'll be stuck repairing me
 Like a doll whose arm needs sewing.
 You scolded me for the clumsy way I use a knife in the kitchen,
 the fact that I did not know how to brown ground beef,
 For cat fur on the bed sheet.
 For letting my fuel tank reach "E".
 For never having flown. Apparently,
 I am schooled in the field of lacking.
 It is the blue of your eyes I may miss the most,
 The way you close them when you're taking it all in.
 It would seem tonight, though, they are big, wide, decisive.
 You look me straight in the face when you say this—
 "Let's be friends."
 I laugh.
 You place the blanket in the backseat of my car;
 I notice how neatly it is folded.

Tom C. Hunley

***Listen, a Wave Crashing Against a Cage
with a Petty Thief and an Angel Inside It***

I think I hear a shuffling deck or
leaves torn by swirls of wind and rain.

I can feel gravity, which brings me
down, Man. I can feel the vanishing
work of the hours moving across
the gray streets like a virus for which
we have no immunization.

Ladies and Gentlemen of my
Tenure Review Board, consider
my dissertation on the number
of angels that glow and then fade
on the tip of a chosen, blessed
blade of grass. No one has cited it,
nor has anyone refuted it. Consider also
the thief who specializes in hubcaps,
VW emblems, spoilers, and headlights
because he is an artist who believes in
art's ability to transport us, which is to
say he's an angel, unconstrained by time
and social conventions such as the law,
but justice being what it is, he works
now without any sunlight, with no music
to carry him along but the damaged,
raspy hum of this poem, which made him
then made him steal in the name of art
which failed to find a way out for him,
failed to put wings on him to let him
lift off, which left him nothing but a deck
of cards, every hand a bad one.

Michael R. Battram

Edward Hopper's Nighthawks

Two gaunt lovers, barely touching,
sit flanked by sturdy mugs of cooling coffee.
Her eyes are slightly downcast; his are hooded,
edgy—maybe tonight he told her he's married,
or maybe they've seen into the future,
and it simply isn't very pretty.

The thick-necked man with his back to us,
 in a suit too tight in the shoulders,
 hunkers in the little space he's claimed
 as if afraid to look for a single inch more.

And the red-headed counterman,
 starched and efficient as he bows before
 the gleaming coffee urns,
 is just now saying something,
 maybe a wisecrack to lighten the mood.

Because he probably sees this all the time:
 the way the generous yellow light floods out
 upon the corner like a beacon to the lost,
 inviting them in just to sit awhile,
 sip an honest cuppa joe or two
 on what, for all they know, could be
 the last night ever.

Wm. Joshua Fulkerson

On Seeing Yinka Shonibare's "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (America)" at 21c in Louisville, KY

I wanted to see the self so I looked at the Goya
 adaptation at the art museum in the hotel in Louisville.
 It had no trouble being there. It stayed put. It seemed
 not to have a sensory overload. It was a state of be.
 It even fell asleep, like the Buddha would do.
 I wanted to learn from it. Learn how to cope with life, sleep, and reason.
 I wanted to be like the cat, the owl, and particularly the bat in the photograph.
 Like the cat, I tried to be near the ground and look longingly at things.
 Like the owl, I tried to be in the middle of things.
 Like the bat, I tried to be deviant, flying high at night.
 I couldn't even be deviant right. I kept losing parts of myself.
 I fell ill. That was the end of looking at Art to find the self.
 Let Art do what it wants to do!
 Let Art wonder at the mystery of confusion.
 Let Art hypothesize man's indifference to it.
 Let Art take a turn at saying what love is.

Annette Allen

We Stand Before Van Gogh's Last Painting

It's December in this city of waterways
where boats lift small sails in handkerchiefs
of bon voyage. Here in the Reiksmuseum,
Van Gogh's blue vibrating skies challenge
the overcast drab outside, the gray wash
we abandoned, eager to recapture last
summer, the Arles green of cypress and olive.

For us, it's a return to light; for Vincent
it was a first finding. After the dark Dutch
peasant paintings, their smells of bacon,
potato steam, his palet flamed with color:
wood, the yellow of butter; grass tinged
in bronze, and red oleanders, raving mad,
as others said he was then. Was that madness?

Or was it, as history suggests, nobility of soul
at odds with circumstance, or with
Van Gogh's own violent need for paint,
for choosing the wrong life each time.
Other passions spill across this canvas,
his last, the one we stand before:
Fields of Wheat Under Troubled Skies.

It is your favorite painting, not mine.
Perhaps, the center path turning into
the field does not end abruptly for you,
nor the menacing sky with its fleeing birds
disturb your natural rhythm. But the wheat
is much too ripe; the brooding storm threatens
me, and even you, with its inner torment.

George Fillingham
You Must Know

Penniless, I eat what paupers eat.
You must know what I mean.
I push the silver basket through the store,
The one whose wheel has lost a rubber chunk.
You must know the one I mean,
The one that rolls with clunk, clunk, clunk,
Collecting what ten dollars can afford—
A bag of rice, a loaf of bread, some margarine, some beans.
You must know how it is.

I brew a pot of coffee and drink it all.
The army helicopters never rest.
They grind the dark deep into morning.
Their powdered darkness rains across the neighborhood.
And still the crickets in my kitchen chirp.
Everybody must have heard them.

Electric time continues, digitally flipping minutes into hours.
I watch the nighthawks tear insects from the streetlamps on the corner.
Compassion for the hungry provides a bounty from the least of things.
Through years observing shadows that were memories, I learned that
No one loves what he or she consumes, only how it is prepared.

Japanese beetles bang against my windows.
They seek entry to my lighted room.
I am still awake.
Nobody knows how far I can go.

Matthew Lasley

With Neither Sense Nor Sensibility

Sunshine falls and ricochets,
igniting red
and amber hues
in the autumn afternoon,

and above the outstretched highway,
two black fleets of robins
pirouette
like DNA strands
—encircling
without colliding.

Lovely,
to be sure,
but I have written about
scenes like these
before,
and something feels different
about them
this time.

But whether it's Kurt Cobain's
dissonant "Negative Creep" riff
barreling through
my car's stereo

the same ten résumés
I've had printed
for as many months
that no employer wants,

the flannel shirt that feels
another size too small
around my waist
this year

that my bachelor's degree lies,
collecting dust,
on a box of comic books,
and I haven't yet decided
which of the two I value
more,

or that I have no “her” to write about
—no “she” to keep me up
all night from chest aches
that seem to wrench apart
my ribs
and sternum
to jab jagged, icy fingers
in my heart,

I can't be sure.

Ceara Robin

Escape to My Wonderland

My boss is never angry;
when his mood fluctuates, his mustache
changes length.
My rent is never late;
the money tree just happens to not drop
enough leaves that day.
My grandfather didn't die;
he simply flew away with the
other cancer patients.
My grandmother didn't abandon
me for a man;
she went on an eternal
trip to Vegas.
My mother isn't bi-polar;
she just changes color sometimes.
The sex is never dissatisfying;
my body just leaves this dimension
for a few moments.
My feelings are never hurt;
I only watch as everything goes gray.
I'm not delusional;
I've simply resigned myself to a world with
purple skies and blue roses.

Michael Battram
All Those Books

All those books I read when I was drunk,
my God, all lost, or only half-remembered—
imagining myself a drinking pal
of Hemingway or Hank, but wary
of a sucker punch for some imagined slight;
tea (for her) and whiskey (mine) in
a ruined garden with Dickinson, trying
to be polite but wishing she'd shut up
about the birds, and bees, and flowers, and death;
trading shots with Roethke, knowing I
could never hope to match him drink for drink;
slowly unbuttoning Edna St. Vincent Millay's
prim iambic blouse, then waking up
at 4 a.m. with her across my chest,
both of us surprised, embarrassed, but
still wanting one more drink; Hart Crane going down,
behind the ship, and me along with him,
while Berryman waves sadly, beckoning
from the Mississippi River bridge ...

But every morning, waking up to the same—
spilled booze and melted ice, another book
with pages soaked and binding broken, hung over
and ashamed, owing the library
another twenty bucks and wondering
where the whiskey money's coming from.

Tiffany Cashman

A Stay at Cristentoph Keep

The sun trickling through the wooden shutters was becoming a normalcy now. I was alone in the bed, but I hadn't expected to find Brennan in the room anyway; he wasn't overly affectionate, but I found his protectiveness endearing.

I listened to the fire crackle for a few minutes before rolling myself out of bed without prompt for the first time in days. The air was cool on my bare skin, and I scanned the floor for the chemise I had worn yesterday. The clothes Brennan had stripped from me last night were gone, so I retrieved a clean undergown from the trunk at the end of the bed. I felt more like myself after donning the thin gown and relieved myself in the chamber pot before washing my face with the cool water set out at the wash basin.

It was hard to tell what time it was, but I anticipated Mari would be arriving soon. I took my time brushing my hair before the fire and braiding it a few times, practicing the common hair style. When the knock finally came and Mari let herself in, I had picked out a dress for the day and was waiting for her to help me lace the back.

"Goodmorrow, lass," she said with a smile. She took inventory of the room quickly before helping me with the dress. I could see she was pleased, but I could manage only a small smile in return. I had been here only a few days and already I was growing accustomed.

"Yer husband has asked ye com to tha trainin' field afta ye break yer fast," she said. She was making the bed, never taking her eyes from the task. I clasped my hands to keep from fidgeting. I couldn't imagine what he wanted, but it probably wasn't good.

"Is that normal?" I asked. "I mean, for men to request their wives meet them at the training field?"

She paused and turned to me, brow raised. "Lassie, he could request ye any where he wants. Tis no' a bad thin'."

It was ridiculous, the way I was feeling. No man should have a right to tell me where to go, and I shouldn't question his every action, but I did. Brennan was nothing like the Laird, but he still had that domineering way about him. I had no doubt that what he said was not a request, no matter the word choice.

"Why do you always listen to what they tell you to do?" I asked, feeling the need to hold on to some piece of my former self.

"What' do ya mean, lassie?" She stopped her chore and leaned her hip against the made bed. "Tis tha way it is. Tha men say, and tha women do. What's gotten into ya this morn?"

I shook my head and looked at the fire. I suppose that's how it had always been here. Women's rights didn't exist in the world she found herself in. As her father had demonstrated, not even the rule of thumb applied.

Mari finished her tidying and looped her arm through mine as we walked to the great hall. The people who were still spread throughout the room talked with the others closest to them, but few paused to watch us. I tried to ignore them. I always hated being the center of attention. The women were glancing at us more than the men. As Mari ushered me into a seat, I realized that the only women I had spoken to here were the cook and the maids for my room. I had been introduced to a variety of women yesterday, but none of them had welcomed me; they just tolerated my presence.

I guess it wasn't much different from home after all. My parents had never treated me with anything but love, but the majority of the world seemed to ignore me at best. The worst was when I was selected for torment-ee of the day. It had been common in high school. The popular kids would choose someone who deserved their undivided negative attention for the day.

People who couldn't or wouldn't conform to society's image were candidates. I was a candidate because I wouldn't wear appropriate revealing clothing and because I wouldn't date the football player who had asked me out freshman year. The insult had left me in a lower position on the food chain for all of high school.

I hadn't had a chance to find a group in college. Being abducted during the second month of classes doesn't give a girl much hope. I can't even fit in here; my father and marriage automatically place me on the top of the food chain, but I still feel like the bottom.

A serving girl brought a goblet of milk to the table, keeping her eyes on the cup and then on the table as she moved away. Another girl brought bread and cheese, and Mari and I ate in silence.

I couldn't force myself to eat more than one piece of bread with cheese, but the milk would no doubt help with my lack of food. I took small sips of the slightly warm milk as Mari ate her second piece of bread.

When she finished, she led me to the large front doors. The little door to the side opened easily, and I recalled how I had been dragged through it late at night.

The day was bright, and birds chirped merrily as children and dogs weaved between the feet of the working class. A wagon was being loaded with trunks and barrels. A few men were securing leather straps around the larger containers before tying them to the sturdy wooden wagon sides. Mari's constant pull on my arm kept me moving as I watched the organized chaos. Around the corner of the main keep the crowd thinned, and the sharp clang of steel on steel sliced the air. The waist-high stone wall separated the training yard from the rest of the grounds. Three men danced around each other as twenty others watched.

The long swords gleamed as the blades wove between the muscled male bodies, metal extensions of the men themselves. The breeze was stronger on this side of the building, and tendrils of hair escaped my braid

and tickled my face.

Brennan was one of the three sparring men. He didn't have a shirt on, and his skin looked darker than it had when we were inside. I became fixated on the way the kilts twirled as the men met each attack perfectly.

We didn't go more than a few steps into the training yard, but I was close enough to see the sweat dampened curls on Brennan's head and the way his muscles flexed with each movement. It was only when he turned to look at me that I realized I was staring.

He smiled, and I felt my face heat in a way that it always seemed to when he was near. I wanted to hate him because he was part of this world. He was created by the same people who had taken my freedom, but he controlled my thoughts without trying.

Brenna slid his sword into the sheath on his hip effortlessly and nodded to the men who had been training with him.

"Marcus," he called, "take me place here. Tha rest ov ye break of' an go fer anotha hour. We leave afta tha noon meal. Be ready."

His brogue was rougher today, like he didn't care to pronounce his words clearly. A man tossed him a cream linen shirt, and Brennan wiped his face with it before slipping it over his head.

"Wife," he said as he reached me. "Did ye sleep well?"

"Yes," I said softly. His eyes smiled at me, but the rest of his face remained blank.

"Thank ye, Mari," he said turning to her. "Ye can go. I'll fin' ye before we leave."

Mari bobbed slightly muttering an "aye" before departing, leaving me confused.

I had spent every day with Mari since I got here. Now I would be without the only constant I had in this place.

When Mari was out of ear shot, Brennan leaned close to my ear so I could feel each word he said. "I did no' sleep as well ye, an rose early so ye might rest while I still had tha strength ta leave."

His words made me shiver. Being desired was something I was not used to, but I wasn't going to let him distract me.

"You're leaving?" I said. He was leaving me to fend for myself. Right when I started to depend on him to protect me from the madman that was my father.

"Aye, we are leaving," he said, his lips curving into a small smile. "I'll no' leave me wife behind when I travel home."

I lifted my brow as he wrapped his arm around my waist and led me around the edge of the building. It didn't escape my attention that we were headed farther away from the servants.

"I'll no' leave ye with tha' man," he said. "I wasna expectin' ta marry, so there is much left undone at me own homestead."

The sounds of battle were almost gone now, and only two cats stretched out in the midmorning light on this side of the keep. I had imag-

ined the stables would be here, but it was just brown and green grass.

