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cover, "Porcelain"

p. 1, "Horses Kissing"

p. 4, "Lighter Eyes"

p. 31, "In Face Horse"

p. 56, "Sunset"

p. 88, "Chapel"

p.115, "Vault"

p. 120, "Secret Door"

Editor's Note:

All of the 55 writers in this issue — including six who are new to *Open 24 Hours* — were invited to submit work because they are affiliated with Brescia's creative writing program and because they are from this region or are writing in it. Some are current or former Brescia students, some have given workshops or readings at Brescia, and some have read at 3rd Tuesday Coffeehouse, which is produced by the Brescia Writers Group. The result is an assemblage of talented writers from Western Kentucky and Southwestern Indiana.

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

D.B.

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

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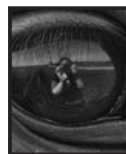
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Natural Disarray of Beauty



"He could not afford both a car and a wife."

John Hay, p. 6

"I circled around my broken husband, looking down, watching, trusting in his ability to return."

Barbara Stahura, p. 20

Dori Howard***Dakota***

A man paces in front of me pawning
stolen umbrellas from a bag on his back
across the street from the sidewalk where you died.
I sit silently, knees-to-chin, under a dry awning,
perched like a late-blooming apple scruff,
and gaze across wet traffic toward
weathered New Yorkers scrambling in sneakers
and business suits through the rain, twenty-seven
years of mourning puddling beneath
their oblivious, routined feet.

Violent or harmless, passive or bloody,
cherished or wrecked or alone,
we all must die somewhere, and this place
is an intersection of mixed emotion,
a summation of a determined desire to connect
life and death, to connect lives
bound by music and a history, lives
leveled by mere geography and inevitability,
and a man sells umbrellas on the corner.

Somewhere there is a map no one
has ever seen, and it is mottled with red tacks
that push through its boundaries and poke
holes in its names, each spot marking a location
a last breath was drawn. Imagine the holy places
I have trespassed, mapless and naïve —
in a hospital hallway, on a patch of highway,
wading in the ocean or sitting on a couch.
I study the sidewalk of 72nd Street,
one red tack that is observed
out of millions that evade us everyday,
and thank God for our animate ignorance
because I struggle enough today
to face the steady sensation of my own
heavy mortality hanging in the air.
With the constant recognition of the sacred places
I tread, could I possibly answer the man
offering me an umbrella as I sit, dry and dazed,
watching the rain stream the sidewalk across the street?
Could I open my mouth to answer him
with anything but questions:
How does life go on as normal here?
How does life go on?

John Hay

Breaks in the Wilderness

He was a hunter, as skilled in hunting as a fox. He didn't have a car. He had a young wife instead of a car. He could not afford both a car and a wife, though she spent no money. It was a matter of food and a place to live. The food he could buy would add up to little.

His wife was slender. She was beautiful in the way a woman from deep in the country can have an unfamiliar beauty. It is not a city beauty. It is a beauty that holds the ancient genetics of survival, and so it is strange and withdrawn. Her eyes were large and steady. Her hair was dark and long and pulled back. She held her head slightly forward, and her shoulders were forward, too. She sometimes held herself with her arms tucked around her waist when she looked with her steady eyes.

Cole was twenty-three years older than his wife. He had lived in the outdoors and lived hard, and he looked older than forty-four, unless you came under the spell of his manner and saw him grow younger in that spell. His bright red, wispy hair grew only on the sides of his head and lifted out from an old, broad-brimmed hat he always wore. He was not tall. He was lean. He walked with an amble as if each part of his body had its own intuition about when to move and which way. In quick action he had the grace of being exact and unencumbered. He was loose when he raised a gun to fire.

They came from Dry Run Creek, in Castle County, a place of rough close-set hills and rocks and rough woods. It had been settled in part with arrivals from the mountains. Some of the mountain people were the best people, and some had neither much food nor much health nor protective education. Many in the mountains did not understand alcohol, as most people everywhere do not understand it; and if there had been drugs then as there are drugs now in the mountains, many would not have understood drugs either.

Cole and his wife did not drink or use drugs. Maybe it was that Cole did not like to drink, or that he had quit. When they came to our family farm, they brought two young children, and three more came, one after the other.

The two young redheaded children clung to the windows in the back seat of the rusted car, and their legs would come out of the window and dangle down. His young wife would pull the children back into the dark car and then turn them loose again.

"Get back in that car, Joey," Cole hollered, as he walked toward the porch to speak to my father. It was a real holler as if he were stopping a nervous bull at a gate, but the child remained smiling. The children laid their heads then on the sills of each window. The car was dark and very old and crushed and rusted. The driver remained unknown, an immobile shadow behind the sunlight on the windshield.

My father was sitting on the porch drinking water. There was a clear glass pitcher of ice water next to him on the cedar table. It was a large pitcher, and the drops of water ran down the sides. My father was sweating through his shirt from cutting up trees, which had come down in a windstorm.

My father bought old, rather arcane books, and spoke to us of what he had read. He would meet people, on a plane, anywhere, and learn their history and remember it, and speak to us of them. Yet mainly, he liked all that was in nature, wood and colorful horses, and history, which was warm and alive to him. We lived in a mansion he had inherited, and he worked hard to pay its debts. We did not keep up the grass tennis court at The Dance Hall nor the formal gardens with their manicured boxwood and arbors of red roses, but we kept up the natural disarray of a beauty that harbored wild roses and scattered narcissus and lilies and aging boxwood twisting toward the sky. If you wished, you could mow what was once a grass tennis court by The Dance Hall and put out a blanket in August to watch the stars fall.

The house had tall, white columns copied from the Greeks. My father was not a rich man. He had to be careful to make ends meet. He wished to educate his children and afford to keep the farm. Yet compared to Cole, he was a man of wealth. My family did not spend much money. We lived for the engagement with people. People were drawn to the farm, and those times were inspired by discussion and laughter and the outdoors. And in working times there was much to do to keep it all going.

My father was a romantic in his dealings. If he had been a practical man, he would not have hired Cole. He could see that Cole was hungry and had no prospects for a place to care for his family. That day, my mother was on the porch, too. She was a perceptive woman who courted joy. She knew Cole was not a worker but that he was a hawk, or a deer, a feral cat half tame, and she knew he would not learn to work with the care that was needed with horses and cattle — that it wasn't his way to buckle down.

She liked Cole, though. She knew about him by hearing his voice and by his look, and his few words, and she knew her husband would hire him. She wished that it did not have to happen, though, as the farm and all the animals were very difficult to keep up, and my father worked away from the farm, and she was the one who had the job of managing it all, and she worked with her hands, too, and would stay close to the work so it would be done. It was probably a heartbreaking feeling for her to think of the farm's struggles heavier upon her if Cole were hired, and heartbreaking to see his poor family drive away if he were not.

"I come up on Dry Run Creek," Cole said.

"I know Dry Run Creek," my father said. "What jobs have you had?"

"I always worked about the farms and 'round tobacco some."

"Have you worked with cows and horses?"

"I know cows. I was raised up around a cow."

"We have sixty cows and fourteen horses."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you have a family, Cole?"

"That's my wife and boys in the car."

"How many boys?"

"Two, right now."

A coonhound, a big Red Bone, stuck her head out the window of the old car.

A hand reached for the chain at her neck, and her ears went down gently, and her eyes closed as she slowly disappeared into the car.

"You hunt coons, Cole?"

Cole's eyes lit up, and he sat straight on the limestone railing of the porch. He had taken off his hat when my mother poured him a glass of ice water. He put his hat back on without knowing he had done it when my father mentioned coon hunting.

"I hunt when I get a chance, when I can," Cole said.

"How many dogs do you have?"

"I got six right now."

My father, after a doctor claimed he would die as a child, was not put in school but given a dog, a horse, a gun for hunting small game, and traps for trapping in season. He spent his early years in the outdoors, and suddenly at ten when he did not die but became tall and strong and healthy, his mother drove him from the farm in the rolling country down into the river valley to the school. Throughout his life, though, something in him held to the remoteness and the freedom he had felt when he was left alone in nature. And when he met Cole, a huge distance was crossed without words. Cole was familiar, kin.

"Do you mind work, Cole?"

"I can work," Cole said.

"Where do you live?"

"We're staying over on Dry Run Creek with my wife's Uncle. We don't have no place to live."

"Do you have a car, Cole?"

"We don't have a car."

"Do you drive?"

"My wife drives."

"How will you get groceries without a car?"

"My cousin has a car. He'll take my wife out to get food. He has another car in his yard we might get running, too."

"I have an empty house here, Cole. You can move in with your family. I will pay for your electric and heat and your water, and the rent is free. I will pay you to start thirty-five dollars a week. I'll give you any material you want to fix up your house, paint or wood, or anything you need to keep it fixed up. You can have a garden for you and your family as big as you wish."

"Thank ya," Cole said.

We walked through our garden gone wild from a more formal time. The three of us were walking together, my father, Cole and I, under the flicker of the new leaves. The dark green boxwoods were growing there, with lower limbs broken and gone in the ice storms, and the trunks twisting high to make a small, magical forest like the ones seen in the mystery books of childhood. The house for Cole's family was called The Dance Hall. Earlier generations had parties there. It was a fine one-story frame house with French doors. The family that was there before our own family built the house as a home for an elderly grandfather.

Open 24 Hours

We came out of the house, which was clean and empty, to the yard in the sunlight, all of it smelling of spring. Cole turned over a rock with his foot. The rock was in the grass on the path near the wooden porch. The house was already his. "I'll go get my wife," he said.

I was in school and not working at the barn with the animals so much. I got to know Cole slowly. When I would come in from school to do a job or to check on the animals and check on Cole, we would chat about the farm. He would be cleaning a stall or just leaning on the wooden gate watching me come down the gravel road.

It was a Sunday in spring after the tremendous straight-line wind when I got to know Cole better.

I already knew that he had spent most of his life in the woods, living close, working little. I already knew he grew up hunting, trapping for food and money. I heard he spent a year in prison for cooking over a campfire another man's pig that was wandering loose in the woods. I already knew that in the nights, whenever he could, he took his dogs out to hunt coons. He would often start with his dogs alone, or with his buddies, even as late as midnight. They would hunt through the night following the hounds and the language of their baying, drop all treed raccoons with a single shot, and work all day the next day. I knew the people on Dry Run Creek nicknamed him Cole the Fox because of his fox-like red hair and his expertise in all that was of the untamed outdoors.

"You can drop me in the woods anywhere," he told me one day, sharply and with pride. "And I can live without a dime." The word "dime" was drawn out long, and his eyes sparkled with confidence.

His hounds were Blue Tick, Walker, Red Bone. I could hear them howl in the night from their pen, their soft, rounded voices softened more as they traveled across the garden to where I lay awake by the fine, tall windows on the upstairs porch, once a studio for my Aunt Eugenia, a fine artist, who might sketch a coon dog as alive as the real ones singing. It was still an artist's studio, a map room of sorts, to trace and wrest awareness from the action of the days. I knew the hounds were not lonely animals in spite of their lonely singing from their pen. They were hunters like Cole.

It was spring when the big wind came and the forsythia began to bloom yellow and the big wild cherry tree in the garden blew over into the electric wires. The ground was soft from the rains, and the tall electric pole with the high silver transformer tilted thirty degrees. It was the transformer where a white peacock had been electrocuted flying for safety from an owl. The lines did not break. The tree hung there in the bowed electric lines. I heard the wind as I stood on the porch the night before. I could hear the high wind sizzle through the holes in the copper screen of the porch like a lean and lonely spirit yearning for a place to rest. And I saw the lights blink in the hall when the big cherry fell into the wires. I could hear the branches bounce and come together against the wires like a dry gourd being shaken. I wondered if Cole was awake to hear it, or his slender wife with her large eyes open in her new home, or one

of his young children lying awake with nothing much to catch hold to for worry but the unknown.

In the morning it was Sunday. The cherry tree was there in the garden across the wires. I saw it now as wood for the fire. I saw it for the open fire in the library, the sweet smell of the cherry wood burning when we would all sit by the fire in the library to tell a thousand and one stories of people or things, astonished at the world, and watch the sparks fly.

I took the ten-foot, heavy, wooden stepladder into the garden. When I was at the top of the ladder, I started the gasoline motor of the chain saw. It was difficult to start it there on the ladder because the saw was heavy and old and hard to start, and the ladder rocked when I pulled the cord.

The big cherry tree resting on the wires was a puzzle. I heard soft voices, and from the corner of my eye I saw Cole's children watching me across the garden fence. I did not want to turn to speak. I had to cut the limbs so that where I cut would not flip the limbs against me, so the trunk would not jerk sideways or roll and hit me on the ladder, or hit the ladder at all, so that I would not have to throw the chain saw, and jump, or fall. I trusted the wires would not snap; I don't remember why.

The garden spread itself wide before me when I cut the motor of the chain saw. The children were screaming. There was no mistaking their screams of fear. They were running wildly toward the door of the house.

"Daddy," the littlest boy screamed. "A kitty is after us."

As they were running, I could see the colors of their clothing flash through the spaces in the new blooming forsythia.

Then Cole was out of the house loping, as light as a feather, and side to side easy like a feather when it falls. He saw the skunk, which was staggering and running and drifting without aim across the grass of the old tennis court. Coming from the skunk's mouth was something white, and I understood what it was.

There was a coke bottle lying in the grass. Cole swept it up and moved into the old tennis court with his head raised. The grass was scattered with boxes and wood and a plastic ball and a rusty child's wagon. The skunk was wagging and stumbling as it turned to run at Cole. At thirty feet, Cole threw the bottle hard so that he seemed to lift from the ground, and his body and arm followed the bottle. It hit the skunk in the head, between the eyes, and the skunk was dead.

Cole saw me in the garden, and I met him at the fence.

"Good throw, Cole."

He nodded and stared out through the trees, relaxing into something else.

"Do you always throw like that?"

"Oh, I can throw a rock. When we was kids we didn't have no money for shells and we hunted with rocks."

"Good with a coke bottle, too."

"Just last week I knocked one of them sparrow hawks off the light line with a rock."

"Where were you?"

"I was just by the gate at the red barn."

"That electric line is pretty high and pretty far away."

"Well, that hawk and another one 'bout eat up all the little baby ducks."

The children had come out of the house and were quietly sidling up behind Cole. His voice was stern and quick: "You all go back, now. Get back in the house."

"They are fine with me, Cole."

"Go on," he said again roughly.

The children moved away a few steps, and when he turned back toward me, they stopped and didn't leave. They watched me quietly as if I were a strange animal, or as if I might suddenly give up some secret that no one else could possibly know.

The Dance Hall where Cole's family lived was just beyond the garden we walked in. And in the summers we sat in the garden in heavy wooden low-slanted chairs painted white. Even though Cole's family was right there, I didn't see his wife out of the house very much, but now and then I would see her standing at the yard fence watching the horses in the field.

His children, with the three more they had there, would play where the grass tennis court used to be. I could see them through the trees; I could see them moving.

The court they played on was from a time I never knew. And on the court, in those past days, my ancestors and their friends would play tennis on a summer afternoon. And on the court in the evening, if there was a party after tennis, they would dance to the songs of a violin, played by a cousin or a friend, under red and blue and yellow and green Chinese lanterns that glowed, lit with flickering candles. If there was a bit of summer rain, they would go into The Dance Hall out of the rain, and take lanterns in and dance there to a piano that would play along with the violin, and there would be sandwiches and drinks, lemonade and beer, and sweet things to eat.

Cole said he would bury the skunk, and he would keep the kids away from the yard for a while because of foam on the grass, and he would be sure they had not touched the grass so they wouldn't get sick.

"Thank you for killing the skunk, Cole," I said.

"Aw, it weren't nothing. Can I help you cut up the wood?"

"It's Sunday, Cole, and I don't have much to cut. I'll split it another time."

When he turned away, I saw his wife standing at the screen. The gray luminous light of the screen softened her, and seemed to mesh with her, and made her beautiful in the way a phantom in a painting could be beautiful, a holy type of phantom. Cole walked toward her. The children parted and fell in behind Cole.

When I finished cutting up the tree, I left the heavy logs where they lay to split later with the sledgehammer and the steel wedges. I looked toward The Dance Hall, and there was Cole's oldest boy, Joey, watching me at the fence. I spoke to him and walked toward the fence slowly and looked up into the trees as I might approach a horse that was hard to catch, for the boy was shy. But he stood solid waiting for me to come to him.

"Hi," I said. "Your daddy is a good hunter."

The boy smiled, but almost all of his smile was left inside because he was so unsure of it in front of me. The smile inside of him almost made him burst, it seemed, as if it were a sharp pain that came and went. His pale skin, his pale red hair and small white teeth all blended, washed away in the full sunlight that was against his face.

"He can shoot, too. He can hit anything."

"Yeah."

"And he can throw rocks. He can knock a bird out of the sky."

"Can you throw rocks?"

"My daddy and mama won't let me."

"Why is that?"

"They're afraid I'll hit something and hurt it."

We stood in silence for a few moments. His bare feet were dusty. The fence was between us.

"Get in here, Joey." It was his mother's voice. She could not see me standing there, as the angle of a tree blocked her view from the screen door. She could only see Joey staring over the fence.

He turned quickly as if to obey, and then swung back to me and looked into my eyes as if I were a loved-one he would never see again. He was just about right, too, about never seeing me again, not in this way at the garden fence with just the two of us standing together to talk. I would be in school and playing high school football and going away in the summer, and then to school in Tennessee, and there was a dark-eyed girl I loved in any moment I could make into a spare moment for loving. And besides, The Dance Hall was far away. Joey's eyes looked into mine without shyness, yet as if something cared for was lost.

"You know," he said, "if my mama and daddy would let me go out of this yard, I'd be dancing on the edge of the tobacco barn."

He turned and walked toward the house, steady like, as if he were pulled by an invisible hand. There above The Dance Hall on the hill was the pale green tobacco barn, faded and statuesque in the shade of a hundred year old sugar maple with new glass-green leaves coming with the spring.

That Sunday would keep going in the way a day can pack it in, as if time never comes around. It was the Sunday Cole and I would meet again.

It was the early afternoon, still April, still the thin, yellow forsythia, and the jonquils, and I walked out along the bright, gravel road between the barns to visit the horses in the long paddock. I also wanted to check on the heifer. Too young to be bred, she had been with calf from the time the heavy, black bull had broken through four rows of fence and spent the afternoon with her. She was due, and we thought she might have trouble because of her size.

Cole was leaning against the fence, casually holding a rifle in one hand. He seemed to be watching the little yellow ducklings huddled against their mother. I surprised him, so he must have been very deep in watching the little ducks. It was not like Cole to be surprised in that way. He always heard me coming.

"How many babies?" I asked.

"Eleven," Cole said. "Used to be seventeen." I leaned against the fence beside him and watched the pond lot and the ducks, and a bluebird flew across. Cole leaned his arms again against the fence, and together we watched the day go by in the pond lot.

"How's your family, Cole."

"Okay. They okay."

"I never see them out walking on the farm. They could be out walking on the farm."

"My wife don't want her babies to get hurt. They could get hurt out here, you know."

I thought of Joey and the green tobacco barn and the great loss in his eyes. I searched for something to say. I thought to ask Cole if his wife liked the house. I tried to let the other go about Joey. I was sixteen. I felt I had to let it go. Then I said, instead of giving up, "Does she worry about the kids getting hurt?"

"My wife, she's not feeling good."

"What's wrong with her?" I had to forget about getting Joey out; I did not know any more to say to help him. Since the word "fate" has never meant much to me, I did all I could do, and then I let it all go.

"She's gonna have a baby."

"When, Cole?"

"Some months, I reckon."

"Congratulations."

"Well, thankee."

That Sunday they had lived on the farm for just at a year. Cole would milk the brindle cow and bring the warm milk in the early morning to my mother in a ceramic bucket. He brought the milk when the cow would eat the wild onions, too, and the onion in the milk would taste like something spoiled in the hot sun. I was supposed to drink it for my health, so I faced it tough-like, gulped it down and shook it off.

Cole took care of twelve horses and fed them in winter, and he fed the cattle in the field bales of hay from the wagon. He hunted coons with his dogs on many a night. At his house there were always old, broken cars that started and could run the distance from Dry Run Creek to The Dance Hall, for he was the one among all his relatives and friends who had a house and a big yard to go to. And he must have been generous with his garden for, especially in the summer, no one left at mealtime.

We gave Cole some of the beef we killed and some of the chickens, too. The many sleek game chickens my father kept because a friend gave them to him ran loose, and the roosters fought each other to the death and were shy like wild birds. In the spring, I would shoot them with a shotgun and take them to the ice locker to be dressed and frozen. If I were not at home on the farm, Cole would shoot them. My father gave him shells to shoot the roosters and shells to shoot the ground hogs and crows and other varmints.

When Eternal Za, a tall bay thoroughbred mare, twisted her leg in a ground-hog hole and cut it deeply on a rock at its edge, and from her hoof to her knee

was swollen and she could not set it down, Cole doctored it for months with her locked in a dark stall, wrapping it in a blue cloth bandage over white salve. She was the mare I helped foal the year before. It was a rough birth, and I was tired when it was over, and she was tired very deep inside, yet she was a good mother and struggled up to clean her foal of the afterbirth and eat part of it for strength, and move carefully in the stall and hold still for her foal to nurse.

After Eternal Za stepped in that hole, Cole focused on the groundhogs that dug the holes and burrowed and dug more, and we rarely saw a groundhog after that, and Cole filled in the holes with dirt he dug up behind the stud barn with a long-handled shovel.

My father gave Cole rifle shells and shotguns shells and a shotgun because he knew that Cole could not afford to buy them, or if he did buy them, as Cole might have done anyway, he would not have money later for some small thing his family might need.

Suddenly, Cole whirled from the fence where we had been leaning, and the rifle was up. The hawk came over the cow barn against the sun. When it saw us, it banked, its wings holding out against the air. The wind was up a bit, and when the hawk banked sharply, there was a moment when its wings held against the wind, and in that moment Cole pulled the trigger, and the hawk did a somersault, dead in the air.

I had never seen a shot like that with a rifle. Yet Cole did not feel lucky. And I did not see it as lucky.

He turned to me as we walked toward the field to look at the hawk. "No more little ducks for him," Cole said

In moments, Cole was over the plank fence and into the field ahead of me. He picked up the hawk and felt its body with both hands, then laid it down and spread its wings. It was a big hawk, a Coopers hawk. Its feathers looked soft where Cole had held its body and his fingers had ruffled them, and the feathers were clean and bright and colorful against the winter grass and the grass coming again in spring. The blood in its feathers did not interest me; blood shows up everywhere on a farm.

We talked about the hawk. We talked about its habits and its name and where it would nest and how many others might live around us. We did not talk about the shot.

"I came out to check on the heifer," I said.

"She was okay early," Cole said.

But the heifer was not okay. Something that looked like a piece of meat was sticking out of her. It seemed round and could not be distinguished as a body part. She was in pain and rubbing against the fence and then running the fence, as if to get free would save her from the pain.

We opened the gate that led into the barn and herded her in on the run. She turned to run out in the field again, and I blocked the gateway with my arms up and yelled, and the heifer, in trying to stop, fell in the clay of the barn floor and slid almost to my feet. She was a wild heifer even without the pain. I slammed the gate shut, and she began to run the hall of the barn. Cole was up on the ledge. This was not his world, and he did not want to get hurt for so

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small a thing. The heifer went into a stall near me, and I slammed the door shut, and Cole was right behind me. She hit the walls several times, then she was still, panting. I ran to the house and called the veterinarian. We waited, and when he was there, we took a rope he had brought and roped her in the stall and pulled her tight against the wall against the steel rack that held hay, and the vet and I threw our weight against her to press her against the wall, and she bellowed and her eyes rolled in her head. Cole held the rope with both hands, leaning against the opposite wall. The vet ran his hand up inside her and around the part of the calf that stuck out, and he said the heifer was small there and the calf was turned and twisted in a bad way, and he could not say exactly how. And he said the calf was dead.

He jabbed a needle in the heifer's neck as we held her, and blood bubbled out, and he told us to keep holding her, and we felt her relax, but we kept against her tightly. We knew we had to get the dead calf out of her, or she would soon die. We wrapped ropes around her legs and buckled her knees with the ropes so that she went down, and she struggled and made a high-pitched bellow, and her eyes were thrown back.

She was in the dirt of the barn floor on her side, struggling and moaning, and water came out of her in the back, and I held her head down with my hands leaning with my weight, and Cole held the back leg that was up while the vet put a chain around some part of the dead calf, reaching the chain up inside the heifer. He attached a come-along, a type of jack, to the chain and the other end to a wooden upright in the barn. He cut the heifer with a blade at her opening to make it bigger where the calf was, and he jacked the calf out of her a little at a time. He cut the dead calf with his blade to make some of it let go when it was being pulled.

We felt the heifer die. It was all of a sudden. It was as if the lights had gone out in the last strike of a storm and all was empty and quiet. It was as if the young heifer was not there. Cole dropped his rope first, and I lifted my hands away from her face. I did not feel good about it at all. What has to be in life does not always sit well.

The vet drove away in his heavy truck, and the smell of his things went away with him. Cole and I began to walk up toward our homes on the gravel road. The gravel crunched under our feet as we walked in silence. Suddenly, Cole swept his arm toward the ground in a broad arc, a theatrical gesture which brought back the liveliness that had gone out of us, and he came up with a small green plant just beginning to grow. He held it in front of me, handing it to me.

"This will make you fly," Cole said. He said it in an exaggerated way, playful and musical, so that when he said "fly," there was an uplift, and he carried the word "fly" out in that drift that implied something coveted and magical.

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's that marijuangee."

This was 1960, and I had heard of marijuana in some manner but never seen it. Maybe I had heard that the Beatniks smoked it when they listened to jazz in the dark cellars and cafes, or when they beat their rhythms on bongo drums. Or maybe I had heard stories around the fire at home about the days when Kentucky

raised huge fields of hemp, encouraged in the war effort when foreign supplies were cut off, and maybe someone told me the farm hands took it from the fields and smoked it.

It was strange that Cole would point out marijuana to me. I held it in my hand, and it was just a small green plant growing wild beside the road. It perked an interest in me, but it was an empty interest; I had nothing in me to connect to the drug, nor any desire for it. I handed it back to Cole. He threw it down, and we kept walking.

"Do you smoke it, Cole?"

"Naw, I don't smoke it."

"Did you ever smoke it?"

"I tried it."

"What did you think?"

"I don't like it. It makes you fuzzy, and it'll make you sick in the long haul."

