IN MEMORIAM

Dinerral Shavers

Helen Hill

New Orleans Review

Volume 33 Number 1

COVER ART:
Second Act in Blue
C. Dawn Davis

FRONTISPIECE:
Ninth Ward, New Orleans, 2006
Reggie Scanlan

BOOK DESIGN:
Christopher Chambers

New Orleans Review, founded in 1968, is published by Loyola University New Orleans. We accept unsolicited submissions of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and translations from September 1 to May 1. Subscriptions are $14 per year; $24 outside U.S. Send all correspondence to *New Orleans Review,* Box 195, Loyola University, New Orleans, LA 70118. For more information, visit us at www.loyno.edu/~noreview. Contents listed in the PMLA Bibliography, the Index of American Periodical Verse, and the American Humanities Index. Copyright 2007 by Loyola University New Orleans. All rights reserved. Distributed by Ingram Periodicals. ISSN: 0028-6400

LOYOLA
UNIVERSITY
NEW ORLEANS

EDITOR
Christopher Chambers

FICTION EDITOR
Robert Bell

POETRY EDITOR
Katie Ford

TRANSLATIONS EDITOR
Sophia Stone

ASSOCIATE POETRY EDITOR
Mary Szybist

ASSOCIATE FICTION EDITORS
Dale Hrebik
Amanda Regan

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR
Mary A. McCay

ART EDITOR
Laura Camille Tuley

INTERNS
Donna Burke, Maggie Calmes, Samantha Carrick,
David Guevara, Amberley Levesque, Gabriella Lopez,
Elizabeth Mueller, Joey Palomino, Linda Rigamer,
Maggie Simon, Megan Stabiler, Zander White

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
John Biguenet, Jeffrey Chan, John Gery, Michael Lee,
Peggy McCormack, Ashley Schaffer, Marcus Smith

FOUNDING EDITOR
Miller Williams

CONTENTS

BRITTA AMEEL

Anatomy Lesson

The cow must want to be put back together,
        12 sliced sections in 12 formaldehyde vats,
                a hideous loaf,

five full feet between each tank.
        The light is unstoppable, terrible, thirty thousand watts
                to secure scientific clarity and art, terror.

I want to be taken away. Lifted by a helicopter's huffing.
        To where.
                To Norwich to visit the skull of Sir Thomas Browne

who said *all knowledge is enveloped in darkness:*
        The public dissection on a fall day in 1632 of a petty thief
                whose corpse lay on display in Amsterdam.

In Rembrandt's *The Guild of Surgeons,*
        the surgeons stare at the anatomy book on the table.
                They do not look at the real arm,

which they have opened for knowledge.
        Imagine the light necessary to see something in the dead
                but Rembrandt did.

On each blade of the helicopter, Descartes says:
        disregard the flesh which is beyond comprehension
                and attend to the machine within.

Did he consider rescue, witness.
The man standing beside me,
who looks like one of Rembrandt's surgeons.

Don't touch it, I want to say to him, I cannot
bear it. But the blades: I read
what Descartes says about the flesh

and think only about touching this cow—
I should consider Browne's skull
in the hospital museum, enveloped in darkness,

far enough away from this museum, its hospital-light.
Here, between. Heart
that once lived, and lungs, cow

that once lived, now slivered. The helicopter
makes light swing, calls to the man
who is backing away,

his fingerprint inside the circle
cross section of bone.
My hand parallels the glass

and there are spinning molecules
between us. They make the air
colder, fill all the fissures,

seal the splits in Browne's skull.
Helicopter thought where
those surgeons cannot look

at the tendons of the thief's arm,
who instead look at the book—their eyes,
dark machines, don't know what to want.

SAM WITT

Before the Flood

The precise need for a beginning was pure agony;
the locusts had been newly evacuated through their shells,
leaving me behind, unable to shed myself.
One dark hood moved up,
one dark hood moved down, and we looked at each other in silence
as I tried to imagine this creation before the flood,
a dry and shameful miracle.
Before the flood of God's face, this holiness was gauze.
One dark hood was *my* angelic face,
now split into four streams, an invisible, porous gaze:
Somewhere between a child being born, during the flood, and half a cubit
was this dry coordinate, this now,
and my particular destination was unknown.
And the small lamp of this dry creation was the air *itself,*
evacuated through its own locusts,
my body cast off into myself and exhausted to become me.
And glory was the skeletal remains of a swallow, glory hallelujah,
and it rained down through the air,
God of the empty, God of the dark, polluted waters, and they moved,
and God saw that it was good.
Darkly gathered unto one place
was what the moon couldn't help doing to its waters,
the small failure of this small lamp that lights the sky at night,
even to darken the chest,
the pure gaza the moon affects,
with its drowned children and its black, missing faces.

And You stood to one side, scratching Your miracle,
inside the tree, inside the tree drawing a dark, warm noise
was the interior of my lung
or the silence of my hand, Lord,
a fine, queering reality—before the flood,
the moon was caught in its branches, a small lamp
wrapped in muslin, half a palm print.
When does the air become unholy again,
wrapped in the drowned bodies, in the unbecoming,
at drift, the unmaking of a dry creation
and when does the human have no sustainer?
Before the flood, no hearts are wicked, nor after,
just suffering and ease, the moon down the waters
to You, Your face, Your dark face undrowned,
and its syrupy body gathered unto one place when You withdrew.
You, evacuation of the moon, emptied or filled with light,
Us, standing to one side,
the beauty of a coast that has largely been lost:
this being now, this lost coordinate, unmade at a moment's scar.
If it were possible for the heart
to be a negative of stormclouds, above the lowland,
reflected in a child's opened eye,
then God might see that it was good.
And so, green plants for food, drowned kine,
sea foam, scattered glowing across the sky,
drops of mercury jumping from leaf to leaf.
After all, the Morning Glory leaves were not sewn together,
nor the heaven and earth complete.
Don't we, in fact, like the rain, rise downward?

And the riverbed tremble with the dry seam of locusts
that runs through the night, and the night conceal its waters?
And were not our eyes opened with the rain,
and was it not God, the great lamp in the heavens
melted through our eyes,
that breath that saddened me in a great mirror of vapors
delivered through my transport tube in a sudden evacuation,
a shameful green shoot crawling out of the hole in my chest?
Water was noise before the flood, pure static and wavelength,
impregnated with noise, nothing more, and an empty whisper,
filled with white static and the names of God,
most of which are empty.
And didn't God in fact take *this* human and set back down
in its place a corpse candle, a bit of reflected light?

SAM WITT

Recipe for the Fire

—for Graves Truesdale, 1963-1994

All day long I've been touching
these emblems of hunger—
hinges, rusted shut,
stewing on the stove in your favorite pot: the television,
smearing its dropsied face all over this room;
the cat, sullen, padding by.
I touch the bloated cluster of ticks
rooted to the inside of its left haunch. If you were alive,
maybe you'd follow her outside too, as I do now,
and crack a matchflame on your thumb and hold it
to each tick until it sizzles and pops,
and feel those fattened birds somewhere up above,
cooing the air with their belly-rumble,
and taste this hunger
the dead don't feel.
Snow, piled up against
the porch door, the heating grill.
The car engine will not turn over. I've spent all day
cleaning out your icebox, and found there,
just now, under the ziplocked marjoram
and dill, between a solo Hungry-Man
and a crusted bottle, 2 fingers full,
this frozen dove—wings splayed, eyes
flashing like a cat's pupil
in the dark.

One heap of uncured hay,
genuine barnburner, pitched onto the snow.
Three birch limbs, leftovers from last season:
denatured, gasoline-doused, flayed, crossed.
One pillowcase your head imprinted.
One telephone, the receiver
your lips touched
maybe fifty times. Lace curtains
that recognize me
and shiver, a single match
that burns my thumb:

This is *your* fire.

For later, you said, tossing the bird into the freezer.
Later: snapped neck, broken wing; in the branches, a bag of fat.
I remember the cat, scratching at the door
almost politely, a message for you, still alive in her jaws.
Now, months past, ankle-deep in snow,

the snow burying even my footprints,
I can feel your needles under my wing.
And then the cat must have dropped her prize, because suddenly,
the bird was beating its one good wing
in the corner, beside the capsized dish of milk;

and as you lifted it, wasn't that *us,*
stiffening and dying, that look of astonishment in your hands?

Mourning doves, perched on the phone lines,
so late in December—it's no dream, these

voices that have grown into fattened bodies,
these lumps of dough,

really, blood-swollen, baked out in the cold.
It's no delusion:

in that pulse, steady and purring,
I hear your heart, jump-started again,

and you hate me for the dove breast
I ate in Paris, glazed

in apricot preserve and stuffed with wild rice.
When I think of your death,

I see sperm, smeared and frozen
on a window pane, from that beady-eyed,

mewling little heaven, I see you hating me
for the cigarette cherry my life has burned to

as my lungs pinch in the cold.

One newspaper, crumpled
around happy words, kerosene-soaked,
deep with trouble and ink,
touched into flame:

this was your brain.

One pinch of pure
snow, pure enough to kick a mule's chest
still: one hunk of fat, snagged
in the ribcage, one broken wing:

This was your stopped heart.

The parlor of a funeral home.
A backyard. Just this morning, right now—
one rosary, collapsing unstrung
into the flames:

these were your teeth.

One suit, crumpled and stuffed
with uncured hay, sliding down the chute—this
was your ash, rising now from the fire,
a sprinkle of eyelash, a handful of cheek and hair:

snow, fall now, evacuate the industrial sky,

of your black, incinerated hair, and let me go.
Mingle, and melt here now above the flames:
One dove, wrapped in phone cord,
tossed into the fire: this,

your gift to me.

G. C. WALDREP

Titus at Lystra

To bring the curious to heal.
A conic section: parabola? Ellipse?
A vesicle conscripted from the oriflamme,
rejecting, rejected,
a butchered
iridescence on the Schuylerville pike.
There was no time to form
a judgment, no instinct for order, to reflect
that rage was an option: that,
independent of the banefire, absolution
might lie further
than mercy was prepared
to go. And so off the pommel at moonset.
And so slope working
its way into the land like flour
into oil: more like oil, the slick of it:
hands fastened
in a chain that resembled
nothing so much as singing, angle
of a mouth
wide open, corners
where lip-flesh never quite reached—
where the tongue seeks,
as if conveying balm, and the chap cankers
in the incarcerate light, body
homing into body,

the nape of that moment
set like a sapphire into the scepter
of incident, smooth and cool.
A vestment of measure.
To dowse for that secret spring:
the geese,
the temblor, what
livid farrowing. And turned again
into the preparation, its vast appointments.
A crossing made once. In
strength. In summer.

G. C. WALDREP

Circle Park

At the place in the trail where one is supposed
to leave a stone, I take one. Selfish, I know, but I reckon
it confers another *nostos,* more or less.
And what a view! Charred hemlocks at horizon's lip,
gurgle of snowmelt two seasons up.
I'm told that soon my breath will start to come short
on account of the altitude. I've read about this, been waiting
for it all my life. Breathing is the one thing I do well,
except when it interferes with sleeping.

I remember the way the children filed in
clutching their pillows, shyly, a nervous giggle
somewhere in the vicinity of the old RCA television's
dark paneling. My idea was
anyone who fell asleep in the next hour
probably needed the rest. I turned down the lights,
let the vanguard get comfortable. In the story I told,
every part of the body was on speaking
terms with every other part, a perfect conversation
that preceded an elevator's assured rise to surface.
One by one the children stepped away

just in time to see a stag leaping a bank of horsetail ferns.
Breathe deeply, I told them, and they did.
They had given up the idea of their own bodies
or rather their bodies had given up the idea

of being *them,* for the moment. Maybe for the last time.
I spoke softly about the ubiquity
of granite schist, about the importance of understanding Mozart
as both a found object *and* a syntax. Soon they were still;
I was alone. My last lung had already sailed.