"Tis no' as grand," he continued, "but yer tha lady there as well now. T'will all be mine no' tha me Da has passed."

I detected a strange tilt in his voice and I stopped, forcing him to look at me. "Are you sad that he's dead?" I asked.

He smiled slightly, but his eyes showed nothing. "I hated tha man, but he was me Da." He paused but never looked away. "Tis strange, but if he hadna passed, he would 'ave had ye, and I would 'ave been lustin' over me new meither."

His smile brightened as he changed the subject. "No' a pleasant thought, mind ye."

I didn't really want to think about his father. The little time I had spent with him had been unpleasant, and that was before he had tried to enforce his husbandly rights in the bedroom.

Brennan's father was much different from my biological one. I could not imagine my father striking me or any woman. He had even calmed Mom on a few occasions when I was sure she was going to beat me.

"Why is this place bare?" I asked, not wanting to talk about my previous, short-lived marriage.

He turned me to face the open space and waved his arm as he presented it dramatically. "This, me lady wife, is where tha grand parties are held." He turned to me wrapping both arms around my waist. "It doesna appear tha Laird is one fer dancin', though."

He ended the sentence by kissing me, slowly, his tongue probing before I knew what was happening. I felt light headed when he pulled back and rested his forehead on mine.

"I'm in need of a bath befor' we leave," he said, "an I've a urge to put a child in ye." He breathed deeply from his nose then pecked my lips again. "Me thinks, I can have both."

Then he swept me off my feet into his arms. I squealed and wrapped my arms around his neck. He laughed, and I felt my face heat again. Why couldn't I say no?

Brennan could indeed have both, and he filled the bath tub much quicker than Mari had. He then scrubbed both of us while talking about the army of "wee bairnes" we would have one day. The concept should be terrifying, but in light of everything, I thought Brennan would make a good father one day.

He expertly laced my gown afterward and led me back to our room. Mari and Terese were there packing my belongings into the trunk at the end of the bed.

Several articles of clothing and a brush were laid on the bed, and Mari seemed to be deciding on which of the large leather saddle bags would be best to store them in. Terese followed directions quickly and efficiently as she arranged the contents of the trunk even as Mari handed her more items.

"What all are you putting in there?" I asked as Mari handed Terese the little crock of tea.

"Och, Lass, yer leavin' an I donna want ye ta feel homesick," Mari replied.

The fact that she thought of this place as my home was disturbing, but I held little hope of ever going back to my real home. I stopped her when she pulled the small banner from the wall, though; the little embroidered crest didn't need to travel with me, no matter how insistent Mari was.

When Brennan left saying he would send two men up for the trunk, Mari went into a panicked overdrive. I wasn't sure how long I was going to be gone, but the trip in Mari's mind constituted bringing the majority of the bedroom with us.

By the time the two men came, Mari was barely containing tears. She sniffed in vain to control herself as the men left, but she pulled me into a tight hug when we three women were alone again.

"Och, Lass, I'll miss ye," she said thickly. "An' ta think I wasted all of yesterday when ye willna be here ta lead tha house afta all."

"I'm coming back, you know," I said softly. "Brennan just needs to settle some things."

Mari wiped her eyes with one hand before smiling sadly at me. "I don't believe ye were eva' really here, Lass, an I know ye willna be comin' back soon."

She held my hands in hers for a moment then grabbed the saddle bag and led the way out of the room to the great hall. Brennan was standing with two men near the main door. One of them said something causing them all to laugh.

I had almost reached them when the main door opened and two men carried my trunk back into the keep, closely followed by the Laird. I hadn't seen him since yesterday, but it seemed he was unwilling to let me go. The Laird stormed up to Brennan's group without them noticing and growled menacingly. He reminded me of a mean dog facing capture as he stared Brennan down. The image sucked the fear I had for him out of me. "Ye, willna take her!" he bellowed. It was unexpected and everyone in the room turned to watch. "Me daughter doesna' leave this keep, eva'."

The two men didn't blink, and the Laird's body shook slightly as he took deep breaths. Brennan seemed calm, expectant even. His superior height allowed him to look down at the Laird like he was a misbehaving child. He turned his head slightly to the men who were with him and nodded. They quickly relieved the other men of my trunk and carried it back outside as the Laird growled again. "Put tha damn thing bac' in 'er room!" he yelled. But Brennan's men continued out the door, and the heavy wood closed behind them.

"Me wife goes with me," Brennan said calmly. It was almost like a whisper compared to the Laird's words. "Ye gave her away when ye married her off."

"Ye willna take her!" the Laird yelled again. It occurred to me that he was drunk. His argument lacked its normal potency, and Brennan was being less fearsome than normal. The Laird no longer reminded me of a cornered dog, but a toddler throwing a tantrum. He had no ground to stand on, so he had become louder.

"Bring the lady her noon meal," Brennan called toward the door that led to the kitchen. "She'll eat as we go."

"She's no' goin' anywhere," the Laird said loudly. "No' with ye or anyone."

Brennan was ignoring him now and took the leather parcel from the serving girl before turning to me. "Ye ready, Lass?"

He pushed past the Laird and wrapped his arm around my waist when I didn't move. Mari shoved the saddle bag into my arms and stood back watching as I was led through the grand front doors. The Laird's heavy boots stomped behind us. He overtook us on the stairs and ripped the leather strap from the trunk.

"Ye canno' take tha trunk," he growled. "Tis mine, as is everything tha' fills it." He grinned evilly as his men rushed forward to remove the trunk again.

"Ye canno' take tha lass withou' gowns," he said darkly.

"Aye, I can," Brennan countered. "She'll hav' new ones befor' ye keep 'er here longer." Two of Brennan's men tried to fight the trunk back onto the wagon, but it just led to shouting among the four men.

Brennan paused beside the flank of his beautiful chestnut horse. A stable boy held the bridle as the large beast tried to jerk its head free. Effortlessly he lifted me and set me on the saddle. I gasped in surprise and he gripped my knees to steady me.

I grasped the coarse mane with my free hand and clutched the leather bag to my chest. Brennan seemed to notice the bag for the first time and smirked.

"Le' him take tha trunk," he said loudly. The chaos behind us stopped, and he pulled the bag from my grasp and attached it to the side of the saddle.

"Me lord?" one of the men called.

"Let 'im take it," Brennan said as he turned toward the men. "We've no need of tha gowns. Tis time we left."

"Aye," the man responded. Brennan's men moved aside, and I watched two stocky men finally carry away the trunk. The Laird was watching Brennan with an expression between a glare and a smirk. The result was painful in appearance, but nothing about the Laird had ever seemed comfortable.

Brennan swung onto the saddle behind me, surrounded me with his arms, and pulled me closer to his chest before taking the reins from the stable boy. The horse pranced in place, and Brennan turned the horse to

face his men.

"We're goin'," he said loudly. "Put Terese on a horse as well."

Terese, I noticed was on the stairs watching. She was dressed in the brown servant's dress that she seemed to always wear. The men in the Laird's service pushed her forward, and one of the men who had been talking with Brennan inside caught her in his arms.

"Marcus," Brennan said, "take me sister with ye. She'll no' stay here longer."

Marcus lifted Terese onto a horse before swinging on behind her. His arms surrounded her much like her brother's surrounded me, but he didn't pull her against him.

The other twenty-one men under Brennan climbed onto their horses, one taking the lead on the horse pulling the wagon. The beast we sat on was restless and shook its head as it lifted each of its large hooves.

The men didn't need to be told to follow as Brennan led his horse toward the open gate. The Laird never gave a command to lower the portcullis, and we left. I had been here for a week, dragged by the Laird and his men, and now I rode out on the back of a beautiful horse in the arms of my husband.

I turned to look over Brennan's shoulder at Terese and Marcus. They both seemed tense in the riding position, but neither was willing to touch more than necessary. From the corner of my eye I saw Mari. Her husband held her back with a strong grip on her arm, and two glittering streams ran down her cheeks.

She was right—I probably wasn't coming back anytime soon. The question was, where was I going?

Q u e s t f o r S o u n d



"I stand naked in a garden and think of things to say,
things we can talk about."

Brittany Lee Cheak, p. 59

"The world is moving while you sleep, and I am just
the messenger."

George Fillingham, p. 74

Katherine Pearl

H and C

When Stella arrived, she was disappointed to find that Blue Monday was a coffee shop, not a restaurant. The location made sense for the time they were meeting, 10 a.m. on a Saturday, but Stella interpreted it as a sign that Chris and Hannah wanted to keep the encounter brief. They weren't even ready to share a full meal with her yet.

Though she was nearly 40 minutes early, Stella gave each of the café's half dozen patrons a close look before joining the line for the counter. She was grateful to see the menu board featured coffee, just regular coffee, in small, medium, and large sizes, no exotic names or confusing increments like the shop near her office. The cashier was friendly, but not engaging. Stella had hoped she would ask what had brought her to the café this morning, or even throw out an obligatory "How are you today?" to which Stella could respond, "Wonderful. I'm meeting my grandchildren in a little while." She wanted to say the words out loud. She had avoided sharing the news with any of her friends or her coworkers at the insurance agency. The few who knew the truth, that the photos on her desk and mantle were the closest she'd gotten to her grandchildren in over ten years, already felt sorry for her. She didn't want that pity compounded if this reunion went poorly.

Stella took her coffee and a quivering slab of apple crumb cake to a table with a clear view of the door. She placed her purse on the chair next to her, squeezing its bulk to reassure herself the photos were inside. Even if Chris and Hannah weren't that interested in her, Stella was certain they'd want to see photos of their mother, and she had organized an impressive collection, chronicling Tricia from birth right up to a few months before she died.

The only thing she'd spent more time on than the photos was her appearance. She'd excavated her entire closet, made two trips to the mall, spent an hour and more money than she'd like to admit at the make-up counter, and finished it all off with a trip to the hairdresser. Stella's short gray hair now sparkled with silver highlights. A bright palette of rouge and lipstick perfectly complemented the pink flower design on her shirt, which she had paired with khaki pedal pushers and tan huaraches. Stella thought the look was casual, but not sloppy, modern but still appropriate for her age. She didn't want to embarrass Chris and Hannah by being one of those grandmothers who dressed like she was seventeen instead of seventy.

Stella sank a spoon into the crumb cake, but her stomach cramped. Apparently there was no room for food in there with all those nerves jostling around. She tried to distract herself, first by flipping through a newspaper and then by watching some of the other customers, a man in a tweed coat pecking at his laptop, a couple on a sofa reading the same book. Inevitably her eyes drifted back to the sidewalk out front. She knew exactly what they looked like. Chris had a messy mop of reddish blond hair and a rather bulbous nose, a trait most certainly inherited from his father's side. Hannah's hair was the same color but straight and her facial features were all petite, just like Tricia's had been. They were both athletes; Chris played baseball and Hannah tennis. Chris had a well-defined upper body to show for it, but Hannah was as slender as a

reed.

David, the children's father, had sent Stella photos at regular intervals, school portraits in the fall, Christmas cards for the holidays, and vacation photos in the summer. Stella could never decide if this gesture was generous or cruel, but she felt grateful every time a package arrived, especially early on. The photos allowed her to chart Hannah's recovery, from a face half covered with bandages, to red skin and a slightly drooping eyelid, and then finally back to perfect. After David married Nan, Stella also received updates every Christmas in the form of year-in-review letters. As much as she treasured them, she struggled to imagine why anyone besides her would care about such inane details.

Chris and Hannah finally appeared at five after ten. Stella wanted to run over and press them close to her, but instead she simply stood and pressed her feet into the painted concrete floor. It took the two of them a few seconds to spot her. Chris raised his hand in greeting as he and Hannah moved toward her table. Stella had imagined this scene so often, she half expected them to evaporate before they reached her.

"Hey," Chris said. "Did you find the place okay?"

"Yes, it was no trouble," Stella said. "It's so good to see you."

"You, too," Chris said.

Hannah looked toward the counter.

"I'm going to get a latte," she said. "Do you want anything?"

"Get me one of those berry smoothy things," Chris said.

Hannah nodded and turned.

"Oh!" Stella yelped and waved, trying to catch Hannah's attention so she could offer to pay for the drinks, but the girl kept going. Stella decided it wasn't worth making a scene. She and Chris sat across from one another. He smiled at her, revealing the shiny teeth she'd seen incrementally straightened by braces over the last five years.

"Do you come to this place often?" Stella asked.

"Nah," Chris said. "I've never been here before, but I knew you were coming from Louisville, and this was close to the parkway exit."

"Yes," Stella said. "It was very convenient, thank you."

Chris cleared his throat but then said nothing. A few nights earlier, Stella had compiled a list of safe, neutral questions to help get the conversation going, but she couldn't recall any of them at that moment. Sounds from the room rushed in to fill the vacuum. Chair legs squawked and scraped. The coffee grinder roared like a wood chipper being fed rocks.

"Are you playing baseball later?" Stella asked. The team logo on Chris's t-shirt had finally triggered her memory.

"No, the high school season ended right before commencement, and I'm not doing summer league."

"Why not?"

Chris shrugged. "I couldn't get a scholarship, so I'm not going to play in college," he said. "I decided I'd rather just have more free time before I leave in the fall."

"Do you know where you're going yet?"

"I sent in housing deposits to UK and Murray State, but I think I'm going to UK. Better engineering program."

Hannah returned with the drinks and sat down. Stella noticed her hair was

damp, the saturated tips brushing against her shoulders and leaving wet spots on her shirt.

"What about you, Hannah?" Stella asked. "Are you playing tennis this summer?"

"Just pick-up at the club," Hannah said, fiddling with the lid of her cup. "I hurt my knee last fall, and the doctor said if I keep pushing it, I'll need surgery."

"That's too bad," Stella said. "You know, your mother played basketball."

"Yeah, we know," Hannah said, making eye contact momentarily.

"Any other plans for the summer?" Stella asked. "Are you working or traveling?"

"I'm going to Florida with some friends in July," Chris said.

"*Maybe* you're going," Hannah said. "Dad still hasn't signed off on it."

"He will," Chris said. "He just wants to know where we'll be staying. And it doesn't matter what he says anyway. I'm 18."

Hannah rolled her eyes.

"Are you going anywhere, Hannah?" Stella asked.

"No, I'm working all summer at the library."

"That sounds nice," Stella said. "I love libraries in the summer, all that air-conditioned quiet."

Hannah shrugged. "It's a job," she said. "Better than slinging burgers."