Maybe he was testing me to see what I knew. Maybe what he showed me wasn't marijuana, and he wanted to see if I recognized it. Maybe he was mistaken about what it was. But I think he told me the truth, at least as he saw it, and he wished to show me this exotic plant, a drug with the age-old promise of human flight the easy way — a story that he knew well — and there it was, the fake promise growing right up near the road.

Cole didn't grow up in the world of drugs, nor did I. I saw marijuana again when I was twenty-one. A fellow, a student I didn't know, had a match box full. There was a group of men my age, standing in a close circle around him, intently looking into this tiny matchbox. I remembered then Cole's sparkle when he swept up that plant by the road. I had seen the press begin to promote marijuana, as in the photograph on the cover of *Look* magazine of a young couple, having smoked it, swaying with eyes closed. I was leaving college that day, having just graduated. Drugs had not made it to Eagle Mountain in Tennessee when I was there, nor did they make it to me later, for my focus was well away from the cramped parameters indwelling with drugs. But all Cole's little children entered that drug filled-world in the 1960's and onward, all his little children whom they loved and tried to protect behind the garden fence.

Cole died at fifty-five, ten years after that warm, spring day we had met on the stone porch. When he was sick and still trying to stay alive, my father asked him to stay at the farm and be at ease and hunt. I held his hand when he could not sit up alone. His wife and children left the farm when he died. They moved back to Dry Run Creek. Years later, I saw his wife dressed in red, still slender, and with red and black makeup and jewelry, big earrings that swung loose, and gold-colored rings on her long fingers and a necklace of red stones. She had a tough looking man on her arm. She looked good. She looked like a color painting of a gypsy from an old encyclopedia. She was at the carnival. They were standing before the Fun House, which billed a Labyrinth With No Escape. I spoke to her, and she smiled and looked at me with those solid, primitive eyes. Her man looked into the distance and not at me. She kept one hand

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on his arm. I was very happy deep within to see her, and I told her so, then we parted.

Again I saw her, after many years had passed. I was at the edge of the concrete parking lot of an old, once fine hotel. It had been turned into apartments for those who could afford little. I leaned against the tall back fence of the home of my friend, a woman to whom I was once engaged. I had brought firewood that I had cut for her on the farm. It was wild cherry, like the tree I had cut from the electric wires near Cole's house years before.

I saw Cole's wife coming from the hotel across the concrete. The lot was wide and empty. She was walking, yet it seemed that she stood still in the moment when she waved. It was a cool spring morning, and she wore a red sweater. She had not changed. Twenty-five years had passed, and she had not changed. She wore close fitting jeans, pressed and stylish, and the red sweater and brown leather boots. She wore earrings that were blue and silver and dangled down. She was built as she had been built at twenty-one, slender, yet now her shoulders were back and her head was up with no tilt forward, and she still looked straight into me, her eyes steady and engaged. And yet, there was something fragile.

I felt that the two of us were meeting as family who had been close, and who had been lost to each other for a long, long time.

"I loved living at your farm," she said softly. "It was the best place I ever lived. The horses were so beautiful. I loved to watch the horses. We didn't much ever leave the farm. Cole liked to stay on the farm."

I felt something try to take me, something that comes just before tears. It seemed sluggish and unreal. I saw the years of choices she had to make alone, and this thing came inside. I could not help the wish that everyone could have a wise hand to help them through. It was a sentimental, throw-away wish, yet I felt it then for everyone who must live. It was for her, and it was for Cole and their babies, and for my friend behind the high fence.

"Your mama and daddy were so good to us," she said. "They were good people."

I asked about her children. She told me about three of them. One boy was thirty-six and one was forty-five, she told me, and both were being treated for the disease that had killed Cole early, the disease that everyone knows and that comes to many. And I asked about Joey, and I thought of him yearning to climb the garden fence to dance on the edge of the tobacco barn, but I did not say it to her.

"Joey," she said and hesitated. She looked away from me for the first time. She looked down at the empty concrete. "I don't see Joey much anymore."

The back of the old, brick hotel was treeless, and I could see the windows of the rooms. There were curtains, faded mostly, except for a few, and small keepsakes were on the sills. Many of the rooms had curtains closed tightly.

"No one ever transcends the life and experience of their early years," an ignorant man once told me. "They become that and stay that until death."

"What do you do these days?" I asked her. "What do you like to do?"

"I go dancing," she said. "I like to dance."

Kelly Lee

Waiting to be Filled

As these older, lumpier people you and I have become
 Listened to that woman, layered with spray tan and spandex,
 Talk about keeping a food journal, making every calorie count,
 I couldn't help but imagine a heavy book
 Thick, blank pages waiting to be filled with description:

Crème Brulee at sunset on the deck of that place in La Hoya
 Feeling drowsy from three glasses of overpriced wine
 And the too hot outdoor heaters
 Both of us plowing our spoons in to break the shell
 Before the startled server could set down the dish

That pot roast full of pepper and mushrooms,
 We ate on the front porch, bowls balanced on our knees
 Watching the rain turn to steam and rise
 As soon as it hit the hot black pavement

Pizza, thick crust piled with every meat a pig can make,
 The two of us splitting a pitcher of beer
 In mugs almost too cold to wrap our fingers around,
 Lingering an hour or so until one of us can drive the mile and half home.

Steven Skaggs

Ice Storm, Later

Car abandoned,
 I brush aside the police barricade,
 enter the little lane through the forest
 – it's nothing but a wide path –
 press through powder,
 not bad, soft to the foot,
 under it something harder,
 more untrustworthy.

Sound everywhere around me!
 Rushing creek at the bottom of the gorge;
 above, the clattering of manacled limbs:
 how the trees shake their chains at my intrusion!
 A strippers' casino –
 clacking of a hundred spinning roulette wheels
 evening-dressed ladies waving their arms
 flinging their diamond bracelets to my feet.

I bend my way, stepping between fallen branches.
My shadow cuts over side drifts.
The deer trails look like someone
pressed halved hickory shells into the snow.
The track the blue heron has made
centers much better than I down the vague path:
each step makes a perfect arrow,
pointing back the way I came.

Forest as Victorian mortuary –
the light of angels draped
over forms of white-gowned mourners
trailing their forelorn hair over the
tomb of their beloved.

Houses in the wood: mausoleum dark,
strange as ancient Indian mounds,
jutting brown, gray, brick, granite,
decaying Great Pyramids made
by some indecipherable people before memory.
A wake of smaller confectionary lumps:
enshrouded automobiles arranged in hushed order
before garage doors down, locked up, sealed tight.

Here, beside a plume of woodchips
and half-sliced trunk, a defeated chainsaw
with its arrogant yellow shell,
discarded chain rising
metallic from the snowbank
in a twisted parabolic arch
like a miniature grandiose gateway
to a miniature buried St Louis.

All the houses quiet.
All the road quiet.
All quiet of people, except my steps –
and to the eye, my breath's white vapor
the only non-crystalline thing.

You cannot tell when it will fall, but
when it falls, an iced tree
makes a mountain of glitter
in the place where it leads,
and it makes a crater in the place it was.
In between is the body,
still sleek,
except for a few pencil-thin cracks.

Barbara Stahura

Rain in the Desert

It's July and once again the rains have come to the desert, sending the sweetest breezes in months, soft and inviting as whispers. Still dressed in our pajamas, my husband and I sit on the patio this Sunday to enjoy our omelet and fruit salad.

"Look, Boo," Ken says between bites and points his fork at one of our breakfast companions. "It's time for calisthenics." Underneath a red salvia, a small lizard is doing its morning push-ups, front legs pumping up-down-up-down-up.

Smiling at my nickname, I look up to see the lizard, too.

I notice then how the open landscape of our backyard, so parched and shrunken two weeks ago, is now bursting with the earthy energy released by several inches of rainfall. During the long, arid run-up to the monsoons, the baking foliage, enveloped by a thin scrim of dust thrown off by the desert floor, appears to hunker down, folding into itself to conserve precious liquid. Today, though, from where Ken and I live on the eastern rim of the valley cupping Tucson, we can see how a few heavy rains wash the valley clean, leaving it emerald and lush. In our yard, we can almost see the prickly pear, agave, and mesquites reaching skyward in a luxurious, coming-awake stretch. Below ground, hidden roots follow the water as it seeps toward the aquifer, growing stronger by pushing deeper.

Along with the lizard, other desert dwellers seem invigorated by the recent rains, too. A road runner arrows along the lowest terrace wall beneath the patio, head thrust forward, tail bobbing. At the back of the yard, a healthy-looking coyote lopes down the dusty wash, intent on traveling and not bothering to look our way. Large black bees resembling bullets with wings, smaller honey bees, and dainty hummingbirds dip into the newly-opened flowers around the patio, sprinkling the air with their delicate buzz.

Until I moved here, I never knew a desert could burst with life this way. Around the patio, red trailing roses and salvia, lavender lantana, lemon-yellow blossoms on a small tree, flame-colored blooms of the Mexican bird-of-paradise, and puffy, white flowers on a plant we've dubbed the "popcorn bush" show off their finery to entice insects and wildlife. Small songbirds chatter from the trees and cacti, as mourning doves zip and swoop over our patio roof (one nests in the crepe myrtle outside the bathroom window). Higher above the valley floor, half a dozen ravens or turkey vultures ride the thermals, circling up and up, never once flapping their wings. How delicious that must feel, such implicit trust in the total support of the currents — no, not even anything as conscious as trust, but simply being upon the rising swirls of air. The view from up there must be fantastic, I think, as the buzz of a small, unseen aircraft invades our peace. Ken, who's not wearing his glasses, looks up from his plate and wonders aloud about all the small planes gliding above us.

I chuckle at his mistake and say they're only birds.

"Oh," he replies, squinting at the sky and grinning. "Yeah."

Beyond the rising birds, rain is preparing to fall later in the day. White and gray clouds are swelling over the Santa Catalina Mountains to the north and piling up in a meteorological traffic jam thousands of feet tall. Even though from the patio we can't see the Rincon Mountains to the east, a wall of blacker, more ominous clouds is building up behind them, too. The moisture held in these clouds will fall probably in the afternoon, in the normal Arizona monsoon pattern that both gives life and often takes it away.

A friend in nearby Amado says a recent storm there stunned her by delivering large hail that fell for a full half-hour and killed lots of birds. They "fell out of the air, hit by the hail, and died in the front yard," she emailed. The mature tropical trees that shaded her small home were "denuded by the hail that literally scissored the leaves to pieces."

The monsoon that brings life to the desert is often dangerous to people as well. Sometimes quiet, gentle rains bless the thirsty landscape. But other times, violent storms pound across it, for a time flooding the normally hard-tack-dry washes that crisscross it. The shallow wash that meanders through our back yard rushes with incredible force during these storms, but it's merely a microcosm of the huge, dry river beds that gouge their way through the ancient desert and the modern city. Out of nowhere, flash floods turn these empty causeways into raging rivers. Flows can reach several thousand cubic feet per second. Nearly every time it rains hard, rescue teams are called out to save people whose cars are engulfed or swept away in one of the rampaging torrents. Each monsoon season, one or two people die this way. Sometimes the bodies are not found for days, carried far downstream by the fierce flows.

Right now, though, the atmosphere is tranquil, and we savor it. Omelets eaten, we sip our coffee and tea, relaxing in the cool morning. Swiveling my chair toward Ken, I push off my slippers and lift my feet up to his lap. He holds and strokes them as we chat. He tugs at the hem of my baggy pajama pants, striped in red and black.

"Cute, cute..." he struggles to find the noun.

"Pants?"

"Yes, pants! You stole them from me, you know."

"I'm allowed. Wifely appropriation."

My husband rolls his eyes.

Four years earlier, I had bought these pajama pants for him while he was in brain injury rehab. Out of nowhere, a white sedan had carelessly, stupidly stormed into our lives, turning left in front of Ken on his motorcycle and nearly carrying him away forever. Even wearing his full-face helmet, he suffered a moderate to severe traumatic brain injury. He could have died from the impact of his helmeted head slamming into the side of the car, momentum sending his brain hurtling forward against the rough inside of its bony home, injuring or killing uncountable neurons in his frontal lobes. He also could have died from the pneumonia that arrived a day later. Or from the blood clot in his lung that developed weeks into his recovery.

I spent several months after the accident in a kind of controlled hysteria,

folded inward to protect my fragile self, like desert plants in summer, waiting interminably for the blessing of Ken coming back to his old self, if he could. Rarely did I break down in public, but, hyper-alert with pumping adrenaline, I could not sleep, could barely eat or do anything but be with him. My anxious heart hurt, quite literally. I circled around my broken husband, looking down, watching, trusting in his ability to return. I brushed aside the fact that he could have died that day, and could still. I would not think of that. I would not believe he might not be the same person he used to be. Early on, I posted signs for myself around our house proclaiming "Relentlessly optimistic." For Ken, I wrote healing affirmations in big type that I hoped he could read and understand.

Yet even in the early days when first he was delirious and then when he could speak only gibberish and then when he had to wear a diaper for a time, he always knew me, at least as a safe, familiar presence. I could tell by the way his face lit up when I came into his room. Even though his eyes were focused somewhere deep inside himself, he smiled in my direction, eager to connect even if he did not know why. Even when he forgot my name for a few days and started calling me "Boo," I knew he knew me.

Slowly, slowly he re-learned to dress himself and to walk, and discovered how to connect words on a page again. The invisible people he had been seeing disappeared. He learned to eat without dangerously bolting his food. He began to speak in clear sentences that did not wander off onto bizarre tangents. Only once did he grow so depressed he thought about dying, but then said he stayed around because I needed him. Yes, I did.

Inside, on the wall behind my computer, there's a picture of him wearing those pajama pants, with a white tee shirt. With a cast on his right arm and a heavy plastic brace around his neck, he proudly displays the omelet he made in the rehab kitchen as a test of his "life skills." His therapists had to know if his brain had recovered enough for him to manage safely outside of rehab and so offered him a variety of challenges. He chose omelet-making — his typical pre-accident Sunday task — and passed with flying colors in the rehab center's practice kitchen. We ate his golden creation for lunch. Even though he couldn't remember the word "omelet" that afternoon, he was deemed healed enough to continue his recovery at home, after nearly dying forty days earlier.

One day soon after his homecoming, Ken scanned our backyard through the window. He remembered having cut mistletoe out of the trees shortly before the accident but couldn't find the noun that named it, a common result of some brain injuries. He could, however, describe it enough for me to understand.

"Christmas kissing stuff," he called it.

"Yes! Mistletoe," I said, watching how his delight at this small triumph could not erase the vague, inward cast the brain injury had brought to his eyes.

Eventually, though, that vague look faded and disappeared. His eyes focused outward again and became brilliant with his presence. Before too long, he passed a driving test and went back to work a few hours a day to start, and eventually full time. I recovered, too, my heart and my inner peace restored. By the time the monsoons returned that mid-summer four years ago, we had begun to believe that Ken might come all the way back. Abundant grace had flowed to us, like gentle rain in the desert after a terrible storm.

Now, our coffee and tea mugs are empty, just like our plates. I put my slippers back on.

"Are you ready to go in, Boo?" asks my husband, purposely using my nickname because he knows I like it. "I'll clean up the kitchen."

"Sounds good to me. Think I'll read the paper."

I still smile when he calls me Boo. His heart never forgot me, even if, for a little while, his brain couldn't locate my name. Our love has grown stronger since then, its roots forced deeper to hold us up, together.

We stand up and begin to collect our dishes from the round patio table. All those clouds herald rain this afternoon. If we're lucky, it won't be a thunderstorm but a gentle, soaking downpour that will last only long enough for the setting sun to paint the remaining clouds in rose and lavender. Our patio faces west. Rain or sunset, we'll watch it from there.

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Tonya Northenor

The Push it Takes

Pulling the curtains across at evening like closing a pair of scissors.
Sharp, precise. If dough is not punched, and rolled,
punched and rolled, it will not rise. A grandmother teaches
a granddaughter to remember
the push it takes.

You have to hold your mouth the right way
my grandfather said. And surely their tasks,
infinite and tiresome, were completed. The mended fence.
Resoled shoes. Three generations under
one roof. Ironing out every wrinkle.
Paper dolls cut in long chains,
their hands always seamlessly clasped.

I sit before the bolt with my arms crossed
the fabric as long as the road outside the front door.
Where to begin; how many stitches;
how tight? What knowledge passes down
in eye and skin, and what needs to be learned
by hands too late willing to learn too much?
Witness to turning seasons,
the needle threads itself and asks where it should go.

Annette Allen

Remembering a Father After his Death

I carve out words on leaf, stone,
any sheaf of paper will do in times
like these. Grief scrawls across
the heart's cellar the call
to bring you back,
say the unspeakable,
kneel at the crossroads
to the Beverly house
where you worked your crafts,
hammering wood, throwing pots
for others, or for me,
oblivious and eager to be free
of sadness
that baked in the all-night kiln.

How can this pen spill syllables
of tenderness endangered
as ours was then,
to salvage what became shipwreck,
the breaking from stern to bow
the love we began
when children ourselves.
It's impossible now
to empty cold lunchboxes,
take back words
that wounded in that small kitchen
before history marched us here.
The sorrow I feared
comes home, refuses to let go,
its sound echoes this lament, love.

Joe Survant

Lock 46 at Owensboro, 1960

The fish hung easy
in the heavy breath
of the water, fine gills
slowly taking
the Ohio's measure.
Dreaming of giant catfish
we cast again and again,
letting our floats
drift carefully downstream.
That night I felt it
slow and heavy,
snapping beaded water
off my line.

We took her out in the dark
not noticing the long hair.
Her hard scales rang
like old armor as
we hurried to shore
shouting our prize –
What a great fish we've caught!
Then I saw by the fire
that double life
flopping and gasping
with two human eyes.
Stunned, I watched
while they began
with a knife
to scrape off
the bright silver coins
of her scales.

Linda Neal Reising

The Spring

When Mr. Turk sold the farm —
Indian allotment lost to his family
in a card game generations before —
he made one last trip,
tottering to the east corner
of the front pasture.

*This was what he would miss most.
Not the apricot tree,
heavy with miniature harvest moons.
Nor the three cedars,
Biblical in size, catching dust from the road
with their blue beads and feathers.
Not even the house,
whose parlor was haunted
by an upright piano, chipped keys
darkened by his late wife's fingertips
before the babies died,
before she sang lullabies
in Vinita State Hospital.*

Bending, he hefted slabs of Oklahoma sandstone,
placed there to save errant hooves.
Beneath — the spring,
live water, bubbling, babbling,
with its sulphur breath.

*People once wheeled their carriages
to this spot, filling their casks
with promises of healing and youth.
Even during those years
when the only clouds were dust,
only heat lightning cracked the sky,
the spring boiled cool in the heat.*

One last time, he cupped his hands,
drank from the spring,
seeping up through rocks,
surging from its source treasured deep,
rising like an undying spirit,
reminding him that in the end,
all that lasts is stone and bone and water.

Alice Driver

The Moken: A True Sea Nomad Does Not Fish Except With a Harpoon

Tall and willowy, Kun Taht was one of only four boat builders in the Moken community on the Surin Islands, Thailand. My husband, Isaac, and I met him when we traveled to the Surin Islands in Thailand to learn more about traditional Moken boat building. After we'd spent several days with the boat builder, he invited us to go spear fishing with his family and his friend Ngui, a 25 year-old with one child and another on the way. When we first saw Ngui from afar, his lean, muscular figure glowed golden in the sunlight, and I imagined that he was a god of the sea. Taht, his wife and two children, Ngui, Isaac and I packed into the traditional boat, a *kabang*. Ngui stowed his three harpoons, and we motored off into the azure sea.

It was low tide when Ngui and Taht jumped into the water with their harpoons, and their muscular brown bodies moved through water that was a thousand shades of blue. They reached the coral and stood as the water lapped against their thighs. They wore no shoes despite the sharp coral, and even after hours of walking, their tough feet were not bloody. Stalking through the brilliant turquoise waters, they headed toward shore. I sat in the boat hoping to see a spear thrown, but the men waded to the beach and disappeared into the shade of the jungle where they waited for the tide to recede and leave fish trapped in the coral.

The *kabang* was anchored where a wall of coral dropped steeply into 15 feet of aquamarine water. At one time, the Moken, also known as Sea Gypsies, traveled among the islands of Thailand, Myanmar and Malaysia living on their boats. The influences of the modern world, however, have slowly pushed them to live on land, but they maintain a strong connection with the sea and take pride in their hand-made wooden boats.

Traditionally these boats were made with wood and Salacca, a fibrous plant that swells when wet. The boats were extremely light and required no caulking, and they were so buoyant they were almost impossible to sink. However, Salacca has to be replaced every six months, so the Moken began making their boats entirely of wood. The heavier boat requires a large motor rather than the traditional palm frond sails. As a result, the Moken need money for gas, they pollute more, and there are serious motor-related accidents.

The National Park Service, which oversees the Surin Islands in Thailand, allows the Moken to spear fish for daily food but does not allow them to sell fish. Many of the foods the Moken traditionally ate, such as giant clams and sea turtles, are now protected species. The Moken speak fondly about turtle curry, as if remembering an old friend. Despite all the changes in Moken life, Ngui said he does not want to live on the mainland. "This is my land," he said. "I want to stay here." Taht said, "I hope my children will stay here and marry people from the village."

I sat cross-legged in the *kabang* while Taht's wife rested in the shade with her two young boys, ages four and five. The boys were golden chocolate brown with dark hair that was shaved on the sides but longer on top and bleached burnt red from life in the sun. The boys giggled as they wrestled, spat on each other, jumped and yelled. Every so often one of them would run over and snuggle his mother, using her stomach as a pillow or nesting between her legs.

An hour and a half passed before the men got back in the water, which was now just below their knees. On the boat, we lay in the shade of a roof woven of Pandanus fronds. The heat left us lethargic, and even the kids were momentarily exhausted. I watched Ngui, his broad shoulders and tiny, muscular torso brown against the blue waters. Far away, Taht intently stalked a fish, his lanky frame moving slowly over the coral. Hours passed.

The sun blazed unbearably. Finally, I jumped in the water, and my cannonball splashed the boat. The boys laughed and clapped, then the five-year-old dove in. He swam to the front of the boat and climbed up the distinctive bifurcated bow of the *kabang*. Moken oral history compares parts of the *kabang* to the parts of the human body. The bifurcated bow represents the boat's mouth, and the stern its anus. This anthropomorphic boat is part of the Moken myth, which describes their nomadic life as a "submerged people" who forever wander the sea, eating and excreting, choosing never to save or store.

In the Moken village there are only four boat builders and even fewer *kabangs* since many were destroyed in the 2004 tsunami. Salama, the Moken village leader who was building his own *kabang*, told me, "I learned to build boats from my grandfather and father. It is important for me to use the boat until I die." Post-tsunami relief efforts, however, flooded the Moken Village with long-tail fishing boats, which now outnumber the traditional boats.

Taht waded slowly back in the direction of the boat, as if the heat had sapped his energy. Standing on the coral near the *kabang*, he called to his older son, who leaped off the boat with a splash and swam over, his body sleek and seal-like in the water. Taht unstrung a brilliant turquoise and orange Parrotfish from his line and handed it to his son, who was treading water. As the Parrotfish passed from the large brown palm of the father to the tiny, eager fingers of his son, the fish slipped from the boy's fingers and began to float away. The boy grabbed the fish and swam back to his father for help, and Taht showed him how to hold it by putting his index finger through the fish's gills and his thumb through its mouth. With the fish on board, we motored toward the purple and golden clouds of the sunset.

According to French anthropologist Jacques Ivanoff, "For the Moken, the true sea nomad does not fish except with a harpoon." But I realized that the ritual I had witnessed was only that, a ritual. Just as they use motors on their boats rather than sails, most Moken now fish with lines and hooks.

Barbara Bennett***Say Something***

The bears that swam the Ohio have died.
So too the people who saw them.
Neither will come again.
Still, hints of the wild remain:
Cardinals' chatter in the cedars and holly,
Squirrels racing along telephone wires,
Chickadees' warnings:
Tcht tcht tcht. Tcht tcht tcht, tcht tcht tcht.
Water in the gully after last night's rain.
Watch out for the black and white cat.

Erin Barnhill***Like the Deer***

Like the deer
lured by perfume
who makes its way through brambles
and leans through the fence gap
to mouth the soft-petaled rose

I, too, seek sweetness
of a special kind.

My soul wanders out at night
among the polar ice caps
and into fields of poppies.
Mostly, it behaves like a nautilus
in the sea
crawling slowly,
in between being carried by waves,
and over years gradually
its shell covers a different animal.

It is not like me.
I look for the milk of paradise
to nourish these bones,
yet my soul roams
living on nothing less capricious
than dreams.

American Amnesia



"Those are the big, brash, crass men who have seen all four *Die Hard* movies at least that many times and could pick Pamela Anderson's knees out of a lineup."
Jason Rhodes, p. 41

"No one with feet on the ground knows what motivates the great abyss...."
Teresa Roy, p. 53

Ed McClanahan***The Forelock: a Lament***

Being an Exercise in the Art of Writing Eloquently
About Nothing at All

All my life, ever since Superman was a pup, the forelock has been my favorite male adornment. Li'l Abner had a forelock, and so did Vice-President Wallace; Elvis and Tony Curtis and Gene Krupa and even that stentorian old foghorn Senator Everett Dirksen all sported forelocks; Charlie Starkweather had a dandy.

Superman's forelock — a tight pubic coil that remained miraculously unruffled even when he flew through the air faster than a speeding bullet — was the sole physical particularity that distinguished him from the bespectacled milksop Clark Kent; without it, the Man of Steel was just another mild-mannered journalism major. Li'l Abner's was a direct descendant of the forelock of Al Capp, his creator, who got it in turn from his early-1940s political hero, FDR's leftish v.p. Henry A. Wallace. In his dotage, Capp abandoned his old liberal politics to become a virulent reactionary, but he never shed his beloved forelock, which accompanied him to his grave, along with his wooden leg.

My own forelock and I have likewise long been intimately attached; I can't speak for Al Capp, but I wouldn't trade mine for a wooden leg, even if I needed one. (There's a photo of my imposing adolescent self on roller skates outside the local rink in the summer of 1948, forelock jauntily a-dangle, in my book, *O the Clear Moment*, still available at fine booksellers everywhere.) To me, a forelock bespeaks, alternatively, rebellion, brooding sensitivity, cool contempt, reckless abandon, menace, and (in Superman's case) stern defiance, all attitudes I've personally been incapable of sustaining in any meaningful way for the last forty years or so. Still, the dream lives on, in the ghostly form of my present-day wispy little white flag of surrender, now but a faded memory of its bobbish youth, a skimpy foxtail ornamenting a venerable jalopy.