G. C. WALDREP

Bishopville

At the time I wanted nothing more
than to shrive what was left of that ghost town,
to beatify the tipples of those old mines.
I didn't mean that anyone needed to pray for them,
or to them: only that they were agents
of miracles. *You & the horse*
you strode in on. Might's chief avulsion
evoked the wingéd tribes—
birds avoided, bats dwelt there
rising at night in a way that suggested
yet another folktale about the origins of darkness.
I was living under a bridge
where the presence of a body—any body—
seemed to augur well. To drill into the procession
required a greater sense of social purpose
than I'd yet discovered.
Though I was invited to every vesper
I did not have the presence of mind to record
any of the major chants. The one about the bridge
was my favorite. Did it exist?
I wanted to interrupt: *Of course it does,*
I live beneath it. But did I really?
What was certain was that
the costermonger's habiliments were entirely
beyond my slender means. I tried speaking loudly
in the hope that this would suggest
my next rursus: primitive

echolocation. At this point Nietzsche's ghost
appeared to me in a dream.
We were waltzing, & discussing
how it was that a ghost could waltz,
but I couldn't make out Nietzsche's replies
because the orchestra was too loud.
Back under the bridge the bats were almost
certainly beginning their evening patrols.
I carried the plastic siphons with my bare hands.
Some felt there was still a chance
that marketable ore might be discovered
beneath the place where the angels
were said to have ascended, but I wasn't sure.
For one thing, they had been pretty tatty for angels.
I was all for arranging stones in circles
on Sky Butte, for letting *be* be.

WILLIAM WRIGHT

Prescribed Fire

Rain stirs clover and rot, rouses the beehive's thrum,
barn slats tiered in fungus. From bloodroot to cinder,
leaf-mold and cedar smoke bitter in six weeks' deepness.
Autumn deserves nothing it demands,
not ghost or doxology:

Say *soon cinnamon and cider, soon scuppernong and gourd.*
Years from now, the body disassembles; bees drowse
in their cells. Ash drifts through the field's red sumac,
spectral edge where two hounds guard
bright scraps of their kill.

No matter: A word rises the moment it is spoken.
Past fodder stacks and tobacco, near the small
blue vase on the sill, garlic crackles
and pales in a broth near boil,
rain quells and the heart
owns its one room.

JOSHUA WILKINSON

Vesuvius

I don't like to see, he declares, flowers on a casket. Let the thing confess. I am grim, I am farewell. Do we dance at a divorce? Celebrate before a surgery? No and no again.

She says, What?

This afternoon, Patrice. We saw that procession.

It's a bayou night, humid and heavy and still. Gray flannel clouds flushed orange by city light. Fish stink that just sits. The hotel greets them with a fortresslike façade, Spanish design, wrought-iron bars over the windows, it opens to them at a wide-mouthed revolving door. He still has on his name tag, RANDALL in handwritten block letters crowded up at the right-hand edge. She has decided not to *give things another go.* Moss muddies up the yellow stucco walls, palm trees march backs bent along the gray rainbow driveway. The decision came suddenly, handed to her like a cocktail. The ALL in a collision, in morning traffic congestion, in a cascade down the side of the name tag.

Well I think they're nice, she says. The flowers, they make it. Tolerable somehow.

Tolerable, he says.

Less terrible, she says.

The hotel shushes them when they enter, it's the drag of the door's rubber flap, the sharp hiss of cold air. True, he still looks likely, even after eight years he has likeliness written all over him. Yes, he's kept his appointments with the therapist. Then why? It's where they always stay, year after year, April for her means the hotel, the realtors' conference. Tax code talk, complaints about lenders, the complications of city annexations. Faces so generic that

they all look familiar, she's never sure which ones she's already met. Of course he suspects nothing, enough of their friends have been in couples' counseling without evident change for years. The shush could otherwise be construed as an inhalation, suggesting that the hotel draws them, one might say sucks them in.

A creek cuts the lobby in two, it murmurs into a miniature lagoon. A floor of ruddy flagstones, the front desk with its poised clerks at one side and the bar behind dark frosted glass at the other. He leans toward the bar, suggesting a nightcap. She'd watched him write his name on the name tag that morning, felt what could without exaggeration be called nausea when he ran out of room and rather than adjust or abbreviate or for god's sake just get a fresh name tag proceeded to squeeze in the last three letters. And no, no nightcap for her, it's late and she's tired and they've spent so much money today already. She frowns at the charcoal glass, the palms in black ceramic bowls. How he has slightly yet irretrievably cleaved from her. Have fun night owl, she says in leaving.

The darkness of the bar is a relief after the fluorescent ballroom, after the long afternoon of shopping and severe sun. Light may be good for the spirit but too much of it wears out the eyes. As always when there's a choice between table and booth he chooses booth. He glides across the black vinyl, leans forward on bent elbows, lifts his glasses, pinches the bridge of his nose. The clouds must have moved in imperceptibly, or maybe suddenly, while they were having their fish. A soup that overtook the city when they weren't watching. Out of habit he glances around before pulling a cigarette from his pants pocket. What happened to the days when couples had a quiet drink and conversation? There are no lovers here. There are instead two men talking at a tall one-legged table, gesturing with their drinks. A young waitress in a black vest, a bored bartender. A few others like him, men and women drinking alone in sullen waiting or forgetting or plain old time-killing. Sparse population but it would

seem so even with a crowd. The bar is built for the illusion of privacy, the shadowed nooks every bit as deliberate as office cubicles. Somewhere deep he recognizes this as one of those backwater moments. One slips out of narrative time into the brackish orderless backwash of life, fragments and hints and dimly-known things.

It's true, it is late, she is tired. Her feet ache from walking all afternoon but at the elevator she decides right as it yawns open not to go up. She heads down a hallway with a gait that's both strident and furtive. What does she mean when she says likely? When he said he would try, why did he have to add the try? No, no, she knows that's not fair, it has nothing to do with that and questions get so tiresome anyhow. Strident in that it appears aggressive, furtive because she clings to a path too near the wall. The hall imposes the hushed somnambulant sensation of an airplane's pressurized cabin, the oppressive white noise of air vents and muted conversation. She stoops to remove her heels, carries them swinging from her fingers, the carpet spongy beneath her bare calloused feet. Randall had skipped the afternoon seminars to take her shopping and wasn't that good of him? The city whirlpooled around them, taxis taking blind corners, people bolting before buses. She saw a large blonde woman wearing a t-shirt that read BIG AND EASY, a scrawny black man holding a cardboard sign that read I AM A MAN SO THIS IS EMBARASING PLEASE ANYTHING HELPS. The city, she understood, speaks at you always. That labels aren't everything but they're more than people want to admit. Randall's name tag affixed to his lapel, he wouldn't remove it for fear it would lose adhesiveness. Is it simply the accumulation, the weight of each other's peculiarities? How his mouth tends to hang slightly open, how he adheres to a strict haircut schedule yet fails to tend the wildness of his eyebrows. That spidery mole on his shoulder blade. The way he speaks, the formal diction, the tirades. Behind the doors she passes is silence or television. Talk shows and newscasts and what's the difference anyway, it's the same

droning state to state to state. She imagines people half-asleep in their rooms on stiff sheets, shellacked in blue glow. The carpet all sidewinding vines and leaves like overfull pouting lips but what's particularly disturbing is that the hall has no odor, no city scents, not even a masking perfume. It's a non-scent, an absolute lack of smell as though she'd lost that sense or had it taken from her altogether and just what do you do in the hours before you break the news?

He fishes the matchbook out of the ashtray and tears out a match. His small ceremony around lighting up, lipping the cigarette and cupping his hands, satisfaction in spark and flare and the first hungry drag. Is it therapist or counselor, he's never determined for sure but is aware at least that the titles aren't synonymous. The forms he'd had to sign described the therapist's goal *to assist the client in achieving a life lived authentically.* Interesting that the form hadn't read *clients* plural even though it was couples' counseling. Like all hotel bars it's comfortable yet ultimately unsatisfying, designed to be both luxurious and blandly tasteful. Candles in beveled crystal cups, glasses so clean they look fresh-bought. Art deco paintings and wine-colored carpet, a small parquet dance floor and movement in the gloom of the corner. He squirrels away his cigarettes singly or in pairs so there's no telltale pack. Not that she would nag with any conviction, it's that smoking still recalls his adolescence. Rehearsing gestures in the mirror, mimicking Sinatra or aping James Dean, hiding the packs from his mother, airing out his shirts by holding them out the car window as he drove home after dates. Of course he thinks therapy is a racket. It operates by selling people the notion that greater satisfaction is deserved. She'd started going herself and then asked if he'd go too, on his own however so he wouldn't feel pressured to say things that pleased her. Which he finds funny since he goes mainly to make her happy. What's missing is any sense of expectation, he imagines no one in the bar anticipates anything different. What used to be a façade of dance club ennui has calcified into pure adult cynicism, at best they make

stale complaints. The older of the two men at the table says, But so Cubism was a response to the new physics, artists didn't want their marvels outstripped by cold-hearted science. Both men are thin he notices, bachelor-thin, not like realtors. Realtors with their paunchy blue shirts, their pleated khakis that identify them additionally as husbands. From the waitress he orders a gin and tonic, lets his eyes linger on her legs as she walks away. The two men look so similar that they could be mistaken for father and son, for two versions of the same man at different life stages. Right, right, says the younger one, but what's art doing now? Selling pantyhose and pocket radios, I'd say. He can tell it's not an improvised line, the young man has worked out this statement from dozens of discussions just like this one. The therapist spoke about patterns, the old yarn about ruts, Randall returned with a recurring dream. The gin comes in a tall thin glass that seems to glow, the waitress takes his credit card without looking at him. A spotlight comes on at the far end of the room, it makes a white cone of crawling smoke and from out of nowhere there's a grand piano and a woman in a yellow sequined dress seated before it. In the dream he struggles to make love with his wife. She's willing, it's just that there are obstacles, a complicated belt buckle, a shirt that rebuttons itself, slacks that knot up around his ankles. When he's finally able to undress he finds she's become someone else. An age dream? suggested the therapist, Are you worried about aging? Who isn't? he said, Is that the best you can do?

The more tired she feels, the more urgently she moves. The ache in her calves becomes a sort of satisfaction, she walks hard the way one presses against a bruise to feel the satisfying ache and there finally is the end of the vines and the odorless hall at the dark glass door ahead. Yes it's possible he could go back to the room and find her gone but she doubts it or lets herself doubt it, he'll have at least two drinks, gin is his therapy as much as anything could be. The exit signs are down near the floor in case of fire, blameless

insinuation of rolling smoke, people on all fours in blind desperate escape. Initially she'd wanted to talk with him about their sessions but they had a rule. Later she decided there probably wasn't much to them, surely he groused the way he did at home only in this case he'd gripe about her perhaps, perhaps. There's something reckless in walking with her shoes in her hands, something forgotten, it's the way she'd walk back to her dorm room when sneaking in after curfew. What she said in her sessions seemingly every time was that Randall didn't seem unhappy so much as done trying. The therapist asked Yes but what about you? She passes a door cracked open behind which she hears cold laughter, canned-sounding, she winces at sitcom cliché and full stage light exposure. Should she feel offended that he didn't ask about her sessions? To hell with should, she had been. He didn't even hint around the subject, he was always respectful of it, too damned respectful, it was enough he felt to ask how they went and leave it at that. A person wants secrets but wants also someone to try to learn them. The sky that day had been cut by airplane contrails and seagulls, straight lines and lazy circles. They'd walked with bags banging against their legs, she with the new high heels she'd tried to refuse and he with books he believed he should have read by now.

In this country, he'd said, we have an insidious habit of masking what we've been taught to fear. Florists run our funerals, we perfume our potties, we bind women's breasts—

Randall, she said too sharply.