Stella would have been troubled by Hannah's brusqueness had it not seemed so familiar. Tricia could turn cold like that. If she felt she'd been wronged, she could sustain that attitude for weeks, answering your questions without actually speaking to you, looking at the floor, the ceiling, the cabinets, the couch, but never at you. Hannah had most certainly been wronged the last time she and Stella were together, so her behavior made sense. Still, Hannah had volunteered to come that morning. Stella took that to mean she had something she wanted to say or to ask.

"I don't want to play the grand inquisitor all morning," Stella said, smiling. "Is there anything you'd like to know about me?"

Chris and Hannah glanced at one another.

"Are you in contact with our grandfather at all?" Chris asked.

Stella sat rigid as a chill radiated from the base of her skull, down her back, and all the way to her toes.

"No, I haven't spoken to him in years," she said. "Why would you ask?"

"After you e-mailed me, I looked him up," Chris said. "I think he lives down in Nashville now. Or at least there's an Andrew Todd living there that's about his age and has lived in Kentucky."

"How did you even know his name?" Stella asked.

"We saw it on Mom's birth certificate," Hannah said.

Stella coughed and surveyed the room trying to compose herself.

"Listen to me—you mustn't contact him," she said. "He was a terrible man. Angry. Drunk all the time. He hit me and your mother."

"But so did you," Hannah said, leveling her gaze at Stella for the first time.

"So did I *what*?" Stella asked.

"You drank a lot and hit our mom," Hannah said.

"No, I never," Stella said, scooting back a few inches from the table. "Not in anger. Not with my fist. Spanking was a very common form of discipline then."

Chris and Hannah exchanged glances again.

"It's no big deal," Chris said. "I don't really want to talk to him. I was just

wondering.”

Stella took a few deep breaths. The truth was she didn't remember ever spanking or hitting. Maybe there had been times when she'd been clumsy or when Tricia had startled her and she'd knocked the girl backward accidentally, but that was it. She was on the verge of asking where they'd heard such awful stories, but then she realized: Tricia had undoubtedly told David about the traumas the therapist had helped her dredge up (or make up, in Stella's opinion). Stella always thought David should have sued that quack. People don't shut themselves in a garage with the car running without sending out warning signs that any competent mental health professional could spot.

Stella wanted to offer some context to what she suspected Chris and Hannah had heard, but she worried that they would think she was calling their mother a liar.

“I did have a drinking problem,” Stella said. “But I joined AA, and I've been sober now for almost nine years.”

“Dad gave us the apology letter you sent,” Chris said.

“Oh, thank goodness,” Stella said. “I was never sure how much of what I sent got through to you.”

Stella had written dozens, maybe hundreds of drafts of that letter. She told them how sorry she was about what happened and that the accident had been her motivation to get sober. She hadn't explained how she had hoped that if she quit drinking she'd also quit having the nightmares where she could hear Hannah screaming but couldn't find her anywhere in the house. It actually took years for those to pass, but when she didn't drink, she could wake up faster. That alone made it worthwhile.

Stella had also resisted the temptation to offer excuses, even the one she sometimes still used to comfort herself when the guilt weighed too heavily. It was the truth, after all. She'd never passed out from drinking just one bottle of wine. It was those pills the doctor gave her. That's what put her in such a stupor. Whenever she had brought that up, her sponsor had reminded her that without the alcohol, the pills probably wouldn't have had that effect. Stella knew that was the truth as well.

“Did you get the necklace I sent for your fifteenth birthday?” Stella asked, angling her body toward Hannah. “It was just like one your mother had when she was a teenager. She lost hers down a sewer grate during a class trip and cried for days.”

“It was pretty,” Hannah said. “But I'm not really into hearts.”

“I think we got most of what you sent,” Chris said. “The cards and presents. Dad just didn't think we should spend any time with you after what happened. Not until we were older, at least.”

“I know,” Stella said. “I hated that, but eventually I came to understand why he did what he did.” In truth, Stella still considered David's decision abominably harsh. He had every right to be angry, but he could have shown some sympathy knowing that Stella was struggling to cope with Tricia's death just like he was.

Stella took a breath to say something, but Hannah interrupted.

“Excuse me,” she said. “I have to use the restroom.”

As Hannah walked away, Stella noticed a shiny patch of skin, about the

size and shape of an oak leaf, on her upper arm. She waited until the girl was out of earshot.

"Why didn't they fix her arm?" she asked.

"She had to have so many surgeries for her face," Chris said. "I think Dad decided to just leave it for a while, and eventually it just didn't seem like such a big deal."

"Does it bother her?" Stella asked.

"No," Chris said, shaking his head. "She loves the attention it gets her. She's kind of a drama queen."

Stella's heart sank as she imagined Hannah telling people the story of how she got that scar.

"I've been wanting to talk to you about that night," Chris said. "I've owed you an apology for a long time."

"What?" Stella said. "Why on Earth would you think that?"

Chris looked toward the bathroom. Hannah had disappeared behind a solid oak door.

"I did it on purpose," he said. "It was time for our baths, but you were asleep. Mom used to get so upset when we got off schedule, so I took Hannah to the bathroom, but she was being a pain, dancing around and making fun of me. I got so angry that when she finally did get in the tub, I pushed her down and turned the hot on full blast."

Stella put her hand over her mouth.

"I didn't know it would burn her so badly," he said, his eyes turning glassy. "Mom had done it to me before. It hurt, but it didn't burn."

"It was an old house," Stella said. "The hot water heater didn't have a governor like the newer ones do."

"I should have told Dad," Chris said. "I shouldn't have let him think it was your fault."

"It *was* my fault!" Stella reached across the table and covered Chris's hands with her own. "I was supposed to be taking care of you, making sure you didn't get hurt. You were just a child. You didn't know what you were doing."

"I knew how faucets worked," Chris said. "I knew what H and C stood for."

"No, no," Stella said. "That doesn't matter. You shouldn't have been left alone. I'm the only one to blame. You have nothing to be sorry for."

From the corner of her eye, Stella saw Hannah approaching the table. She shifted her gaze to alert Chris, who pulled his hands away from her and sat back in his chair.

"We'd better get going," Hannah said. "I need to get to work by noon, and you've got to get the yard mowed if you want to go out tonight."

Chris pulled his cell phone out to check the time. "Yeah," he said. "I guess you're right."

"You can't go yet," Stella said, reaching for her purse. "I brought some photos to show you. I was hoping we could at least spend the rest of the morning together."

"Sorry," Hannah said, her face slack. "Saturdays are just really busy."

"We'll plan better next time," Chris said, standing. "Maybe we can even drive down to where you are."

Stella put her purse back in the chair and stood. "I don't mind the drive,"

she said. "Whenever, wherever. You name the time and place and I'll be there."

"Good to see you again," Hannah said, turning to leave.

"I'll email you soon," Chris said.

Before following his sister out the door, Chris turned and waved at Stella. She waved back and tried to smile, but her mouth felt puckered and she couldn't quite get the sides to turn up like she wanted. She crumpled back down into her chair and stared at the two empty cups across from her.

She had run through a dozen scenarios, good and bad, of how the meeting might go, but none of her projections had even come close. She was disappointed, but still hopeful. Chris would want to see her again, eventually. There is an undeniable value in having someone who knows the worst thing about you and still loves you. Stella knew that very well.

Michael Battram

The Highest Point in Germany

(Father's Day, 1996)

The teachers and chaperones watched as the kids had a June snowball fight on the glacier. They dodged and spun and shrieked like preschoolers, all those fourteen-year-olds who ten minutes before were swaggering out of the cable car and laughing at blow-job jokes. We couldn't have known it then, but this may have been the sweetest day of the last good summer, before the threats and fights and slamming doors, the hurtful words that left us stunned and weeping, helpless as we heard them tumble from our mouths like stones.

On my desk there's a photo of the two of us, on the mountain that day. I'm wearing glasses and the grin my father left me; my daughter's in the braces and the tomboy haircut that still masked the lovely young woman, my wounded bright angel, she was soon to become. Gray clouds mass behind us, the fields of Bavaria tilt away far below, but we lean back fearlessly against the guardrail, smiling right into the camera's eye, as if unaware how close we might be to the edge.

Brittany Lee Cheak

Sex Talk

There are times when mothers sit with their daughters and they talk. You know this—remember when we tucked our feet under a blanket and you told me you had a dream about your teacher? You were naked with him, and felt guilty about dreaming. *Is there any way to forget, to stop completely? To die and wake in a moment without the subconscious TV show?* you asked. And I said, *No, baby. Only some people are lucky enough to sleep dreamless.*

I wished I were able to fall asleep and remain dreamless. Nights spent with your father, who snored or talked in his sleep. He'd roll over, reach around and grab my breast, a crime show conversation in the background. I wanted to lose him under the sheets and then wash them. I wanted to stop sleeping with the same man who demanded I sleep naked.

But, baby, you should never be afraid of sleeping naked. It's good to let the skin breathe while you lie awake and dreamless, and then when you roll onto your stomach and stop trying to stay awake because you heard him talk loudly, like always, unless it was under his breath like when he drinks beer and watches NASCAR, or some other show.

One thing you have to learn is that showing your body is hard because we think too much: it isn't just about being naked. We feel like we're peeling off more than clothes. You have to find a way under all those thoughts that make you wish you could be dreamless—the ones where you picture a woman with legs like stalks who winds said legs around a beautiful man's hips and doesn't tell him to stop

curling his fingers into her ribs, stop licking the shell of her ear, the lobe. It's the same show I played in my head because women like me aren't able to talk about what we want in our sex. We don't feel comfortable naked, so we dream about other women because we aren't dreamless, and in sleep at least she comes and then goes under.

I don't regret the things I dream when I'm under, or when I wake. Now I've shared myself with you and I can't stop. Anyway, I can't let you become dreamless. There are things I want you to know, things I need to show you because you're old enough now. Everyone is naked, baby. I'm telling you now because when I gave you the 'talk'

I lied. There is a way to be dreamless, but I can't show you. When I was young, I fell under dream's spell, and I can't stop. I stand naked in a garden and think of things to say, things we can talk about.

Cheston Hoover
Bloodwork

The needle pierces my three-year-old
daughter's vein. She grimaces,
scowls for a second time.
Because of incompetence, science,
or just bad luck, the blood
has surfaced from heart to skin,
but she won't cry, though rage
surges through her cells; the
worst shame is unveiling hurt.

It is in these moments we are strangely one.
Her father, no matter how polished
or suppressed—the five 0's in the salary,
the 7,000 mornings of ties double-knotted
around the throat—can ever tourniquet
that latent spirit burning, the restlessness
of searching life's backroads
for clarity and meaning.

Pain paints our faces like a shield,
and our hands are loose and ready
to be thrown—jab, straight, hook, parry.
Despite the future's claustrophobic cloak
of career, marriage, and children, her fists
will always be pulled taut and loaded,
and I am proud.

Within these moments she is defined
in my eyes, not as the romantic Neruda poem,
nor the pop song chorus, nor Daddy's princess,
but the brawler, knuckles white with hungry desire,
a piercing anger, like sudden seconds of nicotine
cessation, alertly defensive to all this life offers.

As she pierces her pupils into mine, traumatic fusion,
her fists clenched, my fists clenched,
both betrayed, I recognize the familiar,
the mutual desire to press cold glass
into the cheeks of the nurse, compress the thin
jaws to chew, chew, chew and swallow--
to compress pain with rage--to hurt—
to understand what the future
cradles, vials of distrust and
cornered ire, a necessary understanding
of desire.

Katie Beyke Storm

Apartment 219

The stage is set as the living room of a small apartment occupied by a young, recently single woman, Sarah. A cheap-looking couch and matching armchair sit center stage below a large poster of Robert Pattinson. Between them is an end table with a drawer filled with old magazines. The lamp that used to sit on the table has been knocked to the floor. On stage right, a hole has been punched through the wall beside the front door. The other walls are bare, and several empty frames lean against them. The kitchen door at stage left is surrounded by piles of trash, most of them fast food wrappers. A yoga mat lies on the floor in front of the couch beside small dumbbells. A third door on the back wall at stage left leads to the rest of the apartment. A trail of dirty laundry leading from the living room to the bedroom keeps this door from closing.

The front door bangs open loudly as Josh enters. The lights come up as Sarah bursts into the room from the bedroom brandishing a baseball bat. Josh staggers backward, obviously drunk, with his hands above his head.

SARAH: What the fuck are you doing in my apartment?

JOSH: What are you doing in *my* apartment?

SARAH: You need to leave before I call the cops.

JOSH: This is my apartment, Lady. That's my couch. This is my lamp. That's my poster of Robert Pattinson. No. This is *your* apartment.

SARAH: That's what I said.

JOSH: Where's my apartment?

SARAH: How am I supposed to know?

JOSH: What number is this?

SARAH: 219.

JOSH: Ah... I live in apartment 319. I must have miscounted the stairs. You know, you should really lock your front door.

SARAH: I wasn't expecting some dumbass to come barging in at four in the morning.

JOSH: I'm sorry. I might be a little intoxicated.

SARAH: A little?

JOSH: I'll just be leaving now. Does your living room always spin like this?

SARAH: You'd better not pass out on my floor.

JOSH: I think I need to sit down.

SARAH: You can sit in the hallway.

JOSH: That's too far away.

(He plops down on the floor.)

SARAH: You can't stay here. You have to leave. Now!

JOSH: I don't think I am quite capable just yet.

(Sarah tosses the baseball bat onto the couch and approaches Josh.)

SARAH: Fine, I'll drag you out.

JOSH: Wouldn't it be easier to just make me a cup of coffee?

SARAH: (Sarcastically) Oh, do you want cream and sugar with that?

JOSH: That would be lovely.

SARAH: You're not serious.

JOSH: Actually, I'll take it with milk instead of cream.

SARAH: If I make you coffee, will you leave?

JOSH: Yes.

SARAH: Don't touch anything.

JOSH: Wouldn't dream of it.

(Sarah starts to exit toward the kitchen, but stops and grabs a small trash can sitting by the couch. She roughly hands it to Josh.)

SARAH: If you puke, try to do it into this.

JOSH: Okey-dokey.

(Sarah goes to the kitchen. As she makes the coffee, Josh stands, no longer acting inebriated. He starts to search the apartment for something. He looks under the couch cushions and in the pockets of the jeans on the floor. He continues to slur his speech as they converse.)

SARAH: I hope you didn't drive here.

JOSH: No. I walked.

SARAH: Where from? There aren't any bars around here.

JOSH: There's a liquor store down the street.

SARAH: That's classy.

JOSH: Well, I had been at a bar. Several of them in fact. I was trying to see who makes the best long island iced tea. I had the cab drop me off at the liquor store so I could pick up a bottle of wine to hold me over until tomorrow.