In the antic world of popular culture, forelocks have long played a major role; whole careers have depended upon them — or, if you will, depended from them. Without his forelock, where would Russ Tamblyn be today? Whither Steve Cochran or Vic Morrow or Dan Duryea? (Whither indeed?) Sal Mineo's forelock practically co-starred in *The Gene Krupa Story*, and Martin Sheen has pursued his through countless movies, like a mule plodding along after a dangling carrot. Absent their profusion of forelocks, ShaNaNa might've joined the Vienna Boys' Choir, and *Grease* would be nothing but, well, a greasy spot. If Chet Baker had had a receding hairline, would "My Funny Valentine" retain its wistful off-key charm? If Kerouac and Neal Cassady hadn't had those cute matching forelocks, mightn't Jack's mom have made him stay home in Lowell until a more suitable traveling companion came along?

Nowadays, it seems to me, forelocks have pretty much gone the way of Dash Riprock. (Gov. Blagojevich's bangs don't count; that's not a forelock, that's an awning.) Mitchum, alas, is no longer with us, and Travolta and Kurt Russell are getting on. The television personality Conan O'Brien affects a towering Hokusai tsunami of a pompadour, but, *qua* forelock, it doesn't quite convince. Like its proprietor, it's a bit too bouncy and perky. Real forelocks don't do perky.

Anyhow, unless I can contrive to get myself run over by a bus, I probably won't be taking my forelock to the grave with me (Al Capp's sterling example notwithstanding), because at its present lamentable rate of decline, the actuarial odds are that it will precede me. But then isn't that what forelocks are supposed to do? Male-pattern hair loss being what it is, if we live long enough they generally cross the bar before us, even as, like hood ornaments or bowsprits or unicorn horns — or, for that matter, our very noses — , they have steadfastly preceded us wherever we have gone in life. Whither thou goest (whither indeed!), I will surely follow, eventually if not sooner.

So don't rush off, forelock o' mine. Stick around, insignificant little gossamer puff of whimsy that you are fast becoming, hold your ground until, who knows, maybe one fine day three or four decades from now, an affectionate breeze will come along and waft whatever's left of you right off my noggin and carry you away like thistledown, to the Land of Doo-Wah-Diddy.

Hey, I've got your back.

Richard Taylor

The Women in His Life

His first flame, Ann Rutledge, died of "brain fever" at twenty-two, drinking bad water. Her "sleeping between the weeds" brought him down with "hypo," a funk he only partly eased in paper courtship with Mary Owen, a proper lady who thought him "rude, deficient in links that make up the chains of a woman's happiness." So he cast his lot with Mary — highborn, headstrong, spendthrift. On his wedding day, a boy asked where he was off to. "To hell, sonny," he sighed. But to friend Speed he confessed "a profound wonder." Married life in the White House was a house divided — what presiding was to Jefferson, "a splendid misery." Still he stuck, remembering his father's old saying: "If you make a bad bargain, *hug* it the tighter."

Todd Autry

Whatever You Say

doomsay / naysay / whatever you say
I have something to say

I say it as one who rubs oak bark
and knows when leaves will brown
I say it as one who reads a doctor's eyes
and wilts like a child will be wilting

preface it with this
truth relative
peace relative
peace is truth
truth is peace
truth is
spring thaw / spring hatch / spring flower
spring birth rebirth
birth of a nation
birth of nations
truth is a fine spring has been welling up for ages
one we will not witness
one our children and their children
will not witness
we are painting truth psychedelic
painting it iridescent / neon / moonbeam flash
this fine, welling-up spring
 / when it arrives
we will paint it black
black as the blackest coal
black as the nature we cannot
outrun / outlive / outgrow

the white dove of peace is paling, falling
its fine feathers wearing to quills
 / / shameshameshame

I would scream it out
I would squeeze it out of my veins
 / my pores

I would scratch it out of every eye I see
 / if I thought that would help
 / if I didn't know what I know
and when the white dove is finally crumpled at our feet

we will take up its fine, naked quills
 and be poets again
 we will write fragile words
 /tender words
 words that heal
 words that float/fly/whisper
 words that whisper truth
 and when we have whispered truth
 and nothing but the truth
 /our dove will have new flight

where have I seen this truth?
 /in our schools/our breeding grounds
 young men and women
 raised like good green grass
 crowded out by thistle
 good green stock
 bottlefed/spoonfed/fed and overfed
 to hate to love
 to love to hate
 I have seen enough of this
 /to cry
 and don't chastise me
 oh, you're only seeing what you're looking for, mister
 I know
 /I know the difference
 I know good
 /when I see it

I got my own little big bang theory
 not about origins
 about the big bang ahead
 kind of wallop nobody ever heard
 and I'm not talking about
 /God
 I got a feeling he'd like to let us live here
 /a long, long while
 and I'm no poet-preacher/prophet-teacher
 but I have common sense enough to see
 we don't have sense enough to clean up
 /our own house
 I have sense enough to see
 we are going to light up this universe
 with one mighty wide wallop
 why, our implosion/explosion/supersplosion bang

Open 24 Hours

will wake up galaxies we haven't heard of yet
 we're going to have those visitors from afar
 and when they zoom in to check out what we did
 I hope they scientize/gadgetize what vapors are left behind
 /and figure out where we went wrong
 and goodness I hope they don't let curiosity kill the cat
 I hope they don't play God
 /too

I think maybe Orwell was right
 /war is peace
 we are a warring people
 war is survival/instinct/animal
 we are animal
 despite the techno/info/sancto
 we are animal still
 we are Orwellian

I built a sidewalk one summer
 /not alone
 an old man worked at my side
 he spoke no English
 I spoke only English
 We were two who labored as
 /one
 a street down from George Mason University
 where all the booklearnin' was goin' on
 we was learnin' for real
 /we was learnin' the language of work
 /language barrier my foot
 they's booklearnin'
 and then they's learnin' school don't teach
 like how to look somebody in the eye
 how to hold somebody's hand
 like how to work a smile up on someone's face
 they don't teach you that in school
 me and that old man smiled enough
 our eyes spoke our hands spoke
 our mouths stayed shut
 /there's some truth/
 two translated into
 /one
 one job/one goal/one end
 well done
 we shook on it

proud of the coming together
 the making of the thing
 the agreement

the coming spring must have many sidewalks
 we must teach the building now
 the translating eyes and hands
 the shut mouths

tomorrow at daybreak
 /rise
 stand before your mirror
 take it in both hands
 grip it tight enough to break skin
 tight enough to cry out
 look at yourself
 your blood
 your suffering
 that is
 /truth
 that is why
 you/me/we will not see peace
 we are at war with us
 /we
 /are at war
 /with us

doomsay naysay whatever you say
 say your peace

my descendents will have mine

Robert Yehling

No Longer a Boy Wonder

A boy in the library pulls me aside,
 asks who I plan to vote for,
 leads me to the computer
 and brings up Obama's home page.
 The light of the future blazes from his eyes.

The boy talks in bursts of hope

the enthusiasm of a world-changer
soaring from his voice
like eagles above a mountain ridge
that show the way to the top —
by growing wings and daring to fly.

I see who and what this boy is:
runner, swimmer, writer,
musician, thespian, student leader,
not yet graduated from high school
and coordinating a county's fund-raising effort
for a candidate who has struck
the chord of his most empowered place,
a place he knows and feels
but rarely mentions,

a place that grumbles in my gut.

In the reflection of his eyes, I see
a time long ago
when I was that boy wonder,
writing stories and mingling in worlds
they said high school students
were too young to mingle in...
so they said. I never listened
to what people said I couldn't do.
I had places to go,
many as it turned out,
always the youngest, the kid, the one
taken under wing, shaped and refined
into a pro while my high school buddies
sat in graduate school, waiting to unleash
themselves on the world...

I was already unleashed. Like this boy
who wraps his entire presence around
the rarest of treasures anymore:
a role model who can inspire
him into believing there is a future
in which he will shine and expand.
But it's not the politician's message
that stays with me. It's the messenger,
reminding me of so long ago,
reminding me of how much
a boy wonder can change the world
if we will simply believe in him.

Louise Halsey

"I Had a Dream. . ."

In my dream I was watching TV and the news came on. The news showed the Obama family on the airplane arriving in Washington, D.C. The camera angle was from inside the plane, and the family was lined up in the aisle. They were ready to get off. I could see everyone opening umbrellas, so I surmised it must have been raining outside. Michelle was standing beside her mother. Or was it Hillary's mother? Anyway, between Michelle and this mother there was a difference in height of a foot or more. There was only one umbrella for these two ladies to share. That posed the challenge of how to hold up the umbrella. Should Michelle hold it up high and leave the short mother quite exposed? Or should Michelle bend over and accommodate herself in order to provide better coverage for her mother?

Of course, all of this happened rather quickly, and then in the dream the TV program came back on. There was no more coverage of that particular newsworthy moment. My glimpse into the interior of the plane, with its lineup of umbrella-holding dignitaries, seemed fraught with meaning. What meaning I was curious to discern.

I was mulling over the possibilities. Was Michelle unsure? Who was her real mother? Was she perhaps a white woman like Mrs. Rodham and not the familiar black mother she knew and loved? In these stressful economic times, was the purchase of two umbrellas for women of such differing heights unthinkable? If Michelle stooped over, would she appear servile and thus demonstrate a posture inappropriate for a First Lady? If she stood up straight, would she be seen as haughty and uncaring about her umbrella partner a foot below? And what was the significance of opening umbrellas inside an airplane, anyway?

I remembered that one method of analyzing a dream suggests that the dreamer become each part in the dream. So, I am now Air Force One? Wherever Obama goes, I go. Our journeys are inextricably joined. Now I am the umbrella, being used to cover two people of varying heights, an awkward task. As an umbrella, why haven't I refused to be opened in a cramped space like an airplane? Why am I willing to be used stupidly? Why am I fearful of saying "No, wait till we are outside before opening me." My situation as an umbrella is uncomfortable.

As Michelle, I am a tall black woman about to be watched by people all over the world. I am ready to become the first black woman in the White House. As Michelle, I am not terribly nervous about my new role. Compared to dealing with Rev. Wright, this umbrella situation seems slight. Next, I am a short, stout black or white mother. I am proud, eager, not intimidated by my new status. With my no-nonsense attitude toward life gained through years of mothering, I am not unsettled by this upcoming move. I am ready to make the White House my home. Having an umbrella over my head is not all that important to me.

Finally, I am the TV — intruding into lives, flashing a newscast that is not news. I am disrupting placid daily viewing in order to focus on a non-event involving an umbrella. I am making news out of nothing, filling up the airwaves with trivia, demonstrating a lack of focus and a complete breakdown in understanding what the meaning of news really is.

On waking, I am curious as I puzzle out the meanings to be found in this odd dream. I feel excitement, too. I am ready for this other reality where I am awake and the Obama family is transitioning into a new life with as much common sense and as little fanfare as possible. This change cannot happen fast enough for umbrellas, for TV news or for dreamers everywhere.

Michael Battram

Quiet

...like today, in the park,
no radio, no lawnmower, no softball game, just
the soft whoosh of distant cars, the river
and the breeze, a rare mid-afternoon stillness.
Not the silence of the grave,
but quiet, a small, good thing.
It reminds me of how, at two years old,
my daughter always whispered the word, *quiet*,
as if she'd already learned its value,
a secret worth keeping.

And I'm not sure
how many days like this are left to me,
but I hope between right now
and the end of all my days
I'll learn it, too, begin to let the stillness
in for more than just an hour.

So I'm working on it,
here in the final third of my existence,
paring down this life
to bare contentment — no whiskey today,
or yesterday, one day at a time
for eight years now,
down to 4 or 5 cigars a day,
good coffee, a little chocolate,
just one good woman
to whisper my tomorrows to,
all down to this: a decent life,
and the simple, daily choice
to shout for joy,
or keep it to myself.

Lauren Titus

Statue of Liberty

The juggernaut filled with stairs,
Greek-inspired of French origin, which
Emma Lazarus called "Mother of Exiles,"
Toga folds carved over two mountain breasts

Sonnet written beneath
In embossed graffiti —
A truth that became a lie.

If Emma stood on our shores,
If she saw me emerge from steerage
With my pallid eyes and dishwater hair,
Her chosen arms would still pull me
From the wharf's refuse.

Emma, I am tired.
And, Emma, I am poor.
Each lung a wing of smoke and phlegm.

My country is not my country.
My homeland lies in your empty ribs
Beneath a white shroud
Inside a cedar coffin.

For you I eat lentils and eggs.
For you I rip my blouse.

And now
With murder equated to security
Our customs closed,
And the number on the gas station signs
Followed more closely than the number of casualties,
I pray Kaddish for my country
Yit gadal, vyit gadash
Shemay raba

If only someone would revive you, Lazarus,
If only it had been four days since you died
You'd break the *shiva* of mourning
And cure our American amnesia.

Jason Rhodes

Kong (an essay in 1 parts)

There is a danger to working in a labor intensive job.

At the grocery store where I work, everyone is faced with the constant threat of boredom and malaise owing to the mindless repetition of: remove from box, place on shelf. I've never found it a problem, though, because I was raised under the mantra "only the boring are bored," and I refuse to bore myself.

The danger I encounter is a little more external.

I can accept that I'm not the run-of-the-mill hourly worker, but sometimes the disparity's too much for me. In any job where there's potential to make \$12 an hour for unceremoniously dumping groceries from a conveyor belt into a bag, there are going to be dregs. I have been faced with people and attitudes I previously regarded as impossible in the 21st century. Every cultivar and variety of the weed that is prejudice is represented. There are men who hate women and women who hate themselves in addition to departments that hate each other. And of course everyone hates Mexicans.

Most alarming to me, though, are the man-children. I was walking down the back dock one day when I came upon a cluster of them. These are the big, brash, crass men who have seen all four *Die Hard* movies at least that many times and could pick Pamela Anderson's kneecaps out of a lineup. The men for whom the height of humor involves dicks, farts and what would in more delicate times be called loneliness. One of these men, we'll call him Kong, stands head and shoulders above the rest. He weighs probably 400 pounds, and has a voice like a post-pubescent Bobcat Goldthwait.

As I walked toward the group, Kong noticed me first. "Hey, man," he said, making a gesture I'll let you fill in, "Steve here's been telling me about your favorite pastime."

"Oh?" I said. "I don't have much use for that, having a boyfriend," and I walked on to the cooler, where I was headed. A few moments later, Kong showed up. What would follow was the most disturbing conversation I've ever had about my sexuality.

"You're joking? You serious? I always thought when Chris said stuff like that he was just giving you a hard time, but really?"

"Yeah," I said, "I'm bi." A conversation no better or worse than others at this point.

"Oh, well, that's cool. I mean I don't care." Wonderful. I assumed this was the end of the line and he'd return to work. I should be so lucky. "But, man. . . so, is it like they say?"

Dear Lord. "I'm sorry. I don't know what they say."

"What it's like, you know, with a guy. How's it different?"

He looked at me expectantly, and I just couldn't find the words to tell him to go away. "Well, it's. . . uhh, different, I guess you could say."

"I mean like, if. . . you know, 'cause you can't like punch a chick." RED FLAG. "But like you can beat up a dude."

Now there are all varieties of perverse fantasies in the world, and I'm not guiltless of them. I try not to judge, but this is one I've never even considered. So I said to him, "Well, man, I can't really say beating up my sexual partners

has ever been a priority for me. I don't know."

For the next few minutes, we stocked milk in silence. Kong finally spoke up with the reason he likes the dairy cooler. "It's great in here, isn't it? I mean, it's cool so you don't sweat, and you can watch all the hot chicks walk by but they don't see you." And that was that.

He and I don't work much together, and I am grateful. I really try not to judge. I try to defy my nature. Yet there are some things I just can't shake, though. Whenever I see him, even after several months, I still can't look him in the eye. I don't think it's shame so much as this feeling I get that he's looking back at me, imagining *my* eyes blackened.

Cheston Hoover

Pedagogical Musings

"Is this a grade?"
the studious pupil intones,
and I must
reply, but I wonder
about Plato and if during
his discourses on language
and life, he ever eyeballed
a toga clad student,
explained the eternal
pursuit of knowledge that
did not exist on a
standardized test or
reflect individual value
through a letter classification.

"Do we have to read this?"
the lethargic drooler questions,
waking from his slumber.
How wonderful that Shakespeare's
art is castigation for a culture
of I-Podders, who nod at the eternal
themes of Hamlet while texting
beneath the cover of purses or
desks, and a soliloquy has turned
into a MySpace blurb —
an aside an in-class text.
Ah, back to Act III, let's
move along —
"To be or not to be?"
Wait, could you repeat the question.

Adria Nassim

Having Class with Miss America

Look at you in your shiny new flats
And your pretty little dress
With strands of egocentrism
Stitched into every square.

The blatant disregard for anyone
Less fortunate than you drips
Steadily from your full, red lips
Coated in designer gloss.

Never mind the fashion nerds,
Or the geeky kid who sits in the corner
And never says a word.
Never mind the autistic student
Who fidgets and tries hopelessly to interact,
Watching the group conversations going
On like she's never seen something so
Fascinating.

Never mind that she sits
Wistfully watching and admiring
Classroom chatter, thinking that the
Method for maintaining an age appropriate
Friendship must be the most important
Discovery humankind has ever made.

Never mind that.
You've got your friends.
She's said "hi" and "bye" to you
A few times, but not much else.

You just can't resist turning to look
At her as she covers her ears and
Begins to rock slowly back and forth
As a fire truck surges down a nearby street.

You leave class that day
Wondering how the hell
A girl like her made it to a
College like this, and thanking
God for social normalcy and
Name brand jeans.

Phoebe Athey

Drinking Shots From Her Navel, and Other Poems

As I approach Medicare eligibility, I find I don't like even little bitty rules changes, much less whole paradigm shifts. There have been changes in the rules of teaching, for example, that I find distressing, such as that we now have male teachers. There used to be only two males: the principal and the coach, and only in secondary grades, never primary. And something evil has come of that so-called reform.

A recent report in our local newspaper described a male middle school teacher managing to cope with his workday by snorting cocaine in the supply closet in the back of his classroom. Now, teaching middle school has its stressful moments, I suppose, not unlike a career in telemarketing where you have people hanging up on you all day. And the man just couldn't take it; he was not the principal or the coach.

Seems a consortium of high-minded middle schoolers reported his erratic behavior causing him to lose his license to teach middle schoolers, especially the seventh grade, ever again as long as he should live for all eternity, a sentence which is viewed in educational circles as a punishment. I do not speak with empirical authority on cocaine usage as I have enough of a problem with alcohol and sausage biscuits. However, hard drug use would seem to me to be a natural response to being cooped up in a classroom of middle schoolers all day.

When I was young, you taught school only because the Lord had made you an ugly woman. The Lord had not blessed you with good looks but had cursed you with brains. If you had good looks, a man would marry you and support you the rest of your natural life. But the image of teaching has changed. In addition to male teachers, we now have pretty teachers. Teachers students want to have sex with, even. Adolescent boys do not recoil in horror at the very prospect as they would have in my day.

A few months ago, I became acquainted with a young single mother who related to me an incident involving her and a girlfriend that took place in an upscale watering hole attractive to professional singles — doctors, nurses, schoolteachers and the like — hoping to meet someone new. I happened to mention a school teacher could not go to such a place in my day or be seen taking a drink in public. Schoolteachers could not even be seen out after dark in Owensboro except to go to choir practice. She said, "Oh, teachers are not like that any more!" She told me that even she, with her somewhat liberal attitude toward premarital sex, was horrified to find her daughter's second grade teacher having a bachelorette party with people of all sexual persuasions and professional walks of life drinking shots out of her navel while she was lying flat out up on the bar. Some guy even snagged his tooth on her belly button ring, adding to the merriment.

Clearly, the pendulum has not just swung too far; it has flown from the clock altogether.

Terry Bisson

Catch 'em in the Act

Lou was almost thirty. He had a job and an apartment, but he was lonely. He didn't have any friends. He didn't know why; he just didn't.

So he did what everyone who is lonely does: YouTube and eBay. One day, it was eBay.

"Say, look at this!" he murmured. Lou often murmured to himself.

CRIMESTOPPERS™ VIDEO CAMERA

Catch 'em in the Act!

BUY IT NOW: 19.95

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Batteries Included.

One to a Customer

Shipping, 4.99

That didn't seem like all that much. The shipping wasn't bad, either. That's usually where they get you. So Lou did what every lonely person with PayPal does. He clicked on BUY.

Four days later, it came. It was about the size of a cell phone, with a little viewscreen that folded out to one side.

It only had two buttons: SHOOT and PLAY. Not a lot of features. But the price was right.

Lou pointed it at his cat and looked in the viewscreen.

There was the cat. The picture in the viewscreen was black and white, with a little Date&Time display at the top. It was even grainy, like a real surveillance video.

Cool! Lou pressed SHOOT.

The cat took a crap in the corner, and then left the room, looking like a criminal. But cats always look like criminals.

Lou pressed PLAY. There it was again in the viewscreen: the cat, the crap, the corner, in grainy black and white, with Date&Time at the top:

04/18/2008/8:44 p.m.

The cat slunk off, and the screen went blank.

Lou hit PLAY and watched it again.

"Cool," he murmured.

It was time to try it out in the real world. There was a Seven-Eleven only blocks away.

It was empty. Lou went in and wandered to the back of the store. He looked through the viewscreen and scanned the scene, from the beer case in the back to the Pakistani clerk reading a magazine behind the counter. He looked pretty bored.

Lou hit SHOOT. The Pakistani clerk looked up from his magazine toward the cash register. He hit NO SALE and took a bill out of the cash register and stuck it in his shirt pocket. **04/18/2008/8:58 p.m.**

Lou hit PLAY and watched him do it again. It was a five.

Cool, thought Lou. He looked around the store through the viewscreen. In grainy black and white, with the Date&Time display, it looked like a crime scene. But Seven-Elevens all look like crime scenes. What it needed was more people.

A black guy came in for Salems and a lottery ticket. Lou got him in the viewscreen and was just about to press SHOOT when the black guy turned and looked straight at him.

"Hey, asshole!" he said. "What the fuck are you doing?"

"Nothing," said Lou. "Making a call." He pretended to be punching in a number.

"Somebody ought to kick your ass," said the black guy. He paid and left. The clerk went back to his magazine. It was *People*. Lou pretended to be looking for something in the candy aisle.

A fat white kid came in. Lou knew him. It was the kid from upstairs over Lou's apartment. He was about twelve. He lived with his mother. Lou wasn't afraid of him.

Through the viewscreen, in black and white, with the Date&Time display, the kid looked like a perp. He went straight to the candy aisle and picked out a Snickers.

Lou pressed SHOOT and watched the kid approach the counter. Instead of paying for the candy bar, he stuck it into his jacket pocket. Then he jammed it forward like a gun. **04/18/2008/9:04 p.m.**

"Open the fuckin' register," he said. "Give me the bills. Keep the change. Keep your hands in sight or I'll blow you away."

"OK, OK!"

The Pakistani clerk opened the cash register and took out a wad of bills. He handed it to the kid, who backed out the door, still with his hand jammed in his pocket. **04/18/2008/9:05 p.m.**

Then he ran.

"Did you see that?" asked the clerk. Lou shrugged and said, "Not really." He didn't want to get involved.

He backed out of the door and left the Pakistani clerk calling the cops. He went back to his apartment and pressed PLAY.

There was the fat kid, robbing the store. It had the Date&Time and everything.

Lou watched it several times. He liked crime videos.

The next day after work Lou went by the fat kid's apartment. It was right upstairs. He waited until he was sure the mother was away.

"What do you want?" the fat kid asked. He didn't want to open the door.

"I saw you rob the Seven-Eleven," Lou said.

The fat kid opened the door. "You're a liar," he said. But he didn't sound like he was sure.

Lou hit PLAY and showed him the video on the viewscreen. "I didn't mean to," the fat kid said. "I don't know what came over me."

"That's what they all say," said Lou. "Give me half the money or I will call the police."

The fat kid gave him half the money. "Let me see that thing," he said, pointing at the video camera.

"No way," said Lou. He went home and counted the money. It was \$62, more than he made in a week.

The next day, Lou called in sick. "I have the flu," he said. His boss grumbled but didn't say anything.

Lou took his new Crimestoppers™ video camera to the mall. It was almost empty during the day. There was only one girl shopping. She was extremely pretty.

In the viewscreen she looked like a perp.

Cool, thought Lou.

He followed her up the escalator to Level Two. He watched her in the viewscreen as she went into Cinderella's Slipper, a shoe store. He pressed SHOOT. She picked up a pair of socks when the clerk wasn't looking and stuck them down into her tanktop.

Lou followed her to the food court. She got a taco salad. He sat at the table with her, even though all the other tables were empty.

"Beat it," she said. "I'm calling Security."

"I have something to show you," said Lou. He set the video camera on the table, unfolded the viewscreen, and pressed PLAY. There she was, stealing the socks at **04/19/2008/10:14 a.m.**

"I don't know what came over me," she said.

"That's what they all say," said Lou. "I'm calling the cops unless you split the loot with me."

The girl just laughed. "What are you going to do with one sock?"

That was a good question. "Keep 'em both, then," said Lou. "Think of me as a friend." She was extremely pretty.

"Not even a remote possibility," said the girl, her mouth full. "I don't like your style. Plus, you are not all that good looking."

"What style?" asked Lou.

"Plus, my mother is picking me up," she said, scooting back from the table, which was bolted to the floor. Lou followed her, at a safe distance, out to the parking lot. Her mother was waiting in a Lexus. Lou watched in the viewscreen as the pretty girl got in and slammed the door. He pressed SHOOT as the Lexus drove off. It scraped the side of a Hyundai on the way out of the parking lot, but didn't stop.

Lou went home alone. He watched his crime videos and then went to bed. Now he had two. But he still didn't have any friends.

The next day Lou called in sick again.

"This is getting old," said his boss.

"It's the bird flu," said Lou. He had \$62, and he knew how to get more.

He went to the bank. It was a branch with only one teller. He watched the customers come in and out, then picked out a little old lady with a shopping bag. He got her in the viewscreen and pressed SHOOT.

She pulled a ski mask and a .44 out of the shopping bag. She put on the ski mask and fired the gun into the ceiling. **04/20/2008/09:18 a.m.**

Everybody hit the floor.

"Hand it over, motherfucker!" the little old lady yelled. The teller filled her shopping bag with money, and she ran out the door.

Lou followed her.

She ripped off her ski mask and jumped onto a bus.

Lou jumped on behind her. He sat beside her even though all the other seats were empty.

"I saw you rob that bank," he said.

"No, you did not!" she said. She was out of breath.

"Yes, I did," said Lou. He pressed PLAY and showed her the viewscreen, and she shook her head in amazement. "I don't know what came over me," she said.