We beg pardon for belches, we swallow our goddamn tears. We are in fact a nation mortally embarrassed by the way life is.

They passed a gift shop selling catchphrase t-shirts and beer posters and incense sticks. A businessman with gray stains in his armpits and a cell phone at his ear, a gaggle of girls with gold streaks in their hair and breathless impatient voices.

You're just hungry, she said, I can tell. She gave him her back under the pretense of looking in a window.

See? he cried, sweeping his hands in global indictment. That's exactly what I'm talking about. We explain away or disguise or hide natural processes and genuine emotions, we've been trained to feel shame above all else.

She moved on decisively, he kept talking into the air between them. Well no more excuses for me, he said, no more lies. If I laugh too loudly it's not due to wine but to joy. If I weep it's because I'm sad and if I rant it's because I am perturbed!

I got divorced because of hungry, she said. My ex would go all day without eating and when I'd pick him up after work I'd catch the brunt of it.

You, he said, are caught in it like everyone.

The waitress stops by to tilt the ashtray into an empty one and slides it back toward him. Truth is they empty ashtrays because a full one gets you thinking about hours. Of course there's no way to get the same satisfaction from the next cigarette or the one after that but still you smoke them with a certain devotion. The sequins on the singer's dress sometimes catch the light just right and stab little stars at his eyes, the piano tones melt one into the other like weekdays. Her voice is husky but too polished, surely that's why she's here rather than at one of the backdoor bars in the Quarter. She looks sleepily at the microphone, as coolly as the bartender looks at the taps, the boredom of routine in her eyes betraying the performance or perhaps enhancing it, the song sounds in some way menacing. Two gins and he remembers he's capable of complexities, of bug-eyed theories, of greed grown so sublime it's become an innocent animal hunger. He was not always a husband. An atavistic restlessness aroused, his urge is to grab a woman by the hair, to paint red fire on stone. Suddenly his litanies make sense. He's put his daily complaints in place of bigger dissatisfactions, they've become the fissures through which he expresses disappointment in life. It's a cliché he knows, explained as much to the therapist, nonetheless he used to have different ideas for himself. Somewhere

down the line he put on a professor's round tortoiseshell frames where used to be black and boldly horizontal glasses, even his eyewear was a manifesto, how did he become so damned tasteful? Of course, of course, he replied to the therapist's nodding, it's what we do, we marry and make money for the mortgage, we keep the kids in orthodontia and Oshkosh, we're accomplices in our own abandonment. It's a line so familiar to him he's even made it alliterative, his tirade as rehearsed as the young man's complaint about art. And just now he doesn't want these half-sneaked cigarettes, he wants to smoke two packs one after the other or better still some fat cigar. He wants to argue with these men about art while with his left hand write that hundred pound novel, to grow a wild beard and eat with his bare hands and stare down the moon and scrawl his madness straight through the night. Yes that's an exaggeration but then again it isn't. The two men have stopped talking, their faces gone complacent, their discussion gone cold before the woman leaning forward and singing Come on you, you and whose army…. He concentrates on his drink, losing the men, the singer, everything but his glass, begins speaking to Patrice in his mind. When you return to the room you'll begin everything at once.

She doesn't slow down just pushes open the glass door in one fluid motion and keeps moving, turns the corner and scrapes her shoulder against the stucco wall. Exiting is like stepping into a new element, the humid night stifling but better than the hall, the swamp of smells is reassuring, reaffirming. The aquarium light cast by the blue halogens on the hotel, the wall of dense shrubbery, the fat leathery leaves. The sidewalk is damp and mossy, so slippery as to be treacherous. Is it petty to end a marriage based on the state of a spouse's toenails, the way he navigates a name tag? She hadn't wanted him to buy her the shoes, she'd only liked them a little. He'd misinterpreted it as a feeling that they couldn't afford it and bought them anyway, a purchase of sarcastic silences and exasperated sighs,

but really she just didn't want to know so specifically what would be his last gift to her. Her path takes her behind the hotel, she wants to avoid parking spaces and people, sometimes the whole world is an imposition. She finds instead the sour stink of garbage bins, the loading dock like a poorly-illuminated concrete stage. Butted up against the dock's rubber bumpers is a battered old truck with white cab and silver unlabeled sides. Rhythmic squeaking emerges from the hotel and a man comes out pushing a green flatbed dolly loaded with vases and tall outlandish bouquets no doubt from the ballroom, the realtors having finally retired. The man is stocky and stubble-jawed and grimly dutiful. Everything about him is perfunctory, the slack denims, the decrepit white t-shirt, the grayed sneakers. He lifts a vase and Patrice abruptly stops: he's squinting her way.

They had stepped blindly into the street but Randall recoiled, pulling her back as if a car were racing at them. The street instead was empty, no vehicles or crossing pedestrians, the few people there stood in the shade of awnings and doorways. Half a block down, a parade of people in dark suits moved toward them, others behind them in khakis and black t-shirts. Two trumpet players, their cocked arms revealing glimpses of black suspenders. A trombonist, a small bass drum beaten slowly, women with handkerchiefs at their mouths and children at their hems. Six men carrying the dark oblong box with lilies draped on its lid. Randall looked dumbfounded, his mouth slightly, familiarly agape. Patrice looked at him, her grip on the bag so fierce that her nails cut pink crescents into her palm. The slow scrape of hard soles on asphalt, the lowing of the trombone, sweat in the creases of every face. The high sun dropping everyone's shadows like pits beneath them.

What do you have, she asked, to be perturbed about?

What?

You said if you rant it's because you're perturbed. You were ranting. So?

You'll step out of the heels and unbutton the blouse and pull out one arm and start brushing your teeth before removing the other. You'll slip off the skirt while flossing and coat your face with cocoa butter cream and unfasten your bra and finally you'll kneel naked before the counter and take out your contacts in that posture that's so like praying. You'll beat the hell out of the pillow then sink your head back into it, another pillow over your eyes, bunched up against your ears and thinking, I know, thinking was it too much for the shoes, an extravagance? I'll realize it's late and stop in the gift shop to buy cigarettes for tomorrow, I'll buy some flowers because that's what we do or pull some from the ballroom, maybe some tremendous bouquet, it will obscure my chest, my face, I'll barely be able to see around it as I tote it to the room, you'll think this too is an extravagance, it's over the top, you'll give me that bemused smile, me and my Vesuvius of flowers. But remember, remember when you used to slingshot your brassiere at the wastebasket, when you used to squirt saline at me from the bottle? When all this was followed by you literally leaping at the bed, falling on me from out of the air?

BEN DOYLE

No City

But I have no city
no city to call mine

I own no city
nor suburb nor no

fraction of a gate no
but I have no town

no changing train
to own to call to mind

pour me four more
plastic glasses of that stuff

that spits out of the chemistry
sculpture the ingredient

list has the only pretty words
one more glass

like teeth in the entrance

but I have no city
an outline plus stains

a map of trade
routes winds & a market

community a target
humanity niche

I get so twitchy
when they call themselves me

poor wee small & still
sectored into exponential

ampersand halves that we must have
collective & infinitesimally bold

unsleepy really of insignificant massives
made less spectacular by the speed

of the network but we have
the lessons of shad

the congregations at the sopping basis
another full glass of that glass flake

like fangs in the craw

fluoridated they scrape
from the cutting room floors

from the operating room floors
the flooring store

poor us no tv but I guess
I have the movies I guess

the movies full of mistake
the cities behind them construction

their own context of powders papers
& fortune the prairies behind them

have their own cities to own
if I had one but the movies

are made to be made
if I made my own city that is

start in the middle & work our way down
shaft of dark lets

for the contiguous throngs

    coffee fountains
    cubic fiat
    density dance

but the best thing about a poem
it may be a city or is it a wristwatch

there is always an other

set your bludgeon by it
it all starts with someone

else's colony it all starts with a refusal
a carnal carnival a fun funeral

STEPHEN AJAY

Black Magic at the Guesthouse

for Dr. Patrick Swift and Dr. David Irwin

After being away from this house for so long,
the land around is dusty and flat. Oh, they
were the best exterminators who worked me
like a crossword puzzle. Before they set up
the subtlest coordinates, the bags the nurses
touched only with gloves dripped into the walls
with something they said would illuminate
the pests—this, before the buttons were pushed,
before the staircase and side porch, my favorite
places to walk, were hit. Soon the whirling overhead
began and they were full of reverence,
saw wild cells lit up on a black screen
and when the whirling wound down, they took
out their plumbs and let them sway on red strings.

I could see all this from inside the tight mask
that held me in place each morning. I could see the house
that had been me with the same outline as before.

Now, so much later, few strangers come
to the guesthouse but if they knock in the night
I will know them by the scars on their
faces and if they ask to be let in, I will
bow remembering that first time when
a tearing wind vibrated my joists
to exhaustion, left only part of the roof
and my flesh still sheltering my bones.

MARK DECARTERET

Down, Figurine, Down!!

> A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane.
> He is dangerous even if that idea is an idea
> of justice; for may he not bring the heaven
> down pitilessly upon a loved head. —*Nostromo,* Conrad

The moustache alone took an hour.
Not to mention the fiberglass hump.
So we put aside the rest of the plot instead
sticking with the yuck-yucks from the alleyway—
someone clearing their throat of more tragedy
and what looked like a buccaneer's flag
but ended up as a sky only half penciled in.
Those who hadn't asked for water now asked for it.
And those who stopped listening found no way to start.
Not even the ring of a nail being driven deep
into the earth raised us out from the trance.
You sit long enough your legs lose their place.
And speculation gives out like these flyers
holding out for that one match to dry.

Seeds often see little in the trees that they like.
They miss how the world could be sucked
through a straw in a day or two
not to mention all the naptime.
Now our stories are so similar it's spooky.
But spooky in that most common of senses
as if all those visions got bumped to the back
with the free trial software and the recipes:

how to make clouds arise like finger puppet Jesus',
these moths that lash themselves to some mast
just to witness a sunrise, and those crows that can't keep
from always checking their parts in a pie plate.
I can't get the way your fingers felt out of my head.
How is it those wed to the wind only hear
of that love that is spoken in whispers?

MARK DECARTERET

Horror Flick

What most of them couldn't help
but remember I have nearly forgotten—
the births they tried tidying up,
removing to the stalls with their arms
full of jars, their still trembling wares.
How the village is still rotten with it—
a montage of crepuscular skies
and every doomed castle since
the first ever rupture of light.

My love of the monster was not a small thing.
It once overheard that we shared the same soul.
So at night they would drive it
into hoary-limbed forests
with its dry iced embrace and canned prophecies
only to wake to it solving their swing sets again,
sampling the milk off their front steps.
Which of their gospels prepared them
for its gait and stitched memories,
its first ever cries from the manger?
What vision of Hell for its imports?

How they'd plead for its demise
with their own stunted prayers,
tried singing it back, deep into sleep.
But I continued the experiment nonetheless—

working the sky for its knowledge of light,
knuckling into more matter,
letting my shudders, my faint sparks be seen
even with the tossed heads and fixed stares,
the night sky lit up by their torches.

NICK COURTRIGHT

Everyday Crash

It is a no-think day like an even dozen horseflies
stuck to the glass but who put them there?

Lower eyes, keep them

on the street to see how here and there little bushels
of grass all in a row spring but don't look up

because a flag is waving like a rectangular tree
for the love of the strange spinning earth again—

such a thing maybe would stop if it could
but then what? —You can't say much about this

nor the flies with their sugary wings. But past
those black legs, that body like a terrible costume,

your eyes would see if they could

those thin wings surely beautiful
as any everyday crash of things against things.