SARAH: Where is it?

JOSH: What?

SARAH: The wine.

JOSH: Oh. Huh. I must have left it in the cab.

SARAH: I thought you bought it after the cab.

JOSH: That's right. I must be drunker than I thought.

SARAH: Maybe you should drink some water.

JOSH: There's water in coffee.

SARAH: I don't want to have to drive you to the hospital.

JOSH: I'm not that drunk.

SARAH: Are you sure? You couldn't even find your way home.

(Sarah reenters the living room with a Styrofoam cup and catches Josh as he is going through the side table drawer.)

JOSH: That didn't take long.

SARAH: I have a Keurig. What the Hell are you doing?

Open 24 Hours

JOSH: (*Now sounding sober*) This isn't what it looks like... exactly.

SARAH: You're not going through my things?

JOSH: No, I definitely am.

(*Sarah sets the coffee down and steps menacingly toward Josh.*)

SARAH: What happened to the long island iced teas you drank?

JOSH: Those may have been fictional.

SARAH: Are you robbing me?

JOSH: No. Not exactly. I'm Carl's friend.

SARAH: Carl?

JOSH: Yes.

SARAH: My ex-fiance Carl?

JOSH: Yes.

SARAH: My ex-fiance Carl who isn't supposed to set foot in this apartment ever again?

JOSH: Technically his feet aren't in your apartment. Mine are.

SARAH: I'm calling the police.

JOSH: Wait! He just sent me to get the ring.

SARAH: You're stealing my engagement ring?

JOSH: I'm not sure it's yours. Carl is the one who bought it, and now that you are no longer engaged, I believe that etiquette requires you return it.

SARAH: Fuck etiquette. He cheated on me; I'm pawning the ring.

JOSH: That's his grandmother's ring.

SARAH: Is that what he told you? It's a two hundred dollar ring from Wal-Mart. It's hardly worth pawning, but it's the thought that counts.

JOSH: Well, no matter where he got it, he wants it back. If you don't mind.

SARAH: I mind.

JOSH: He told me not to leave without it.

SARAH: I don't care.

JOSH: He'd really like it back.

SARAH: Then why didn't he come for it himself?

JOSH: He said you would have shot him.

SARAH: I would have.

JOSH: He assumed you wouldn't shoot me.

SARAH: That's a pretty big gamble.

JOSH: I think I'll just tell him you lost it.

SARAH: Good idea.

JOSH: I'm sorry to have disturbed you. Have a lovely evening.

SARAH: I'll try.

JOSH: You know, you aren't nearly as crazy as Carl said you were.

SARAH: He said I'm crazy?

JOSH: He may have mentioned it.

SARAH: I'm not crazy. He's the crazy bastard who punched a hole in the wall.

JOSH: That doesn't say much for his sanity.

SARAH: And he's the one who slept with some tramp three months before we were supposed to get married. I wasn't even the one who wanted to

get married. Why would he propose if he was just gonna fuck around on me?

JOSH: Perhaps he thought you wouldn't mind as long as you had the ring?

SARAH: What?

JOSH: Some women seem content to be engaged, and don't care about the state of their relationship. They just want to be able to brag to their friends that they snagged a man; they don't actually care if he's faithful.

SARAH: Do I seem like that kind of woman?

JOSH: Not at all. But maybe Carl thought you were.

SARAH: We were together for four years. I'm pretty sure he knew what kind of woman I am.

JOSH: He's not the most observant man in the world.

SARAH: More like the least observant.

JOSH: Although, it did take you four years to realize he's a cheating bastard.

SARAH: He hid it well.

JOSH: Not all that well.

SARAH: What do you mean? Did he cheat before? Did you know about it?

JOSH: No. I just meant that if you were engaged for four years, maybe you should have realized that he had commitment issues.

SARAH: He didn't have commitment issues. He was the one who proposed.

JOSH: But did he set a date?

SARAH: No.

JOSH: And in the four long years you were engaged, did he ever actually talk about the wedding?

SARAH: No, but....

JOSH: So maybe you aren't all that observant either.

SARAH: That doesn't mean he has the right to cheat on me.

JOSH: Nothing gives a man the right to cheat on a woman. Of course, the opposite is true as well.

SARAH: Are you accusing me of cheating. That's it. Get the fuck out of my house.

JOSH: What about my coffee?

SARAH: Get out!

JOSH: You promised me coffee.

SARAH: That's when you were half passed-out on my floor.

JOSH: You still promised.

SARAH: Fine. Drink it fast and get out.

(Sarah roughly hands him the cup.)

JOSH: *(Gesturing to the couch)* May I?

SARAH: No you may'nt.

JOSH: That's fine. Although, I can't promise I won't spill this if I'm standing. I'm feeling just a bit unsteady on my feet just now. How much was the cleaning deposit on this apartment?

SARAH: Sit.

JOSH: Thank you.

SARAH: Whatever.

JOSH: Won't you join me?

SARAH: No.

JOSH: This is a very comfortable couch.

SARAH: You aren't drinking.

JOSH: It's still hot. I don't want to burn my tongue.

SARAH: I can see why Carl likes you. He's found the only person in the world more irritating than he is.

JOSH: And yet you stayed with him for four years. Or was it longer? You were engaged for four. How long did you date before that?

SARAH: Why do you care?

JOSH: I'm just trying to figure you out.

SARAH: I don't want to be figured out. I want you to leave.

JOSH: So you keep saying.

SARAH: And I'll keep saying it until you're out.

JOSH: That's going to make our conversation very one-sided.

SARAH: Two years.

JOSH: Excuse me?

(Sarah sits in the chair.)

SARAH: We dated for two years before he proposed.

JOSH: You wasted six years on that bastard?

SARAH: He wasn't always so bad.

JOSH: Really?

SARAH: Yeah. He used to tell me that I was the prettiest girl he'd ever seen.

JOSH: You are very pretty.

SARAH: One time he spent his whole paycheck to take me out to this really fancy restaurant. He wore a tie and everything.

JOSH: How romantic.

SARAH: He *was* romantic.

JOSH: Until he slept with that tramp. And all he left you was a two-hundred-dollar ring from Wal-Mart.

SARAH: Just tell him I lost it. Okay?

JOSH: That's pretty good. He'll think you don't care anymore. You care so little, you can't even find the ring.

(Sarah's hand reaches up to a chain around her neck which obviously holds the ring.)

SARAH: Yeah. I don't care enough to know where it is.

JOSH: It's almost perfect.

SARAH: Almost?

JOSH: Almost.

SARAH: What's wrong with it?

JOSH: I'm just worried he might think you're lying.

SARAH: I am lying.

JOSH: But he might think you're keeping the ring for sentimental reasons.

SARAH: But I'm not.

JOSH: Of course you aren't.

SARAH: I'm not!

JOSH: I know that, but he doesn't.

SARAH: Tell him.

JOSH: I think that would have the opposite effect.

SARAH: What should I do?

JOSH: I don't know. What could you do to show him you don't care while simultaneously proving that you didn't keep the ring?

SARAH: I could...give it back?

JOSH: Genius.

SARAH: Really?

JOSH: He'll be crushed by your callousness.

SARAH: You think?

JOSH: Definitely.

SARAH: Do you think he'll cry?

JOSH: Probably.

SARAH: Good. He deserves to cry.

JOSH: Yes he does. Now, where's the ring?

(Sarah starts to pull the ring from her shirt, but hesitates.)

SARAH: You won't tell him this, will you?

JOSH: Not a word.

(Sarah takes the ring off the chain and hands it to Josh.)

SARAH: Here.

JOSH: I'll let him know how unemotional you were about the whole thing.

SARAH: Thanks.

JOSH: Thank *you*. I think I'd better get this back to him...so he'll believe you just handed it over.

SARAH: Don't you want to finish your coffee?

JOSH: I'm feeling quite satisfied now.

SARAH: Maybe I could buy you a *real* coffee sometime.

JOSH: Of course. Why don't I call you?

SARAH: Let me write down my number.

JOSH: I'll get it from Carl.

(Josh hurries out the door. Sarah calls after him.)

SARAH: Make sure that bastard cries!

(Lights down.)

Linda Neal Reising
Like Wild Paints

Our fan bus shuttled past redbuds
and daffodils rambling foothills
as we neared the state line,
headed for the Seneca Indian School—
tall, glowering building guarding
the baseball field—where their boys,
year-round boarders, warmed up,
skin gleaming like copper kettles in sunlight.

We were Indian, too—Cherokee, Shawnee,
Wyandotte—but paler, bleached
by Irish or Scottish blood, not like these boys—
Seminoles freighted from Florida swamps
or Lakota hauled from the Black Hills and set here.

They never spoke to us girls—giggling and flirting
on the rickety bleachers—or even smiled,
eyes always averted, downcast, except
when they stepped up to bat.
Then they held their chins high—
warriors or gods or both—watched
as the ball hurled toward the plate,
then sent it orbiting into brambles
beyond the fence, before galloping
the bases like wild Paints,
their manes whipping behind,
with one thought—to run,
run!

Rey Ford
A New Season

This morning
long before sunrise
a plastic princess clock
on the wooden window ledge
in the living room
ticks off
a sort
of rhythm
behind
the way
this day
may shape itself.

The wooden floor creaks
beneath my wife's footsteps,
up early to
sit zen in the next town
south of here.

Our dogs, excited
as she leaves, click
their toenails against the floor
as they bounce
to the sound
of the truck waking
in the driveway, moaning
its way down the road,
then leaving us all
in a wake of silence.

And, now, the sound
of the clock is back,
somehow less subtle
in this new quiet.

A rare silence empty
of the life of my granddaughters,
away at their father's
for the night.
And my daughter
asleep upstairs
still in her dreams
of starting a new life.

But why not?
It is almost Christmas-
the season for dreams.

And last night,
in my sleep,
in my dream,
I painted all night
the cheek of someone
I didn't know,
a shaping
and reshaping.

Outside it is still dark
except for the glow
of colored lights
the neighbors offer the world
this time of year.

And now a train,
two blocks away,
clinks and blows its way
through this empty morning.
And there, car lights, someone
unknown to me enters
and leaves my day.

Who knows why,
but this morning
it feels good
to be here
in this quiet
as this day begins,
as this season
dreams itself
into existence,

as the plastic princess clock
holds vigil over it all,
ticking yes, yes...yes....

Mark Williams

Theory of Everything

We are such stuff...

—William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

In my universe, David Letterman has finished his Top Ten List—*GOOD THINGS ABOUT LIVING IN A POST-APOCALYPTIC WASTE-LAND*—and I am studying two bottles of Smithwick's Irish Ale on my way to our recycle bin.

1710, says the bottle in my right hand.

1710, says the bottle in my left.

Smack! says my little toe to the kitchen baseboard.

Rushing to screams, my wife doesn't immediately remind me of Alequasina—Robert Peary's teenage Inuit mistress who bore him two sons as he waited for eight prosthetic toes to arrive in Greenland before launching an assault on The Pole. But with my toe throbbing and a liquid redder than *Irish Ale* seeping onto our hardwood, I, too, stay in my lover's arms. When your toes don't work, forget The Pole, the recycle bin, the *Late Show with David Letterman*. You've reached a basic understanding—what some might call a TOE,

something John Dee, Shakespeare's inspiration for Prospero, anticipated four hundred years before modern-day *M*-theorists—as in *membrane*, *magic*, *madness* or *mother*—anticipate a *TOE*: also known as a *Theory of Everything*, which, according to Michio Kaku, suggests our universe is *one bubble floating in an ocean of bubbles*—a little tempest in a large teapot—a suggestion Mr. Lutz, my high school physics teacher, understood when he described the many bubbles he had inhabited—the bubble where he blocked Wilt Chamberlain's shot, the end zone where Bart Starr found him—when he should have been explaining gravity.

Superimposed on top of the universe that we know of is an alternative universe where Al Gore is President, Alan Guth said at a time when most Americans wished they were living in an alternative universe.

Tell us about the time you played with Elvis, Mr. Lutz!
and off he'd float.

Stephen Hawking said, *If we find the answer*,

*it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason—
for we would know the mind of God—
something every religious zany out there claims to know,
and look where that has gotten us. I'm inclined to agree
with the hermaphroditic Foreteller, Faxe, on the planet Gethen,
who in Ursula Le Guin's novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, says,
*The only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty:
not knowing what comes next*, or
as my father used to say before he discovered what *does* come next,
*The meaning of life is to search for the meaning of life.**

Yet sometimes I wish I could find the meaning of life,
know the mind of God, whatever.
Maybe hop a membrane now and then:
catch *The Tempest* at The Globe,
travel to a post-apocalyptic wasteland
(*Lots of parking places, no Republican debates*),
re-enter my 83-year-old mother's bedroom doorway.
You are the most selfish person I know, I do not say.

Tom Raithe ***Bouquet***

Set them down in that earthenware vase
on the table in front of the window.
Don't mind the icy wind beating behind them.
Center them so that they greet the morning
and convey the day's light through the room.

Gently trim the stems and arrange them —
the daisy, its sunrise piercing pale clouds,
the shy yellow rose now opening like summer.
Make space for the Peruvian lily's sunset,
the sea lavender rising like evening mist.

Place these together. These set apart.
Then stand aside and let them fill the room
with their scent and their sunlight,
though the room chills, and the shadows deepen,
and the snowstorm raps at the glass.

Amy Tudor

Home Movie: Parting Shot

Twenty-seven inches of snow, Baltimore,
The Blizzard of '78. Fresh from the South,
we woke just after dawn like Christmas children
and wrapped ourselves to go out.

The storm door strained against the drift
blown against it. We stepped out into this new world
as if to some Promised Land

(which is to say my mother
and her new husband's promise)

now vanished under too much white.
The pound dog we'd just gotten
was stuffed in a sweater and dragged out.

On the silent Super 8,
there is my mother in her knit brown hat.
There is my sister in her blue coat, 12 years old,
braces still bulging beneath her dry lips.

Now we are walking, red-faced,
behind the dog. He is leaping
a long trench down the center
of the vanished street.

I remember that for a long while
(before the cold soaked in)
we were all enjoying this new game.

The dog was young then.
He went a long way down the street.
Once he gave out from making the path
for us to thread, I bent and carried him.

There we are, facing the camera,
My mother, as always, between us.
We know our parts.
We smile and wave.

So easy then,
yet they have not spoken in 25 years,
and though I'm not exactly certain
when the war between them started,
even here I see it in this Super 8
as it rat-tat-tats on its ancient reel.