"That's what they all say," said Lou. He made her give him half the money. It was \$560, more than he made in a month. It was all in twenties.

He got off at the next stop and went home and watched crime videos. Now he had three. The cat walked through the room, prancing like a criminal, but Lou ignored it. He didn't want to run down the batteries.

The next day, Lou called in sick again.

"This is getting old," said his boss. "You are fired."

Lou didn't give a damn and told him so. He had \$622. What did he need with a job?

He went back to the mall. The pretty girl was there again. Her mother apparently dropped her off every day. There was hardly anybody else around.

Lou followed her up the escalator. He watched her in the viewscreen as she walked into Cinderella's Slipper. He pressed SHOOT. She swiped a pair of little pink socks and stuck them down into her tanktop. It was pink, too. Then she went to the food court and ordered a taco salad. Lou sat beside her.

"I warned you," she said. "I'm calling Security."

"Go ahead, they might be interested in seeing this," said Lou. He showed her the video of her stealing the socks at **04/21/2008/10:22 a.m.**

"I told you, I don't know what came over me," she said.

"I do," said Lou. He explained to her about the Crimestoppers™ video camera. "Everybody that I shoot commits a crime," he said. "They can't help it."

"It must be magic," she said. "If so, it's not evidence."

"There's no such thing as magic," said Lou. "It could be from another dimension, or something. I got it on eBay." He made her look at the video again.

"It's not evidence anyway," she said. "The socks are pink, and that's in black and white."

"I'm not interested in turning you in, anyway," said Lou. "I just want to make friends."

"You have a funny way of going about it," said the pretty girl. "Now if you will excuse me, my mother is picking me up."

Lou followed her out to the parking lot and watched her on the viewscreen getting into the Lexus. He pressed SHOOT. On its way out of the lot the Lexus

ran over a little dog but didn't stop.

Lou went home alone. He was more lonely than ever.

That night he was watching crime videos when there was a knock at the door.

It was the fat kid. The little old lady was with him.

"How did you find me?" Lou asked.

"There are ways," said the little old lady.

"Let's see that thing," the fat kid said.

"What thing?" Lou asked.

"You know what thing," they both said.

Lou showed them the Crimestoppers™ video camera and explained to them how it worked. "Everybody I shoot commits a crime," he said. "They just can't help it."

"You're telling me!" said the little old lady.

"That's why we're here," said the fat kid. It turned out they both had enjoyed the experience, and now they wanted to form a criminal gang. "Your apartment will be our hideout," said the little old lady. "You can be our boss," said the kid.

Lou wasn't so sure. But he let them stay. He even let them play with the cat. He was lonely, and a criminal gang was better than nothing.

The next day Lou called in sick again. Then they went downtown and committed some crimes. They stole a box of nails at the hardware store and a thousand dollars at the Indian casino. Then they went back to their hideout and divided up the loot.

"That video camera is cool," said the fat kid as they divided up the loot. "It's like magic."

"It's apparently from another dimension," said Lou.

"Dimension shimension," said the little old lady. "It's from the future, if you ask me."

"I got it on eBay," said Lou. He was beginning to worry about the batteries.

The next day Lou called in sick again. "You don't work here any more," said his boss. "So knock off the damn calling in."

They went downtown and committed more crimes. Then they went back to their hideout and divided up the loot. Then Lou and the fat kid watched crime videos while the little old lady played with the cat.

Lou had \$979.12 by now, but he couldn't get the pretty girl off his mind.

"Why the long face?" the fat kid asked.

"Fess up, Boss," said the little old lady.

Lou showed them the crime video of the pretty girl at the mall. He told them everything but the truth: that he wanted her as his girl friend. He had only just realized it himself.

"She's a skillful one, that one," said the little old lady.

"I'll bet that Lexus is filled with socks!" said the fat kid. "We should ask her to join our criminal gang."

"Hmmm," murmured Lou. He was beginning to come up with a plan.

The next day, Lou called in sick again. He hung up as soon as his boss

answered. Then they all went to the mall together. They got there late. The pretty girl was already in the food court, having a taco salad.

Her tank top looked stuffed with socks.

"You again," she said, when she looked up and saw Lou approaching, watching her on his tiny viewscreen. "You're wasting your time. How can I commit a crime while I'm eating my lunch? Brunch. Whatever."

It was **04/23/2008/10:09 a.m.** She didn't see the little old lady and the fat kid sneaking up behind her. Lou pressed SHOOT, and they immediately went to work kidnapping her. They duct taped her to her chair and gagged her so she couldn't scream for help.

They carried her on the chair to Lou's apartment, which was now their hideout.

"What's the big idea?" she asked, as soon as the gag was removed.

Lou explained to her about the criminal gang. "We want you to join," he said. He introduced his two partners. He didn't use their real names, which he didn't know anyway.

"You're a natural," said the little old lady.

"We steal a lot more than socks," said the fat kid.

"There is no way I'm joining your criminal gang," the girl said, looking at Lou with scorn. "I already told you, I don't like your style. And you're not all that good-looking. So untie me. Or untape me. Whatever."

"Only if you will join our criminal gang," said Lou. "Otherwise, you are a hostage. Your call."

Before she could reply yes or no, he got her in the viewscreen and pressed SHOOT.

"OK, I will join your criminal gang," she said. "And I will be your girl friend, too." It was **04/23/2008/12:19 p.m.**

"What's this about a girl friend?" asked the little old lady.

"But my mother is picking me up in the mall parking lot at one o'clock," the pretty girl added. "I have to tell her I won't be home any time soon, or otherwise she will worry."

"Fair enough," said Lou.

"Don't trust her!" said the fat kid.

But Lou was the boss. They carried her on the chair to the mall parking lot and untaped her just as her mother was pulling in. But instead of telling her mother that she was never coming home again, so she wouldn't worry, the girl jumped into the Lexus and rolled down the power window.

"Fuck you and your criminal gang!" she shouted as they sped off.

Lou watched her depart with tears in his eyes. He didn't even bother to shoot her departure.

"Told you," said the fat kid.

"Why the two sad faucets?" asked the little old lady when they got back to the hideout. Lou was crying. "This kidnapping was a bust, but there are lots of other crimes waiting to be committed," she said, trying to cheer him up.

"The day is yet young," said the fat kid. "So 'fess up, Boss. Why the long

face?"

In a sudden burst of honesty that surprised even himself, Lou explained that it wasn't the crime of kidnapping that had interested him, but the victim herself — the pretty girl.

"I feel used," said the little old lady, the cat on her lap.

The fat kid was crying, too. "What about our criminal gang?"

Lou confessed that it wasn't the criminal gang he had wanted all along but a girl friend. He didn't give a damn about the criminal gang.

"You devious bastard!" said the fat kid. He went off on Lou. Then he reached into the little old lady's shopping bag and pulled out the .44.

"Careful with that," said the little old lady. "It's a one-way ticket to Hell."

"Good!" said the fat kid. He pointed the gun at Lou, but he couldn't pull the trigger no matter how hard he tried.

"I've got an idea," said the little old lady. She grabbed the video camera from Lou and pointed it at the fat kid. She got him in the viewscreen and pressed SHOOT. "Try it again," she said.

"No," said Lou.

"Yes!" BLAM! The fat kid pulled the trigger and fired at Lou but missed, just barely. The bullet went through the cat and then demolished the computer at 04/23/2008/01:32 p.m.

"Try again," said the little old lady. She pressed SHOOT again. But just as the fat kid was pulling the trigger, the viewscreen went blank.

She handed it back to Lou.

"The batteries are dead," he said. He was sorry, yet relieved.

"Bummer," said the little old lady. She took her .44 back and dropped it into her shopping bag. It wasn't real anymore; it hardly weighed anything.

A silence fell over the hideout. The cat was bleeding to death.

"What now, Boss?" asked the fat kid. Lou was in charge again.

They took the Crimestoppers™ video camera to Walgreens and showed it to the clerk.

"It takes Triple Es," said the clerk. "The problem is, there's no such thing. It must be from another galaxy or something."

"Then I guess that's it," said the fat kid dejectedly. "That's the end of our criminal gang."

"I should have known it would never last," said the little old lady. "I'm outa here."

"You and me both," said the fat kid, and they left, but not together. Each went to his or her own home. The criminal gang was *kaput*.

"Good riddance," murmured Lou. He wasn't going to miss those two. But now he felt more alone than ever.

"Can I help you with something else?" asked the clerk.

Lou couldn't think of anything, so he just went home.

He called in sick the next day.

"I told you, you don't work here anymore," said his boss. "Quit calling."

Lou went to the mall. There was the pretty girl again. She pretended to ignore him. He followed her up the escalator to Cinderella's Slipper and

watched her steal a pair of socks. Without the video camera, she got caught. Her father made her give them back. It turned out that he was the store owner. Lou went to the food court and waited for her to show up.

"I'm sorry about the kidnapping," he said. "I just wanted a girl friend. The criminal gang thing is over. *Kaput.*"

"Too late," she said. "I hated that tape."

"You did say OK, you would be my girl friend," Lou reminded her.

"I don't know what came over me," she said with a mean smile. "That was on your Crimestopper's™ video, and perps always lie."

"How about I buy you lunch," Lou suggested. He still had his \$979.12. It was burning a hole in his pocket.

"If you insist," she said. "You're not all that bad looking." Lou felt a momentary stirring of hope that perhaps things were going to work out after all. She picked out a taco salad. It was only \$6.25, but when Lou pulled out a twenty to pay, the cashier held it up to the light. "This is counterfeit," he said. "I'm calling the police."

"I should have known," said the pretty girl.

"It's the batteries," said Lou, showing her the dead video camera.

"Without them, crime doesn't pay."

"So, replace them," she said.

Lou explained the problem. "It takes triple E's," he said, "and there's no such thing."

"It must be from some alien planet," said the girl. "I never liked your style anyway."

Then she walked away, prancing like a cat, leaving the unbought taco salad behind. Lou didn't follow her. It was over, he could tell. He could hear sirens. He walked home alone.

His apartment was lonelier than ever. It felt more like a hideout than a home. Not only did Lou not have a girl friend, he didn't have a job anymore. His money was worthless. His Crimestoppers™ video camera was no good anymore, and it was one to a customer. His computer was totally demolished, and to top it all off, his cat was dead. That one shot had done it in.

The police were pulling up out front. The pretty girl was with them. She had apparently led them to his hideout.

Lou locked the door and sat with the dead cat on his lap. Its fur was still soft in places. Soon he felt better. "So what," he murmured to himself. So what if he had failed, and he had to admit he had. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

04/24/2008/02:47 p.m. The police were breaking down the door, but Lou would never forget his adventures with the Crimestoppers™ video camera. And he had learned an invaluable life-lesson. Now at least he knew what the problem was.

It had something to do with his style.

Teresa Roy

Eternity

Admit, at least,
there is glamour in the prospect –
expanse of indeterminate architecture
astonishing as an ocean
on first crossing. Imagine

Eternity
at your beck and call –
blue ribbon for this test
of blind endurance, for nights
when pain could not put the world to sleep,
(oh) the *worry*, the *worry*.

We're at a loss
to tag *Forever* "friend" or "foe,"
or simply legend that got out of hand –
game of *Gossip*
passed haphazard through the circle,
gathering speed and muscled invective
until spilled from suspect pulpits.

No one
with feet still on the ground
knows what motivates the great abyss –
but there are those
more terrible, more secure,
finer, dull,
and weaker minded,
more earnest,
humbler,
hated
and betrayed,
dearer,
evil,
bravely sweet,

who have beaten a path to the door
that takes us there.

Alison Baumann

Climbing Toward The Dark

I believe at Christ's second coming the body of every departed saint will be raised...the righteous who are living on the earth...will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air....I am fully convinced that some time between March 21st, 1843, and March 21st, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation of time, Christ will come.

— William Miller, 1843

How quaint the silent adolescence of the moth —
asleep all winter in his bounden nest, he dreams
his grand emergence — the satisfying rip of silk,
the great pale wings, the loping, moonlit flight —
Enough. In truth,

the sun arcs south, tomatoes blacken on the vine,
and luna's child, swollen green with summer,
starts his clumsy-footed climb.
He is neither eager nor afraid, his brain too small
to fathom what might be.
Hunger, boon companion of his youth, is gone.
He climbs.
His skin grows hard and dark; he can no longer turn.
A leaflet trembles out of reach and falls.
The wind comes up.
With stubby feet he hugs the topmost twig
and stops. He did not choose this place,
exposed to every starving beak,
but here he is. And here, unbidden, uncontrolled,
the silk pours forth. He shakes his head.
And wraps himself. Again.
The swaddling fills his pores. He cannot breathe.
Somewhere in his tiny brain, a dozen synapses,
not more, explode
a burst suspiciously like terror —
Enough. In truth,

the sun arced south, the final day drew near,
and Miller's flock gave up their farms,
their cows and pigs, they shed their clothes.
Naked under advent robes, they climbed
to mountain summits, treetops, roofs.
They were both eager and afraid, their brains alight

Open 24 Hours

with what might be. Surely now
the Rapture was at hand.
Temptation, shadow of their earthly lives, was gone.
They climbed. And waited, trembling in the cold
as darkness wrapped the sky.
Above the jeers of unbelievers still
they clung, dumbstruck with faith,
waiting for His fearful hand to lift them up.
At toll of midnight, deep
in five score thousand brains, a million charges arced
from primitive amygdalae to frontal lobes —
Enough. In truth,

as sudden, fine, and inexplicable as silk,
the sun arcs south,
a million million nerves send out their blind, imperfect signs.
The world extends, a fraction of a nanometer at a time,
into the abyss, and all is mystery —
mystery,
 a flash of light,
 and yet again,
 mystery.

Frederick Smock

The Mice

for Steve Sanfield

The mice have been at your books again –
Alechem, Ansky, Babel, all the way to Wiesel
And Zweig. The Cossacks and the Jews alike
Nibbled into dust, fluffed into batting
For nests, rendered into little turds.
Do not be saddened by the mice. Or
By your indifferent cats – lazy hedonists.
Do not be saddened by this wanton destruction.
(And, I have just spilled coffee on your letter
Telling me about the books, mice, cats.)
So it goes. A book is only a soft barricade
Against time. Even our own quiet dissolution
Has begun. After all, what shall remain?
A turd the size of a mustard seed, I imagine.

Comfortably Pink



“Is that fireworks or gunshots?” she asked the angel, a sexless shapeshifter that took on the appearance of everything from cotton candy to Paul McCartney....”

Joey Goebel, p. 72

“Her hips rise like loaves of bread ready to bump a man into tomorrow.”

Rusty Smiddy, p. 82

Jesse Mountjoy

Old Man

For Vernon's father

The last of daylight collapses
Onto the porch.
His shadow detaches from darkness,
And burns into the front door
Behind his chair.
He sits in a dark wool suit
And pearl-grey hat,
In a dignity of tedium.
His hands rub memories
From white corn and yellow tomatoes,
Into the bushel basket.
He has skinny bent shoulders,
A white stubbled face, three days
Behind a straight razor,
And a chin quivering like a clarinet's reed.
Old age now is nothing
More than memories, less of what happened,
Than of what was said to have happened.
His Adam's apple forever
Eludes the loose-buttoned collar.
Unknown, unowned, he is a farmer
Without a field.
His soul has a distinctive limp.
Voyeur or insect-charmed,
He stares at the last light.
His savings passbook climbs up
From his coat pocket
For all interested widows to see.
He mutters inanities
To the tiny man who is not insane,
Who hides far away in a small corner
Of his head. And on rare occasions
In the dark, his closed hand on his cheek
With the index finger touching his temple,
He becomes an artist (almost a dreamer)
Of consummate virtuosity.

Jason Chaffin

Visual Noise

You're in your crib and there's a plush, blue worm to hug. The worm, its face made of plastic, is smiling. Inside its plush body is a rubber box. Inside the rubber box is a small red button. When you hug the worm, you feel for the box, for the button.

The worm's face lights up. A lullaby plays from behind that everlasting expression. A familiar slumber song.

You fall asleep, safe in the arms of mother familiarity.

When you wake up, you're one year old. You're in your crib. The worm is still beside you, still huggably soft. Still smiling. At your feet is a toy aquarium. Plastic fish lay at the bottom, out of sight behind a large, red plastic button.

You kick the button with your feet. The aquarium lights up. A tune begins playing. The fish float up, just for you. They are smiling. Happy to float because you kicked the red plastic button. So long as you keep kicking the button, they'll never stop floating, or smiling.

You hug your worm tight enough to make it glow and sing. You fall asleep, content.

When you wake up, you're placed on a large play mat in the middle of your parents' living room floor. You're crawling on all fours over a patchwork design of letters and numbers, arranged alphabetically, numerically.

Each letter has a bulge beneath it — a plastic box, sewn under the material. Inside the box is a little red button. Every time you smack the letter, you smack the box, the button, and that part of the mat lights up.

As for the numbers, when they light up, they also chime. Smack each number in a row and you'll hear a song. The wheels on the bus go round and round.

When your grandparents come to visit, they bring a learning book made of soft, washable plastic. On each page is a different animal. In the middle of each page is a soft, red button.

Push the button. Make the animal talk. Squeal with delight.

The final night in your crib, you nudge the aquarium with your foot, squeeze the pages of the book with your chubby little paws, and hug the smiling worm as tight as you can.

A symphony lulls you to sleep.

Life's never been so good. Happiness is only a hug away.

When you wake up, it's your first day of kindergarten. You can't bring your worm. You have shoes that light up when you walk. All the other kids are jealous. Their shoes are dull. Their clothes are dull. Plain.

Your shirt is loud, and like most of your shirts, there's a button that lights up. It's sewn in the material, above your belly button.

Open 24 Hours

You know your ABC's by heart by the end of the first week of school. You can count to twenty. You know your colors, your shapes. You're often picked by the teacher to lead the class in daily activities because you're the politest. Because you're the smartest. Because you like to share toys. The only toy that you really like is a small plastic phone with different shapes comprising the keypad.

Your best friend, she likes playing with the big phone with bright numbers on the rotary and a long yellow cord tied to the orange phone handle like a leash. The big, bulky phone looks similar to the one at your grandparents' house.

As the months go by, your best friend hints at how she wishes she could have a phone just like yours. Nobody else in class wants to play with the phones. They think phones are boring. The other kids, they would rather play with cars, planes, blocks, guns, and dolls.

Without your teacher seeing you, you swipe scissors from her desk and cut the cord on the toy rotary-phone. Then you swipe tiny plastic shapes from the math box and tape them to the orange receiver. You draw numbers on the shapes.

Though it's not as pretty as yours, your best friend has a portable phone now. You even tape a little flag on the tip of the antenna.

When you graduate kindergarten, your parents reward you with a surprise: a tiny television, a thirteen-inch, for your room. Now you can watch cartoons whenever you please. Or any other channel, so long as the material's appropriate.

Your very own Moving Picture Box. Your window to the mysterious world outside.

That night, you sit on the floor. Your best friend is with you. You're hugging your worm. She's hugging the portable phone you made for her in school. She took the phone from the toy box and smuggled it home.

Before you, the Moving Picture Box displays wonders.

You push a button, any button, and a different image appears. She does the same, pushing buttons, turning the pictures. Bite-sized eye candy, and the two of you can't stop sampling.

Outside your door, your grandparents and parents are arguing. You don't know why.

With a press of a button on the Moving Picture Box, the volume rises. The noise becomes a large wave constantly crashing against the shore of your room. That crash is all you hear.

An hour later, alone in your daybed, you sleep to a lullaby of low static with a smiling, singing worm tucked between your arms.

When you wake up, it's your first day of the first grade. Your parents see you to the bus. You sit with your best friend, who is sad. She tells you that her older brother smashed the phone you made her. You promise to make her another one. A better one. With lots more buttons.

When you arrive at school, making her a phone is all you can think

about. That, and coming home to sit in front of the Moving Picture Box, coming home to indulge in the world.

First grade is a blur. The only thing you can remember is making your best friend seven cell phones because her brother kept smashing them.

Twice, your parents were called into parent/teacher conferences. First, to hear praise of your exceptional hearing and manners. Second, to hear that your reading level is below adequate. That, despite your ability to count all the way to two hundred and master short sentences, you've been unable to retain information gathered in the reading assignments.

Those books you had to read, they didn't interest you, and that's all you can remember about them. Even the titles are vague.

Your parents buy you a discman in the vain hope you'll use it to listen audio books. They also buy a computer.

They set you before the computer. They show you how to turn it on.

You push the power button. The computer hums to life. On the computer are dozens of learning programs. Reading programs.

All summer, your parents make you take a different reading test each week. The test is on the computer. The books are on the computer. How genius an idea.

All summer, at least once per week, your grandparents visit you. They're genuinely happy to see you, yet when they're with your parents, their smiles seem forced.

At least once per week, your parents and grandparents argue. Mostly, you don't hear it. You have your discman. Your best friend, who also received a discman from her parents, managed to swipe CDs from her older brother. You're always borrowing them from her.

There must be scratches on the discs, though, because most of the lyrics are bleeped out. Just as there must be scratches somewhere inside the Moving Picture Box, because half the shows you watch, the people occasionally drop words during conversations. Or say something nonsensical like "I don't give a chirp." You shrug it off. You forgive the Moving Picture Box during these moments.

By the end of summer, your reading ability has slightly improved, and you learn that bad words aren't tolerated by the Moving Picture Box and the music you listen to.

By the end of grade school, you learn that not everyone has a Moving Picture Box. Not everyone has a discman. But many have pocket phones, called "cells." And these cells, they're more than just portable phones. They're windows to the world, too. And doors. Chimneys. According to the other kids, those who own cells have more rights than others. Are more trusted. Responsible. Mature.

You mention this to your parents. They make a deal with you. They say that if you want a cell, you must help mow not only their yard but your grandparents' yard, regularly.

You agree, and on your next birthday, they throw you a TV-theme party.

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Turns out, that's what the Moving Picture Box is called: TV.

Your cake is TV shaped. A big, chocolate block with a square of vanilla icing for the screen. Two long, white candles for the antennae.

You get a TV pinata. The weak spot is the ON button. Hit that button just right and all the candy will fall out.

Your parents give you an Ipod and a cell. Your grandparents give you a birthday card. Inside is a five-dollar bill and a gift card for the local bookstore. Your best friend knitted a hat for your TV. The hat doubles as a light. On top of the hat is a red button. Press it, and the hat glows.

That evening, the two of you leave your grandparents and your parents to their adult conversations. Together, you walk down the block to the bookstore. On one of the racks by the front register you spot a neat, black Ipod holder and a cell holder. These are what you buy with your gift card. What your grandparents would want you to have, to make you happy.

At the register, the cashier pushes a button, takes your card, slides it across her keyboard, tells you how much is left on it, and then hands you your gift. You give the card to your best friend, confident you'll never be in this bookstore again.

That night, you download music to your Ipod from the Internet. Afterward, you fall asleep in front of the TV. Your fingers are sore and swollen.

A month later, your best friend's father's work forces his family to move out of state. You say goodbye to her in private. You give her your cell, and you tell her that you'll work for another one and that the two of you can still be in touch.

Your mother thinks that's the sweetest thing ever, and two days later she buys you a brand new phone. It's red. When you turn it on, the faceplate glows, and a familiar tune, almost like a lullaby, plays. You vow to never, ever turn it off.

When you wake up, you're twelve years old and hitting the snooze button on your alarm clock. It's the start of summer, and you're about to mow your grandparents' lawn.

Hours later, you're inside your grandparents' quaint home, waiting for your grandfather to give you money. Ten dollars.

Your grandparents, they have only one television — and no cable. This bothers you.

They don't have cells. They don't have a computer. This bothers you, too.

You don't like being there, in that house. They have rooms full of wooden statues that smell like dirt; books that smell like tobacco; shag carpet that feels full of crumbs, a cream colored ceiling and complementary almond-colored curtains.

Your grandfather, he offers you a part-time job working for the county archive. You would only have to work ten hours a week. It's a

minimum-wage job.

You accept, reluctantly.

The archive, it smells worse than your grandparents' house. It smells like the library, stale and stagnant.

Your job lasts only one day because you can't leave your phone alone long enough to pay attention to what you're doing. You don't even know what it is you're supposed to do. You don't even know what the archive is filled with.

You tell your parents you've quit. They understand. Your grandfather, he knows better. That night, he comes over and, for the first time, you watch him push your father. He stabs him in the chest with his finger. You watch your grandfather unleash his fury in a string of nasty comments, each one burning with spittle and vehemence. He has a heart attack, yelling at your dad. You watch your grandfather seize, clutch his chest, drop to his knees. Your father rushes to him, places his hands on his shoulders, and your grandfather mumbles something against your father's stomach (a plea, perhaps) before he collapses.

The funeral is strange. Many people are sad. Many more bear tired expressions. Alone, you sit, watch, and stare. Waiting for something to change, but everything, everyone in their mourning attire, has blended together. All the different shades of black and gray with floating ashen faces, it's like watching a rolling storm cloud that never breaks, never drops fire, never bleeds light.

The funeral is a large pot of water that you can't stop staring at, waiting to boil.

A week later, and your grandmother, who is all alone in her big, big house, begins to have complications with her heart while taking a shower. She can't get to her phone, a rotary, fast enough from the bathroom, and collapses, naked and wet, in her hallway.

If she had a cell, your mother says bluntly, her death could've been prevented.

Your father agrees. You agree. Your parents make you promise that you'll keep your cell with you at all times. Even in the bathroom. And to never, ever turn it off.

The funeral is a blur. Several attendees, mostly family members whom you've no recollection of, comment about your lack of emotion. Your parents are nigh-inconsolable. You simply float. Sit. Stand. Wade through your muddled mind. Wade, and wait.

Some of the attendees try to make conversation with you, but what's there to talk about? Why does everything have to be so complicated? You don't understand the big deal surrounding death. First you're here, and then you're gone. Life's just that simple. Press the button, turn the channel; change the song. The rest of the world goes on. Life goes on.

Soon, you're left alone, sitting beside a sleepy child cradling a plush, blue worm. In your pocket is your cell, where you've been texting your best friend. A familiar tune now plays when she calls you. And as the funeral

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carries on, you send, sigh, reply, carry on — safe in the arms of mother familiarity.

When you wake up, you're seventeen and smacking the snooze button on your alarm clock. You turn the TV on, find a station that emits static, and listen to it as you slowly drift out of your subconscious, as you crawl back into your head from slumber, as you rise from your pillow and sit up and give your muscles a few seconds to finish rousing.

Today, you interview for a part time job in a clothing factory. At the end of the interview, you're hired as a bundle-mover on the assembly line. Your job is to pull a lever every time a bundle is placed on a specific conveyor belt. Pulling the lever moves the belt, which takes the clothes. . . somewhere.