NICK COURTRIGHT

All Those Globes

—See caves that cannot be. Too light. Inside
A nest, strings and twigs are warm. Like a sword,
Who will feel great joy when we die? A shame,

A gun, a sharp dumb gun commanding what
Remained unsaid: death is a hand covered
In ants, troubled by tulips. —Grand, the gas

Lantern warms a room, but only if it's
A small room. *O crier, thy sea! O, mad*
Laugher and sad sweater! —Belief, she says,

Is the milk of innocence—not good milk
But like water or silk: a lot will kill
A man. And hearts are all they want to be.

Suzie, whom I love, is not truly loved.
The truth: one shot, no keys, some sand, four fights.

MICHAEL HUDSON

Capital Punishment on the Day after Tomorrow

for C.S.

I'm afraid the Governor will snooze right through
my ice cream's final strawberry, or ignore

the ritual greasing of my arm's biggest and bluest
vein. And as for that woman

from *The Indianapolis Star,* ah, she'll be happy

to jot down the hour they come
to knot my hood, buckle my shoe, and squeak

me down their green linoleum hallway. But lady,
don't forget to write how April's pollen

furs my nostrils, even in this place,

or how the chaplain, nestled
snug within God's beard, murmurs me blameless

and harks me towards the light, away
from you, away from all these excruciating nows.

MARK EHLING

River Dead of Minneapolis Scavenged by Teenagers

Until you swim the river, and spend time watching what floats downstream, you're kind of surprised at first there are so many dead people. I swim under the trestle—Third Bridge, Hennepin Avenue, then back the whole length again—and I see the bodies. They float past at one and a half miles per hour. You can swim out and touch them. And you can check their pockets for money.

One thing I've noticed is that the meat on a drowned man—the flesh, not skin—is white, very bright white meat, and it looks exactly like sturgeon.

The other thing is that heads don't look like heads. They look like shrunken, very old potatoes. A guy might hook into, and then lift up, a drowned man with a gaff and then set that body dripping onto the bow of a tug boat or a timber barge in broad daylight and think to himself: *Now all I gotta do is find the eyes and I'll know I'm lookin' at a head.* But sometimes you can't find the eyes. You can't find ears. Noses, maybe.

There is no sound under water—no sound except the sound of water itself. There's no light. One thing that happens under the river in darkness is that a fish as long as a tall man will bump into my leg or my face. For a moment, there is a hairy, air-breathing descendant of apes suspended in water, which is me, listening to the sound of water, and he is suddenly hit in the face by a fish. And for a moment the ape-thing and the fish-thing are down there thinking of each

other. Some other guys I know have felt this and screamed. But under water it doesn't sound like a scream. It's just bubbles.

I don't know where drowned men come from. They just come from upstream. There is a bum's camp on Nicollet Island—at night you can hear the fights. Or maybe the drowned men come from the Yacht Club, which is not a club, but a bar on Marshall Avenue with the words YACHT CLUB written on it. It is many blocks from the river. Maybe guys get drunk there, walk ten blocks west, and trip.

It's nothing to touch a body. You swim out there and just take the arm and guide him into shore. You can't squeeze too hard, because drowned flesh is fibrous and weak and your fingers can push through it as if it were cake. Then a smell comes out of the skin-holes. So you learn to gently lead and hold, like walking grandma to Mass. One thing I always say to myself is, *Dead guys don't need money in Iowa*. So I take their coins and the crucifixes from around their necks, and I gently send them back out, in a manner of speaking, to sea. It's either the sea or the power plant.

A drowned body—if it floats well and does not hold fast to a root or a sunken log—will drift under the train trestle, flow past the hobo camp, float under the Third Avenue bridge, and then reach a junction with two forks: starboard, and it tumbles over the falls and continues south. Maybe Muscatine. Maybe the Gulf of Mexico. If it veers to port, that man's journey is done: stuck in a grate at the intake of the St. Anthony Falls power plant, damming the water and stopping up little scraps of paper and twigs.

I have seen how the men from the plant pull up a body with gaff hooks and poles. I see how they sit at the intake rail and wait for cops and light cigarettes and smoke. I can't touch the body anymore. It's theirs.

When I sit under the bridge and watch the plant workers pull up the bodies, I know that I am committing the sin of envy. I want their job, instead of the one I soon will have: serving concessions at the Jednota Hall to the Slovaks. To pass the time, I dive for scrap metal. Sometimes there is none. I put my clothes back on and get ready to go home. In about three weeks I start my summer job for real. I pick up a rock and throw it at the power plant. It doesn't even come close. It hits the water. It does exactly what you'd expect a rock to do. It sinks.

DANIEL GUTSTEIN

Salt and pepper

During the winter months, we played salt and pepper basketball games at the combat junior high school, mostly in the gymnasium, at half court, while the girls played volleyball on the other half of the floor, though not salt and pepper. One time, an errant volleyball crossed over the big screen the phys ed teachers had erected and collided with Solomos (salt), a short guy, who'd leapt up to take an improbable shot. The volleyball hadn't been struck hard, but Solomos reacted by taking a violent looping tumble, and had to be carried to the nurse by Wendell (pepper), the student assistant. One guy, Jackson, could almost dunk and he usually staked pepper to a comfortable lead. He and Hamlet (pepper) were the best two fighters in school. Nobody fought them and they never fought each other. Once in a while, though, as a reminder, they'd punch us all (salt and pepper) in the chest as we lined up for class. The smart kids, like Hanna (salt), would always take a notebook with them, to hold over their chests, but the gym teacher, Mr. Pimiento (salt), would always ask them why the hell they had notebooks on them for basketball games. Flowers (pepper) was widely regarded as the third best fighter until he and Ridgeway (salt) agreed to "go" after school, a bunch of us (salt and pepper) crowding behind the tennis courts. Ridgeway threw haymakers, his elbows working upwards as if he were taking a vigorous walk, backing Flowers up until he dropped. Pepper would win our basketball games by the following kinds of scores: 54-22, 46-12, 60-18. On balmy days, we'd play full court, outside. One time, as we were waiting for Mr. Pimiento to bring the basketball, a guy named Corsiatto (salt) tried to sing the lyrics to an AC/DC song, but didn't really know what he was doing: "…dirty deeds ander dunder cheap, dirty deeds ander dunder

cheap…," thinking "ander" and "dunder" were words. Later, toward the end of class, he chased a loose ball out of bounds, down a small hill. He hit a patch of mud and skated, shrieking, into the woods. We never saw him again. Not in phys ed. Not in school. Helms (pepper) grabbed the deodorant belonging to Cooper (pepper) and ran it all over his body, handing it back with nasty hairs all over it. The two wrestled into the showers, slipping and smashing onto the wet floor, while a gang of salt hung Farzad (neither salt nor pepper) by his underwear, on the inside of a tall locker. Solomos, who had since rejoined the class, was thrown into an industrial-sized dryer, where all our towels spun around after school. Adore (pepper), a kid from a francophone African country, never gooned it up. Neither did Birdy (salt) nor Sausages (salt). Nguyen (neither salt nor pepper) could not look at the sun and did not speak English. Green (pepper), the class clown, idolized the Swedish tennis star, Mats Wilander (salt), mostly for his first name—"Not Matt but Mats"—and he and Stubbs (half salt/half pepper) snuck off all the time to get high in Corsiatto's woods. Fat Mike (pepper) hit a jump shot. Carter (pepper) hit a jump shot. It was spring by then, the last basketball game before we played softball. Figgers (salt) tied the game with a jump shot. The ball came to me. I (salt) put up an ugly hook shot. The ball swirled around and around on the rim, a "toilet bowl" the guys called it, before dropping through the net. Mr. Pimiento took the ball, and Ellison (pepper) said, "Oh gawd!" before collapsing to the floor in jiggly contortions. The only game that salt had won. We passed through the gymnasium door, then, salt and pepper, one or two at a time, on our way to the locker room.

KIM CHINQUEE

A Hundred and A Thousand

After my father's mental breakdown, my sister got two goats. One she named A Hundred and the other was A Thousand. She bought the goats herself. She got up every morning, fed them hay and milked them.

One Christmas we didn't have any money and my mother was sick with the flu. My father walked around on drugs looking haunted. It was the Christmas before my mother left.

I was about twelve. My sister had told me that A Hundred had died. My sister said she had a fever, and would I go out to milk A Thousand. I put a Santa hat on A Thousand, resting it on her horns, singing "Silent Night." I asked her if she missed A Hundred. She ate her hay and I pulled on her teats and the milk shot into the bucket.

When I returned, there were presents under the tree. My sister said that it was Santa. My father got a Devils jersey, my mother Spanish cookbooks, and for me, eyeshadow, lipstick, earrings. There was nothing for my sis, but she said she didn't care because she was a good investor. And she wasn't sick anymore. She sat at my father's desk making calculations about purchasing and profits. She said goat meat was expensive. It was the start of her career in economics.

My dad ate peanuts and farted, watched hockey on TV, and my mother was in bed, screaming for iced tea. My sister went out with her tape to measure A Thousand, and I turned the radio up, putting on gloss.

POETRY FEATURE

K. A. Hays

K. A. HAYS

The Snow Queen Speaks of April

In the long months, the cold has lips
like a burn nothing can soothe.
It carries chains. The cold rubs up

to night and coaxes it to bed,
claims it. I know the need: to slip
a sheet over the passive buds,

to bludgeon the thyme and slow
the juncos. Look: the seedlings
curtsy, shy under their garlands, and sleet

gives stinging keyboard clicks, working
to make coherent the ivy, the dormant
crab grass. The chimes hang unswaying,

as if the Romans built them. I want to see
as a garden would, in winter: the toad
under leaves, mapped in brown,

a fine and perfect art. Soon he will heat
and hunger, dig out to sing, mate
messily in April. I don't love the cold,

but it knows me. If I went to it and stood,
it would make of me what I want to find elsewhere—
an exhibit: lustrous. Held even on the verge of being lost.

K. A. HAYS

Meanwhile

All of us, every one,
will be dissolved not long from now.

Meanwhile we tuck away the winter's claims,
put photos in a box, look elsewhere.
It is not as difficult as it would seem

to shrug off the dead. Half the population
could go in fires—ah, we would say, but look,
the snowdrops hang their weeping brows
beneath the shrubs: a sign of spring!
And the winged insects, hatching.
There will be a disasters special
on the news tonight—we will mourn then.

Now the grackles have returned.
I hear their hideous clacking
as they slam about in packs, settling
in the stripped branches—moving
as if an equation, perfect. That is how
we must live: mathematically,
like seedlings in the shade of the old
ash, waiting for rot, when we will fight
for a place to grow.

K. A. HAYS

Sacrament

And the hectic show of birds rewinds
and plays itself endlessly, loops, rallies
through this warped and baffling film we call
the real. What perfect closeness they have, circling
the chimneys, pillaring down—it seems surprising
when out of that sifting

a swift breaks itself on a window, folds to the road,
the sun brilliant as an empty pan. The seconds
skip on, unflagged, and the grass gives itself to the seeded
wildness it wants to become. What does it mean
when a swift comes to eat its own dead? To be safe,
we must jeer at the birds,

they are so different. To them we are only alien
flesh, a smell that moves in the brush;
as one, they bob on the air's tides. It is as if
they had divine purpose, as if we were second
to them—as untroubling as the stars. Philistines.
I want that kind of communion.

K. A. HAYS

This Morning After Snow, the Body Scrapes Off

sludge, is mere action. It strips the sleet from the walk
at dawn, blue-lit, forging a path as water would,
with that constant stream of spite for solids, whose fixed

contented stupor everyone wants. A pain—
that we're mostly water and therefore subject

to the flaws liquid has, in addition to the joke
of being aware. Best, if we can manage it,
to annul thought—to hunch frozen, ground-bent

and sure as bullies, fixing the brow as if
a thread were drawn from leaf-rot to face, sewn

up to the fickle air. Best, after too much
vision, to be only might—an organizing
grunt, a mass. Gutted. Shoveling corewards.