It started in this parting shot,
my mother in her too-thin jacket
coming back toward the house
down that hard-won path,

me holding the spent dog
and caught between them,

and my sister-tight jeans
tucked into too-large boots—
turning to go the other way.

Ceara Robin

Simplicity

My teddy bear was a fearsome warrior
who protected me from the monsters
under my bed.
My tooth would be carried off by a
pixie with a blue dress and
white wings and be replaced
by a dollar bill.
Mud was an ingredient for everything.
Trees were jungle gyms.
When I threw a rock, a Pikachu would
emerge.
The remote control was a microphone.
All gummy worms were "slimy yet satisfying."
When there was a war between monsters,
there were no casualties.

George Fillingham

The Road at Night

Within the limits the streets are lit:
The grid-work crisscrosses from shop to house,
From tavern parking lot to restaurant parking lot
And here and there the empty churches awaiting Sunday.

My travels take me outward toward the line
Between suburban and estate and then beyond to farm,
The seat beside me stacked with news on paper,
Sports, financial speculation and a story from the arts.

I drive the rutted pasture trails to someone's house.
I pitch the paper to the porch to make it easy to be found
In robe or nightgown. I back out to the gravel road,
Take gravel road to asphalt and move on.

My headlamps form two cones of light that brush
The woods and fields I pass. I have become another
Larger creature of the night. My eyes are very bright.
Yet I still catch the opossum, rabbit, deer, raccoon

Attempting to dart away. My rumbling truck
Is terrible because the stereoscopic eyes inside record, remember.
My caution and quiet nature serve to pacify the deer at least.
They stare, at rest, because I slowly pass and do not stop.

As long and twisty as these night roads are,
The night around me is more serpentine. Beneath the black sky I sweep
From farm to farm, from drive to drive to leave a message at your door.
The world is moving while you sleep, and I am just the messenger.

Jason Chafin

Choices

"What sounds good, Meg?" Meyer asked as he tried to hypnotize the red stoplight. Rapid City was only a thirty minute drive from Hokum. The moment they reached the city's limits, the place bloomed with billboards like oppressive petals, neon bulbs, and lanes clogged with travelers minding their own business while shouting at others for not driving up to their standards.

Marjorie's thoughts were pulled from the murky, starless night. She turned away from her window and looked out at the strip. When the light turned green and their Volvo threaded through traffic, the first of the restaurants came into view from between trees and closed offices, their bright neon signs like lighthouses in the sea.

"You decide," she said. "I don't care. I'll eat whatever."

She had let it slide, the name Meyer used. She stopped reprimanding him on it weeks ago. He was a lost cause, and accepting that made her belly ripple.

"That's not an answer," Meyer said with a smirk. He drummed his fingers against the steering wheel and continued to scan the strip for ideas. The traffic slowed to a crawl again, then stopped. He broke hard, like always. Amy stiffened, then glared at him in annoyance. "Sorry," he said, pointing up ahead. "Look. McDonald's."

Marjorie frowned. "Yuck. We had that yesterday."

"Wendy's? Bill's Burger Blowout?"

She sighed and returned to her window, to the starless murk. "That sounds good."

Meyer slowed and drifted into the far right lane, then cursed when the traffic went still, and the line of cars in the left lane sped on.

"Bill's or Wendy's?" he asked. "Which one?"

"I don't care."

"But you said 'sure.' So, which one?"

Marjorie shrugged. "Either or."

"No, not either or. Bill's or Wendy's?"

Marjorie sighed and returned to the strip—so noisy, so crowded, and filled with too many trivialities. She sat up straight in the seat, her hands folded in her lap. "I guess—"

"We just passed Bill's," Meyer said. He shoved his finger in her view and gestured as though wanting her to see that it was too late, too late, you were too late.

"Wendy's is fine," she said. And there it was, a few car lengths ahead. "There."

"Is that what you even want?"

She shrugged. "I guess. Does it matter? It's right there. Turn, Roy. Right there."

Meyer chewed on his lip, smirked and shook his head. He turned to his own window, looked out at the people on the sidewalks, the motorcyclists pairing up, the cars that vibrated, the cars that rattled. He didn't slow, he

didn't flinch when they passed Wendy's. "Oops," he said, returning to the flow of their lane. "Missed it. Wasn't paying attention."

"If you didn't want it, then it's fine," Marjorie said.

Meyer glanced over at his wife. She was still in her wedding dress, and he in his tux. They had been married an hour ago. Already, the honeymoon was a memorable one.

"You're bored, aren't you?" he asked.

"I'm fine," she said. "Just a little tired."

"But you said you were hungry! We agreed to go out!"

"To where? Wendy's?"

"You said sure!"

Marjorie chuckled. "I said I didn't care, My. I don't care where we eat. I'm not picky."

They passed two Chinese restaurants, four fast food joints, and a Subway. The traffic began to thicken, and when they reached the next red light, Meyer turned and stared at Marjorie, transfixed on something beyond his comprehension.

"Look at me," he insisted.

She obliged.

"Don't do this," he said.

"Do what?"

He waved his hand back and forth between them. "This, hun. This indifference crap."

"But I'm being honest," she said. "I really, truly, do not care where we eat."

"But I do," he said with a slight whimper. "You used to tell me all the time what you liked. Now all I ever hear is 'I don't care. I don't care. You decide.' Just like our last marriage."

"Look," she said as she peered through the glass at a young couple on the sidewalk. The guy's mouth was moving, and the girl seemed to be both listening to him and to her own thoughts. She looked indifferent, yet content. Enough that she took his hands in her own and, as though burned by Marjorie's voyeurism, looked over at her. The guy still rambled, didn't notice that long seconds passed between the staring of his girlfriend and this strange woman. The meeting quickly grew disconcerting. Marjorie wiped her eyes and returned skyward.

"Marj?" Meyer asked.

"Doesn't it make sense for you to just pick a place, and then I'll order something?"

"But I want us to pick a place," Meyer said. When she didn't respond, he shook his head and double-checked the light. "What the hell! Turn green, for God's sake!" He ran his hands through his hair and leaned back in the seat.

Like tiny pebbles dropped from heaven, small raindrops pitter-pattered the car. Meyer pressed his palms to his face. "Just tell me what you would like to eat," he said against them.

"I don't care," Marjorie said. "Anyplace is fine."

"Obviously not," he said, "because Mickey D's wasn't fine. You shot that down right quick. Fast food is obviously a no-go, so just tell me

you're not interested in fast food."

"Fine," Marjorie said. "No fast food."

He removed his hands and sighed. "Thank—"

"Light's green," she said, pointing. "Better go."

When he looked out through the glass, across the hood, not only was the light green but the traffic had moved on. Around him, cars were driving by. Some honked. Others blared their radios. One had a gaggle of teens inside that mouthed obscenities as they sped by, kicking water up as the rain hardened.

"Shit!" he yelled, putting the Volvo into gear and peeling off to catch up with traffic. "Shit! You didn't tell me the light had already changed?"

Marjorie shrugged. "I didn't notice. Besides, you're the one driving here—not me."

Meyer bit his lip and nodded fast. "Fine fine fine, we're not ordering. Having other people make us food is bad, I got it."

"Do you, now."

"So...I'm going to cook," he said.

He turned at the next light, drove a block, and then turned again. Soon, they were on their way back to Hokum.

"You're going to cook?" Marjorie said, bursting into laughter. Her excited voice was so genuine that Meyer's frustration vanished, as though upon hearing her laugh, and knowing that he had been the one to do it (though accidentally), made him feel good.

"Yes," he said. "I'm going to cook."

"With what? We don't have any food."

"Leave that to me," he said. He thrust his finger into the air, an action that always annoyed Marjorie. "I. Will. Provide. A. Feast."

Movement in Marjorie's belly prompted her to place her hand there. Three months, and finally she was showing.

"You all right?" Meyer asked, noticing the sudden distress on her face.

Just peachy, she thought, studying his dumb expression. *Just...peachy.*

Teresa Roy

The Moment Had Begun Gathering

before morning hooked a lantern the mountain, before
October's ghostie fog drew back to squat in the dank-hollowed roots of
brush and timber, and as creek beds swelled, troughs jammed by
red/gold/flame and copper foliage, it was

gathering as I passed my key back to a yawning clerk
at the Super 8 in Sommerset, as sky pulled up its nightshade, announced
another day to be open for business and while V's between the mountains
blued, life in the dense woods quickened, it was gathering

on Route 31, South Pennsylvania,
headlights tapping yellow do-not-pass lines, tearing wild banners of fog
stretched across a two-lane pavement. And as hunters cut their engines,
crept from pickups to hide along dark-rooted brush and gnarled hollows,
the moment

gathered
as I eased my car down the ess-curve of the mountain—so careful to move
unnoticed through the Saturday morning of little towns with their gas
station coffee counters and amber lights punctuating sudden rural junc-
tions, it had

gathered in that
blind spot where a mountain relaxes its grip and the road sighs, where exists
that tense relief you have licked the hard ride down but life in the forest
quickens, deer and quail are on the run and there are no flashing lights to
warn or witness.

And I eased my car down the ess-curve of the mountain—so careful in that
blind spot where the road sighs and the mountain stops, so careful when he
came into view, man in a farmer's cap

who did not look both ways or even one but
walked across the highway as though his feet lacked some commitment
from the body, stopped where the gathering left its mark—where man bent
to the dog, lifted its bronze head, face-fur black about the eyes and ears,
ears erect, still puzzling out the sound
gathering around him. Dog not full grown and would never be old enough,
bound to the blow slashed like a checkmark across the proud part of his
chest.

And the beauty of the day reached its conclusion
as morning gained a toehold on the mountain,
and while supine leaves drifted down the creek bed
on their backs worrying the sky for hints of winter.

Open 24 Hours

Jim McGarrah
An Ordinary Man Goes Shopping at Kroger's

(no more to use the sky forever but live with famine and pain a few short days.)

Robinson Jeffers from "Hurt Hawks"

Between the basmati rice and the garbanzo beans
 an urge for chaos nested in his brain waiting
 to hatch a scream. What drove this need
 that would embarrass him and frighten shoppers?
 Was it the woman who dropped the ketchup bottle
 and left the floor bleeding or his own image
 in the angled mirrors above the shelves?
 Reflection is the mirror's way of dreaming.
 Once he dreamed a white tiger in Vietnam, a sign
 his whole patrol claimed was only fog until the roar.

From the seafood aisle the stench of fish forced him
 to the produce section. Even there, the sweet scent
 of overripe Kiwis and organic oranges felt tragic
 in a feral wake of swarming fruit flies and housewives.
 The idea of screaming filled his mind
 with inner consistency. He could prove
 all that he believed, and believed
 all that he could prove. When does the habit
 of pretending faith become the habit of faith?

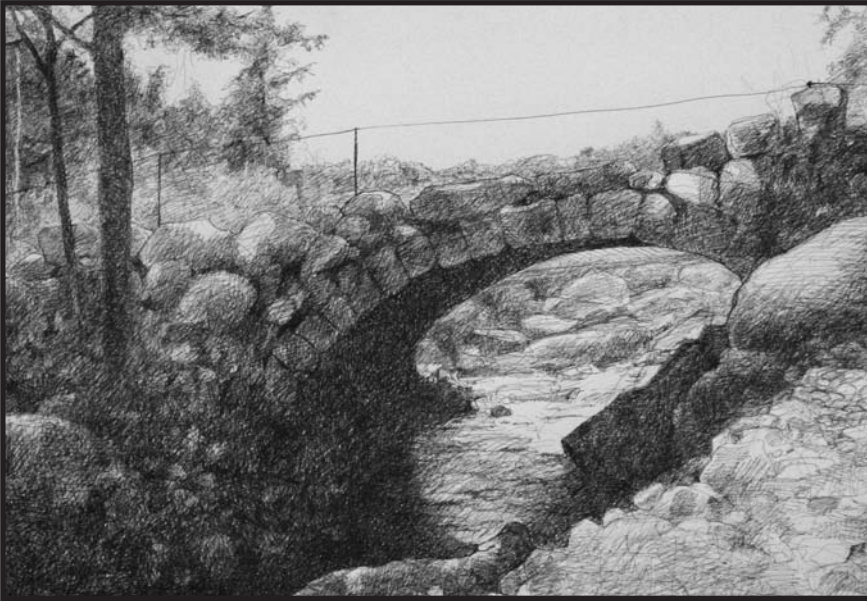
*Intoxicated
 Trees list left
 When they drink the wind*

He had a student who wrote haikus and joined the army.
 Her favorite poem they read in class was "Hurt Hawks,"
 she confessed in an email from Iraq on the same day
 shrapnel severed her spinal chord. Her smile among
 a group of teens hoping to buy a case of beer
 paralyzed his quest for sound. Hushed by memory,
 he filled his cart with cottage cheese and frozen dinners.

*What is left over
 Is carried
 In math and in life*

A stirring in the ancient sea, where he had come from
 nothing and all, where the currents connected him to life
 before and after time, almost gave him voice.
 The line from a poem took it away.

BLUE SLUMBER



"The boy was already missing when we traced his steps up Flat Top Mountain."

Linda Neal Reising, p. 89

"I'm lost. I want to snatch some pebble of time, declare it island, live here: all together."

Chris Tiaht, p. 102

Raymond Abbott

A Warm Spring Rain

I don't sleep well; I haven't for years. I trace the malady to two circumstances. The birth of my daughter, my only child, some thirty years ago is one of them. I suppose getting up at night with an infant will do that to you. The second circumstance is age. I am crowding seventy, and older persons—or so I often hear—don't sleep so well. I can attest to that myself.

I attended a conference for social workers last year—I was a social worker at the time—and chatted for some length with an older M.D., a general practitioner. He appeared somewhat older than me. His son had entered his medical practice a year or two before, and he told me how grateful he was for it. We were in a seminar for sleep problems, and the fellow conducting it had a medical practice of sorts designed to help with that very issue. The older M.D. said he believed getting eight hours of sleep was, for older persons, something of a myth. He said he often awakens every two hours or so, and never gets eight hours of sleep unless he has four two-hour stretches. And he seldom gets that much, he told us. That has pretty much been my experience.

Last night (or rather, this morning) I awakened rather suddenly at 3:00. I had been asleep about three hours. I lay there reflecting on events in my life, both recent and remote. I am divorced, and these days I live alone in my own house. I have one child, as I've already noted, a girl living in St. Louis with her husband. She is an accountant, and her husband, I think, is a computer programmer. I am not sure exactly what he does except that it involves a lot of math. He is paid well for his services.