You don't care enough to know the details, and during your first break you leave the plant. You call your parents to come pick you up, telling them you got fired. You sing an outrageous story about repeated health-code violations. You lament you're a minority. You explain that you were only hired to be fired, to be an example to the lagging workforce of exploited lever pullers.

You find, after telling them all this, that you have a knack for exaggeration, so long as you act sincere. You find yourself musing that no matter what you say, so as long as it remains somewhat justifiable, your parents will agree with you.

That night, asleep in your bed, your body awash in the glow of television static, in the glow of the computer monitor, and with the corner of your cell resting against your lips like a pacifier, you dream about snow angels with round red noses.

When you wake up, you're eighteen and the morning sun lags. You do twenty push-ups on the floor. You meditate for five minutes in front of muted television static.

You take a thirty-minute shower. Afterward, you put on your best shirt, one that buttons down the front. Recently, a survey stating that people who wear buttoned shirts receive more respect than those in tee-shirts and sweaters. So now, most of your closet consists of buttoned shirts. And every time you press the last button in, you feel a click in your head. You feel your brain sighing, sending waves of contentment through your body.

You reply to a short email sent by your best friend. She wishes you luck on your driver's test, which is today. She's also coming to your graduation, which is in three days. There's also something she wants to talk about. She's driving across four states to see you.

You fail your driver's test because you couldn't keep both hands on the steering wheel, you kept messing with the radio, and you hit a parked car because you were too preoccupied with imagining what your friend must look like now because, since her initial move, no photos were ever swapped between you.

That same night, you're at your first day working the drive-thru at a fast-

food restaurant. The job is cake. You just push buttons on the cash register that correspond to the customers' wishes. For four hours, this is what you do.

At home, you gently unbutton your uniform shirt and carefully place it in the hamper as though the shirt might suddenly unknit if improperly handled. The rest of your clothes receive no such kindness as you strip and kick them aside.

In your room, in the dark, you play with the features on your cell while waiting for your best friend to call. Eventually you doze, the tiny phone warm against your heart. In your dreams, the phone sings.

Graduation arrives. Your parents are proud. Everyone takes pictures. Your best friend arrives, and she's three months pregnant. She says it was an accident, but the pregnancy is only a minor thing when compared to what she discovered, what she wants to share with you.

"The world is a terrible place," she says and, laying a hand on her belly, adds, "But the people? Not so much."

She tells you the father is a wonderful person, and how she has come to see you one last time. She's starting a new life with this man (who is absent at the moment), and to save money they're dropping certain amenities, chiefly: cable, Internet, and phone. She also has a job: making levers at a factory.

She tells you she'll write; she's steadily enjoying pen and paper. The outdoors. Books. Bicycling. She never mentioned any of this during your correspondence.

Standing before you, belly swollen, hair cut and dyed and in heavily embroidered clothes that smell of woodlands, she is a stranger. You have no idea who this person is.

You realize, your own face swelling, that she was easier to talk with when she existed only on the phone. Only in the computer. Only as a person alive in electronic terms. In electronic terms, you can be non-committal. Sensitivity is only an option, and hardly a fundamental one.

You realize that, while growing up, the girl you knew is not the girl you know. You don't know this person in front of you. You've never met this girl in your life. The person before you, you realize, is a parasite. You grip your phone in your pocket, and its surface is cold.

All around you, graduates and their friends and families blend together, funneling into an abrupt vortex that swallows sound and time. There's a din, familiar yet uncomfortable, echoing from a pit within your gut, and you realize that it's your phone beeping. Your battery is low and needs recharging.

After some aimless wordplay and an unenthusiastic hug, you wish your friend well and change course amid the whirling gyre to find safer waters to tread and, maybe, a familiar pillow on which to lay your suddenly feverish head.

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A week later, your friend texts you from a strange number. She says you've changed more than you've let on during your correspondence. At your graduation, she wouldn't have known it was you had your name not been said. It was weird, she says. You looked so complacent.

You decide to call her but get only a busy signal. Hours later, the signal remains. You realize that she has your number blocked. She doesn't want you calling.

Something inside you, long dormant, stirs. Whatever was inside, that ball of feeling that friends and relatives at your grandparents' funerals wanted to see, it unravels.

In the glow of the monitor, of the TV, of your alarm clock, you exhaust yourself with grief that tries, and fails, to produce a voice. All it can manage to form is a timid ball of acid that rotates uneasily in your throat.

Two acidic hours later, you're finally able to rest. Like opening a floodgate, a barrage of turbulent images — mostly of your grandparents, one about pulling levers — pour into your dreams, leaving you waking cold, striving to see, and choking for coherence come sunrise.

It's election year. While flipping channels one night in your room, you notice something about one of the candidates. Something you can relate to. Something that speaks to you in such a way, it is almost epiphanal.

You don't care what the candidate says. You care only about *how* he says what he says. *How* he presents himself. How he looks. How he smiles. How, sometimes, he seems to exaggerate on an issue. How, sometimes, he seems to dodge certain questions with arbitrary answers (or with answers disguised as questions). This presidential candidate, he lets slip what music he listens to. He talks about his cell phone plan. About family. Religion. About the need for the world to come together and communicate on a single level. About how we need to set aside our emotions and think logically. Tactically.

You see this man as a fully functional, self-aware, free-willing, free-wheeling human being, and all it took was twenty minutes of listening to him talk.

As for the other candidate, he carries on about the need for religion to reassert itself as the focus of family life. About certain, dangerous kinds of music, television — censorship. About how we should just leave the rest of the world alone and worry about ourselves. About how we need to embrace our emotions, to act with our hearts, and to not let statistics and numbers get in the way of the morals and ethics of our country.

This guy, he says things that remind you of your grandfather, of what he would say.

At the voting booth, there are two big red buttons. You push the one for the fully-functional, self-aware, free-willing, free-wheeling non-conformist candidate.

Three months later, that candidate you pushed for is sitting in the oval office. At the corner of his desk is a glass box. Inside the box is a red plastic button. A world changing button.

Come morning, you wake up to news of bombs being dropped. The news is all over the Internet. All over the television. Just like that, war has been declared.

It happened faster than the cameo of lightning in a storm.

You press a button and turn the TV off. You press a button and turn the computer off. You press a button and turn your clock off. You press a button and turn your Ipod off.

And, breaking your promise to your parents, you press a button and turn off your cell.

That night, you sleep not a wink. You lie in the dark, on your back, and stare, stare, stare. So quiet. So still. The world outside is filled with nothing but the scatterings of sound effects. Distant cars, the wind, crickets, some birds, muffled voices.

Visual noise. That's what you see, in the dark.

Like static on the TV, you realize it's a cry for help. A thousand languages compressed into one kaleidoscopic voice: the language of the mad.

Just like with colors, when every color smears, all you see is mud. And who likes mud?

Then you recall what your best friend said at graduation. Did she see the Noise? The world is a terrible place, she said.

You hope this president will come through on his promise to bring global communication to the next level, and then you wonder: What if he doesn't know about the Visual Noise? What if he doesn't see the underlying threat? That there are people with their emotions going unchecked and running wild. All that pent up energy being expended in fruitless endeavors. All that rage and turmoil, that uncontrollable joy and lust, all flying apart and attacking the nearest person.

You can't help but think of overpopulation, and how many babies are born out of boredom, or because two people have all this energy to burn, and sex seems like the right idea at the time. Then you think of your best friend, and how close she is to being due.

You think about your grandparents and how they died. Such needless deaths, brought on by emotions they couldn't control. Fish out of water, drowning in electric air.

At home, in your room, in your bed, your world is awash in the pale blue mist emitted from your television and your monitor's screen saver. As you lie down and stare up at the plastered ceiling, your cell tucked safely under your pillow, snow angels drift out of the plaster and hum a familiar tune, their silk-static sighs lulling you to sleep.

Sometime in the night, your television shuts off. Your monitor burns out. Your cell battery dies. Your alarm clock resets.

When you wake up, the world is quiet, but its inhabitants are steady-

ly rising like a colossal wave crowning from a crimson horizon. Outside your window, the faint chimes of morning rituals — horn blasts, joggers, birdsong — drift in, the first to assault your sensitivities, and the wave is coming, the devastating carpet is unrolling at your window, every color smearing together, every thread enlivening, striving, and choking for surrender.

Jessica Head

First Memory

The training wheels scraped my ankles.
My father walked three paces ahead,
neck bent against the wind.

I looked through tears at his figure
warped further by dusk and golden burnt leaves
waving, cheerful, toward death.

My gaze shifted down to my bike.
I wanted to throw down the wreck.
Broken horn and tattered streamers
dangled beside my white fists.

Teeth clenched and arms squared with
the handlebars, my shoulders rocked
back and forth with lost restraint.

A second later, a gust whispered
depend on me and other wisdom
as it whirled past my ear and lashed my eyes.

Goosebumps rippled through my skin
with the fleeting realization that
my resilience would endure
no lack of trial in this family.

I could never see myself
as weak as I saw him when
he slammed my
shiny blue bicycle
against the twisted trunk
of my favorite weeping willow
in the park
at dusk
in the fall.

Matthew Weafer
Sectional Sink

Here we are again.
We — the sectional sink,
a clean kitchen, and myself,
washing ketchup-smeared,
greasy plates: warm soapy wash,
clean rinse, sanitize. . .
warm soapy wash, clean rinse,
sanitize. . .

My fingertips are golden raisins.

A song plays
over the CD player
shrouding the silence
in distorted guitars and angry
wails.

Yes, we're here again,
waiting for the next order, shorthand
scribbled on a 3 x 5 greasy piece
of paper. Chicken sandwich,
no onions. Cajun steak,
extra cheese. Fries on the side —
always fries.

Then the bar swarms
with farmers fresh from church,
craving a beer on Sunday
before noon to wash brimstone
from their mind —

like the ketchup from this plate
warm soapy wash, clean
rinse, sanitize. . .warm
soapy wash —

before Monday,
before the cows, the chickens,
the crops and the
incessant clock.

The farming herd

O p e n 2 4 H o u r s

orders its after-mass brew
with the occasional sandwich
or mound of nachos
while NFL and NASCAR
flicker on the big screen,

and children scurry somewhere
outside, mothers watching,
waiting.

And we're still here —
always here,
ready to serve
ready to feed
ready to
warm soapy wash, clean
rinse, sanitize
these remnants of the last lunch,
the last supper

then degrease counters,
kick crumbs from under the oven,
sweep and mop,
and unplug three drains, the
warm soapy wash,
clean rinse,
sanitize. . .

as the farmers leave —
sun low and comfortably pink —
to endure the remaining hours
of the end of the week
until they are back to the dirt,
back to the cornstalks,
the sunlight
and the wind that cools
the backs of sweaty necks

while we sit here —
me, the sink and the greasy
kitchen —
always here
always ready. . . .

Elizabeth Oakes

Being Born Again and Again

(for GEL)

*"You act with your soul," Stella
Adler said. "That's why you all
want to be actors – because your
souls are not used up by life."*

It's hard for the body
to squeeze through the
tunnel again, but

think of the soul
as it rides in
on the bobsled of the body.

Although it can't feel pain
as we think of it, it surely
can know vertigo,
speed, and the sudden
heaviness the catapult
into time brings.

The whoosh like going
down a hot sliding board,
like jumping off a swing after
you've pumped and pumped,
hitting the ground.

And the many necessary
deaths: the rifle shot,
the head on the chopping
block at sixteen, the battle
wound in a country so
ancient it had no name,
death by flames, starvation,
old age, and each time
the soul slips away
like the t-v cop the bullet
barely misses or the maiden
saved at the last moment.

Then a kind of cosmic
Alzheimer's, the stage
make-up wiped off, the

costumes forgotten, the
set dismantled.

A step
into the river of Lethe.

And then the whoosh —

the body this temporary
stopping point —

Tom Raithe
October

My theory is, as the body fails,
the soul turns increasingly frantic.

That's why the sun, as it slips to the south,
grips the world with more jealous light,

why the gum and the maple exchange sober green
for new outfits of crimson, saffron, and amber,

why I rake the leaves into scattered piles
and come up with scrambled theories.

The cricket that sings from the garden ruins
testifies to this theory.

Has it ever played music this loud,
or made a song sound so alone?

Or consider the spider that spins by the shed.
Has it ever spread webs this wide,

or plucked at them with such fury?
Clouds now ascend in bright purple streaks,

and geese veer off to discover new skies.
The wind turns surly and lean.

So I bag the leaves, go into the house,
put on a pot of coffee,

and theorize why the stars rise brighter
as nights fall increasingly cold,

or why, as we sit in these darkening rooms,
our thoughts are becoming more clear.

Joey Goebel

Commonwealth

(excerpt from chapter 13)

Fireworks or gunshots?

Whatever the noise was, Elizabeth's subconscious self followed it as she climbed the craggy insides of a wormhole out through her own darkest orifice and into her childhood bedroom, where an angel sat on her windowsill.

"Is that fireworks or gunshots?" she asked the angel, a sexless shapeshifter that took on the appearance of everything from cotton candy to Paul McCartney to the beach. The angel told her with its mind that she needed to go outside, and as if on cue, all of outside bowed down before her. The pops turned into bangs, and loud as they were, they were overpowered by a monstrous industrial rumble.

An ominous convoy of incandescent tanks rolled down Main Street, creeping forth in a crooked line that began beyond the horizon. The cloudless sky took on an otherworldly mauve glow, and there was a dark red clot where the sun should have been. Lightning struck but stayed so that the heavens looked like they had permanently exposed their white-hot nerves.

Elizabeth, now a cowering little girl, turned to ask the angel what was happening, but it was gone. Then she realized she was standing on top of her house, which towered over the earth and hurled its shadow across the rest of formerly quaint Main Street, whose houses looked like shoeboxes and whose gutters ran thick with diarrhea. All cars stalled. They must have been stalled for years because they were entirely shrouded in rust, rusted onto the concrete so that they had no choice but to let themselves be slowly crushed by the sluggish tanks.

Then all the tanks stopped at the precise same second, allowing for an unearthly silence. From the turrets poured an unlimited amount of soldiers, all of whom had the size, shape, and earth-toned fatigues associated with humans but otherwise were not. They moved with mechanical spasms and their faces were nebulous blurs of skin and night. Eerily quiet and wraith-like, thousands of them dispersed with rifles in hand across charred lawns, all of them knowing exactly where to run with not a whisper of communication.

All the ant-sized people came out of their shoeboxes and onto their lawns. When she saw that they were all naked, Elizabeth looked at herself and saw she wore the sparkling evening gown of an immortal starlet. All the nude people turned to her and hissed, which scared her, until she realized this was their way of asking for help, and the hisses were actually coming from under the ground, which had started to develop yawning chasms that would never be sutured, over which syphilitic harlots were caught doing the splits. The hisses became louder and louder until finally an explosion shut them up and released so much power that the river ran backward.

In a state of terror, Elizabeth floated away from the scene and into some flawless white space that pulsed the secretive vibe of an inner-sanctum.

Open 24 Hours

She saw a king-sized bed and at first felt she was in the presence of her father, but it was actually a baby. The baby was so gigantic that his crown was New York City and his rectum was Los Angeles. He had long hair made of gold and wore a diaper of silver and beams of light emitted from all twelve openings of his body. Despite being an infant, he was somehow ancient and deteriorated. He languidly looked down and smiled at Elizabeth.

"Hey, Mom," he said.

"John, what's wrong with you?"

"Nothing is wrong at all. I caught the victory disease."

"We've got to get out of here!"

"Why?"

"We're at war. We're under attack. They're swarming us."

"Mom, we're not under attack," said John as if his mother were a moron. "Those soldiers are on *our* side."

"But they're aliens."

John coughed up a cute child laugh.

"They're angels. And they're following my orders."

"But you're just a baby."

At this, John banged his child-fist against the white ground and somewhere another explosion occurred, powerful enough to jolt Elizabeth back into her bedroom. She was back inside her adult self and Henry lay by her side, but the angel still sat on her windowsill, faintly glowing and now in the shape of a young man with soft features.

"I don't understand," she said.

"You need to know that those soldiers down there are here to help you."

"But if they are here to help me, why does it look like hell on earth outside?"

"It has to take on that appearance to attract the attention of the one who will save you."

"Who will save us?"

"The Monkey Who Mends Destinies. Your son will orchestrate the deal that brings Him back."

"But those people said they needed my help."

"They're fools. They're wasting, but they will be saved. Their mechanisms will all be shut off automatically. They will suffer no pain, sorrow, or suffering."

"What does my son have to do with this?"

"He will represent his superiors for their highest agenda."

"What's their highest agenda?"

"To resurrect God."

At hearing these words, Elizabeth felt the dawning of a warm, soothing buzz in the center of her brain, similar to how she had felt in the past when she drank a martini on an empty stomach.

"God's not dead," she said as the buzz slowly rotated and snowballed.

"Of course He is. Of a broken heart. But we've found the science to resurrect Him. Our Father who had to leave us."

Elizabeth felt the buzz blossom into full-blown bliss. She had become

high from within, no artificial chemicals present, her brain producing natural euphoria on its own accord, and as the explosions resumed outside, she was completely certain that everyone everywhere was on the verge of becoming perfect. With the explosions came radiant lights that must have looked like mayday flares to alien eyes.

Patrick Reninger

He Feels That Old Age Coming On

(with regards to Wyonnie Harris)

He becomes exhausted merely walking three blocks
to the grocery store near his home.

Missing details have forced him to spice up recollections
with mention of movie stars and chivalrous deeds

such as the time he performed the Heimlich maneuver
on Lauren Bacall in a Hollywood coffee shop.

Root beer floats, red beans and rice, Scotch or peanut brittle
cannot be consumed without the disapproving glare of a nurse.

Bowel movements occur so erratically he is convinced that foreign
terrorists have planted microscopic explosives in his intestines.

And among strangers, he often says nothing
for fear of losing his train of thought.

After decades of contemplation, he has concluded that the most sublime
music, the most delicious food and history's most benevolent collection
of humanity resided in Biloxi, Mississippi, during the summer of 1952.

Sometimes in bed, his deceased wife comforts him
and he no longer fears death.

As his arthritic hands fumble with the remote control, the man
with the French accent chopping onions disappears and Heaven emerges
on the screen in glorious Technicolor.

He is at a picnic in a park in Biloxi with his wife and two young daughters.
The sky is a perfect shade of blue. Lanky teenagers are playing softball,

and while he leisurely eats peanut brittle and red beans and rice,
Lauren Bacall approaches from behind a towering willow

carrying a bottle of Scotch.

George Fillingham
Angel Wings

“... I wish to God I had made this world. . . .”

James Wright

Sutra for my Daughter, gone before I knew her

Where Cumberland River becomes Lake Barkley I found your wings,
my little angel.
Born in water of your mother's womb; carried by water to this river-sand
inlet, you must have known
where to lie still; you must have known that I would find you.
Your mother told me
you wanted out; you would not stay; you hurt yourself to death
before you were prepared.
Your mother told me how she bled; your mother told me
how you spilled from her blood.
What love conceives becomes a moral mystery, and mothers know
themselves by what each does
when all the silky wet of love is wiped from thighs, from private places
of love. She may turn toward him.
A family may be born. Or she may turn away and two remain as two:
you were kept a secret from me.
After years without a word, your mother looked for me, and then I looked
for you. She had to tell me she had bled,
she had to tell me you were gone. Your mother bled, went into shock;
her body shook – you went away.
She wanted me to know it hurt. She wanted me to know. She wanted me
to understand she never wanted me.
With water, sponge, and soap, and then more water, always water,
she tried solution after solution
only to discover, by washing blood away, that in her bones she still had
something to say to me.
She found it long years later when I could never know you; she left me
pictures, sketches of sorrow, bits of poetry
she wanted me to have, to tell me you had been, to name the pain.
I knew I had to find you;
I knew you had something for me, something from your water nature;
it must have been these wings.
I found them there washed river-clean; I knew them right away –
your sturdy wings.
I sat upon a driftwood log and watched the river traffic pass.
I wrapped your wings around my heart,
away from the river and time.

Clayton Galloway

Shatters

Detective Scott Campbell reclined against the white headboard of the queen canopy bed and caressed the rumpled satin sheets, mindful to keep his boots hanging over the edge of the mattress. He locked his fingers behind his head and stared at the ceiling fan through the transparent pink and orange curtain that draped the posts of the bed.

Where did you go, Emily? he thought.

His precinct chief had called a couple of hours earlier with a new missing persons case. Emily Fulkerson. Caucasian female, nine years old. Height: four feet, five inches. Weight: sixty pounds. Blue eyes. Shoulder length auburn hair, except for a close-cropped section near her right temple. A surgical scar on the shaved portion of her scalp. No other distinguishing marks or features. Last seen in her bedroom, wearing a white knee-length nightgown, fleece with ruffled collar and long sleeves. No sign of a struggle; bedroom window and door locked from the inside. Reported missing at 6:56 AM.

Scott stood and walked to the window. He parted the drapes which matched the canopy bed curtain and raised the wooden Venetian blinds. The Fulkersons lived in a three bedroom apartment on the fifth floor of an affluent brownstone which overlooked 57th Avenue, two blocks southeast of Central Park. The brass sash lock was closed. Light rain pelted the panes.

He unlocked the latch and opened the window. He watched the bustle of traffic for a few moments. He watched, but didn't listen; no, *couldn't* listen. He hadn't been able to hear a thing since he entered the bedroom.

He had never heard anything this quiet, never experienced such a complete lack of sound. Last summer, he had visited Mammoth Cave in Kentucky with his girls. Toward the end of their tour, the guide had doused the lights and asked for total silence in one of the underground caverns. He had heard his heart beating as he stood in the cave, but the bedroom he stood in now seemed impervious to sound, as if the air were a vacuum, and the oppressive silence stifled his eardrums.

He held his arms in front of him, and then quickly brought his hands together.

No satisfying clap.

He pursed his lips and whistled.

Nothing.

He left the window open and walked back to the bed. He rested against the headboard again and surveyed the room. Aside from an exceptional neatness, the room appeared no different than any other overindulged nine year old girl's bedroom.

Plush burgundy carpet covered the floor. Burnished mahogany trim and molding accented the cream-colored walls. A white entertainment center stood against the wall on the right side of the bed; the largest opening held

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a 27" television. The shelves were covered with an assortment of DVD movies, video games, a DVD player, a Nintendo Wii video game console, remotes and controllers, frames containing various family photos, a few books, a couple of stuffed bears, hair ribbons, a tube of lip gloss, and one bowling trophy. A crumpled Hannah Montana bean bag occupied the floor in front of the TV.

On the left side of the bed, a white vanity sat next to a pair of white hinged closet doors. The vanity contained two drawers, one on each side, and a framed oval mirror suspended between two posts. A white jewelry box with a section for hanging necklaces behind a glass door rested on the left side; a large make-up kit occupied the right side, full of nail polish, glitter, and lip gloss (with one empty slot for the tube on the entertainment center). In the middle, a large hair brush lay beneath the mirror. A small white bench protruded from the space beneath the desk.

My girls would love this room, he thought. I wish I could afford half of this stuff for them.

Scott rose from the bed and approached the entertainment center. He located the remote for the television and pressed the power button. SpongeBob and Patrick frolicked on the screen. He held the volume button down and watched the onscreen indicator progress to the maximum level. No sound.

He lifted one of the frames containing a recent picture of Emily. Her auburn hair jutted to either side of her head in twin pigtails. Her blue eyes glistened, as if he could touch the photo and pull his fingers back wet. Freckles spattered across her pug nose and dimpled cheeks. She wore diamond earrings and a red dress with frilly short sleeves. Her smile blazed through white, perfect teeth.

He powered the TV off and walked to the closet doors, pulled against the brass handles and folded the doors open. He flicked the switch to the right of the doors; the light revealed a walk-in closet lined with clothes on both sides and a cedar shoe rack against the back wall. An impressive collection of Barbie dolls occupied the shelves above the clothes racks. Various Barbie play sets and automobiles rested beneath the clothes on his left; an organized clutter of stuffed animals and board games hid beneath the clothes on his right. He moved the toys around, parted the clothes on both sides, and checked behind the shoe rack. He could not discern an exit panel on the walls or ceiling.

Reluctantly, he closed the closet doors and turned his attention to the vanity mirror. He had noticed the bizarre mirror when he entered the room, before he noticed the queer absence of sound. He had decided to investigate every corner of the bedroom and save that mirror for last.

The oval mirror measured two feet wide and three feet high, enclosed by a two-inch beveled frame. The polished glass cast a high sheen, as if the reflective coat amplified the available light in the room. No cracks or smudges marred the sparkling surface.

An ordinary mirror adorning an ordinary desk.

Except for the "bubbles" floating beneath the surface.

The bubbles drifted across the mirror, bouncing against the frame and each other, coalescing and separating. Instead of air, each bubble contained liquid, as if the mercury of the reflective surface had melted and congealed. The fluctuating shapes in the mirror reminded him of wax blobs rising and falling in a lava lamp; the bubbles altered the mirror's reflection like an animated mirror in a carnival funhouse.

He removed his dark brown fedora and stooped to examine his reflection. Short, unkempt black hair covered his head, except for a bald patch near his right temple. Shadows of fatigue circled his green eyes. Dark stubble peppered his cheeks, and he noticed a few gray hairs in his goatee.

Emily's parents hadn't mentioned the mirror or the silence in the room when he interviewed them, hoping to discover something that may have been overlooked in the report. When he asked if they had noticed anything unusual in Emily's behavior recently, he learned two things – she suffered from brain cancer, and every evening for the past week she had sat at her vanity, staring into her mirror as if mesmerized by her own countenance.

He massaged his head near his right temple and brushed the raised scar tissue with his fingertips. He had been diagnosed with brain cancer when he was eight years old: medulloblastoma, a condition found most often in children under the age of ten and slightly more predominant in boys. He remembered the crippling headaches, early morning vomiting, sleepiness, lack of coordination, and double vision. Surgery had reduced the size of the tumor, but the surgeon had been unable to completely extract it. Intensive radiation and rounds of chemotherapy followed, as well as steroids for swelling and anti-seizure drugs. After two years of hell, the tumor had stopped growing, and his neurosurgeon declared it benign. Annual checkups for the past sixteen years had confirmed that the tumor was still benign, but it was always there, accompanied with the uncertainty that it might rise from dormancy and kill him.

Scott's cell phone vibrated against his left hip. He stepped back from the mirror and slipped the phone from its case. The bubbles in the mirror trembled and shuddered with each vibration as the surface on a pool of water ripples with an impact tremor. He checked the caller ID: his ex-wife, Karen. He pressed the green button to answer the call and placed the phone against his ear. No sound emitted from the earpiece. He checked the LED to confirm that the call was connected and listened again. No static, no voice.