K. A. HAYS

Leap

after Søren Kierkegaard

There must be a joke in the light to lure him out—
though the sky droops, pewter and flat, the grim
first face of dawn—or he would not perch

in the spruce, launching into late winter

his red mantra. He sings like one of those doomsayers
on city streets, as urgent as that, only with a crimson
exuberance, an orange-mouthed sense. I wouldn't hope

to be a bird, but what about one of those

flea-like insects who show up on snow in March
hopping, plying themselves onto the bellies
of dogs and wool socks, whatever walks

and holds heat. The absurdity of their being

thrust into ice crystals too soon in spring—
such suffering, and for nothing but time
to make more sufferers before a departure

mired in pain, no doubt, headless and twitching—

it's stunning, that they jump sixty times their height
for a few dumb instants and sex. When the kingfisher

streaks past me upstream after some hoary

darting thing, then dives, terrible missile,

into the river's cadaverous crust, thrusting
far through the current then flashing out
wet-white-blue with that spiked crest

knifing the light and a fish in its thick

comic beak, I want that kind of faith
or unthinking willingness to fall
into the difficult places cold and sure

as Abraham or as a simple tail feather

cued by some ancient stupidity we call
wisdom, and to be happy to go.

K. A. HAYS

In the Garden

Afternoons past three o'clock, the orchard shrugs.
The unripe apples look jaded and the air
tastes like fruit fermented. Afternoons
make us listless things, overripe. Why is it?

And soon that rattler, tomorrow, will swallow us,
its skin first gold, then brown, then black…Pluck,

heave me away to the compost. Afternoons I need
to talk epistemology with something ugly
and inanimate: the earth, for example.

Dr. John, 1985

SMITH HENDERSON

Blooms

Can we blame them for the fire?

First consider the paving contraption itself, Sully perched atop it and steering with the levers. Vince and the rest of his uncle's crew followed behind and tapped flat what asphalt the hot screed left pocked or dimpled. Consider the griddlelike screed the size of a sandbox, and the repurposed barbecue grill tank that rattled where it was bolted to the paver. The diesel engine shook and spat the lurching machine down the drive.

And Sully had to mind the length of radiator hose, certified to five-hundred degrees, lest it vibrate onto the screed and burn through. Plus the fucking spigot to which the hose attached had no teeth. No clamps or duct tape could withstand the heat and the juddering of the paver, and the hose very often popped off and spewed propane across the hot screed. Vince and the others would holler over the din of the diesel engine and strike the machine with their shovels to alert Sully, who would turn and look dully at their engine-drowned shouting and pointing. But because of how his father died and he himself nearly died—suffocating in a propane-filled camper—Sully would hook the hose with his boot and snap it from the heat-shimmering screed as soon as he smelled the gas. He'd stop the paver, crouch, and take up the line. The gas pouring out of the tank lightened his head, rendered the Missoula maple trees and the men leaning on their shovels and fetching cigarettes as they might behind a curtain of up-falling water.

When today the hose burned through, the blasting gas set it twisting like a garter snake in a boy's hand, and a chance arc of

static electricity lit the gas. Vince and the men screamed and beat the machine with shovels to alert the oblivious Sully of the flaming and thrashing hose. But the diesel engine backfired and he did not hear them before he was lashed about his torso by this flaming and impossible viper. He shrieked and leapt from the paver that trundled onward driverless and without valence into the street. He cringed where the flannel burned on his back, and Vince and the others slapped out the blooming black holes on Sully's shirt as he gripped his knees. Dumbstruck all, they watched the length of hose melt still thrashing in the air like the final tentacle of some creature caught and painfully drawn into the machine's workings. The hose burned up to the nub of the spigot and then from the tank itself a flaming column now rode the paver as if some fire god or devil had commandeered the vehicle and purposed to crash into the cars that had stopped and now reversed from the residential intersection towards which the paver rolled.

Vince was at once brave. He sprinted to the machine, hopped across the screed that melted his boot heels. Shielding his face with a gloved hand, he put another gloved and instantly smoking hand to the knob of the tank, and twisted it closed. The tank spat a sky-blue flame at him and died. The paver continued its lumbering advance into the street until Vince killed the engine, its final racket like a dryer full of bolts. Silence. A vague hissing. Birds resumed their songs. Vince's gloves stuck to the melted plastic on the levers. The dials like guttered candles. He stepped from this smoldering ruin, landed awkwardly, stumbled, and then showed the men, Sully, and the people clapping next to their cars how he could pull his boots up his ankles, and too where only a gum of heel, the insoles, and his socks remained between his feet and the street.

Where did they go after Vince's uncle showed up, took one look at the incinerated paver and then at the burned-up Sully and accused him of being drunk or high or both, so that Sully and Vince told him to go take a flying fuck and quit?

To Charlie B's where the walls celebrated in framed 8x12s the cherished sots, each dead archsot among them marked with a silver star in the corner of his image. Vince and Sully—who were only eighteen and nineteen—could drink there because they fell and fit in with these afternoon drinkers, the first-shifters from the mill in Bonner and the old drunks on social security. Charlie B's was rife with smells and noises like those known to them in the bars of their hometown. The idiot dinging of Keno machines, the cigarette smoke, shouting, mumbling, and even a man who quietly gibbered until someone bought him his first shot. Bars where they hazarded as boys, from where the owner or the deputy sheriff or one or the other's mother eventually rousted them.

Today's severance pay smoldered in their pockets and they had a story to tell of the paver fire, a story they did not have to initiate, for Sully's crinkled skin, though not yet blistered or supperant, glazed with Neosporin from his glove box. He stank from where the propane fire had singed his black wooly hair rust-orange, and he still wore the shirt with the fire blooms on it, proudly, as if garlanded by it. Vince stood barefoot at the bar, his soleless boots like shell game shells over his feet.

What dying logging community of their origin might we blame?

Tenmile, about a hundred and fifty miles north, between the Cabinet and Salish ranges, not far from the borders of Idaho and British Columbia. Tucked up in the corner of Montana like a dust bunny. A union-suit-whipping-on-the-clothesline kind of town. Where old Studebakers are shot through with bullets and timothy. An eight-man high school football kind of town. The kind of place where it might occur to you to walk out through the cheatgrass into the cottonwoods behind the body shop to stick a honey bear full of grain alcohol up your ass, squeeze, and get drunk that way. Yowling each night from within a different trailer in the park, some of it from

fucking, some from fighting, some just to get somebody anybody even the cops to come and behold the methamphetamined, nicotined, alcoholic outrage within. A town peopled with old cranks, broke farmers, loggers, and at least two pickupsfull of teenage louts who came up out of their beer-soaked loitering in the mist by the river or from their parking spot near the Ace Hardware to beat on Vince again for spray-painting GOD IS A FAG on the wall of the Dairy Queen or Sully for his smirk, his thick black curly hair, his army jacket with names of bands scrawled all over it in black felt tip. Parked in Sully's Subaru on some switchback on some mountain, they drank cold syrup and smoked the flecks, seeds, and stems of weak marijuana. They ran afoul of all three of the cops there, the principal and teachers, the Ace Hardware and the Dairy Queen. Ill gossip attended their lorn mothers. The lot of them trash, even for Tenmile. It was said that they couldn't even see Fucked from where they were.

What occasioned their departure?

Sully's mom kicked him out. Vince's mom forbade Sully from entering her trailer.

They camped in the mountains just below the old ghost town of Deerwater. Talked over beers on opposite sides of the fire about going to Seattle or Portland or Boise or Missoula. The owls went silent from the ruckus of Tenmile boys getting drunk up at the ghost town, smashing the old tavern and flophouse. When the noises ceased, Sully said they ought to put out their fire but it seemed chickenshit to actually do it. They listened to the gang defile down through the firs, and when they appeared in the ring of light from the fire and told them to stand up, Vince and Sully did. They told Sully to give up their beer. Vince said they had no more, that it didn't matter if they did anyway because these boys had come for one thing: to beat on Vince and Sully. One of the louts said that

seemed like a fine idea and hit him in the mouth. Sully fled but Vince stood and took it.

When they finished they propped Vince in the firelight. In attitudes satisfied and craftsman-like they held his head and inspected the marks they had made on his face. Then they kicked the burning sticks out of the fire as if the light offended them and they left.

Sully slunk back. Vince sat in the dark like nothing had happened. They collected their things from where they were strewn and drove out of the woods. Each waited in the car while the other took a garbage bag of belongings from home. By sunup they were driving south to Missoula.

How exactly did they find themselves in Missoula?

Happy, free, and resourceful. The summer city was sleepy without university students. The sunsets were the color of melon from forest fire smoke. With Sully's old Stella guitar they busked for quarters and dollar bills on Jacob's Island near the campus. They shoplifted hamburger and grilled on a cookie sheet they fished from the ditch. They dry camped up the Rattlesnake. They floated the Clark Fork every day and befriended the bums under Higgins Street bridge who bought them their liquor. They ate chickenfried steak at the poker table in the Oxford Bar when they could afford it.

They craved more. A little bored after Vince healed and they were hale and wanting tattoos, marijuana, crystal meth, and a place to take girls, none of which they could afford on the wages from Sully's crude pluckings. They paid Vince's uncle a visit, got hired on his crew, and moved out of Sully's Subaru and into an apartment near the river, across from downtown.

Was the work hot and manual and mindless? Did they dig and pave? Treat with oil and sealant? Did they edge and mow and otherwise landscape, and scrape and prime and paint and stain? Did they go home sore but strong,

and nap and rise to meet the night? Did they skirmish with hicks in pick-ups who even here in soft Missoula were endemic and hated the very look of them—Vince skinny and shirtless, Sully with a clothespin in his ear—like the last combatants in a lost feud? Did they do what drugs they could, have over girls who took off their panties and stayed up all night with them? Did they drink deep of their new cup? Was it a grand time, possessed of the joy of young men who have discovered previously unknown thirsts and the ways to slake them?

Hell yes.

And by degrees they became unreliable, late for work or too hung-over or high for it, so that when the paver burned up, it was natural for Vince's uncle to fire Sully, to not care that Vince quit with him.

How did they tell of the conflagration to the old men in pearl-snapped shirts and vests, dirty Carhartts and flannels and cowboy or work boots who gathered at the end of the bar at Charlie B's? What enchanted these men who have seen it all, heard and burned it all themselves?

The mimicry that was a kind of obeisance. Vince and Sully spoke as their fathers spoke, though neither had seen his father in years. Inflected like them, jargoned like them, stood and gesticulated like them. Enhanced by Sully's constant tuning of the cherry-colored Stella, as if the tale would require music at some point. They told it as if yoked to some purpose, comic and for profit.

Sully said, I was trying to keep the sumbitch flush with the fence-line. Why they put the fence in before the damn pavement, I wont ever understand. But it is loud on that mother, you know. Thing puts a shiver on you good. Lookit my hands. Still shaking and not because of the fire or being scared. I go to bed vibrating every night. Swear to god.

So what happened?

Like I was saying, as fucking usual that hose from the propane tank pops free of where it attaches to the screed. Hell, Vince should tell you. He seen it better than I did actually.

Go ahead, Vince said.

No you tell em. Tell em what it looked like.

Vince took a sip of beer, looked around, met each eye like all glad-handing, master bullshitters do before a good embellishment.

You know how a hose on full-blast will flop around in the yard? Well, that's what this hose was doing, only spewing propane. Over that—what, six hundred degree?—over that screed. And Sully here is just staying flush to that fence—

You try and back one of those pavers up, Sully interjected.

And so he dont notice that propane is spraying all over the place behind him, even though we started to whale on the machine to get his attention. Thing is, we prolly sparked it with our damn shovels, and this blanket of blue fire flashes over the screed and that hose catches and damned if it didnt just start flipping around in the air like this—

The men chuckled now at the charmed-snake dance Vince did with his arm.