I am not from Louisville, but I have lived here for over thirty years. What support system I have is minimal. I rather prefer it that way, but under such circumstances, one needs to plan ahead, it seems to me, for the end of life, especially if it should come suddenly, as it often does. I am not a religious person, so such planning should be rather simple. I die, I am cremated. End of story.

When in high school, for a time I dug graves with my grandfather in the town's cemetery. I decided then I did not want to be planted in the way I saw things done in that Massachusetts cemetery. I prefer no service, religious or otherwise. Just get rid of the evidence, my ashes, however is convenient. Scatter them on a windy day maybe, or dump them in a lake. Perhaps in the lake where I own a cabin. It is a Corps of Engineers-run lake, so they might complain if they knew. (They complain about everything else.)

There is to be no notice of my death in the newspaper, at least not a paid notice, and I can't imagine any other kind. I have little respect for our local newspaper, the *Courier-Journal*, so I would not wish for them to profit in any way from my passing. I haven't subscribed to a newspaper for years, although I sometimes read one when I am out and about. I am at a Panera bread shop on Bardstown Road as I write this account, and have already scanned the paper, which was provided along with my coffee. Like many my age, I tend to read the obits carefully. Sometimes I see

somebody I know who died, or maybe somebody I knew of. I note how many fairly young persons are well represented in the obituary section.

The medical propaganda we get these days, usually in the form of hospital ads and drug companies promoting their new products, suggest our lifespans are increasing. The hospitals like to boast of the high tech world we live in and how they—the experts—use the technology to our distinct advantage, at no small expense, of course. Still, as I said, I see lots of young persons in the obit section of the *Courier*.

All sorts of notices appear. Very short ones giving the reader just the bare facts, and then there are notices where the deceased was found dead someplace, and locating family is proving to be difficult. Then there are still others—the majority, perhaps—where it is written that "Joe Smith" has gone to his reward and joined his Heavenly Father, and at the time of his passing the deceased was surrounded by loving family and friends. Such write-ups often remind me of a death notice I read someplace (not in the *Courier-Journal*) about a novelist who died in his home on Martha's Vineyard where he had lived for years.

He died after a long illness—although maybe the long illness was not mentioned in the writeup. And yes, he too was surrounded by loving family and friends. This is my favorite kind of obit. Here is a guy (it was a man) undoubtedly dying and knowing he is going, and yet he has so much to live for. There is fame, and maybe a young trophy wife there or in the wings, perhaps his third wife, and wealth enough to own a house on Martha's Vineyard. And all around him to say their good-byes are family and friends. Maybe one of the friends is already eyeing the young wife with the great ass. He may notice this, too. Not too much of a comfort, I surmise.

Others there are older than he is, and some of them have been ill a lot in their lives, and maybe ought to be dead by now, but somehow they are not. Doesn't strike the man as all that fair. He's going, and they get to stick around.

Then you have the opposite: the fellow or gal who is ill and dying and he or she is pretty much alone. This person may welcome the process, might even wish to speed it up. He or she may have had a decent life overall—lots of others have had it worse—but this person recognizes too that this dying thing is a lot easier (never easy, though) when there is not a hell of a lot being given up. Clearly it can be said I am biased to the latter. I will never have the house on Martha's Vineyard as, of course, few of us will.

Then there is the business of an afterlife. If you believe one of the major religions of the world, you're held accountable for behavior in this life in the next one, the afterlife. Did you fuck your neighbor's wife a few times. Indeed, did you steal her from her husband. The writer I mentioned on Martha's Vineyard was on his third wife, so perhaps he may have things to answer for in the afterlife. I suspect he believed in it.

Then too, if you believe the rhetoric, the words of the bishops and others, we all have accounts to settle when we die. Then there is something else in this unhappy scenario I've created, which I think bothers me more than anything I've written, and it is this thing called Eternity. You go to the

promised land, supposedly, where you are reunited with loved ones, friends and relatives of all sorts who have predeceased you. But what if you don't wish to be reunited in such a fashion. Many a man (or woman) must exist alone after losing a spouse to death, and they may say publicly, *Oh, when I go, I will be back with my Elmer (or George) at last*, except that Elmer or George was not so great in many ways, and they remember that well. So in the dead of the night, when such honesty emerges, such survivors might not in fact welcome a reunion, especially when it is slated to be for eternity. There is that word again, eternity. Such a troubling concept for all of us. Or for me, anyway.

Might be nice to see a deceased loved one for awhile, for a visit, even a long visit, but for eternity, I don't know. Then, too, the deceased thought to be waiting patiently in heaven or some such place, might also have reservations about a reunion. They might wish the still-living person to go on living and be healthy for a long, long time. One of them might say, *I think I can wait a bit longer to see Helen again*, perhaps recalling what a pain in the ass she was when she was alive. Eternity is a long long time, no mistake about it.

How much easier it would be for all concerned, all of us, I mean (dare I say this?) that when we die our remains are disposed of in a fashion that makes the living comfortable, and that is it. No afterlife. We just stop existing. I was born in 1942, and naturally, I remember nothing before that date, or for a few years after. So you go back to that situation, to what we were before we were born. Nothing. Quite easy in a way, though tough on the ego, I am sure. I say again, though, who among the living can miss events before they were born. Nobody, of course. Impossible to do. Likely, too, is my guess, that that is how things transpire. We die just as an old dog dies.

Talk to an older person, as in very old, older than I am, certainly, and while they go through the motions, you kind of sense they don't really believe they are going anywhere except to a hole in the ground. I find such a prospect more comforting than being judged for my behavior in the hereafter. And I have not done any big punishable crime; certainly I have not committed murder. I have not even carried away another man's wife. Not hardly.

Yesterday morning at 3:00, awake again, I got to thinking of odd things, which included terrorists, specifically Muslim terrorists, who sometimes strap on explosives and blow themselves up and, in doing so, blow up many innocent people standing nearby, all the while screaming "God is good," or something to that effect. These individuals, men mostly, are promised two dozen or so virgins in the next life. (I may not have the correct number.)

A curious incentive, virgins. I used to be married to a nurse, an RN, and we didn't meet, much less marry, until she was well into her twenties, and I, somewhat older than that. She had traveled a good deal. She worked as a nurse in New York City and in Boston. I recall how she even told me that once while at the hospital in Boston she took care of a U.S. Supreme Court justice who was dying. He kept mistaking her for his mistress. But this is not pertinent to the point I wish to make.

In those years, Mary dated men from the Middle East, Egyptians, Syrians, Lebanese, Iranians. You name it. It doesn't much matter where in the region, except that all those men she met had one thing in common: they really liked their American women. Why. Because they were experienced sexually. And they were willing, too, I suppose. I don't believe I need to elaborate on what I am suggesting, but I will, just to be clear. They liked things such as anal sex and deep throat blow jobs, and maybe threesomes. Things they would not dare ask of Muslim women.

So I ask this. I wonder, and I don't wish to cause an uptick in recruiting of male Muslim terrorists by those who recruit such souls, but might these leaders—these recruiters—be more successful in their efforts if they offered as a reward in the next life two dozen American women. Implicit would be the knowledge that they would be very experienced in matters of sex. Might there be more takers for volunteers to wear belts of explosives. There could be, of course, variations. I mean, half virgins and half American women, say. Now, please understand, I say it again, I do not advocate for this to happen. Anything but. But sluts and whores (that is how American women are viewed by Muslim men) would be a grand treat, just the same, so much more enticing than inexperienced virgin girls who were Muslim. Just a thought, you understand.

And finally, another 3 a.m. thought, also concerning Muslim fanatics, the bomb-thrower types, only they prefer to throw themselves with the explosives attached. I have observed increasingly that a number of the terrorists are women, Muslim women, often young girls, blowing themselves up for the cause, for God, for Allah. I wish someone would please tell me what they are being promised in the next life. Could it be two dozen virile well-endowed young men. Some women who will read this will respond immediately that size does not matter, that size is a myth. But somebody believes it does matter, though, judging by the number of ads I frequently see in newspapers and on cable TV for male enhancing products. No matter. I am merely making a point.

Maybe what these young women will seek in their male gifts is not something sexual at all; perhaps they will look for men who are sensitive, not captivated by sports, and men who want to explore their feelings with their mates for hour upon hour, for example. Or, maybe, simply men who will accompany them to church (or to temple or to mosque) and sit through a long sermon without falling asleep. Perhaps a combination of all three. But no sex-fixated American males, for sure. At least in my mind. But they have to be offered something substantial for such a huge sacrifice. Do they not?

I have always thought being a stand-up comic is an occupation of considerable challenge, requiring great courage. I mean, the possibility of falling on your face totally is always there, and it must happen often, especially in the beginning. But I sense if I tried out my opinions of life and death and Muslim terrorists and the rest, that even in a place like Louisville, which, while fairly cosmopolitan, is not yet a melting pot, I might be attacked for my views, even though I am a man, as I said, in the beginning, in the hammers of seventy, and statistically speaking, not thought to be very long for this world.

So if I went out in this way, shot to death on a comedy club stage someplace in Louisville (where there are a lot of comedy clubs, by the way), my obit, if there had to be one, would say, *He led a decent life right up to the end, and consequently he is entitled to his two dozen virgins (or at least a dozen) in the afterlife.*

I don't know what I would do with such a prize, but a dozen American women, or two dozen—well, that's a horse of a different color. I've lived long enough and had sufficient experience to deal with that outcome adequately. Yes, in that way, I expect myself and those over-enthusiastic Muslim men (crazy is the word I want) are very much the same. They praise Allah while I praise—what do I praise. I am not sure I have yet decided, and here I am almost seventy. I could say, a warm spring rain, but who would ever believe such crap out of my mouth?

Susan Stark

I Never Thought I'd Do Those Things,

But here I am in middle years arranging
a linal path along the basement floor,
from stairs to washer, those well worn,
but too good to throw away rugs...rugs made
from the cloth of yesterday: out-dated dresses,
seam-ripped slacks, blouses too small for
growing breasts. Strips loomed or hand hooked,
like the circle of color that lies just beyond the bottom step.

What I notice most are my hands...broad palms,
short thick fingers and chewed off nails.
"More like my mother's or her mother," I say,
"surely not my hands." My hand that not so long ago
held a lover's hand, touched him in the night,
the same hand he slipped a gold ring on.

But, here I am,
tiny lines crossing the path
of years, joints turning from youth.
My hands like the hard working hands
of those women before me who ran
the hot cloth through the wringer
and hung it high to dry.
The same cloth I now see before me,
perhaps well worn,
but too good to throw away.

Rey Ford

If You Are Lucky

One day
if you are lucky
everything
that you thought
you had ever known
for sure
will begin
to gather
on the sidewalk
in front of your house.

And either
one at a time
or in small groups
they will come and knock
on your door
to say to you
that they are leaving.

You listen
to this long parade
of righteousness
come and go

until finally
you are left standing
empty
in the doorway
of your silent house.

In an instant
in that stillness
you feel
the deep darkness
of not knowing
and something
begins to tremble.

Not from fear
but the way
a wet dog

stepping out
of the lake
shakes itself dry

only to run happy
into the borderless
fields of night,
barking wildly
at the moist potential
for everything.

Tom C. Hunley

What If There Lives, Within You, A Man Who Loves Random Consolations?

If the sun pinks his skin all over, he says *yeah*
but night has come, the sun has conceded,
I win. What if, deep inside your ears,
you can hear this man making the rounds
in his tiny secret townhouse? He tells your sick
lungs *at least you're still breathing,* and he tells
your heart *kudos on remembering to beat even*
at night in a sleeping body of (mostly) water.
What if he gets a toothache and says *at least*
I have teeth? Says *I never noticed them before?*
He might embarrass you. You might hide him
behind that mask you wear which is becoming
your face. He might feel jilted. He might try to change
for you or let you change him, the way big rocks
on the beach let gulls paint them guano-white,
anything to have some company other than
the vast ocean whose roar sounds like an endless
dial tone. He might turn rabid, a threat in the shadows.
Then who will encourage the teeth in your mouth
to hang in there? Who will cheer on your
white blood cells? *You made me human,*
you begin to tell him, but then you die
before you get to finish. You no longer remember
the time your house caught fire, how a strange voice
from deep inside said, *Hey, at least now*
you don't have to wash those dishes,
and yay, here comes the ice cream man, carrying
a little song and a whole truck full
of goodness that those flames haven't melted.

Jesse Mountjoy

After Oral Surgery

Congruent with appearance,
 As the light's darkness increases,
 With my fractured tooth
 Extracted, floating on Lortab
 (One tablet every four to six hours
 As needed for pain), I lie in bed,
 The blanket up under my chin,
 My bare feet barely sticking out,
 Reminding my wife (she jokes)
 Of Doc Holliday in 'Tombstone',
 As I repeat one of Val Kilmer's
 Final lines through the gauze in
 My mouth - 'Live, Wyatt. Live for me'-
 And fall asleep at a right angle
 To the flow of time, moored
 To the short links of mortality,
 The ceiling fan above me stuck
 On a B flat cowboy chord
 In the day's melancholy.
 Outside, the world carries on
 With its eternal folderol while I dream
 Of Doc's incredulity at his own death
 Without his boots on, as the hard,
 Unnatural moonlight appears,
 And evening begins, as if declared.

Lesley Henderson

Today Is Not That Day

No day will be the same as today.
 My hair will never fall in the same fashion,
 My clothes will never fit as perfectly.

Some say they can count on the sun to shine,
 But the sun, too, will die.
 We won't notice until eight minutes too late.

Nothing lasts forever.
 Even our gods will die.
 How can they survive without followers?

All love fades, all relationships end.
 All bonds weaken, all friends leave.

Linda Neal Reising
Too Many To Count

The boy was already missing
when we traced his steps
up Flat Top Mountain.
The rangers' stations wore
his picture—a twelve-year-old,
freckled face, gapped teeth,
small for his age.

As we neared the top,
I spied a ptarmigan,
still and spotted
as a lichen-covered stone, blending.
And farther up a young elk,
Neck stretched high in alarm,
scurrying to find her friends.
Finally, as we crossed the Divide,
we saw skulking from boulder to boulder,
a wolverine, wary and wraith-like.
But we did not see the boy.

Not even when we slid
down Andrew's Glacier to find
an avalanche had taken out
the trail below,
and we bushwhacked back
to camp, half-dead ourselves.

Days later, rangers found him
just feet off the path we'd walked,
lodged between the rocks he'd hopped
before he slipped, cracking his skull,
his gaze twisted upward
as the Colorado sky turned
from blue to black,
and there were too many
stars to count.