He disconnected the call and navigated through the phone menu to compose a text message to Karen.

Cant talk right now. Will c u 2nite.

He confirmed that the message was sent and then holstered the phone. He looked at the mirror. The bubbles still drifted and collided, but they also pulsed as if each had its own tiny heartbeat. They pulsed out of sync with one another, and with each arrhythmic beat his surgical scar throbbed. He pulled the bench from beneath the vanity and sat in front of the mirror. He pressed his right hand against his temple; his skin swelled

and contracted under his palm.

He had pondered why the Fulkersons did not mention any of the strange phenomena in Emily's bedroom in their report and interview, but he thought he knew the answer. He didn't think they would intentionally withhold information, and he didn't think they just hadn't noticed because of their frantic nerves.

They can't see the mirror, he thought. They can't see the bubbles, and they can't hear this awful silence.

He removed his hand from his temple and extended his arm toward the mirror. He sympathized with the Fulkersons; he imagined what it would be like if one of his own daughters disappeared. He related to Emily also, but on a more personal level; he understood the physical and mental torment she had endured for the past few months. His splayed fingers trembled slightly as he pressed them against the glass.

The mirror yielded under the pressure of his fingertips; rather than a cool, hard surface, he discovered a pliant, elastic material. The texture reminded him of warm sand; the bubbles that passed beneath his fingers generated heat. He pressed harder, and his fingers extended beyond the frame surrounding the mirror. He shoved his arm through the mirror past his elbow. Instead of shattering, the glass stretched and expanded around his hand and forearm like a latex balloon. The bubbles swathed his arm like an electric blanket. He peered around the mirror's frame and gauged the distance between the glass and the wall; his hand should have been buried several inches in the drywall.

He removed his arm and slouched in front of the mirror, massaging his right temple. The skin surrounding the scar had tingled when his arm was encircled by the mirror. He stroked the spot and stared at the mirror, trying to will the answers from the unresponsive glass.

"Where is that little girl?" he asked the deafening silence.

The mirror shuddered as if offended by the question. Scott bolted upright and gripped the edges of the vanity until his knuckles whitened. He glared at the mirror briefly and then closed his eyes. He relaxed his grip on the vanity and placed the fingertips of both hands lightly on the surface of the glass. He opened his eyes and concentrated on the throbbing in his scalp.

Show her to me, he thought. Show me where she went.

The bubbles quivered and frothed at their edges, stirring thin white foam across the surface; the edges dissipated, and the fluid dispersed throughout the mirror. As the liquid expanded, Scott's reflection and the bedroom disappeared; the surface faded, as if it were a Polaroid picture working backward.

He removed his fingertips from the mirror and leaned forward, squinting into the murky glass. The liquid simmered around the edge of the frame, and a new image formed in the mirror. The view was distorted and blurry, like looking through the lens of a camera under water.

Through the mirror, he saw a long, dim corridor; dark fluorescents overhead disappeared into the gloom. Two hospital gurneys with

leather restraints and tattered yellow sheets rested against the green plaster wall on the left; a chrome clock with a white face encased in wire mesh hung on the opposite wall. The walls were cracked and peeling, and drifts of dried rose petals mixed with flecks of paint sprinkled the floor tiles. A breeze stirred the debris, which scraped across the gritty floor. He could actually hear the scraping. He snapped his fingers and heard nothing, yet he could hear sound emanating from the mirror.

Fear and doubt invaded his thoughts, forcing him to question the validity of his senses. What if his tumor was malignant and causing hallucinations? Could he really believe what he was seeing?

Only one way to find out, he thought.

He pulled a pack of gum from the inside pocket of his jacket. He selected a piece and unwrapped it; he folded the stick twice and placed it on his tongue, savoring the tingle of cinnamon before he began to chew. He crumpled the foil wrapper between his thumb and index finger, and then he flicked the wad at the mirror.

The mirror bulged inward and issued a wet plop as the ball of foil passed to the other side. Small veins of black lightning coursed through the mirror's surface and lingered around the foil, then dissipated as the ball bounced off one of the corridor walls. The ball skittered across the floor, disappearing in one of the piles of petals. He watched as the pile scattered and separated in the wind, the foil wrapper flickering in and out of sight.

His cell phone vibrated again, and he jerked as if his hip had been exposed to a live wire. He snatched it from the case and looked at the LCD; he stared in disbelief at the caller ID.

Emily.

He hadn't programmed the Fulkerson's number into his phone, and he didn't know another Emily, yet his caller ID displayed her name. He pressed the answer key and placed the phone against his ear. A young girl spoke.

"Daddy? Are you there?" He didn't recognize her.

"Hello?" he said. He couldn't hear his own voice, but he continued speaking. "This is Detective Campbell. Who is this?"

"Daddy, I'm so scared," she said. "I'm lost in the mirror. Please find me, Daddy. I want to come home."

"Who is this? Emily, is that you? Emily Fulkerson?"

"Please, Daddy," she said, her voice barely audible. "Hurry before she finds me."

"Wait! Who is this? How did you get my number? Who are you hiding from? Don't hang up! I want to help you! Hello?"

No answer. Scott pulled the phone from his ear and checked the display; the call had lasted twenty-eight seconds.

He holstered his phone and snatched Emily's hairbrush from the vanity. He hurled the brush at the mirror; the glass swelled inward, lightning flickered, and the brush clattered across the tile, stopping against a rusted gurney wheel. A thin sheet slid from the edge of the gurney and pooled in the floor, concealing the handle brush and most of the bristles.

O p e n 2 4 H o u r s

He stared at the strands of hair wound through the brush's bristles.
Emily's auburn hair had transformed into a luminous white.

Hurry, she had said. Before she finds me.

Scott reflected on his current post-marital predicament. His teenage daughter had inherited her mother's dislike for him; his younger daughter approached him with reserve and pity in her eyes. For the past several months, he had failed his loved ones and alienated his coworkers.

He took his .40 caliber Ruger from his shoulder holster and ejected the clip into the palm of his left hand. He inspected the clip to be sure it was loaded, slammed it back home in the hilt of the pistol, pulled the slide and readied a cartridge in the breech.

Hang on, Emily, he thought. Hang on, little girl. I'm on my way.

And he dove into the mirror.

Theo Mallas

Mirrors

One day came to the village an ugly witch
And everybody ran to see her.
Somebody threw her bread, and some others threw her rocks
To save her from her ugliness.

And a child gave her a red flower, just a child
And asked her to sing a song, the child.
And the witch said, Don't you ever let them know how ugly they are,
Those who hate you but stare.
And she said, Don't you ever look those people in their eyes.
Mirror you become, and everybody breaks you into pieces.

One other day, an injured angel came to the village.
They brought him in a cage.
Tickets were sold
To the angry world
Thirsty to see his beauty.

And a child, like a tear, beautiful angel, just a child,
A child asked him to sing a song. That child.

And the angel said:
If you want to save yourself from your beauty,
Take a saw and a sword
And cut off your wings.

And the witch said: Don't you ever look those people in their eyes,
Mirror you become and everybody breaks you into pieces.

Rusty Smiddy

The Woman Scarecrow Blooms

From where she stands
a coven forms around her
circling the smaller plants
who concede it is time
to fall in upon themselves.
But these verdant rebels refuse to stop growing,
bloom still,
bringing sugars to the surface
in mad colors of attraction —
opportunists who worship the moon now.

She wants to be part of the circle,
but she's stuck mid-garden
watching dark vines uncurl
toward a heat she cannot feel,
born a tee of wood
dressed in red gabardine,
bled pale from rain.
Ready for change,
she flings her wire sombrero across the yard;
pulls earrings from imaginary lobes;
waits for a gale to rip away her clothes.
Hail, the size of golf balls, loosens nails
until she is pieces in dirt
trying to take root
in this garden wild with desire.

It could happen.
My friend told me you can invent anything
as long as you start with a shred of what
you know to be true.
The truth is, my tomatoes are as tall as I am.
Hyssop, thyme, savory,
still achingly green
in my November garden.
The woman scarecrow splits like a seed.
She buys a bar in a college town
with a small stage for artists —
sleeps days, has too many lovers.
At first thin, sheer, she could have been a kite
with her long trains, flat chest, but now
she can't stop touching herself,

cupping her breasts, palpating gently
as if she is choosing fruit from the market.

Her hips rise like loaves of bread
ready to bump a man into tomorrow. Already,
her daughter is a tiny nut of capillaries, brain cells.
She will have a wild arrangement of red curls,
pearlescent moon-colored skin.
The woman knows when the time comes,
the pain will be marvelous,
forgotten so quickly she can't wait to do it again.

John Beemer
Boudica

The wagon rolls forward,
its frame and bed
juddering.

The green field's sparse rocks
crack the rickety wheels.
The scythes rotate like silver fish,
and the lumbering, wooden wagon groans.
The ear-needling rattle of spinning blades,
rotating man-hewers
revolving like grass-cutters.

The bloating throats of men,
bellowing howl,
their cold lips
asperging the land with spit.

I lean
and lengthen my arm,
letting my knife dip among the throng.
It comes up shining,
black with life,
and the scythes to the side
grow slow with gore.

With these cuts,
the wombs of my daughters
are woven shut.

Sagan Sette

My Mozart Effect

Some women put headphones on their stomachs so their unborn baby can hear Mozart. Scientists seem to think this makes smart babies. When my mother was pregnant, she didn't have time for Mozart.

My mother already had a three year old son when she was pregnant with me. She was living in a cramped apartment in Nuremburg, Germany. She was over 4500 miles from her parents. And she was experiencing motherhood nearly single-handedly. Her husband was a tanker in the Army and as he moved rapidly through the ranks, he spent little time with his bride.

I obviously don't remember hearing Mozart or the German television as I floated in my mother. She probably didn't have time to focus on what her unborn daughter should be hearing. I doubt she ever considered the importance of prenatal music. I doubt she thought about what she said before she said it. For her, the science behind how her baby developed was irrelevant to the child she was carrying. But the scientists are convinced what I heard inside my mother contributes to who I am. And I, for once, have to side with science over my mother.

My mother was friends with her neighbors. They shared a fundamental likeness. Their husbands served the United States. So my mother talked to them on the landing of the second floor in her newer, bigger apartment that her husband received when he was promoted. She was waiting for him to come home, and together they would pick up their perfect son from preschool. He trudged up the stairs and gave my mother a peck on the cheek.

I bet I heard it. I'm sure of it. A sudden interruption of high toned feminine conversation. A gruff smack. I'm sure I heard it. And then my father asked her to make him a drink as he changed out of his boots.

My mother responded like a teenager would to her father: "Just a second. I'm talking." She finished her conversation as he changed. Then she went in and made him an iced drink. He drank. She told him about her day. I heard it. Her sing-singing about some soap opera, about a new name to add to the list of baby potentials, a dress in a magazine, and her perfect son. I might have heard her husband mumble replies. They left. I'm sure I heard the loud heavy door of the military apartment — used to keep private noises private — shut.

My mother continued onto the landing in front of my father, seven months of baby leading the way to the stairs. And her husband, he pushed her.

She slid, kind of, scraping down a narrow flight of stairs. I'm sure I recognized the sudden inhalation. Her squeaky "whoa." When she was safely sitting on a lower step, her hand cradling me, he kicked her with the heel of his loafer until she continued down.

I'm sure my father's voice was unmistakable as he stepped over her and said, "Don't ever talk to me like that."

That was my Mozart. Nearly every day I heard a bang or a cry or both timed closely together. What would that do to the baby? Apparently, it made me a dreamer.

I was born. I grew.

I can tell from my earliest memories that I had an incredible imagination. Most children have imaginary friends, but I had whole worlds. I would build a tent out of sheets in my bedroom and just sit. I would stare at an empty floor and imagine: anything. I read at a young age and believed every single word. Oz was an actual place and animals could talk. I thought there was something fundamentally wrong with me because my toys never played back, and I never received my call to Narnia. But I tried, so hard. I dedicated hours to what I called practices. I would chant lines from books like passwords for invisible doors. I would wait under sheets unknowingly praying. I thought there was a prince, somewhere, and he would come and take me, somewhere. Why shouldn't I have thought this?

Perhaps all the time under sheets is why I missed my childhood. I missed my father. I am almost positive he must have been there at some time. I have selected memories in which his image is standing off to the side. But I find it almost impossible to place him in an everyday setting. My mother is there. And my brother, not so perfect anymore, is sitting beside me. But I can't see my father.

Like Narnia. Like Oz. Like the mouse on the motorcycle. I couldn't see them. But I knew they were there. And they were perfect. Like God. So there I was pushing into the middle of my childhood, and I couldn't picture my father. My only solution for this was: My father is as perfect as God, as lovely as Oz, and as magical as Narnia.

When I was eight, I ran away every night. My mother always caught me before I got to the front door or, once, down the street. I was running away to my father. At this point he was off in Korea learning how better to save the country. My mother no longer found beauty in magical lands. She refused to go with him. I hated her for this. I didn't realize my parents were separated. No one told me.

My father eventually came home. And for months he was there every day. I watched him beat up my mother. I left with her and my brother. I slept on my grandmother's floor and heard my mother cry. I saw her bruises and heard her explain divorce. But none of this mattered to me. My father was God.

After that, every Wednesday morning I would wake right up. I paid my teachers no attention. I raced off the bus and I held my breath. I watched out the window for his car. And I ran into his arms, every time. I told him everything I did that week. I smiled till my face ached.

Major restaurant chains across the nation have specials on Wednesday nights. They offer free kids' meals with an adult order. Restaurants know

that divorcees are decreed to love their children every Wednesday. No one told me. I thought my father squandered money every week at the same place because he knew what I liked. I thought he loved me.

I cried every Wednesday night. It would be seven years until I understood why my father couldn't live with me.

My mother made pizza during the day and cars during the night. She came home early in the morning smelling like tomatoes and grease. I was a preteen. I attended middle school trying, like every girl my age, to be everything I wasn't. My mother and brother and I lived in a two bedroom shack. It had rotting wood floors and no foundation. Or hot water. My father lived in Kuwait. He was serving his country.

He would call about every month. And I convinced myself that despite the technology of my generation, he couldn't call more often because he was so far away. He sent packages twice a year. I wore cheap gold to class and told stories about my father that I made up based on the handful of pictures he would send along with cards of well wishes. I had a seventh grade teacher smile one day and tell me he wished his daughter would grow up to be as much a daddy's girl as I was. At that point I was down to hearing from my father four times a year, and I hadn't seen him in three.

But I loved my father. I hated my mother. I dropped hints about how much better our life could be if she asked him to forgive her. I had this notion that my mother had made some epic mistake likened to Eve eating the apple. I knew that after we'd lived a few years in squalor, my father would rescue her. But then he remarried.

The first time I saw my father after four years, I recognized him immediately. I ran into his arms. I smiled. And he told me he was so happy, and I thought his voice was rough because he had lived in a desert for five years. For a few hours I listened as he explained that he was taking my brother and me to meet his new wife. He made up an analogy I was much too old for. He said nothing would change but I would be his little princess now and his wife would be his new princess. Somewhere between Maryland and Connecticut, I realized I was in a car with a stranger.

I didn't recognize his new rough voice. I had heard his voice since before I was born. Yet here I was in a car and I couldn't understand what he was saying. His words weren't wrong, but his actual voice, the tone, the rhythm — it wasn't the father I had spent so long creating under a palace of sheets.

What do you do if a stranger tells you he loves you? You're a fifteen year old girl and you're in a car and a strange man says, "I love you, Little Princess." Is he your long lost prince? Is he the person you dreamed about for so long?

He was taking me to meet his wife. We were going to Connecticut and then Canada on an adventure. I had matching luggage for the flight

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home. It would be my first time on a plane since I was a baby coming to America. Was this Oz? Had years of my practiced dreaming come true? That summer he showed me so many foreign and beautiful things. His wife was from Canada, a very foreign land to a child from Kentucky. By all reasoning, I was in my dreams.

But I was a teenager. I knew my toys never talked to me because they weren't real. I knew books were books. I knew Narnia was just a giant metaphor for Heaven and that my father could not be God. I knew that in August I would start high school. And above all I knew I wasn't a daddy's girl.

At the end of that summer, in the driveway of the house my mother worked two jobs to buy, my father and his wife asked me to live with them. They were moving from Kuwait to yet another foreign land, Alabama. My father wanted me. How was I to know his menopausal wife always dreamed of having a daughter?

As a child I was a dreamer, not a genius. I blame this on the fact my mother never listened to Mozart. But as I struggled into young adulthood, I was finally able to see things as they were, not how I dreamed them. And the answer I gave my father kept him from speaking to me for three months. When he finally got over the shock of his daughter's denial, I was over my own denial.

At seventeen I found a prince by the name of My Own Life. I left my father behind. I realize I had no solid memories of him because there were none. He left when I was two, separated from my mother, and only made holiday appearances. With the exception of a two month stint of "happy home" that ended in my calling 911 and my parents' divorce, my father had always been continents away.

He wasn't there. But I had such a good imagination. I made him mean so much to me. And no one had the decency to say, "Honey, your daddy doesn't love you." But I can't blame them; I wasn't a Mozart listening genius. I was stupid. Now, though, not so much.

A Yes from God's Lips



"Abi made her prom dress from neckties. She quoted Pablo Neruda. She took pictures of herself in cemeteries wearing corsets and tutus."

Katie Beyke, p. 100

"Part of her wanted to snatch the ring from the box, throw her arms around him, and make her foot fit into that slipper, even if it meant cutting off her toes."

Katherine Pearl, p. 110

Cat Wethington

The Gift

As he walks past, Jerry taps the glass once, between Star and Bucks, though he knows they won't sit by the window, where he prefers. Instead, Brad will have chosen a central table. He will have ordered for both, even knowing it takes Jerry twenty minutes longer to get here. *The Couple* is approaching from the opposite direction. *Your couple*, Brad would say, as if Jerry owns them, as if he made them up. Jerry holds the door for them. Each tips his fedora and thanks him. He has given them names. Nathan is slight with thin white hair and skin so luminous it looks innocent of the sun. Clifford has broad features, a mole on his left cheek and dark gray speckles in his silver curls. As Jerry shakes drizzle from his jacket, each helps the other out of his coat. Clifford then shuffles to the counter while Nathan claims a couch by the window and fluffs two pillows. Their longevity enchants Jerry. His oldest gay friend is Kyle, forty-eight and adamantly single. Among his younger friends, relationships blossom and die in a season.

Jerry drapes his jacket over a chair then sits opposite Brad.

"Where have you been?" Brad asks. He would kiss then sit close, holding hands, if Jerry would let him. "It's like trying to get an audience with the Pope."

Jerry has barely seen his apartment lately. The night he abandoned Brad at the Electric Magnolia, he slept in David's bed, meaning eyes closed and dreaming. (David belongs to Peggy.) He peels the lid off a go cup of warm mocha and pushes the brownie toward Brad.

Brad's fingers thrum once against the tabletop. "You embarrassed me in front of my friends."

Jerry's stir stick clicks against the table. He slumps back, tilts his head and gives Brad a warning gaze. But he doesn't want to argue, so he pushes his sneakers against Brad's loafers. "Well." He slips his cup out of its sleeve. "I'll forgive you if you forgive me."

"Fair enough." Brad unbuttons his cuffs and turns them up one fold, just enough to show off the fine blonde hairs curling alongside his Rolex. "It's not as simple as that," he says. "Is it?"

It's as simple as you let it be, Jerry thinks, but he says, "Relationships aren't simple," as if he knows something about relationships. If he doesn't count Craig, a married man with two sons, this is his longest romance. Four months.

Clifford and Nathan are holding hands, comfortable in their silence. They have been together a lifetime. They met during Stonewall, their hearts already beating with fear and courage and rage. Later they laughed at how they'd joined others kicking in chorus line fashion, taunting police with bawdy lyrics. Another scenario casts Clifford as a closeted cop who turned his back while prisoners slipped out of the paddy wagon.

In unison, as if they've rehearsed it, they smile and wiggle their fingers at him. Blushing, Jerry shrinks into his seat and waves, barely lifting his hand from the table. Brad expels a puff of air, but he doesn't roll his eyes this time or say anything. Jerry wishes he'd never told him about them.

"I've got something for you." Brad reaches into his satchel. "It's not for

your birthday." He lays something on the table, cupping his hand over it. "I have something more. . .um, intimate in mind for that." His hand slides away leaving a ruby and silver jewel of a cell phone. Jerry clings to his smile. Brad frowns. "What?"

"Nothing." Jerry shrugs. "It's just. . .I don't think I can afford the service. It's sweet, but. . ."

"I'll pay for the service."

"I don't know how to use one."

"A three-year-old child could figure it out, Jerry."

Jerry bites the inside of his cheek and stares at the door. If he leaves now, he can catch the bus and be home in half an hour.

"Here. It's simple." Brad scoots his chair beside Jerry's. "Turn it on." He talks Jerry through placing and answering a call then locking the key pad. "Now, call me."

Jerry slides the phone onto the table. "Maybe later."

Brad scrapes his chair along the floor and turns it sideways to the table. He holds his latte to his lips and watches patrons entering and leaving. Jerry stares at the phone. When he looks up, Nathan and Clifford are watching. What would they say if he was to stride over, flop down and ask advice? *Oh, my dear, love is a struggle. You have to work at it, or If he's not the one, he's not the one. Why are you wasting precious youth?* And then would he tell them that he doesn't think there is a right one for him, that his right one is married or engaged or celibate? Maybe he's fated to sit in the audience and watch the man he loves fall in love with his best friend. Maybe he's destined to sit across the table from someone who is not his dream but who offers good enough (safe) sex and intelligent enough conversation (when they aren't arguing) and who is generous (sometimes in ways Jerry wishes he wasn't).

Jerry touches the phone's face. "It's sweet, Brad. I just don't know that I'll ever use it."

"Then keep it in your car." Brad snaps a napkin, spreads it on the table and sets his cup on it.

This will be their next big fight — the first time Brad calls and Jerry doesn't answer because the phone is lying in a drawer with a dead battery. He's not carrying the thing. He's not going to be on twenty-four-hour call so they can argue over where to meet for lunch or whether a sparrow can fly clutching a coconut seed in its claw. So Brad might as well give the idiot thing to one of his friends or throw it in the East River. And Jerry will say all that during that next big fight. He won't now. In the flurry of his friends' attention, he didn't much miss Brad, but sitting across the table, he misses him now. Up close, relationships look to Jerry like complication and compromise. Still, there's something comforting in sitting across from someone who knows something about him and is willing to be there tomorrow.

"It'd be silly to keep it in the car," he says, though that would be the perfect place, the car he never drives. "I'll have to keep it. . . Where?" He will have to answer it the first few times, then it will be harder to claim he forgot it. Still, a tiny cell phone should be easy enough to lose, to drop in someone's drink or accidentally crush under a hammer. Right?

Open 24 Hours

His phone rings, and Jerry plops down his duffle bag. He closes his eyes, turns and drops against the washer before answering. "Hello, Brad."

"Where were you?"

"What?" He looks out the window, his gaze following a young couple huddled under a raincoat.

"I've been calling the last five hours. Where were you?"

"At work?" Phones aren't supposed to follow you around demanding constant attention. They should be leashed to walls. They should lie on the floor beside the sofa like his other phone and be quiet.

"Oh. Where are you now?"

"The laundromat." He turns and stuffs laundry with his free hand.

"Which one?"

"I don't know. Sudsy Wudsy or something." *Is there a reason you called?*

"Is anyone with you?"

Jerry lifts the phone so Brad won't hear the sigh then answers, "There's a woman folding sheets. You want to talk to her?"

"Funny," Brad says. "Did you get the part?"

"I don't know yet." He didn't. He didn't audition. He hasn't made it through an audition since July.

"Oh. Well. How did it go?"

"Fine. It went fine. Can we talk later?"

"You didn't get it."

"Brad," he says, drawing out the name. "I'll see you tonight. What are we going to talk about if you call every hour?"

"I'm trying to be supportive."

"You can be supportive tonight. I'm going to hang up now. I'll call if anything spectacular happens." *If I start levitating. Or get hit by a bus.* "I promise." Before Brad can respond, he hits the red button and slips the phone into his pocket. A woman with yellow streaked hair frowns at him. He shrugs an apology for whatever cell phone etiquette he might have violated, but just in case, he mentally informs her that at least a faggot would know better than to wear that dingy orange top with those faded green slacks.

Every transaction here is like playing slots. The machine gives him quarters for his five, but when he pushes them into the washer, nothing. He closes the lid, hoping it will activate, then opens it and glares at the attendant. The last time he had trouble, she blew smoke in his face and claimed that she didn't have access to anything that would help. As he is moving his clothes to the next washer, his phone rings again.

"I'm busy right now," he says into it, hangs up then sets the phone on the washer's edge. This time he waits until the washer has tugged all his things underwater and begun agitating before adding soap and closing the lid. He glowers at the phone. *Ring. I dare you.* He wants to sit down with his book, to reread that scene where the protagonists meet. He wants to believe in the possibility of such an encounter. But probably those things only happen in California. If they happen in New York, it is to beautiful, exotic men in the stratosphere, not to Midwestern transplants like him. For one thing, he would never lie naked on the beach, and if he came upon a naked man,

even a gorgeous one, lying on the beach, he'd turn his horse right around. Maybe that's the problem. He needs to quit reading such books. Or move to California. His phone rings. He opens the washer's lid and sweeps it into churning water.

He had to lie. Brad would never believe it was unpremeditated, an act of passion akin to stabbing your lover in the heart after he's asked, for the zillionth time, where you are. Jerry feels bad enough that he doesn't argue with Brad's assessment of him as an irresponsible child. But the following night, when presented with the phone's replacement, he flops onto the couch and folds his arms over his chest. "Why don't you just hire someone to follow me around? It would be cheaper." He props his bare feet on the coffee table. Brad knocks them off then sits, which surprises Jerry. Brad likes to stand when they argue. He likes to lean against something, fold his arms and tilt back his head so he can look down his nose. Now he is sitting.

"Maybe you should go hang around the church parking lot," Jerry says. "Go find yourself a good little boy. You seem to forget where you met me."

"I remember." Brad puts an arm over his shoulder, and Jerry knows he will have to accept the new phone.

Jerry catches a curl as it slides down the nylon smock and flings it. Sulking in the next chair, Brad picks it out of his lap and gazes at it.

"You love them so much," Jerry says, "you wear them." Scissors flash in his peripheral vision. Marc clamps his wrists on either side of Jerry's head and sets it straight. When it started, the fight was not about this haircut. It has mutated many times. Early into it, when Brad called him a prick, Jerry said, "Well, yeah." In the past, an interjection like that would make Brad laugh, would end an argument. This morning, he accused Jerry of making light of his feelings. And it didn't help that Jerry couldn't remember what they were arguing about in the first place, that he'd inadvertently admitted to sleeping in David's bed that night weeks ago.