And alla sudden it snaps Sully on his ass and he up—

Vince hopped from his barstool.

—and looking around like, *What the fuck?* And this time it comes and snaps him on the ear—

The men laughed, gathered, increased their number around Vince and Sully, and Vince danced like someone was firing a gun at his feet.

—and now he's pissed, because he's still driving and cant figure what the hell is going on. And he's trying to keep that paver true and just shooting us the stink eye because he thinks one of us at the back of the paver is doing it. And I'm pointing at the hose, but it's moving so damn fast he cant see it over his shoulder and he gets stung again and again and—what, you stepped or something?

Sully set the guitar on the bar and said, I take a step and the thing is between my legs and flipping around and just burning me, man. Burning me all over. God it hurt. Still hurts. Lookit my shirt.

Stop, someone cried. I'm a piss myself.

Sully swatted at an invisible flame-snake. And Vince in pantomime covered his genitals, puffed his cheeks. The old boys exploded in laughter.

How did the telling and retelling turn a profit? What, after all, rent the friends? What about after they told the story?

The old men told of other disasters, tilted away drunk, new ones drifted in and were called over, and Vince and Sully retold it. They were set for beer because of it and Sully's orange clown hair and Vince's bottomless boots. And over and over some hard old boy clapped Vince on the shoulder, put a beer or a shot in his hand, admired him through eyes crowfooted from seasons of squinting in the sun's reflection off white planes of snow, and said, Goddamn brave of you getting up on there and turning that tank closed.

Vince thanked the man, Sully nodded, and the excitement of the event and its telling diminished each time. The setting sun cut slant through the windows, lanced the smoke with light and heat.

Vince finally said, Shit dude, that old boy didnt know what the hell he was talking about. You were saying for weeks that the damn thing was a firetrap.

Naw. That took some sac, Sully said.

Shit.

And everybody had a good laugh. You tell it real funny.

Sully spat and leaned against the back bar.

It's just a story, Sul. I didnt mean to—

Show me up?

Hell no.

Dont matter. I always come out lookin like chickenshit, dont I?

Then Sully began to drink like he'd seen his father drink. Little glass of brown water, big glass of yellow foamy water. Vince was already bloodshot and reeling. Footing the peanut shells. They were quiet.

Would it have helped if there had been girls at Charlie B's that night, with Sully drinking so much and Vince keeping up and joining him for hits of crystal in the Subaru parked on the street, right there out in the open like they just wanted to spend the night in jail?

Perhaps. Maybe not. The crystal was wrong, cooked or cut funny, thick with jitters and shy on euphoria. Though it burned in their lungs, jolted them from beer and whiskey bleariness, they hardly spoke, and when Vince tried to fault himself, to apologize, Sully would shake him off, say, We cool, and turn up the hardcore in the tape deck, and take another hit.

Could it really be called a fight what they had when the tape ended and Sully lurched out and Vince followed him and called him back and Sully strode off into the alley where Vince chased him and tried to grab and hold him and Sully shoved him and like brothers they had it out grappling and headlocking and even a little crying, like brothers turning in that alley in the dark who would have appeared to passersby as groping lovers or clutching cowards but were in fact fierce and bruising and abrading, uncoupling and panting and coupling again in muffled violence that sounded in grunts and would not escalate but seemingly could not abate?

No. For there was an inarticulate but no less binding pact that fists would not enter into it. There would be no hitting. This was bad enough, for dumbshit hillbillies fought with fists, fought at all. Not them. They were free. Fatherless. There were no disciplining men or gods except what each of them was to himself alone.

But Vince at last submitted to Sully's main strength and burnt and sweaty reek and fell backward onto the ragged alley pavement and broken glass. Sully straddled him and even this was like Vince had thrown the contest, the fight they were not in fact having. Sully's face glistened from sweat and where his blistered face wept, as if the tears came from his whole face and not his eyes.

What did Sully whisper in Vince's ear as they sat on the back bumper of his Subaru, which Vince did not listen to, having heard it a hundred times, and because it embarrassed him to hear it even once, and because he was swollen, dizzy, and grateful at least that Sully was beside him partly because they were friends bosom and true, and partly because Sully beside him meant that there was one less of them out there, and he was grateful that the world was not swollen with people such as he and Sully, who were broken and stupid and every bit as bad as hicks, and deserved everyday to be lashed by fire gods and who would have made a fire to burn themselves if the world did not see fit to provide one? What was it Sully whispered?

It was me and Daddy in there. In the camper. I didnt want to go. But Mom made me. For my tenth birthday we was going hunting. Big deal, I thought. I was a shit about it. Pouted the whole way up. We got settled in somewhere around Deerwater, and he has a ton of beers that I fetch for him. He lets me beat him at cribbage and we go to bed.

I woke and I was choking. I dont know. I could breathe, but the air was like it wouldnt, you know, take. And all down my hands, all down my arms, it was so cold it burned. But bearable, not like real fire, and I knew it was killing me.

I musta hit every corner and cabinet trying to just get out of that motherfucking camper. It was cold outside, boy. And not just the air. Well the air is what I'm talkin about, but the air that got into my lungs. I gagged on it at first, that clean air. I walked about twelve

feet from the camper. Clear cold night like tonight. I was seeing extra stars. Oh I was sick. Headache like you never had and my ears ringing and throwing up.

What does Sully always say at this point?

There wasnt any going back in there for him. I just knew it. It was all matter a fact like that. I'm ten years old. He weighs two-fifty, easy. The camper is filled with propane. I'm sick. I aint gonna save him. No one is.

What does he say this time instead?

I closed the door, Vince. I went right by him, his big still body. And I closed the door behind me.

If not to make Sully look like chickenshit, why did Vince jump on the paver and turn closed the tank?

In the winter the bus came in the dark and dawn came after class had begun, when their chilblains had quit itching. Sully hunched behind an angled desktop, his forearm in his mouth as if to eat it. With a smack he popped the arm free and inspected his efforts in the new sun and was pleased. He showed Vince where blood died in pools just under his skin, where he had splotched and flattered his arms with purple blooms, the possibilities if you were not afraid.

CHRIS DOMBROWSKI

Tarnation

When the goose fell dead at the bus stop, it was not quite dead (the hunter having taken a high shot, because the goose would not decoy, the spreading wad of bismuth pellets shattering only the left phalange, barely piercing the breast), so when a plucky girl broke the wavering boys' semi-circle, reaching to hoist the bird in her arms, its black head shot out hissing, its good wing flailed Icarus-like (though the children knew nothing of him yet), fanning gutter trash until the chocolate Lab arrived (stretching with each purposed stride his neoprene camo vest, cock bouncing, toenails clicking ridiculously on the cul-de-sac sidewalk) to clamp his jaws—after a brief scurry, stutter-flight—around the pillowed shoulders of the goose that was still not quite dead. Shotgun shouldered (afraid so), the hunter soon appeared, a tad portly, knelt and pried bird from beast's mouth, stroked the tooth-torn plumage, scratched his *good girl* behind the ear. Then twisted the bird's esophagus shut, stepping back from the throes as the bus (yellow, lethargic as a swath of mill-tinged dawn) climbed, crested the hill, and coasted to a curbside stop: its driver surveying the scene (*Tarnation*), releasing the brakes, filling the poised air with a collective gasp.

CHRIS DOMBROWSKI

Vespers Beginning as Sheep Tallow in the Hands of a Priest

—St. Ignatius, MT, 1856

No less important than the light
is what it falls on: penitent coil of wick
rising from clay floor to scraps of tallow

shaped into the candle hung (bare wall,
three nails, the casual horror of the iron)
beside a window open this spare March evening

to homeward geese, their mist-parting calls, a rainfrock
above mountains we named Mission
for the building we built beneath them.

*

By now it's another life's list: a pasture
veiled in frost where a frost-colored mare
lowers her head to graze; a kite without a wind

to fill it; the quilt laid across my mother (its blue
of washed and sunbaked stones) whose wheezing
kept time with the rocking chair the plump

monsignor always chose, his Saint Louis habit
of talking at great lengths about books he'd never
read; her dress hanging still wet on the line, mothlit

as I prayed her passage was; brotherless,
keeperless, a blackbird flying so quickly west
the coming, evening sky fails to darken.

⋆

We live beneath these mountains as if
beneath the stoppage of time: snow-blanketed
distance, the clouds' one encumbrance…

As if beneath the last statues worthy
of adoration, the remaining uncorrupted,
snow gathered atop them as on

the shoulders of the dead. And these tribes,
the dying dead-to-be: I pray they seal up those things
uttered by the seven tongues and write them not,

for we novitiate have failed to learn,
even with the fat of the Lamb on our hands,
any of their rectitude. Even with the valley's light

lapidary in the canyon creases, the two rivers
joining limpidly. —*If God is for us,*
who can be against us? Besides God?

SARAH ESTES GRAHAM

Autumn on The Steppes

Our horses pass ivory bones of other horses steadily,
spooking at chance bottle caps in the sun.
It's hard to imagine drinking a beer out here,
Green Sargassum stretched to the horizon—
inland basin of grass and bone.

An hour on horseback, and you've taken a step backwards.
Ten thousand years, and no one notices.
Nomads walk the plains for water,
ankle bones and winter dice.

Late August winds flatten green to white
as the search slows to wait and see
        if the food will hold.
Strung carcasses felt the walls.
Children roll the die,
        hope for lucky ankle bones.

J. MATTHEW BOYLESTON

Writing Like I Live in Tel Aviv

March and the olive trees show buds.
The world is only as new as the mind of the nearest infant.
I wanted to talk to my heart but I found a woman
who knew a secret spot out in the desert
where no one came save the stray
boys hiding from the Mossad.
And the stray boys would not bother us.
And the sun over the cliffs of Jaffa is as soft as blood.
Who will disturb us with the talk of dangerous things,
like a heart attack, like the glass shards waiting
at the bottom of the thinning pool,
like the life we are bound to if we read too much?
I drove a car to Ashqelon near the Gaza Strip and forgot the way home.
Life is the road and the unpaved sand after the road has ended.
It is the kerchief of a woman who wakes up in Tall al Ful.

HAESONG KWON

The Other Alibi

Twenty-three years
after the war, I couldn't
find the gates to the tavern
path, the small
gravels. I kept
seeing the same
flicker of throwing
or launching, longer

than I remember, and tall
as the pointing
Buddha in the stretch
of my mountains.
You could sense
the croon of the plains
toad, wheeling about
the fronds and spring.

HAESONG KWON

To Hills

Some let you rot
for gravid fish.

They twig their
gums with rose.

By the stream
that's fast,

sometimes before
the pinkish spawn,

a hawk will
ask for more,

as in: to mother
God, two twitches

of prey, as in:
not this, not that

ALLEN BRADEN

What Returns

A calf born with two heads
was buried under the loading chute.
That was the year the barn cat's litter
all had six toes for walking atop the snow,
the only reason they survived at all.
It was easy to miss the signs then.
No one missed the child
trapped within the trundle bed
nor minded a drownt bird in the cistern.
Outside my window on nights of wind,
that calf would not die.
I could hear it but found no trace in the snow.
So often I remember the torn skin
shed by a snake, that paper-thin occurrence
of another life, hidden away in the dresser
…a life belonging to one of us.
Maybe you. Maybe me. No one doubts this.

You should know everything I've said
up until now is mostly untrue.
The child was afraid
to play under the bed
and the calf was unremarkable really
though the body is buried where I said
on account of deep snowfall,
the coyotes' hunger that winter.

What returns is not as important
as how, how it can blow back
like certain weather without a trace
beyond your window. The truth seems
at this instant a reconstruction
of the child I once was
playing in a clear-cut beneath a hawk,
the cursive scrawled by its wing
almost legible.