Amy Tudor
Last Job

In the ICU, bed in the *chair position*,
 my father types on his laptop.
 I ask him (carrying two cups of black coffee
 in what is now our morning ritual) what
 he's working on. His cannula hisses.
 "Oh, I had some things for work to finish,"
 he says, takes a breath. I smile, a fist in my chest.
 He is worried about getting paid. "Dad, only you
 would find a way to work right now," I reply.
 He huffs from deep in his ruined self:
 "Yeah, I guess not many of us are making
 a living up here." I shake my head. I take out
 my own computer. He works. I work.
 The television (FOX News) flickers on mute.

Last night the woman in the next cube
 was making noises like a bat caught
 out in the light, the same high-pitched whines
 and scrabbling in fright. She's stopped now.
 Her son—my father's age—stands
 at her doorway and looks out.

By that afternoon, they tell us Dad has a week,
 maybe two. They start slipping painkillers
 into his central line while he sleeps. I sit with him,
 drink my coffee, my thumb hooked on his.

Just one last job to do, then
 he'll finally have his day of rest.

Patrick Reninger
Comfort Food

When the piercing ring of a phone announces your mother's death
 at 1:00 a.m., sleep is not an option.

When you are ready, you will need to be coerced into the darkness gently
 with the voice of an old friend or the warm buzz of brown lager.

To cope with the shock, it is best to keep one's hands busy and

prepare a dish for the deceased, to firmly grip a sharp knife, slice squash in thin ovals, chop onions and add butter as cast iron turns red.

As the skillet bubbles and vegetables soften into a creamy mound, stir vigilantly, season with salt and pepper and do not let your mind wander. Fresh tears dripped into a heated pan will not enhance the flavor.

As the weight of silence fills the kitchen, her never-ending commentary will intrude without warning; do not let your peppers wilt or your beef become blubbery. Do not wallow before the blue flame as the fragrance of cinnamon and cloves, tomatoes and shallots billow away on a trail of steam.

Death creates melodrama out of commonplace objects, so avoid staring fondly at stained dish rags or clutching cutlery with murderous intent.

As long as you keep vigil, the myth of everlasting life will continue simmering. There will be time for rest and reflection after the dishes are scrubbed and the floor is swept.

For now, remain patient as the thick stew dances along the boiling surface, the flavors ripening as you await the solace of ghosts.

Susan Stark
Morning Prayer

With a cube of ice
 he draws an invisible
 line from the base of my throat
 down through me.
 Across my breasts—
 another wet stroke.
 Signed me for his own.

Like the young nun,
 beginning morning prayer,
 dips a finger in holy water,
 touches herself in those four places.
 Dark eyes rise
 to meet her loving god.

Teresa Roy

...Are the Devil's Workshop

How
did this happen
that my hands have become
strangers?
Stiffening
at the merest suggestion,
they puff up like haughty tourists
who refuse
the native language.

Not enough
to say now,
they have served me well
—humpbacked
they conspire against me,
loyalties bitter
at this very end.

Look
how they dawdle—
contentedly crippled,
idle
as vagrants.

Richard Taylor

Accommodation

Sun out this winter morning,
my dogs bask in a patch of fallow grass
where the skim of snow has melted
next to a wall of white clapboards
on the smokehouse, the angle of sun
to wall to recumbent canines
cupping heat, sweet solar solace,
onto their furry flanks.

Phoeby Athey

Close Encounter: Couldn't We Just Cuddle?

I wish to begin by announcing that at 68 I have entered a New Phase of Life. It's called, "All I have to do is die!" After that, I will not go to sleep in the arms of Jesus. Rather, the Gates of Hell will be flung open wide as I have always worshipped Coco Chanel, the French designer whose iconic fashion legacy is her trademark \$5000 dollar and up aborted calf fetus quilted handbag with 24 carat gold plated chain. (And I want one of them in the worst way.) In her memoir, Chanel revealed she stood at the age of 50 completely naked before a full length Louis Seize mirror coming to the aesthetic but not particularly moral conclusion that it was time for some things to be over. Emulating Mademoiselle Chanel at the age of 50, I too took the full length mirror purity pledge. But I did not earn the interlocking double "C" signature handbag, being disqualified by one little lapse, which I will now share.

A couple of years ago, I was living in a town very similar to this one. A group of a dozen or so elderly men played tennis where I did. They kept dying off and decided that they would have to resort to allowing a female to join their group. They were mostly WWII veterans getting back into the game after triple bypass surgery. They deemed my tennis skill commensurate with theirs, and I became a popular sub in their group until they all went to Florida for the winter.

Late the next spring, one of them called me to sub. I was driving while answering my cell phone with a young woman in the car with me who didn't think I had much of a life. I was showing off for her that I was in demand, that a man had actually called me to play tennis, and I could drive and talk on the cell phone and chew gum at the same time just like her. I tried to sound blithe and casual speaking to him: "Oh, I thought you didn't love me any more! This is the first time you have called me this spring to play!" You know, throw the old boy a biscuit.

We met at 7:00 A.M. as usual. By 7:15, however, no other geezers seemed to be arriving on the court. Did they all die!? Suddenly we were going to play singles for the first time. He explained, "I've been thinking about what you said about our having sex in your phone conversation of April the fifteenth."

My offhand remark had mutated wildly. Conclusions had been leapt to. He had misconstrued. Why am I struck dumb at times like these? Why is the apt retort such a slow dial-up? I need to mull things over. Consult the thesaurus. Way too long after the fact you will hear me cry out, "That's what I should have said!"

One of us continued to warm up and play the first game while I was trying to mentally draft a formal diplomatic retraction before we sat down for the first changeover, that 90 second rest period always observed in a professional match so a trainer can run out and perform minimally invasive laparoscopic surgery. In amateur tennis, in the 80-to-90-year-old division, they need those little nap breaks and time to take their medications. I had lost the first game love-40.

During the changeover chat, he announced that his wife didn't like to

come down to Florida with him the entire winter, and we wouldn't have any problem down there in his spectacular oceanfront condominium. We could even frolic naked on his private beach or swim in shark infested waters any time we wanted to. I could even be shipped down on his private jet. Air-lifted, if you will! I dubiously allowed, "That sounds nice," thinking that a safe neutral response, and by winter I would have figured out how to just say no. I couldn't hurt his feelings!

The next changeover, I made another grievous error in bragging that I did have a little place of my own, correcting his condescending assumption that I lived exclusively with my elderly parents.

"Great," he said. "We won't have to wait until the winter in Florida; we can go to your place next week after tennis!" We shook hands, formally ending our love match. He winked promisingly during the handshake, gauging his forefinger into my palm in a gesture I recalled from seventh grade. Then he added, "I didn't bring my pump today. Next time I'll bring my pump!"

Pump!?

"Do you know what that is?" he asked.

Yes, I did. I was well familiar with The Pump. I had seen it advertised in my parents' senior citizen accessories flimsy gadget catalogs alongside arthritic bottle openers, single egg poachers and suspiciously shaped facial massagers.

In his judgment, I had signed a series of escalating consents, advance directives, at each changeover giving authorization to not only premeditated adultery but also to kinky pump sex. There was also a waiver agreeing to being transported across state lines for illicit purposes. There was even a contract clause about joint Jacuzzi privileges!

Then God came into my life with divine intervention sending forty days and forty nights of rain and, I think, a tornado soaking, making unplayable all the tennis courts and destroying most of the crops in the region.

During the deluge, I had procrastinated in preparing my tactful senior sex mission statement. Then the sun came out, and he called, eager for a rematch, and I was locked into a package deal. If I agreed to tennis, the après tennis activities came with it. But he was saying they "needed a fourth." Safety in numbers, Mother always said. And maybe he had forgotten. Sometimes old people forget.

But no such luck! He reminded me of the advance consents by dangling the little extra pump-sized gym bag in front of me. Then he popped a Viagra. It was a point of no return!

I tried to make him cough it up. But I must have briefly lost consciousness because we were back at my place in this mutually consensual full frontal nudity situation.

Like former President Clinton, I can vacillate about whether we had a sexual relationship or not. Full frontal nudity may not be sex, but at 65 and 90 it is depravity of the worst sort. I have had psychiatric therapy and hypnosis to aid my recall of this event.

What were my other motivations? The most obvious was I got to be a boy toy. Second, despite attempts to raise my consciousness by radical feminist

so-called friends in New York City, my sexual microchip was installed in 1958 Kentucky. My conditioning and programming will not allow me to hurt the male ego or make unflattering comments about his sexual performance, or my computer systems will crash and I will have a nervous breakdown. Lastly, his wife was a snob who said I was too ugly to be an angel in the church Christmas pageant when I was six. So it was justifiable adultery. We'll see who is pretty now!

Reclining on a Recamiér chaise lounge trying to look luscious, languorous, and inspirational while he was yonder in the room doing something that looked like a boy scout trying to start a fire with two twigs over a bunch of dried leaves, I was trying to decide if I should take off my glasses as everything else was off and it would look more consistent.

I am extremely nearsighted and think I look more attractive with my glasses off. However, it would be awkward if I kept putting them back on at intervals to check on his progress. I couldn't just glance over surreptitiously. I had a lot to worry about. I settled upon glasses-off, occupying myself by casually perusing the pump manual. It was printed in English, Spanish, French and German, and I was a bit turned on by the German. The pump priming seemed to be destroying all the spontaneity in our relationship. Since we were already in a clinical quasi-medical situation with him sitting over there under a bright light, and I had mastered all the audio visual materials, maybe I could put a little erotic ritualized sex spin on the situation.

I now had the expertise; I could personally offer to operate the pump. Trying to make it sound like fun, I said, "Why don't I try it? Why don't I play naughty nurse and you play patient?!" He looked up from his labors in shock and horror at such an obscene notion. I was going to have to think of something else.

At this point we will take a little break, flashing back a half century to 1962 after my first semester home from college for Christmas. Through no effort of my own, I was still a virgin—in every which way. Therefore, I decided to ask Mother why everyone at school would snicker and giggle about the number sixty-nine. Mother could not imagine. I explained from what I had gathered sixty-nine seemed to symbolize a lewd act involving a headstand kissing a boy's thingy while he did something or other to the girl's toes. Mother gave me some reassuring and concise advice on this sexual topic: Yes, she had heard of women doing such things, but "that" was something only the very lowest form of prostitute would ever, ever do. Poor Daddy!

Mother elaborated that there were sissy men who lurked in nasty dirty filthy stinky Gulf gasoline station men's rooms who would put their mouths on other men's privates and do such things. With this information, all my anxieties were assuaged.

Back then, the blowjob had not evolved into being simply a combination pregnancy preventative, hymen preservative technique, an oral proficiency prerequisite of upscale gated community, granite work island, and Palladian windows middle school girls as it has today. Sixty-nine was reserved for

"When You Really, Really Love Someone" and he was in a really good fraternity and pre-med.

Oral sex was a way to keep him relaxed yet focused while maintaining your virginity and working in the dean's office until you were about twenty-eight and he graduated and you had that big church wedding and you could sit by the country club pool with the colored girl looking after the average 2.5 children for the rest of your damned life and drive a tasteful beige Lincoln Continental.

But back to our prolonged full frontal encounter: loudly, over the suctioning sounds of the pump, by desperation possessed, I blurted, "Wouldn't it be easier if I just sucked your cock?"

Right away, I realized that had not been a ladylike thing to say. Sodom and Gomorrah! He was not that kind of man! I had not been Biblically correct! We were going to have sex the way God intended for one man and one woman and a pump to join together. I decided I had better suggest something more Conservative Christian.

"Well," I said, "couldn't we just cuddle?"

Destiny Minton

Summer Storm

You tell me, "I'm yours if you want me to be."
It is our third date. Electricity ripples, eels beneath my skin.
Thunder is distant, almost hushed
lightning crawls the lake's epidermis.
You hold my polka dotted umbrella above us,
wonder aloud at the birds: "What are they saying to each other?"

Under the picnic shelter, our first kisses, slow dancing
as if it were an empty middle school gymnasium.
It bothers you that I am slightly taller.
"I've been looking for someone like you my whole life,"
you say, your eyes adamant.

I should have realized your fickleness then,
smelled it in the heady air,
your constant need to be the closest star to the sun.
My boots will wear the mud of this date for months, long after us.

Irene Mosvold
How to Slay the Demons

Feed him full of all the foods he likes especially chocolate, demon's delight and wait for the beast to ascend your spine, the last place you think he will look to unwind, but there he unwraps tendrils, fine as ether, a spider's web across your back, while he seeks two points of entry, scaffolding, to check for cracks in the mortar holding your soul: the pericardial sac, the heart as a whole. Hooking his tail around sternal notch, he invades your body his mouth raw maw, devouring all in its path, and you think you're crazy all the while, he poisons your insides until you agree: spawn or die. It's then you meet someone with eyes in her head, who can see the beast on your back and the wound in your nearly dead spirit, who can recognize this as a true cry for help: *"Please save me from this dragon, this eternal hell."* So you watch as she picks up her sword and bends blade around, breaking haft collaring neck of the beast she found encircling your heart and eating your soul, she chains it to her, feeding it from her begging bowl, pouring mercy upon its hot scaly head, subduing your dragon so you don't end up dead. She's used to working alone, and collecting the tref that few can behold, taming wild creatures with no place to go, they go to her, they know: she will release them into the fold, not loose them into the Great Abyss, the dreaded unknown. She does not kill dragons, but feeds them instead, bowl suspended above she pours love in their mouths, love down their throats, with each draught and morsel, lays claim to the creature with kindness and patience, gentling their wrath, reclaiming their Nature.

Tom Raithe

Awakening

All the night's restlessness thrashing your house —
that back-and-forth raging, weeping of wind —
could lift you but briefly in its cold currents
before setting you back down in darkness.

And that early finger of uncertain sunlight,
brushing the curtain, stroking the wall,
could coax you only to turn to one side
and to sink your head deeper in sorrow.

But now the soft music, and out of blue slumber
come tiny winged voices quietly saying,
Whatever the darkness, it is now passed;
whatever the winter, this is the thaw,

and no matter how snug you've become in your shadows,
how stiff-limbed, sluggish, how slow to your feet,
rise now and dress, crack open your door.
Take those first steps into spring.

Julie Wade

Black Diamond

Anaphora is old hat, but what am I to make of
the rapid succession of pines, the street lamps
poised for obliteration? My mother reclaiming
her past; my mother incessantly returning. There—
to the yellow house, built on renunciation. To the
old man in the window who doesn't recognize
his daughter. And the woman in the garden,
clippers in hand, whose passion is for cutting
things down. We go again, knowing full well.
We go again, prepared to leave empty.

Erin Barnhill

I Am

I am the mirror of a mountain
reflecting the dreams of all time.
I am majesty and strength in cool water.