"I pay for everything." Brad wraps the curl around his ring finger. "I ask this one thing from you. . . ."

"If you don't want to pay for everything. . . ." Careful to let only his eyes move, Jerry glares at Brad's reflection. ". . . then you have to go places I can afford. I'm not the one who thinks I have to eat lobster every night. I'd be just as happy. . . ."

"I don't eat lobster."

"The point is," Jerry says, "I can't afford. . . ."

"The point is we can discuss this later. At home."

The muscles in Jerry's neck tighten and he stares forward. Home. He would like to go home to his own apartment. But Brad will insist that they "clear the air." They won't clear anything. They will say things to each other they shouldn't. Then Jerry will acquiesce. And Brad, who won't remember any of his own words, will file away every one of Jerry's.

Marc tilts Jerry's head downward and combs the curls up away from his neck. Already Jerry feels cooler, lighter. Brad releases a loud sigh. Jerry shuts his eyes tight. "I have a great idea. Why don't you go read a magazine or

something? Quit staring at me like this is some tragedy."

"You know what? I have a better idea. You can find your own way home."

Jerry lifts his head and glowers at him. "That is a better idea."

Brad stands and slaps at his pants, brushing away some invisible something. "You are such a twit," he says. Jerry expects him to toss the curl, but he walks out with it still wrapped around his finger.

Marc places his hands on either side of Jerry's head, faces him toward the mirror and meets his eyes in reflection. "Maybe he's just worried. The shorter cut really brings out your eyes."

"Maybe he's just a control freak."

Marc nudges Jerry's head downward. "Mmm," he says. "Maybe you need a new boyfriend."

"Or just get rid of the one I have."

Before Marc finishes with him, the phone rings. Without answering, Jerry tosses it onto the counter, hoping that later he will forget to pick it up.

Employees call the upstairs bar the Dungeon. Situated between the restrooms and a door to the wait station, it is always dark, there's no television, and fake fig trees screen it from the dining area. Only servers ever sit there. Today, Jerry will mix drinks for the upstairs wait staff and make only a share of their tips, but he is grateful not to have to deal with customers. Yesterday's argument has nudged him into a low-grade depression, not bad enough to warrant unplugging the phone and crawling into bed. It's like being hobbled and handcuffed to someone plodding and resentful.

He stops in the doorway. The bar is strewn with overflowing ashtrays, crusty napkins, dirty plates and glasses. Floating above the bar, black balloons say, "Congratulations!" He closes his eyes and lets out his breath. "Son of a monkey." From the end of the bar, he lifts the mangled remains of a sheet cake but there's no room for it, so he plops it onto the bar above the trash can. He looks for a back-up trash bag but can't find one. He dumps dried up fruit, onions and olives onto the cake, stacks the bowls into an overloaded bus tub then drains last night's water and runs fresh, emptying the last of the bleach into the middle sink. As he is tossing stir straws and dumping ashtrays onto the cake, he notices Brad standing in the passage between plastic trees.

"I can't talk now. I have to get this place cleaned up." Jerry tugs the string of a deflating balloon. He doesn't know what to do with it so lets it go.

Brad sits, leans his elbows on the bar then, grimacing, lifts them away. Jerry wrings a towel then wipes the spot. Brad dries it with a wad of cocktail napkins he then tosses into an ashtray. Jerry plucks them out and tosses them on the cake. He moves down the bar, gathering glasses six at a time, fingers against their sticky insides, and trying to avoid lipstick smudges.

Brad pushes out of his seat and follows. "Why didn't you answer my calls?"

Jerry rights a Collins glass, picks a streamer out of the liquid and reels it into the trash. "I didn't know it was you." He scoots glasses together and lifts them.

"What else have you got to sell?" Brad follows him to the sink. "Because

I'm not buying that."

Jerry turns the spigot to the last sink. "I didn't feel like arguing. I don't feel like it now. I *can't* now. I need to get the bar ready."

"Did you go to David's?"

Jerry shoves a glass onto the brush and agitates it. "David's a friend. If you're trying to accuse me of something, you'll need to be more specific. But no, I didn't go to David's." Rinsing one glass, he washes another. "Can we do this later?"

"Serve me. Whatever's on tap."

"I'm not open."

"Serve. Me." He sits.

"No." Jerry slings water from his hands then lowers glasses from bar to sink side. "You're going to get me in trouble. I don't go to your office and harass you."

"I answer the damned phone when you call."

Jerry straightens and imagines the last of his energy seeping through his dripping fingers.

"Hey!" Tying her apron, Sally steps beside Jerry and glances at Brad. "Hi."

Jerry introduces them. Brad manages the pleasantries, but his gaze remains fiercely locked on Jerry.

"I'm here to help," Sally says. "Boss me." She takes the glass out of his hand. "Why don't we let the dishwasher take care of these? I'll get a rack."

Why didn't he think of that? "I'll get it. I need to go down, anyway. Maybe you could make a list of what I need from stock."

"Done. Nice to meet you, Brad." She snatches a pad and pen and spins toward the beer cooler.

For the first time this morning, Jerry's eyes connect with Brad's. "I can't do this right now," he murmurs, hoping Sally won't hear. "You have to leave." He turns, picks up the bus tub and carries it into the wait station where he sets it on a stainless steel table. He stands, elbows on the table, face in his hands, until Sally scratches him between the shoulder blades.

"Brad's a cutie."

"Yeah. He can be." Jerry straightens. "If you put a roll of duct tape over his mouth. Is he still out there?"

"Gone."

Jerry hoists the bus tub to a cart and rolls it into the elevator. As he descends, the phone rings. Soon he will toss it into his locker, and Brad will run down the battery, calling every fifteen minutes.

Two days later, on his day off, he is standing in Peggy's bedroom door, watching her change from burgundy pumps to scuffed sneakers. She's sitting on the bed and has to bend sideways. He swears, she looks pregnant, but he knows better than to ask. "Want a phone?" He holds it aloft as if displaying it for auction. "Free. It's a good one. You can take pictures. Go online and check the weather in Hawaii. I don't know where phones keep their teeth, but it's supposed to have a blue one."

Pulling on socks seems to have exhausted her. She drops back, and her hands rest atop her protruding belly.

"Only problem," he says. "It rings every fifteen minutes. And if you

don't answer it, a crazy man shows up at your job and picks a fight with you."

The phone rings, and she laughs. "Then you'd better answer it."

He does and makes Peggy say hello to prove where he is.

Much later, he's on the subway when he realizes it hasn't rung every fifteen minutes. It hasn't rung in hours. Thinking the battery must be dead, he reaches into his pocket. His mind empties. He doesn't try to think where he might have left it. After lunch with Peggy, they visited M.O.M.A.. He visited the library alone then walked almost to the health food store before thinking Kyle might still be gone. He visited B.J. instead and browsed three bookstores with him. He's cut through Central Park twice and ridden the subway and several busses.

"If I knew where, it wouldn't be lost." Jerry drops the cushion onto the couch and slaps it into place.

"I meant. . . ." Brad tilts his head back. "Narrow it down."

Jerry pulls the other cushion up and wedges his hand between the back and seat. "New York. Somewhere in New York." He feels nothing but crumbs.

"Smart ass." Brad pulls out his phone.

"It's not *here*," Jerry says.

"Then why are you looking for it *here*?"

Jerry sighs. "It could be. It might be. I don't think so." It's not. He was searching only to avoid meeting Brad's stare.

"Well, maybe someone will answer and. . . ." Brad tilts back his head as if pointing with his chin. "Do you have a better idea?"

Jerry raises his hands and steps back. He wants to ask where and when was Brad born. No one in this town is going to answer a strange phone except maybe someone who's already decided to keep it. Brad bends his head, listening, then looks up frowning. "You let the battery run down again?"

"Did I?"

"I'm getting a 'no service' message." He flips his phone shut. "So, yes, apparently you did."

It feels like being pecked by chickens. The fight has reached that stage when Brad keeps asking the same question only worded differently. He refuses to leave, so Jerry grabs his own jacket, yanks it on and shoves his hands into the pocket, checking for his key. Brad steps in front of the door, plants his legs apart and crosses his arms. Jerry is younger and stronger, but he's not about to turn this physical. Clamping his teeth on all he wants to say, he pivots and tromps to the bathroom. Brad follows. Long pauses punctuate his monologue as if he's leaving blanks for Jerry to fill in later. But Jerry has quit listening. By the time he's in the tub, he isn't even angry anymore. He is lamenting the audition and wondering when Kyle will be back from India. He closes his eyes and sinks until his ears are submerged. Brad flicks water in his face. Jerry bolts up and blinks at him. "Dang."

"I was talking."

"Fine. Talk, Brad." Jerry reaches for a towel. "But I'm finished listening. I'm tired. I'm taking a bath and going to bed."

Brad glances at his watch. "It's eight-thirty."

"I'm tired."

By the time Jerry slips into bed, Brad is smoldering in silence. He sits atop the sheets and, as Jerry reaches to shut off the light, grabs him. Jerry spins meaning to clip him. But Brad hooks his arm, pulls him down backward and pins him, sitting on his chest and holding his wrists to the mattress. Jerry arches his back and lunges trying to buck him off then lies still. He may be younger and stronger, but Brad is heavier. Brad starts to say something. Jerry lunges again and rolls him. He wants to hurt him, but the thought of bone crunching against bone checks him. They tumble like boys on a playground, inflicting bruises and twisting burns to the arms and wrists, rough but no real damage. After a few minutes of grunting, clawing and wrenching, Brad drops onto his back, flinging one arm out and folding the other under his head. Jerry sits, pajamas twisted, and they study each other.

Sometimes, in junior high, Jerry or the other boy would walk away with a busted lip or bloody nose, the only serious injury being the ache he didn't understand then, the knowing-without-knowing that he would never get what he wanted. The ache is almost the same now as he drops beside Brad. He knows now the words for what he's been trying to say but hasn't the courage to say them. *The fact that you love me doesn't mean you own me.* But maybe it does. Maybe that's the bargain you strike for love. If so, he will grow into a lonely old queen with a foo-foo dog for companionship. The thought makes him want to cry. He doesn't even like dogs. As he reaches to turn off the light, he wishes Brad would reach for him, would hold him and prove something to him, though he doesn't know what. Brad doesn't.

When he wakes, he and Brad are tangled. He imagines they look like two thirds of the *Laocoön* group, two men bound by a snake made of sheets instead of marble. He rolls onto his back.

"Mmm." Brad opens his eyes and rubs his face. "I'm hungry. Lets go get something."

"It's three in the morning."

"So?" Brad wriggles to pull a corner of blanket over himself.

"Okay. Where?"

"I don't care." He puts an arm around Jerry and nuzzles close, breathing quietly onto his shoulder.

Jerry tries to make out his features in the dark. "Brad?"

"Mmm?"

"I don't want to fight any more."

"Okay. No more fighting."

"And I don't want another phone. Okay?"

"Mmm."

Jerry can't determine if this is an 'okay' or a non-answer or if Brad is already halfway to dreamland.

(excerpt from a novel-in-progress)

Rey Ford

Some Mornings

Some mornings the world
looks different. Maybe
it is the angle of the sun
or the amount of moisture
in the air.

Maybe the trees haven't shuddered
their leaves into place
or the birds, feeling the cool hint
of winter, have just slept in
a little longer.

But this morning
I'm sure it is not the sun
or the leaves. It is not
the slight shift in the earth's axis
that makes me afraid.

It is not even the low
dark sound sighing from the inside
of some suffering animal
too far away for most to hear
that scares me.

No, this morning mystery's fear
floats up within reach of my own heart
as the sun lifts slightly higher
and light loosens the colors of the world,
as wind swims the frail sounds of birds
toward the ears of everywhere,
as, whoever it is that I am
stands here trying to love
whoever it is I think you are.

Chris Tiaht

Have Canvas; Can't Paint

1: Still Life

Keep the background simple: white
Walls and drawn drapes striped
In burgundy and olive – more rich than drab.

And the foreground – simple.
A wooden table, maple, good grain, deep
Knots, and four matching chairs neatly arrayed.

Keep the subject simple: a nearly
Bare table, no floral arrangements, bowls
Of fruit, fancy bottles bleeding baroque –

Just a single setting on hard
Wood: one plate, one glass, one napkin,
Knife, fork, spoon – awaiting food in copious space.

2: Sketchbook

Consider it the border of Infinity and Nothing,
the study of Time trapped in Now,
or the shape of Truth's footprint.
Consider it the shadow of Words Clanking in gears,
the Moment dream Wakens
a Voice unHeard in fifteen Years.
Consider it an Humble opportunity
to Drag a Yes from God's lips
and to command Space to hold It.

3: Landscape

From a distance, everything is
Horizon.
The girls' giggles, the placed puzzle
Piece, last night's argument, all
Drop
Behind a wall, under the elms,
Becoming hairs on a hill.

From a distance, it's all about
Line,
Shape of a boundary, edge
Of Earth, with mottled brown

Mirroring
The sky's blue. And
As distance increases,

Infinite
Line curves into circle,
Circles fade to dots, and finally
Blank,
Black space. From sufficient
Distance,
Even I can draw.

Kelly Moffett

Portrait of a Man (Parmigianino)

for J.W.M.

Your eye, half-light, this permanent shadow
for a chin, there is a crack in the flesh of your lip,
and in there, I think I may find what you used to be,
all the things I've been too scared to know.
The finger that soothed your chapped lip before mine.
We are in the business of making bodies.
By three months, I could feel the fissure
of cartilage into bone, and at night I dreamed
of a small mouth sucking a small thumb.
Deep in the layers of me, something formed.
And your hand sensed it. Your eyes those nights —
your brow. What if, in return, I handed you the sucking thing,
plucked it directly from my womb, almost whole,
then, in that hour. We may have been more honest.
But, really, we ask for little more than paint and skin.
The you staring at the me we have created.
And in this way, I love you.

Katelyn Beyke

Abi Gets Her Hips

Abi was the only Beyke girl not built with German hips. Instead, she was given a large ribcage and small bust. The overall effect was that she was very straight. She would look at herself in the mirror and long for the womanly curves that even her youngest sister had started to show.

Abi wore her hair longer than all of the other non-Pentecostal girls. She kept her bangs after they went out of fashion. She had squinty eyes for which she received compliments from the waiters at the Asian Buffet. She bought tee-shirts from the boy's section of Wal-Mart and made purses from old jeans.

Abi made her prom dress from neckties. She quoted Pablo Neruda. She took pictures of herself in cemeteries wearing corsets and tutus. She drank chocolate turtle lattes while writing in a journal with Our Lady of Guadalupe on the cover.

Her favorite movie was *A Chorus Line*. Her favorite band was The Dresden Dolls. Her favorite celebrity was Andre the Giant.

Abi loved to pick a direction and just drive. As she passed through the rural towns, she would imagine that she was taking her mom's car and never coming back.

Abi always came back.

She spoke Spanish at home to confuse her mother. She spoke it to make her older sister, who never mastered even the basics of the language, jealous.

Abi made a living babysitting for Peruvian doctors. She learned to love *The Wiggles* and *Gustofer Yellowgold*. She shaded in the pictures of dark-haired children in the coloring books. She read *Green Eggs and Ham*.

She was fired from a video rental store for flirting with the owner's son.

She wanted to be an actress. She wanted to teach English to migrant workers. She wanted to be a tribal dancer.

Instead, Abi became a mother.

When our mother called my younger sister, Joey, and me to her room and sat us on her floor, I knew that my Papaw was dead. I had been waiting for this moment for years. Each Christmas was celebrated as the last time we would see him. Each time he had a cold, we considered it a death sentence. Because I had been preparing all my life for his death, I had almost begun to believe that he wouldn't die after all.

The tears welled in my eyes, anticipating my mother's words. I held my breath as she began to speak.

"Girls, Abi is pregnant."

Pregnant. One word was all it took to change our relationship with Abi forever.

"You can't tell your brothers. They're too young to understand, especially if she doesn't keep it."

Abortion? Was that an option? Abi was raised Catholic, just like my little sister. Just like me. Could she even consider killing her baby? How could she have gotten into this situation to begin with?

Open 24 Hours

Until three years before, it wouldn't have been possible. Abi had been a good girl. She was a member of our high school's academic team and a member of the church youth group. She wore modest, though unique, clothes. She was a good girl.

Her senior year, though, she cut her hair and pierced her nipples. She wore short skirts. She skipped class to smoke. She stopped going to the coffeehouse in favor of bars.

She slept with sleazy gas station attendants and the singers in punk rock bands.

She had older boyfriends who would buy her alcohol. One of these boyfriends was the reason for her trouble.

Rorik was 35. He was balding. He was a nurse's assistant. She had met him at a bar over the summer after her freshman year at college. She came home wearing his tee-shirts. One day she came home with a ring. We didn't take it seriously. This was her third engagement.

The first was a good Catholic boy. They had known each other since kindergarten. He was a week younger than her. His parents had moved to America from Panama before he was born. His dark skin and wide eyes made him beautiful in an exotic way.

They had liked each other for as long as anyone could remember. They had held hands while sitting in the wooden pews at church when they were in first grade. They had gone to dances together in grade school. They had always liked each other, but they didn't start dating until their junior year of high school. We were happy for her.

He took her to prom. He bought her a giant penguin for Christmas. They went to his mother's wedding. He gave her a ring.

We all loved him. He talked about Catholicism with Dad. He sent Mum flowers for Mother's Day. He bought me flowers for my birthday. He came over and played DDR with Joey and our brothers. He spent New Year's Eve at our house playing Cranium. He was so nice that we couldn't help but love him.

Abi said he was too nice, he loved her too much. She was tired of being worshipped. She didn't think she could live up to the ideal he made of her. She dumped him.

Her second fiancé was her manager at Hardee's. He was tall with thick, curly hair. He told her when she was doing something annoying. He argued with her when she was doing something wrong. He wasn't afraid to tell her no. He reined her in when she went too far. He was smooth. He was friendly.

He was gay.

This didn't stop her from loving him or him from loving her. They thought they could work it out. They would get a little house and bake cheesecakes together. He gave her a ring and promised her that he would always love her.

But she missed physical affection. He didn't hold her hand. He didn't kiss her. He didn't put his arm around her.

For Valentine's Day she made him a picnic dinner. She arranged candles

around a blanket by a lake. She had a book of love poems with Pablo Neruda's marked to read to him.

He never showed up.

She knew then it would never work, but instead of being sad, she got pissed at him. She found a greasy man who worked at the gas station across from Hardee's. He took her back to his apartment. He gave her the physical attention that she wanted. He took her virginity.

It was then that she changed. It was then that she became a bad girl. She cut her hair. She got her tattoos and piercings. I saw these changes, but I refused to believe that she had changed on the inside. I would not believe that she had lost her morals. I couldn't imagine that she would ever give up something as important as her purity, especially to someone she didn't know. We had been taught to wait for marriage, and if I had known then what she had done, it would have killed me.

Three years later I knew what she had done. I knew who she was, but it was no less upsetting to be reminded that she wasn't the good Catholic girl we all wanted her to be. I had spent the last three years imagining that she was innocent even if she was rebellious, though I knew better. If what my mother had told me was true, if Abi was really pregnant, I would never be able to see Abi like that, like me, again.

Our parents left that night for the small Catholic college she attended. They left us at home, clinging to the hope that Abi was wrong – that it had been a false positive. How would our sister, hardly older than us, raise a child? She was never the responsible one in the family. She neglected her chores and blamed us for the things she did wrong. She teased and taunted us. She drank. She smoked. She wasn't ready to be a mother.

"What's she going to do?" Joey asked me.

"I don't know," I answered.

It was a question that would be discussed at length the next seven months. My parents offered to adopt the baby, but the adoption had to be final. If they were going to raise another child, it couldn't just be until Abi felt ready to be a mother. It had to be for good. Abi didn't think she could be so close to her baby, though, and not be its mother.

Would she give up the baby for adoption? She couldn't spend her life wondering if it had a good family, how it would turn out, who it would grow up to be.

Would she get an abortion? We never asked her this. It was as if my parents were hoping she would forget that abortion was an option.

They didn't need to worry about her terminating the pregnancy after all. She wanted to keep the baby.

We prepared ourselves for the addition to our family. When Mum went shopping, she looked at baby clothes. When Dad talked to his family, he talked about being a grandfather. Amber, our oldest sister, read books on midwifery to better help Abi in the delivery room. Joey and I watched movies about birth. I think part of the reason Mum had us watch them was

to discourage us from behavior that might lead to pregnancy. My parents finally told my brothers that Abi was having a baby and they would be uncles. My youngest brother was five. He didn't know what being an uncle meant, but he was excited anyway.

Abi prepared by ending her engagement. Becoming a mother *and* a wife was too much growing up for her. She moved out of the dorms and into an apartment that was paid for by the government. She found a doctor that was paid for by the government. She took vitamins and ate lactose-free foods, all paid for by the government. Being a single mother-to-be had its perks.

Though he was no longer her fiancé, Rorik didn't disappear. He drove after work once a week from Southern Illinois to Western Kentucky to bring Abi money, food, or toys for the baby. He bought her a stroller, a high chair, a swing. He made sure she was well and had everything she needed. He loved her still but never said as much to her.

When my junior year ended, Abi was eight months pregnant and was living alone in her small apartment in a bad part of town two hours away from her family. Mum decided to sacrifice my summer vacation and send me to live with her. I packed my sewing machine, my clothes, and as much food as I could steal without my parents noticing, and I had my boyfriend drive me to be with her.

The apartment had two floors. The first consisted of a living room with a couch that could fold out into a bed. She had found it at a thrift store and bought it so I would have a place to sleep. There was a TV, too, and a modest collection of VHS tapes.

The kitchen was downstairs, too. She had hung posters on the walls, and artistic pictures of her growing belly, but nothing could make those not-quite-white walls look any friendlier.

Upstairs there were two bedrooms and a bathroom. Her bedroom floor was piled with books and clothes. The second bedroom was for the baby. The crib was the same one that all seven of us had slept in. My parents had given it to her a few weeks before when they had decided she really meant to keep the baby. The sheets were made out of the same bold fish-print dollar-a-yard Wal-Mart fabric as the curtains. A stuffed squid, from Rorik, lay in the crib beside a giant ant I had bought from a thrift store. An ant from its aunt.

The two weeks I spent there were like a loop. Each day she would leave for work at the Bluegrass Museum. I would stay home, clean what I could, sew another twenty-or-so patches on my quilt, watch the same three movies, and eat peanut-butter sandwiches. When she got home, we would go for a walk until she started cramping. She had read that walking could induce labor, and she was ready to have her body back.

She didn't mind that her breasts were larger or that her hips were wider. What she didn't like was that her belly had swelled like a watermelon. Pregnancy had brought with it lactose intolerance and insomnia. It had also brought to a halt her wicked ways. She couldn't smoke. She couldn't drink. Men no longer flirted with her.

We usually walked before dark. Abi knew her neighbors, and she knew that they weren't the nicest of people to live with. She could hear fights through the thin walls that connected her apartment to those on either side.

She saw the bottles and needles on the side of the street. She discerned from phone calls and visitors that the previous tenant had been a woman of ill repute.

When we did walk after dark, we would call our cousin to pick us up. He was the same cousin who had given her a washer and dryer. The same cousin that had given her his children's old clothes and their old toys. He did all of this although we had never talked to him outside of Christmas and the occasional family reunion. I guess babies bring people together like that.

After two weeks of Abi not giving birth, Mum brought Joey to take my place and took me home. I went back to spending my days with my boyfriend and my nights wondering what kind of mother Abi would be and what kind of aunt I would be.

When Abi went into labor, Joey, our oldest sister, our mother, our favorite aunt, and the baby's father were with her. I was absent. I regret not being there, but my mother needed someone to watch my brothers, and my father was away on business. I drew the short straw by being the only daughter living at home.

Mum and Joey said that Abi did magnificently. They told stories of the horrible nurse who tried to keep them out of the delivery room. They said that Rorik held her hand and then held my niece, Philla. They came home and left Rorik there with her.

I don't know what changed in that week they spent at her apartment, but when Rorik came home, he brought Abi and Philla with him.

They were married. They moved into a new apartment. He went to work. She stayed home with Philla.

The apartment had one floor. There was a big kitchen and an open living room with a clean carpet. There were two bedrooms with pictures of family and antique thrift store furniture. There was a bathtub instead of just a shower as there was in her other apartment. Abi hung a picture of a Hindu goddess above it.

She decorated their apartment with furniture she made from old suitcases and wooden boxes. She sold greeting cards with designs cut from construction paper at local grocery stores. She made scrapbooks for her friends.

Abi obsessed over the weight she had gained during her pregnancy. She could no longer wear the clothes she had worn before she had Philla. She was determined to lose the weight. She bought Yoga Booty Ballet DVDs. She ate healthy choice meals and quit drinking soda. No matter how hard she tried, though, she didn't lose any weight.

Abi read her daughter bilingual books. She bought her tiny tutus and cowboy boots. She danced with her to the music of *The Wiggles* and *Gustofor Yellowgold*.

She took Philla to parks where they would climb through tunnels and go down slides. She took pictures of her on the swings and taught her how to pose.

She enrolled Philla in a dancing class for toddlers. They would shake tambourines or maracas and swivel their hips with twelve other mommy-baby couples.

They went shopping, and Philla looked at the price tags just like Abi did.

She grabbed things from the back of the cart and threw them on the floor and squealed with laughter when Abi had to pick them up.

Philla loved clothing. She had a unique style, like her mother. Abi let her pick out her own shoes. She gave her a box full of costume jewelry. Philla would come to our house in the summer wearing snow boots and seven beaded necklaces. She would come in the winter wearing fairy wings and princess tiaras.

Philla loved to cook. She would play with pots and pans for hours, feeding her imaginary delicacies to Abi and her baby dolls.

Philla refused to wear hats and went nowhere without her squid. She danced whenever music was played. She sat and looked at the pages of magazines and books. She loved her uncles, especially the youngest.

Abi loved Philla in a way she had never loved anything before. She was devoted to her. She amazed us all with what a wonderful mother she was. We all thought things were finally perfect for her.

We just weren't looking closely enough. Before Philla's second birthday, Abi decided that Rorik was not supportive. He was a liar and didn't love his daughter. He never did anything around the house. He was fat and lazy and she didn't love him.

She wanted a divorce.

She wanted to be free again.

She wanted to be wild.

It wasn't a week after she moved into Amber's old house that she told us she had a boyfriend. He was also married and had three kids. One was old enough to be Joey's friend. He was an actor who supported her in her acting career. He encouraged her to get a job. He told her how sexy she was.