ROBERT PAUL WESTON

Paris, France (Somnumbulitis)

I brought home flowers. Helen filled the green vase with sugar water. They were stargazer lilies, Helen's favorite. I thought of them as ostentatious, but I couldn't name another kind I preferred. Helen put the vase on a shelf by the west-facing portal, for light. The sun pushed their shadow up the wall. The wallpaper resembled a shattered windscreen.

We watched the news, a succinct broadcast. Voice only. There were no images. There was little to report.

We played Scrabble. I won, laying down ZEPHYR as if by magic. But a running tally was tucked inside the box; the word buffeted ineffectually against Helen's enduring lead.

We held hands.

Dawn. I canted the blinds, sliced the light to ribbons. They striped Helen's face like gift wrap. She rolled over. In the living room, the telephones glimmered like insects. I pressed their buttons.

"Matthew?" said the recording. "Where are you? I'll stall if I have to, but hey, c'mon."

There were more: "The whole remediation team is here. Hey, look. You know I can't honestly talk contingency planning without you, right?" "Matt? It's me. If something happened you'd tell me, right? It's me, yeah? Matthew?" "Can you hear this? I'm not sure. The meeting's over, guy. Jeez."

I assumed my colleague had his days mixed up. The risk mitigation people weren't coming until later that day, not until noon. So why telephone in the middle of the night? Something was amiss, I thought. I ought to get going.

In the shower, the water fell over me like sunshine. When I slid open the shower stall, Helen was there. She was perched on the toilet, on top of the towel I'd set for myself. Two newspapers hung over her knees like caught fish.

"There's two," she said.

"I'll take one to work."

"I mean there's two." She held them up. "I think we've overslept."

The doctor was tall, the crown of her head wreathed in an aerie of gray thatch. I tried to explain. Helen bit her lip; she kept at it until an incisor got into the meat. Her teeth were suddenly, startlingly red. The doctor failed to notice. The popped lip speckled her chin with a single, deep red spot.

The doctor stayed on-message. "Listen to your body," she said. "Your body knows best. If you need to change your habits, your body will find a way to tell you." I was unsatisfied. "But we weren't even hungry," I said.

"We weren't even thirsty," said Helen.

The doctor's mouth made a motherly expression, an apologetic smile. It resembled a seashell, or a poorly rendered W.

That evening, a Saturday, we attended a party as planned. The helicopter landed at nineteen-hundred hours. Clumsy men spewed from the hold. "COME ON!" they yelled, trampling everyone's rhododendrons. Their voices carried astonishingly well over the wind and turbines. In the porch light they hollered, "YOU CAN STILL MAKE IT! GO, GO, GO!"

We relented. Helen had already prepared the appropriate footwear. Soon, we scudded above poplars and a neighbor's child was blown horrifically from her bicycle. There was recycling everywhere. More guests were collected before leaving for the suburbs, so we witnessed the same shouts over and over. The pilots, evidently, worked from a script.

At the doors, we were offered surgical masks and hard-wearing green pants. Behind the house, the booze came from intravenous drips under a small bivouac of M.A.S.H. tents. Puncturing the skin was optional. Most merely put tubes in their tumblers and squeezed. Once she had her drink, a large one, Helen vanished. The hosts were friends of hers from college. She knew the layout better than me.

A theatre troupe was commissioned to play the enemy. "Look for the yellow outfits," I was told. "If you see one, shoot them dead." The woman gave me a solemn air rifle. It was important to remember people by the sounds of voices, muffled as they were through gauze masks. Some were spackled with crimson paint, but I never saw a single yellow jumpsuit.

Partner swapping was going on. I ducked out on a proposition from an army nurse. I lied to her. I told her—unfashionably, I realized—that I preferred my wife. I spent much of the night exploring the building, tramping up and down and up every kind of stairway. I found Helen in one of the basements, smoking marijuana with a celebrity chef. I smoked some too and once we'd arrived at a roach, Helen tugged me up the nearest stairway. She led me to an abandoned guest room with a door that locked. She fucked me in nothing but muddy, high-laced boots and a facial bandage. It was a compelling twist and I came, but only when I thought of Muriel.

Afterwards, Helen asked me how many people I'd killed and again, I felt the urge to lie. "Three," I told her.

We took the first available chopper home. We upset the pilot by insisting he leave without a full load. He claimed he had been a participant in a real war. No one believed him. The weather was poor. The engines screeched and fell silent at worryingly intervals. It kept us all on edge. Only one of us could sleep—a fat man.

As we alighted in our neighborhood, sheltie after sheltie howled at us. Helen hurried indoors. I forced myself to tidy everyone's newspapers. I felt responsible.

Inside, Helen sat by the television. The screen was blank, not even a voice. "I'm not tired," she said. "I feel like tea. We're out of decaf." I wasn't tired yet either. We decided to go for a drive. We bought steamed milk from our city's only drive-thru Starbucks. We parked at the airport. An impassable warren of fences crept up around us like trees. We sipped two-handed from paper mugs. A jam of air traffic slid over us. The air pressure rattled the fences and made everything sway like a cradle.

Officer Bib woke us. His face was the sort of round and repellant that's ideal for a certain kind of coercion. His deathly truncheon knocked the glass. "We've been looking for you," he said.

Beside me, Helen was still dozing. Her mouth was open and her upper lip was curled against her teeth. She resembled an unconscious cat.

At the station, Bib's partner, a man named Clemens pelted us with questions. "Do you ever dream of death?! Your own?! That of those around you?! Do you consider yourself superior to your peers?! Have you ever harmed yourself, a sibling or a pet for reasons that are unclear to you?! As a child, did you aspire to attain a station in life greater than that which you currently occupy?!" He slapped his pair of ruddy palms against tables, chairs, walls and his shouts recalled the helicopter pilots from the party in the suburbs. Clemens left us frustrated and Bib took over. He coddled us with compliments, but we refused to fill out their questionnaires. We were worried about our health. That was all. Neither one of them believed us, but we were unwittingly shrewd. They had no choice but to let us go.

Two months had passed. My colleagues had been the ones who filed the lost person report. We discovered we were now unemployed. Insurance didn't apply because, on the surface of things, ours was a case of truancy.

Helen wished to return to the tall doctor, but I refused. Our visit had confirmed a lifelong prejudice: the world is too easily swayed by scopes and tongue depressors. Doctors know nothing more than any of us. "I'm going to try my herbalist," I said.

Helen was silent.

I hadn't been to an herbalist since my teens (adolescent acne, fruitlessly treated with pills and salves and scents) and I believed they too were as blind as any doctor. Herbalist was my code word for Muriel. A whispered phone call would trigger a relapse of a vague illness and I would vanish to visit "Lionel Keller." Keller was real. He propped up a clinic on Seventh Avenue beside a mattress factory. I had never met the man in person.

Muriel and her family had recently moved to the top of the Williamson Building. The incline was murderous. I was certain our little Malino would tumble backwards, but no. At the crest, Jim kneeling in their allotment. He and Muriel had quite a few rhododendrons of their own. Jim's pants were gathered in at the knees with bright orange pads. His whole front was flecked with fake dirt. Looking closer, I could see the rhododendrons were also artificial. He had dug out two little cup holders of soil, a bottle of beer in each.

I smiled. "Is Muriel around?"

Jim cocked his head at the house. He watched me go inside without saying a word.

Muriel was in the centre room. She was on her knees, helping Karden with a jigsaw puzzle. The image was of horses in a pen.

In her fingertips, Muriel's piece hovered over the table. "This is a surprise."

"How are you doing?"

The piece of the puzzle descended. She pressed it forcefully into place with the pad of her thumb. "Here I am," she said. "Doing fine. Is that all?"

"I'm sick, Muriel."

"So you've come to see your herbalist?"

"It's both Helen and me. We've caught something."

She invited me up to the roof and I told her about it. She didn't know what to say. We were just staring at each other when Karden came running. He scaled up Muriel like a gibbon, clamped his legs around her waist and choked her. "Dad says we can go swimming! On Sunday!" It was nearly dusk; his face lit up like everything below us.

Muriel grinned as well. "I haven't been swimming in a long, long time."

Karden squirmed. "Let's play piano!"

The unit was no bigger than a candy bar. Karden played Old Black Joe. It's a simple tune, but the boy startled me by finding a hidden grandeur. Muriel sang into a tiny microphone. The sound was something else. Speakers were everywhere. I would have liked to have joined in, but it was impossible. I'm tone deaf.

"Well, I'd better go," I said. Neither one of them heard me. The music covered everything like wet snow.

At home, Helen was on the sofa. The lilies were dead and dry. They were on the table, swaddled in newspaper. Only the stems were showing. Helen was on the couch. She lay there like a spineless thing. "The doctors say its stress," she lamented. After a moment, she said, "What about the herbalist?" The word was devoid of its usual venom.

I stared into her private pool of light. "Oh, he's clueless. I'm never going back there."

"Uh huh?"

"Yep."

Helen looked at her hands. "Let's go to emergency. It's where they put the top minds."

It seemed reasonable. We drove in silence.

The waiting room was enormous. I hadn't been to an emergency ward since I was a child—a freak asthma attack. I'd been long ago

cured. Oddly-shaped chairs, each one dissimilar from its neighbor, lined the walls like a poorly-planned mosaic. Near the entrance, few of them were occupied, but closer to the ticket machines there were crowds. Our ticket number was absurd. In one chair, a man stared at us. His throat was a noose of lesions. Elsewhere, a woman in bandages trembled uncontrollably. Across the aisle, a child with no fingers sat with her father. She read an illustrated book with a pair of dexterous thumbs, licking them thoughtfully to turn the pages. An old woman beside us lolled and snored. A man in a bloody trench coat limped past. His face and hands were alarmingly red; he left a trail.

He lowered himself tenderly into four vacant chairs, lying flat out. I watched closely the rise and fall of his belly, waiting morbidly for an inevitable end. I had heard that sort of thing was not uncommon. Minute after minute, I watched him. I watched him for a long time.

"Paging Doctor Marcus!" said an agreeable voice. "Doctor Marcus!"

The bloody man snapped upright.

Helen was quicker than me. "Excuse me," she said, raising her hand. I saw the father of the fingerless girl. He was glaring. Helen squinched up her face. "Please," she said. But the bloody man ignored us, or he couldn't hear us. He may have been deaf. He moved with unassailable purpose. He was gone.

We continued to wait.

At some point, we fell asleep.

I woke up in a hospital. It was not the same one as before. I could see this was a long term facility. It had no attending staff. The systems were startled to find me up and moving about. "Where's my wife?" I asked them. "Where's Helen?" but they only blinked curiously. The corridors reminded me of the warlike shindig in the suburbs. They were fathomless and disorienting. Everything had

a nearly imperceptible curve. They were something out of science fiction. I'd never been to this sort of facility before. These sorts of places were for the aged, not for people like…I suddenly longed for a mirror.

Helen appeared at the far end. "Mathew?" Her voice sounded like a bird. We approached each other tentatively. We sensed a certain danger, the possible addition of a symptom, the threat of abrupt and inexplicable narcolepsy.

We held each other. Our smocks were uselessly thin. In many ways, we were in the nude. Helen's body was chilled and rigid. She said, "I want to go to Paris."

Helen judged cities by their rail network. A city without a subway was not a city. She kept a postcard map of the Paris Métro on our bathroom wall. She'd received it from a friend years ago. It was framed like a portrait. I understood that Helen believed the Paris Métro was the best of its kind. It was superior to the London Underground, the Tokyo system, the New York subway. We had navigated all of those in the past, as tourists. Paris, however, the fittest of its species, remained a mystery. For Helen, avoiding it was to avoid the chance of disappointment. The many times I'd mentioned a visit—to make up after a fight—Helen only shook her head. "Not yet," she'd say.