I am the roof of the world
sheltering joy and weariness
under my beams.
I am the roof of the hut
letting the light leak in.

I am the cloud
drifting overhead
in the shape of a dragon,
shifting my shape to your vision.

I am the wish and the wish fulfilled
the cat and the canary
the cage and the key.
I am the word and the song
the listener and the giver.

I am the door
to the house
of the hundred pines
at midnight,

The door
you walk through
when you leave,
the door
you open
to come home.

Tonya Northener
The Thin Lines

I think of Williams with his doctor's pad,
 fitting to it what words the thin lines allowed.
 Dickinson, exasperated by brilliance and a woman's heart,
 in a world of black and white.
 The bankers, lawyers, painters, and hordes
 of other teachers,
 fitting their ageless voices onto notepads and napkins,
 between phone calls and beakers,
 between brushstrokes and conferences.
 At times, cash register rings or customer complaints
 the only rhythm they can hear. Those
 little words rising and fading like lunar phases,
 regardless of how the writer's planet spins.
 The rivers running, as if underground,
 as if in a tongue that needs a translator
 or much time to comprehend.
 Feeling, more than watching, them lisp
 across the waterfall edge, burning in deeper,
 more out of reach, with a crash and a murmur
 as they turn farther below.

Katerina Stoykova-Klemer
And in the Morning

...and in the morning
 we saw a moth,
 fused head-first
 to the shallow tin
 of a burned-out tea-light,
 his wings glazed with wax
 antennae set into the wick,
 and every pair of his legs pressed
 into a prayer.
 Done. Gone out
 with the light.
 What a way to propagate
 your cautionary tale, friend!
 What a way to stay
 a monument to love.

Laurie Doctor
Before Dawn

I.

Before dawn this morning
the last firefly of summer
sails by the window
like a star.

II.

This morning before dawn
before trash trucks or lawnmowers—
before birdsong, the last firefly of summer
soars by the window

like a ship headed toward the sky
and had it not sailed by
I would have forgotten all the fireflies
who ended their seasonal fling in July

and forgotten, too, those summers spent
dreaming of the future in mountain streams
or sitting under a blue umbrella
sipping soda to the song of tree frogs.

III.

Before dawn the gibbous moon
gives that particular glow to the lawn,
and the blue umbrella sways beneath
the dark trees.

There is only one firefly—
all the others have been long forgotten
like so many things that shimmer
with mystery and vanish.

Sagan Sette

First Time Flying

After a fourteen hour flight from Rome and a two hour layover in Atlanta, my tour group loaded the commuter plane for home. You and I sat in the back. Our large group seemed to encompass the whole plane, and the flight attendant made small talk over the intercom about our adventures. Within minutes of takeoff, however, the plane is silent and the people asleep. Except you. I let you have the window seat. In the large plane, we were both stuck in the center aisle, but I don't mind missing out on the view.

You weren't the oldest member of our tour group. You really held up well considering all the walking. But after a week-long trip, you're beginning to fade. You tell me you haven't flown since your Army days, before the kids and long before the grandkids. I tell you everyone is sleeping and you might want to close the window shade. The sun is setting and angled just right to shine in on the sleeping passengers.

You tell me that you can't. I reach over you to pull the shade, but you stop me. You say that you can't miss the view. We are right above the clouds. I lean my head on your shoulder, and you narrate the flight. You explain how each cloud is the size of a mountain. You name them after specific ones. My favorite is the Sleeping Giant. And the cloud does bear similarities to the landmark back in Connecticut. You wonder out loud about what flying must have been like before windshields. You want to know what the clouds feel like. I don't remind you that they are made of water vapor and feel just like cold, wet fog. I don't remind you because I want you to feel them, too.

The sun turns the largest clouds dark pink, and at the horizon the colors fade to darkness. I want to go home. I want to sleep in my own bed. But your eyes behind the thick lens of your glasses are so much brighter than I've ever noticed. And I'm suddenly terrified of seeing those eyes empty.

Chris Tiaht

Last Ride

Holiday World Theme Park, Spencer County, Indiana

It's the last day of the 2012 Holiday
World season; no further
Visits 'til next May. It's 5:56 PM.
Crowds have thinned from
Their mid-day peak—we wait only
Until a ride stops for boarding.

At 4 minutes 'til closing, we are queued
For the Scarecrow Scrambler,
Last ride of the year.

It's three days before Halloween and
It's perfectly fall. The sun
Has played checkers on a cotton-strewn
Sky, while a not quite
Biting wind kibitzed from the West.
Now, flames bathe the world: orange from
The setting sun, yellow from the
Whole moon, sparks from the carnival lights.
This moment will not come again.

It's one hundred eighty-seven days after
Your third birthday. Acorns and
Hickory husks bulge your pockets as I
Admire your tight blond curls.
Your autistic sister scratches sketches
In the dirt with the twig you donated.
It's time to board now. Your mother
Gathers you two girls; I hear the happy
Patter of your footsteps to the waiting cart.

It's two days after the cruel MRI, one
Day after we fled that Louisville
Hospital, clutching only the present.
This was the day I would stretch
To forever; one window to never
Shut. But already, soaring hawks
Have conceded the day. Circles
Upon circles slowly close, and
The ride stops.

It's who knows what on God's clock;
Who truly reads this grand cartography?
I'm lost. I want to snatch some pebble
Of time, declare it island, live here: all
Together – you laughing, twirling, teasing,
Being teased. But the park
Has closed: our last infinity reduced
To a slow walk to our car, a long
Glance back, and a dark drive home.

Annette Allen
Twin Willow

Each day the Chicago heat searing
the garden's wildness helps you
look for him. The foliage he once
planted, almost a thicket now,
opens the memory you water
at dusk. Like a wary farmer,
you prepare for possible drought.

In the wilted housedress, you
surrender to hunger, grief,
as Russian women might at market,
offering tomatoes and lean corn,
their fingers like yours grown raw
rubbing against stems, leaves.

These summer months burn on,
like distant lights where cars
stop and go, their riders wedged
between birth and death. Still
staying on, you haul the hose to
each fern, blossom, bittersweet vine,
then touch the aged twin willow
that shadows the sun-spotted yard.

Your hand pulls to the place
where the trunk divides.
The tree's bark, warm and dry
from heat, recalls the way fire
makes wood sing, as if the sealed-
in song of one lone nightingale
still lived in the tree.

Contributors

Raymond Abbott, who lives in Louisville, has published several novels and story collections, and his stories often appear in the *Journal of Kentucky Studies* as well as *North American Review* and numerous other magazines. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 2nd appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Annette Allen is Professor of Humanities at U of L, author of two books of poetry, and recipient of three state council fellowships. She also has published essays on women poets and a scholarly book: *Clinical Ethics and the Necessity of Stories*. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her 11th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Phoebe Athey said, "God's plan for me was a career as small town old maid school teacher. I have lived my life in defiance of that destiny." She is a frequent reader of satirical prose at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her 8th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Erin Barnhill, who lives in Lexington, KY, enjoys writing, painting, and playing, and appreciates "all the wonders and blessings of creating." She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her 10th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Michael Battram lives in Evansville and works in Henderson. His poetry is widely published, including a recent appearance in *The Barefoot Muse Anthology*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 15th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Barbara Bennett's stories and poems first appeared in *Open 24 Hours* in 1995. She has studied writing at Brescia and Spalding U. and at several writers' workshops, and she has co-hosted 3rd Tuesday Writers Coffeehouse for 16 years. This is her 15th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jason Chaffin is the recipient of Brescia's 2008 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing and has stories in several issues of *Open 24 Hours*. He said he is an absurdist who values optimistic pessimism and lengthy confabulations of an anthropomorphic nature.

Brittany Cheak, an emerging poet and editor set to graduate from WKU this spring, is studying Spanish and yoga in Costa Rica. She has been published in *Still*, *Ithaca Review*, *I Breathe Words*, and *The Heartland Review*,

and she has performed at 3rd Tuesday.

Laurie Doctor, whose work is based on language, image and contemplative practice, is an artist, teacher and writer whose work is in collections and publications in the United States and Europe. She has read at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her 4th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

George Fillingham, from Hopkinsville, KY, has been studying and writing poetry for many years and has had poems published in *The Sewanee Theological Review*, *Kentucky Monthly Magazine*, and others. He is a frequent reader at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 7th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Rey Ford, from Owensboro but relocated to Colorado, is a part-time writer and full-time painter. He received Brescia's 1989 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing, and his poetry has been appearing in *Open 24 Hours* since 1987.

Joshua Fulkerson is a 2012 Brescia graduate with a BA in English and philosophy. He writes poetry and fiction, and this is his 2nd appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Clayton Galloway, a 2010 Brescia grad and the recipient of its 2010 Award for Achievement in Fiction Writing, devotes his time to family, work, hobbies, friends, and writing. This is his 6th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Joey Goebel has had four novels published in 16 languages and is especially popular in Germany. He received Brescia's 2002 award for Achievement in Fiction writing, and this is his 13th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

John Hay (johnhay@juno.com), who lives on Scotland farm at Frankfort, KY, has received honorable mention in *Best American Short Stories* and has stories in *The Kentucky Anthology: 200 Years of Writing in the Bluegrass State*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 12th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Lesley Henderson is an English major at Brescia who enjoys anime, gaming, and reading, and she aspires to be a video game journalist. This is her first appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Cheston Hoover, a Brescia alum, educator, husband, and father of two daughters, received Brescia's 2002 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing, and this is his 10th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Tom Hunley is an associate professor of English at WKU, director of Steel Toe Books, co-editor of *Creative Writing Studies*, and author of *Scotch Tape World*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 6th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Chris Karn, who received Brescia's 2012 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing, said he once took home the most beautiful girl in the bar instead of the smartest, and he's been stuck in an existential crisis ever since. This is his 2nd appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Matthew Lasley, from Leitchfield, KY, is a Brescia grad and recipient of the University's 2012 award for Achievement in Original Poetry. He is a reporter for the *Grayson County News-Gazette*, and this is his 3rd appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Ed McClanahan's latest book is *I Just Hitchhiked in From the Coast: The Ed McClanahan Reader*. He and his wife, Hilda, live in Lexington. He has read often at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 15th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jim McGarrah is an award-winning author of poetry who also has written a memoir of the Vietnam War, *A Temporary Sort of Peace*, and a non-fiction account of re-entering society after war titled *The End of an Era*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and his writing appears regularly in *Open 24 Hours*.

Destiny Minton, from Beaver Dam, KY, now living in Louisville, is a 2002 Brescia grad and recipient of Brescia's 2001 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing. She said she hangs out in a library by day and with her cats at night and is in search of herself. This is her 5th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Irene Mosvold is the recipient of grants from the Kentucky Arts Council for her non-fiction. Her stories and poems have been published at home and abroad, and she hopes to complete her first collection of

poems by this fall. This is her 6th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jesse Mountjoy is a lawyer in Owensboro whose writing has appeared in many publications, including *The Legal Studies Forum* and *Exquisite Corpse*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 15th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Tonya Northenor is an assistant professor of English at OCTC whose poetry has been published in *Appalachian Heritage* and anthologies, including *Mamas and Papas: On the Sublime and Heartbreaking Art of Parenting*. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her 9th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Patrick Pace earned a degree from Brescia in graphic design and received Brescia's 2002-2003 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing. He is an assistant editor of *Open 24 Hours*, and this is his 9th appearance in it.

Katherine Pearl earned a BA in English from Brescia and an MFA in creative writing from North Carolina St. in Durham where she lives with her husband, Joe. Her short fiction has appeared in *Jelly Bucket* and *Cooweescoowee*, and this is her 12th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Tom Raithel, a retired newspaper reporter, lives in Evansville, IN. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Southern Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Poetry East*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. He reads regularly at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 6th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Linda Neal Reising writes fiction, non-fiction, and poetry, is widely published, and has received numerous awards, including first place in the 2009 Judith Siegel Pearson Writing Award, a national competition for a collection of poetry concerning women. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her 9th 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 band based in Waukegan, IL. This is his 9th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Ceara Robin is a psychology major at Brescia aiming for a career counseling teens. Her interests include watching old movies, singing, and writing, and this is her first appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Sara Rossio is a sophomore at Brescia with a wide range of interests, including writing poetry. This is her first appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Teresa Roy is an Evansville writer who has faithfully contributed to *Open 24 Hours* and read at 3rd Tuesday Coffeehouse since 1996. She said she enjoys that she and the publication have matured together. This is her 15th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Sagan Sette, a 2011 Brescia grad and recipient of Brescia's 2008-2009 Award for Achievement in Fiction Writing, is working on a master's degree at U of L. She lives with her mother and said she is only slightly ashamed to admit that they are best friends. This is her 6th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Frederick Smock is associate professor of English at Bellarmine University. His new book of poems is *The Bounteous World* (Broadstone). He has read at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 8th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Susan Stark has received several awards for her poetry and for five years has organized Woman's Poetry Reading at Woman's Institute and Gallery in New Harmony, IN. She also has performed at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her first appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Katelyn (Beyke) Storm, recipient of the University's 2010-2011 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing, is a published playwright who would like to have her plays performed by every high school in the U.S. This is her 6th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Katerina Stoykova-Klemer is the author of three poetry books, most recently *The Porcupine of Mind*. Her poems have appeared in publications throughout the U.S. and Europe, and this is her 3rd appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Joe Servant, a native of Owensboro and Emeritus Professor of English at WKU, served as Kentucky Poet Laureate from 2002-2004. The third book of his Kentucky trilogy will be published by University Press of Kentucky in spring 2014. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 16th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Richard Taylor, Kenan Visiting Writer at Transy, is a former KY Poet Laureate, and he and his wife own Poor Richard's Books in Frankfort. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 13th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Chris Tiahr, a Brescia math professor, is a husband and father of two. He has been involved with *Open 24 Hours* as either submitter or associate editor since 1993. The rest of his bio was abducted by aliens and is unavailable.

Amy Tudor has published fiction, non-fiction, and photographs; she teaches at Bellarmine, and she reads at 3rd Tuesday. This is her 3rd appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Julie Marie Wade is the author of two collections of lyric nonfiction, *Wishbone: A Memoir in Fractures* (2010) and *Small Fires* (2011), and two collections of poetry, *Without* (2010) and *Postage Due* (2013). She also received the Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Memoir. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her 4th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Mark Williams lives in Evansville, where he is a member of First Mondays Writers Group. His writing has appeared in *The Hudson Review*, *Indiana Review*, and *The Southern Review*. He reads at Third Tuesday, and this is his 10th 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.