He was short and balding. He had noticeable tattoos. He had an abrasive laugh and an overly-firm handshake.

When she did get a job, he asked her for money. He asked her to pay for their meals, the gas, the bill for their phones. She saw him at the supermarket with the wife he said he had left. We were happy when she dumped him.

Abi painted the sunroom of her new house sea foam green. She hung brightly colored curtains in the living room and dining room. She drew pictures of cats with her daughter on a chalkboard in the kitchen. She decorated the two bedrooms with Klimt and Waterhouse prints bought at yard sales. She kept a litter box for her three cats in the basement by the washer and dryer her cousin had given her. She hung a shoe rack in the mudroom for Philla's shoes.

She cut pictures from magazines of vegetable gardens and flower gardens. She bought packets of seeds and clippings of flowers. She dreamed of hydrangeas.

Abi's new job was at an assisted living facility. She planned events for the old men and women. She drove them to doctor appointments. She danced with them at sock hops and made patriotically decorated cakes with them. She sang with them.

Abi worked with people her own age who were similarly unique and energetic. She talked to them on her breaks. She ate lunch with them. She went out for drinks after work with them. For the first time since Abi left college,

she had her own friends. They weren't her husband's friends or her sisters' friends. They were her friends.

Abi worked on the second floor of the facility. Every day she ran up and down the stairs. She ate the carefully planned meals that were prepared for the residents and staff. She led exercise sessions. She finally lost the weight she had gained while pregnant.

When Abi looks in the mirror, she sees a confident woman with a career and a house. She sees a single mother who is raising her daughter with love. She sees someone who is creative, intelligent, and inspired.

Abi wears her hair short and dyes it deep red. She has squinty eyes for which she receives compliments from the waiters at the Asian Buffet. She wears cardigan sweaters and knee-length skirts with polyester shirts bought from the vintage sections of thrift stores.

Abi now has a slim waist and a proportional bust. She still has a large ribcage, but it is balanced by her hips. The overall effect is that she is a curvy, confident, sexy, motherly, unique, beautiful woman.

Terri Whitehouse ***Memorial Day***

It was all parties,
and finger food,
bourbon and vodka tonics,
mimosas all night long.

Wasn't it to be expected
that the drive home
would rub against complete
darkness in a city,
tree limbs decorating
the road like a rebellion,
and cruising so smoothly
by the large old oaks
and man-sized root balls?

And what better way
to pay respects than
making love on a dark
couch, a whole
city making love
at once, near midnight,
the earth shaking right back
at the sky, with so many words
in Latin and candlelight
stopping and starting
with each movement of wind?

Jordan Overby
A Tarot Reading

All this talk lately
about the oasis within,
the fecund and flowering body of water
alive with our long desires, our longing
to explore every dark corner for what we do not have
and rescue, wrap, and savor
our tender hearts.

The Ace of Cups pulled
is a reset button, is a promise ring
that if I walk with love,
if I pull back the curtains of my heart,
the clouded hand of the Almighty might deliver
that first unfolding
of her,
might allow me
to feel her breathing heavily during a dream,
eyes flicking behind closed lids
to decode the mystery that has enveloped her.
Her head pressed firmly upon my shoulder, hair slightly damp
from sweating, she pulls toward me
as if I were an island she was rising onto
after that hard swimming through dark water, shivering
at the snakes or kelp brushing her tired
legs, hands in fists, nostrils flared,
as the fireworks of light and land push out the darkness,
and in her dream she recognizes
that it is me she has climbed upon.
She smells the briny scent that is mine
and exhales deeply. All that water,
and struggle, and mass
gone now.

My heart is an overflowing grail,
the waves whispering
It is all here for you; come and take it
and know the way of water.
How much one can drink.
How much will drown.

Irene Mosvold

***How Much
Do You Love Me***

how much is forever
enough to carry water
in a sieve, not spill a drop
ever, enough to measure
time out in infinities
enough to weather, waiting,
wading through the slough
enough to put the rest aside
until we are together, now,
however brief the interlude
that knits us me to you
in one creature, bareback
fantasy come to life, quick
time in eternity, that's how
much I love you, fierce
and unforgiving, like the
turning of the screw, or set
into stocks in the center
of the square, locks thrown
on hands and feet, moving
not a hair, never leaving
place, til I know it's an even
playing field, that's how
much I know I love me
now, even though despair
proves close companion
when you ask, "*How much
do you love me?*"
a monumental task such
an undertaking, but
I answer nonetheless,
despite your possible mistaking
me for someone else,
a doormat possibly, while
I wait for you to grow up,
come home accept responsibility.
That's how much I love you
enough to obliterate the sun
to write only in ink as pencil
implies impermanence, a
possibility of erasure, leaving
only shadow love, shallow,

too thin to soak good paper
that's how much I love you
to dive into oblivion
never mind the landing
to sit in someone else's skin
for briefest understanding
to climb into another life
to crawl as case may be
that's how much I love you
turning separate into We
go out when it's too wet to work
to set your mark in stone
chisel myself alongside you
so you'll never be alone
through misery and bad weather
one company we will be
until ashed, and swept along
cosmic heart debris.

Mark Williams

Psychic Fair

You're the one who went to the psychic fair
while I stayed home and watched you choose
between booths of runes and tarot cards.
I saw you stare at ovaries, lungs and hearts
on charts of feet. Someone traced your palm
and read tea leaves before my vision stopped.
I missed the one you liked, the psychic artist.
That night you showed his sketch — edged in grays,
reds, blue waves, exploding yellow crests.
You read a list: your strengths and needs
he attributed to your red-gold heart. I knew
you wanted me to sit for a portrait of myself,
but the next day I stayed home again, afraid
to have my picture drawn, for fear you'd see.

Katherine Pearl
Reconciliation

The movie Stuart had chosen was sappy and contrived, or at least JoAnna thought so. Two housesitters fall in love, both believing that the other is wealthy. Eventually it's revealed that they're both starving artists competing for the same big public arts commission. They hate each other for about five minutes and then reach some hackneyed compromise that makes both of them happy. At the very end, they buy a little house with an art studio big enough for two. JoAnna wanted to gag.

"That was even better than the reviews I'd read," Stuart said when they got in the car. "The music was great, too. I wonder if you can buy the soundtrack. Maybe we can stop at the music store after we eat."

JoAnna hadn't asked where they were going for dinner, but she guessed by the route they took that they were headed for Bianchi's, the only Italian restaurant in Lexington owned by Italians, or at least by people who'd really mastered the accents. JoAnna and Stuart had gone there for their first official date, and JoAnna found it fitting that things were about to come full circle.

The walls of the restaurant featured poorly drawn murals of ivy-covered stone, but the proprietors kept the lighting low for dinner, so the deficiency was hard to notice. The air was warm with the smell of basil and tomatoes, and on the weekends, a violin player strolled around the room performing for tables upon request. Thankfully, Stuart had made a reservation, so instead of waiting two hours, they were seated in about fifteen minutes at a small round table situated in an intimate corner of the dining room.

JoAnna suggested they start talking as soon as the bread plate arrived, but Stuart asked to hold off on the big conversation until after dinner, so they chatted about weather, work, and the most recent political scandal in the state capitol.

After they'd finished their entrees, Stuart insisted they both have cannolis and coffee, despite JoAnna's protests that she was stuffed. Their waiter brought the coffee first.

"So what is it you wanted to talk about?" JoAnna asked as she watched Stuart add his usual five teaspoons of sugar to the shallow white cup.

"Let's wait until we have our dessert," he said.

"There's really no reason to keep putting this off," JoAnna said. "I've been thinking the same thing for a while."

"You have?" Stuart asked, smiling slightly.

"Yeah, and it's nobody's fault," JoAnna said. "Sometimes things just don't click between two people."

Stuart had been rapidly stirring his coffee, but he released the spoon without removing it from the cup. The little smiled slipped away, replaced by a grimace.

"What are you saying?" he asked.

JoAnna's courage faltered, but there didn't seem to be any way to turn back now.

"I'm saying I don't think we should see each other anymore, at least not romantically. I just can't see this relationship progressing any further, and I think we both want that, something more serious and permanent, so it's time we started looking for that with other people."

Stuart cleared his throat loudly and fidgeted in his chair. Then something over JoAnna's shoulder caught his eye. He shook his head, waved his hand, and then stood.

"Excuse me a moment," he said, dropping his napkin on the table.

JoAnna turned and saw their waiter approaching with two plates of cannolis. Stuart intercepted him, and the two of them walked back to the serving station together. JoAnna wasn't sure what was happening at first, but then she remembered their first dinner at Bianchi's. A man had proposed to his girlfriend by slipping a ring into her white wine glass. After he got down on one knee and she said "yes" and hugged him, the whole restaurant clapped. Stuart in particular seemed thrilled by the exchange, smiling as though he'd known the couple personally. JoAnna told him she thought the whole maneuver was a little dangerous. If the woman had taken a big drink, the ring could have slid right down her throat. "Food's a better option," she'd said. "Something creamy so the person would feel it with their tongue really fast."

Stuart returned. "He almost brought us the wrong order," he said. He carefully arranged his napkin on his lap then examined his remaining silverware, clearly determined not to make eye contact with JoAnna.

The waiter followed soon after and set the cannolis in front of them with an apologetic look. Stuart picked up his fork and sawed into the pastry's shell. He ate a couple of bites, chewing rapidly. Then he dropped the utensil, reached into his jacket, and pulled out a small blue velvet box. He set the box near JoAnna's water glass. She stared at it, frozen, as though it was a snake and any sudden movement might provoke a strike.

"I don't understand," Stuart said. He'd resumed carving up his cannoli. "We get along so well. We're both so well suited for each other. I know what you're saying about something more serious, but I thought we could do that together."

"I'm so sorry," JoAnna said. "I had no idea you felt this way."

"What's the problem?" he asked. "Maybe we can work on it. I know I'm not the best communicator, but I can get better. I'd be willing to try. I love you, JoAnna."

"I care a lot about you, too," she said, her eyes blurring with tears. "And there's not one specific thing that's wrong. I just don't feel . . . the way you should feel about someone if you're thinking about marrying them."

"Does this have anything to do with that Karl guy?" Stuart asked.

JoAnna paused. The short answer was no. She wasn't breaking up with Stuart to be with Karl or because she thought she could win Karl back. But she suspected that if she hadn't met Karl, hadn't known him or loved him, she'd be smiling right now and showing off that ring to the other diners.

"No," JoAnna finally answered. "I've been thinking about this for a while."

Stuart stared at her for a moment, then his eyes went over her shoulder again, and he made a quick gesture with his hand. The waiter came and laid a small leather rectangle on the table.

"Would Signorina like her cannoli packaged to take home?" the man asked timidly.

"No," JoAnna said, turning away from him so he wouldn't see her glistening eyes. "No, thank you."

They drove back to JoAnna's apartment in silence, but the air between them felt thick, charged, like the invisible force that keeps two opposing magnets

apart. When they pulled up in front of her apartment, JoAnna decided to offer one last apology.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "I really didn't suspect. Not for a moment."

"Do you at least want to see the ring?" Stuart asked. At the restaurant, JoAnna had slid the box back across the table without opening it, but now he whipped out the velvet container and flipped up the lid before she could protest. It was an elegant square cut with a burnished gold band that seemed to twist around the diamond. Stuart licked his finger and rubbed a white film left by the cannoli filling off the stone so it sparkled in the light from the car dome.

JoAnna looked at the ring and then at Stuart, both of them gorgeous. Part of her wanted to snatch the ring from the box, throw her arms around him, and make her foot fit into that slipper, even if it meant cutting off her toes. Instead, she murmured another "I'm sorry," and reached for the door.

Stuart snapped the box shut. "You know, I've been watching my friends get married and have kids for the last ten years."

JoAnna released the door handle to listen. She thought she owed him that much.

"And probably for the last five years, I've been worried that it wasn't going to happen to me, that I'd missed my chance somehow." Stuart swallowed hard and licked his lips before continuing. "Then I met you, and I was so glad I had waited."

JoAnna couldn't answer. She couldn't breathe. She bolted from the car, taking a huge gulp of the cool night air before slamming the door behind her. She stumbled through a patch of wet grass to the sidewalk, then turned back. Stuart stared at her. His face had never looked more serious, more hopeless, not even when he'd explained the possible side effects of chemotherapy to JoAnna's mother. After a few long seconds, he broke his gaze, put the car in gear, and drove away.

JoAnna made it to the stairwell, but her legs felt too heavy to climb. She sat on the third step and began to sob.

(excerpt from Chapter 11)

Jessica Weafer

Sky

The full moon lights the clouds
eerie blue, intoxicating me
as I think about missing you.
The foreboding sky speaks: Trouble
isn't far behind.
I want to listen, but fear
I will realize things aren't
as pleasant as they seem.
The stars flicker between the clouds,
and I remember: optimism
glimmers in the dark.

Bernd Sauermann

The Wax Life

It's his candle's wax under her thumbnail
 and it's the blue part of the flame near the candle's wick,
 and it's that same flame doomed by the foolish moon.
 It's a drive at night in December with the windows rolled down, air
 from the heater licking their arms like an August wind,
 and it's her face in the rain and the morning never seeming to come.
 It's her hair flowing underwater, her lips parting,
 starting to mouth the sounds,
 the language of motion in a shadow.
 And it's the broken promise of the lake
 to the girl in the dream of uneasy sleep.
 It's the last flicker of TV.
 It's the black storm putting out to sea
 wanting to dream of a honeyed wind,
 wanting to ask, "Is the enormous sky really me?"

Joey Connelly

Killing Moles

One end, a garden hose. The other, her shovel.
 As the hole fills, water thick as clover.
 She wants the collision of mole and metal, the thud.

I would be that mole if I could.
 The blindness, the underground,
 darkness behind darkness,
 navigating by smell. Touch sometimes.

Instead, the beat of my own hum-drum.

Shredding ribbons into advice.

And all to protect her peonies
 while the hard rain falls.

Jim McGarrah

***The Last of the Rock & Roll Poets
Puts a Dollar in the Jukebox***

When Rilke couldn't write, he walked
through Paris in a fog until his muse found his memory.

Me? I listen for the same songs
played years later in different bars, like tonight,
reaching once more for those euphoric chord changes
only heard by youthful ears as my mind returns
to '67 when Morrison's lyrics entwined
with the wild scream of Vietnam and the swirl
of Jack Daniels invited me to grab
the girl across the table, giggle at her small
jokes, kiss her while glasses rolled off
shattering like gunshots against the floor.

If she sat by me now, I would share
this one thought: my life has always been
the same song played in different times, the same
journey down different paths toward her.

Instead, I'll drink and dream how our lips
might brush again, how this small
gesture might rescue me from absence,
inspire a new poem. I'll pretend
that what we both need has everything to do
with the melody in the air between us
and imagine I remember her name.

*(first appeared in When the Stars Go Dark,
Main Street Rag Publishers, Charlotte, NC)*



Contributors

Jamie Alexander graduated in 2009 from Brescia with a BA in graphic design. She specializes in photography, particularly nudes, and she won an honorable mention at the Owensboro Photography Club's 37th annual juried exhibition. She is also published in *Photography Forum's, Best of College Photography 2009*.

Annette Allen is director of the humanities doctoral program at U. of L., where she teaches graduate courses. She has two poetry collections, *Country of Light* (1996), for which she received the Witte Award, and *What Vanishes* (2006), and has received three Arts Council awards. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her seventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Phoebe Athey, an Owensboro native, has resolved all of her problems by buying two old houses and painting them pink. She lives in 30 pink rooms and her mother's yellow house. Her satire is a popular feature at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Todd Autry teaches language arts at Ohio County Middle School. He recently published his second book, *Monroe County: Volume II*, and he and his brother have released their first bluegrass cd, *Walkin' Jerusalem Ridge*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his third appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Erin Barnhill works as an editor in Lexington. Besides writing poetry, she enjoys making pottery. She has read at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Michael Battram lives in Evansville with his dear MaryAnne and three dogs. His writing appears in many publications, including *Abbey* and *Pearl*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his eleventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Alison Baumann writes short fiction and poetry on her farm in Posey County, IN, with the encouragement of the First Mondays writing group in Evansville. She also is proud to call herself an old friend of 3rd Tuesday Coffeehouse and *Open 24 Hours*, in which this is her eighth appearance.

John Beemer, from Hartford, KY, is a sophomore English major at Brescia. He usually writes poetry by first imagining

a scene and then trying to relate it in words, and he is keeping an open mind about possible careers. This is his first appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Barbara Bennett grew up on farms in Illinois, Arkansas and Kentucky, which she fled at 18 for city life in Chicago, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Salt Lake City. When she returned to KY 26 years later, she watched farmers clear their fence rows to expand their yield a little, destroying wildlife habitat a lot. She is an emcee at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her 12th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Katelyn Beyke, from Cartersville, IL, is a sophomore at Brescia majoring in English/professional writing and math. She aspires to be a professional playwright and lifetime employee of McDonald's, and this is her second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Terry Bisson, an Owensboro native, lives in California where he writes mostly science fiction. His most recent novel is *Planet of Mystery*, and he is adapting one of his short stories for Komodo Films of Jakarta, Indonesia. He is a frequent contributor to *Open 24 Hours*.

Jason Chaffin, a writer of fantastical fiction, is majoring in English/professional writing at Brescia, and he is the recipient of Brescia's 2008 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing. He hopes his prose will one day accelerate human evolution to the space fetus stage, like in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. This is his second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Joey Connelly is a 2006 graduate of Kentucky Wesleyan College with degrees in English and religion/philosophy, and he is earning an MFA in creative writing from Ashland University. He has attended 3rd Tuesday for 10 years, and this is his first appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Alice Driver is a Ph.D. student in Hispanic studies at U.K., and she has published an interview with Colombian filmmaker Victor Gaviria in the *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*. She has read at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

George Fillingham loves and writes poetry and reads at 3rd Tuesday as often

as he is able. Currently he works in conjunction with social services to aid families in crisis. This is his third appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Rey Ford, from Owensboro, lives with his wife, Laura Minks, near Boulder, Colorado, where he mostly is painting and writing. He received Brescia's 1989 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing, and his poetry has been appearing in *Open 24 Hours* since 1987.

Clayton Galloway is a senior in the Brescia S.T.A.R.S. program and an aspiring novelist who says he will never be able to adequately express to his mother his love and appreciation for her support and friendship. This is his second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Joey Goebel is a 2002 Brescia graduate and recipient of Brescia's 2002 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing. He is a frequent guest at 3rd Tuesday, and his three novels have been published in ten languages. This is his ninth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Louise Halsey is an emcee at 3rd Tuesday, a weaver, a runner, a recent convert to swimming, and partner to ceramicist Stephen Driver. She also recycles plastic tops and is known for her white hair. This is her third appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

John Hay lives on a farm in Frankfort, Ky. His stories that first appeared in *Open 24 Hours* have been reprinted in *The Kentucky Anthology*, *The Kentucky Humanities Council Magazine*, and *The Legal Studies Forum Journal*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his eighth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Cheston Hoover received Brescia's 2002 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing. He teaches English at Ohio Co. High School and lives in Livermore with his wife, Halpen, and daughter, Xanthe. In his spare time, he is an avid woodturner. This is his ninth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Dori Howard received Brescia's 2006 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing. She is a Beatles junkie and wanna-be world traveler. This is her fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Kelly Lee lives with her husband in Mt. Washington, KY, where she writes poems, grows sunflowers, and contemplates what to do with the master's in Marriage and Family Therapy and Social Work she will soon complete at U. of L. She received Brescia's 2004 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing, and this is her eighth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Ed McClanahan is the author of *The Natural Man*, *Famous People I Have Known* and several other books, the most recent of which is *O The Clear Moment*, a "fictional memoir" published by Counterpoint Press in 2008. He and his wife, Hilda, live in Lexington. He has performed at Brescia and 3rd Tuesday, and this is his eleventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jim McGarrah is the author of two award-winning books of poetry, *Running the Voodoo Down* and *When the Stars Go Dark*; a memoir of the Vietnam War, *A Temporary Sort of Peace*; and the novel *Going Postal*; and he is co-editor of *Home Again: Essays and Memoirs from Indiana*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday and appears regularly in *Open 24 Hours*.

Theodoros Mallas, from Cyprus, is an art major at Brescia who works with mixed media and finds inspiration through human bubbles. He loves fashion and wine, enjoys all kinds of music and plays piano. He says, "Poetry is another way to paint a picture." This is his first appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Kelly Moffett directs the creative writing program and Kentucky's Retreat for Women Writers at Kentucky Wesleyan. Her work has appeared in many publications, and her first book of poems was released in 2008. 3rd Tuesday welcomed her five years ago when she moved to Owensboro from Pittsburgh, and this is her fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Irene Mosvold won the 2005 Fool for Poetry international chapbook competition in Cork, Ireland, and she has received two professional art awards from the KY Arts Council. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her third appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jesse Mountjoy is a lawyer whose writing has appeared in many publications, including *The Legal Studies Forum*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and *Exquisite Corpse*. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his eleventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Adria Nassim is a senior at Brescia majoring in English/professional writing and minoring in Spanish. She hopes to work with children with developmental disabilities, whom she uses as material for her writing, along with her experience of growing up with Aspergers Syndrome and epilepsy. She received Brescia's 2008 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing, and this is her second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Tonya Northenor teaches English at Owensboro Community and Technical College, and her poetry has appeared this year in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Earth's Daughters*, and other journals. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her sixth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Elizabeth Oakes recently retired from teaching Shakespeare and women's poetry at WKU. Her new book is *The Luminescence of All Things Emily*, published by Wind; her first book, *The Farmgirl Poems*, won the 2004 Pearl Poetry Prize; and she is working on a series of poems in the voice of Mercy Woodbridge, Anne Bradstreet's sister. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her fourth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jordan Overby graduated from Brescia in 1998 and is a book editor in San Francisco. This is his seventh appearance in *Open 24 Hours*. When not writing, he plays guitar in the San Francisco band Boot. His amp goes to 11.

Katherine Pearl received Brescia's 1999 award for Achievement in Fiction Writing. A native of Kentucky, she is completing an MFA in creative writing at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. This is her ninth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Tom Raithe, who recently retired from a 30 year career as a newspaper reporter, lives in Evansville and reads regularly at 3rd Tuesday. His poems will appear in upcoming issues of *Southern Poetry Review* and *Poetry East*. This is his second

appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Linda Neal Reising writes poetry and fiction and has taught English for over 30 years. Her writing has been published in *Southern Indiana Review*, *The Comstock Review*, and *Fruitflesh*, and *Know This Place*, an anthology of Indiana writers. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her fifth 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, Illinois. This is his fifth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jason Rhodes lives and works in Owensboro, where he hopes to someday live without working. He attends 3rd Tuesday religiously and performs there regularly. This is his first appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Teresa Roy is a member of the First Mondays Writers Group from Evansville, and she has participated in 3rd Tuesday Coffeehouse readings since she was a debutante. This is her 12th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Bernd Sauermann lives in Cadiz, KY, and teaches composition, literature, and film at Hopkinsville C.C. He also is a champion of skepticism. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his eighth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Sagan Sette, from Elizabethtown, KY, is a sophomore at Brescia where she is studying English/professional writing because it is appealing. She hopes to someday make enough money writing to not have to do any sort of manual labor. This is her second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Steven Skaggs is head of the Communication Arts and Design Program at the Hite Art Institute at U. of L. His graphic work is in the Sackner Archive of Visual Poetry in Miami; the Klingspor Museum- Frankfurt/ Offenbach; and the Akademie der Kunst, Berlin. His *Poems from Elsewhere* was published in 2006. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his sixth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Rusty Smiddy, a member of Evansville's First Mondays Writers Group, began collecting images and stories for poems before she knew how to make words. The result is a textured collage of personal history woven into poems with a universal thread. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her second appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Frederick Smock chairs the English department and directs the creative writing program at Bellarmine U. He has published three volumes of poetry with Larkspur Press, and his newest book is *Craft-Talk: On Writing Poetry* (Wind). He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his sixth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Barbara Stahura, formerly of Evansville, lives and writes professionally in Tucson, AZ. Her latest book, *What I Thought I Knew*, is a collection of personal essays about how changing her mind changed her life. She has read at 3rd Tuesday several times, and this is her fourth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Joe Survant, Kentucky Poet Laureate from 2002-2004, has authored four collections of poems and has work in two new anthologies: *Abraham Lincoln of Kentucky*, from Larkspur Press, and *Five Kentucky Poets Laureate*, from the Kentucky Arts Council. A native of Owensboro, he retired in 2007 from teaching at WKU. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his 12th appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Richard Taylor, Kentucky Poet Laureate from 1999-2001, teaches English at Kentucky State U. and Transylvania U. His poem in this issue is part of a collection titled *Rail Splitter*, which will be published by Larkspur Press in the fall. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his ninth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Chris Tiaht, an associate editor of *Open 24 Hours*, he has been published in it since 1993. He is a professor of mathematics at Brescia, where he rarely finds time enough for measuring words.

Lauren Titus earned her MFA from Spalding U.; has published poetry and fiction in various literary journals and anthologies; teaches composition and literature at Bellarmine U.; and writes a column for *Velocity*, an alternative weekly subsidiary of *The Courier-Journal*. She has

read at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her first appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Jessica Weafer is a 2006 Brescia graduate with a major in English/professional writing, and she has returned to Brescia to pursue a certificate to teach high school English. This is her fourth year as an assistant editor and her third appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Matthew Weafer, a 2006 Brescia graduate with a major in English/professional writing, received Brescia's 2006 award for Achievement in Poetry Writing. He is pursuing an M.A. in English/rhetoric and composition at WKU while working as a freelance writer, and he is seeking a publisher for his poetry collection. This is his sixth year as an assistant editor and sixth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Cat Wethington graduated from Brescia in 1987 as an art major. She teaches art in Owensboro and lives in a suburb of Pellville (formerly Bucksnot), KY. This is her fifth recent appearance in *Open 24 Hours*, for which she is an associate editor.

Terri Whitehouse, a Daviess County native who currently calls Louisville home, is an alumna of WKU and received her MFA in writing at Spalding in 2007. She gets on her soapbox at barefootprogressive.com and aspires to be a judge at her hometown's International BBQ festival. She reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is her third appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Mark Williams lives in Evansville. His writing has appeared in *Hudson Review*, *Indiana Review*, and *The Southern Review*, and online at Able Muse. He reads at 3rd Tuesday, and this is his sixth appearance in *Open 24 Hours*.

Bob Yehling is the author of seven books, including *The River-Fed Stone* (Aisling Press) and *The Write Time: 366 Exercises to Fulfill Your Writing Life* (Pen & Publish). He makes his home in Crittenden County, KY; he has read at 3rd Tuesday; and this is his first 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.