We emerged on a street corner. It was winter. We had nothing but these flimsy smocks, these plastic footies, these unusual skull caps. Scrupulous newsreaders informed us of dates and of times. Years had passed. Our accounts, miraculously, were in order. We scanned ourselves into devices and were rewarded with clothes, spending money, a Scrabble travel edition, salty snacks, taxi chits, everything we desired. Traffic, however, was dense and our movements were slow.

The flight was uneventful. We kept each other awake with pinches and games. We inaugurated a new Scrabble tally. Helen took a swift and commanding lead.

From the air, Charles de Gaulle Airport was a coliseum of light. It was a luminous donut, the hole filled with invisibly suspended escalators. Helen looked at me. "I'm getting tired," she said.

I shook her gently. "We're almost there. Fall asleep on the Métro."

Through the airport, I dragged her like a stone. "Just a short rest," she said.

Plush loveseats were stacked like bleachers before tinted windows. Planes leapt up before us. They wailed in triumph and the glass trembled. Helen put her head on my shoulder.

"Helen?"

"I'm here," she whispered.

"Look at us. Can you see our reflection?"

"I already did. In the rearview of the taxi. In the windows along the way. Everything's metal and glass. You ought to pay attention."

"Do we look the same?"

Helen squeezed me. "Nothing's changed."

All around us people moved. They were fit and healthy. They moved as a unit, like toned muscles running up and down a spine. They moved like the spattered doctor—with purpose.

Immense kitelike mobiles were suspended from the ceiling. Each triangle of fabric was the flag of a different nation. They twirled drowsily in the currents produced by so many people. All the flags of the world were there, but I could identify only a few. Never once had I framed a postcard for our bathroom wall.

I squeezed Helen back. "Love you," I said.

Her arm fell limp in my lap.

She was asleep.

I was exhausted too. I stretched my arm farther round her shoulders, rested my chin on the crown of her head.

I closed my eyes.

KAREN LEONA ANDERSON

Cure

Cured of foresight and a body that
feels, a man finds himself
in his kitchen, which is also a forest.

A woman calls for him; this is his wife,
who considers it a place easy to negotiate,
though it seems full of hospital silver (this may

be the moonlight) and legs of growing, heavy
wood. It may be he answers, for the Romans
he's been reading to avoid the knife advise a cure

of hellebore in vinegar if the disease is alive;
horehound in wine if it's dead. He'd
never know where those things are,

and she would. The forest goes dark
and his legs give. Diagnosis: Always
something wrong, too soon. And now

comes metal and now comes the wood.

JUSTIN GARDINER

Sunridge

Cheesecloth frozen with carcassed suet,
still no birds come near my window.

Occasionally, at snowshoe intersections,
I take in a Grosbeak's rakish flutter,

the upside-down antics of a Nuthatch,
or denizen *wee-ah* of Whiskeyjacks.

Who wouldn't love the birds' hoodlum names,
their ballplayers' dark napes? Yet what I envy

is the fidelity of their daily actions.
A demeanor that errs

on the side of lightness and restraint.
While each morning, the cupboard's tiny scat

mirrors my own tracks of spirit—cabin mice
pattering the dark, oblivious

to the sure patterns of their lives.
And that hollow-bellied hunger finding

nothing, then nothing again,
gnawing down the huddled handles of knives.

CHRIS GREEN

My Death

We either wait, it comes suddenly, or we die in our sleep.
I choose sleep.
Maybe there will be sun deep into the house that morning.
Who will get me down the stairs?
Professionals, with years of practice.
There might be snow in small patches, white islands on the lawn,
a warm winter…the sky will fill with the cries of late-flying birds.
Or instead of snow, it will be rain,
the guys wet from the stoop to the waiting truck.
Thursday is garbage day, and I will die knowing that,
the trash can lonely behind the house as always, waiting for Thursday.

CHARITY KETZ

Schreyer's Cave

Everything in a mine says the world's our grave—
poison we'd been swimming toward
waited in a crook.

Or collapsed and the collapse
was someone else's death—
The car that ran the track—

It's useless. To lie in, stare out from
any tomb. We only see it
by unsteady flashlight—rocks sudden and close—

From the outside—(a cave is different)—Schreyer's looks
like land
sunk beyond someone's feed corn.

We're museum-quiet, all three of us
piling on nylon
against rainwater and clay seep, for when we've got to

belly over stones and "relax"
when our clothes catch. Is this the ground
that tightens from inside—that sends roots

to break our ribs? Close as the press
toward our backs. We could let our hands
graze the rock before our chins—vertebral, lunar—

We call back or forward to hear
the others' scuffling. Nothing else
gives us the earth, strange and huge.

It's different to go alone.
Then, the fierce unreportable
luckiness: I've given up the world. No one's coming
to rescue me.
The "fried egg" formation,
the clay dragon's reflector-eyes.
Here, no one hears my breathing scrape
the pressed beds of the dead—shells and things—
giving way to water—
the death of minutes piling up.

We pull ourselves along with our warm
fingerprints, our halogen beams ridging

bats against the ceiling, their faces
rimed with ice, our jackets skinning over jab

and pool. The cave has been shepherding its own—inconstant

drip—Not that we're the first, but now
there's no before—

The cave moves in the dark, reforms
so quickly it's the same.

Ahead and back,
the cave's uneven rhythm,
our helmets knocking
if we lift our chins or turn.
We're swimming through rock—
in the plink of water and water down walls—
when we turn off our lights
rocks sway into our spines.
The cave in its shift, the cold suck of air
farther down.
The earth on its no-string
hurtles with its minutes clinging.

TOMAS Q. MORIN

Eclogue

Father to Son: The trees are fat with ash
    And horses are dead in the street;
The blast has startled the crows, go shake
    The trunks while I work the peat.

GLEN POURCIAU

Shake

I was having a discussion with the woman I'd been seeing. Not exactly a discussion. We were on the floor in her den. I was on top of her. We did say a thing or two. We were well along the way but not about to finish. I was unaware of my surroundings. To my surprise, she was not unaware. She saw something. Her head popped up over my shoulder, pushing my head back. She pointed at the window over her kitchen table and chairs. I looked back where she pointed. A boy's face. He'd been watching. He saw us see him and he took off toward the alley.

I reacted. I started to get up. She pulled me back down. "Let him go," she said.

"I'm not letting him go. This is none of his business."

I pulled away from her. I grabbed my pants and shirt and started putting them on.

"He's already gone," she said. "What will you do if you find him?"

"He's in trouble. Let's just say that."

"Don't hurt him. He didn't do anything."

"I call it doing something."

I jammed my feet in my shoes.

"Don't hurt that boy," she shouted at me as I left.

I ran out the back door and around the corner to where my car was parked. I stuck the key in and started it up. I drove slowly around the neighborhood and looked between the houses for him, thinking he might be perched in front of another window. I planned to get out and chase him. He couldn't outrun me. He was too little and wasn't strong enough. I'd grab him and lift him up, look in his

face, tell him a few things he'd take with him. He wouldn't forget what I told him or the look on my face. I'd make sure he remembered.

I'd done the same thing when I was little. Not at someone else's place but where I lived with my father. My mother was away. I heard the noise inside the bedroom and wondered. I quietly pushed the door open. My father's pants and shirt were on the floor and he was on top of a woman who wasn't my mother. I didn't know what they were doing, but it made me feel sick to watch.

She saw me and pointed. I saw him pull the plug out. He came after me, sticking out, bouncing. I ran but couldn't get away from him.

"Don't tell your mother," he said when he grabbed me and lifted me.

He stank. The wet hair on his chest stank and his armpits stank. His face was damp. I was shaking.

"You got me?" he asked in my face.

Since he was telling me not to tell her, I knew she'd want to know.

"She's no different. Believe me."

He put me down then. It was right in my face, pointing at me. My face was burning.

"Deal?" he asked but didn't offer his hand. To him, it was a deal whether we shook on it or not.

He went back in the room with the woman. He closed the door. I heard him prop something against it. He said something and I heard the woman laugh.

I turned a corner and saw the boy walking down the street, left side. His back was to me. He wore a dirty gray t-shirt. Hair cut down to his scalp, like a grown man who's balding. Like me. He walked with his head down, not looking ahead or around. He didn't hear me behind him and it gave him a jolt when I rolled up next to him and ran the window down. He stopped and looked at me. I

stayed in the car. It wasn't the way I planned. I saw him shaking, but he didn't run this time. Maybe he figured he couldn't get away or maybe he was waiting to see if I got out of my car before he ran.

"You saw us," I said.

He nodded.

"How long?"

He shrugged.

"Five minutes?"

He shook his head.

"Less?"

He didn't answer.

"You go around looking in people's windows?"

He didn't answer.

"You won't tell anybody what you saw?"

He shook his head.

"You know what you were looking at?"

He nodded.

"It would embarrass her. You understand that?"

He nodded.

"I never told," I said. "Never."

He looked at me and waited, his face red.

"I'm telling you. I saw them. I never told her. I couldn't. What would have happened if I had? To me and to them. Think about that. What would happen? Would it help you? Would it help anything? Keep it to yourself. That's what I'm saying."

He nodded, still shaking.

"Inside your head. That's where you should keep it. Keep it there. You'll learn to do that. You have to."

He waited.

"Don't go back there. Don't look in her window. What's inside people's windows is not your business. You never know who or what you'll be looking at. You follow me?"

He nodded.

"Do you?"

He nodded again.

I saw a couple on foot turn the corner ahead and come toward us. I ran my window up.

I waved at the boy. He didn't wave. I waved again. He waved.

I left him there. As I drove away I watched him in my rearview mirror. The couple walked past him.

I went back to the woman. She'd dressed. We sat on the sofa in her den.

"You found him?"

She could tell by looking at me.

"Did you hurt him?"

"I didn't get out of the car. We had a discussion."

"Did you scare him?"

"I talked to him. He won't come back."

"I don't want him talking to the neighbors."

"You told me not to go after him."

"I was afraid you'd hurt him."

"He won't talk."

"You're sure? What did you say?"

"I told him a story."

"What story? A true story?"

I nodded.

"What was it?"

"Between him and me."

"You know this kid?"

"Not before."

She leaned against me. She stopped talking. The silence was between us. We were there in it.

JEFFREY LEVINE

Smoke is a Dream of Manila

There's the way my lover's face softens then settles
into a different orbit, filling with distance and blood
when she talks about her house, as she might as well
be telling fishermen, lovers, dog walkers, priests,
for she has gone there, leaving me in the woods, lying
on my stomach in the foxhole on the wooded bluff
above Woeful Pond where I am reading a book
called *Passport to the Cosmos* by John E. Mack
and I am trying to get my eldest girl to contact these people
because she sees UFOs has seen them since she was seven
and it scares the shit out of her to the point where
I had to sleep with her for almost an entire year in high school.
Her response to me is why should I go there.
Well maybe because it has formed a lot of your life reactions
which if you talked with people who went through the same things
you could make some sense of the insanity instead of seeing it
as insanity, and surely that's ineffable but
that's not what I mean by boat. Nothing was going to happen.
After great sound, upheaval, the rise and clashing of nations,
unspeakable terror, the world seemed suddenly not to breathe,
to be still, as if the nature of drama itself had changed.
What I mean by boat has to do with traversing the bottomless
oceans in pursuit of clarity and romance, and the stillness
of the small town, sheltered safely in a wood-frame house,
everything that does not belong in the small boat, empty lawns
in front of other quiet houses, front doors closed, primly

curtained windows, high pointed gables reaching out
toward a cold, indifferent sky, so cold that even from the boat
as it throbs mid-ocean we (for is it not remarkable that I can put
you there with me, instantly and irrevocably?) we smell smoke
in the air, a subtle flavor of density and heat that we are certain of.
The smoke is a dream of Manila, the white beaches of Tahiti.
The smoke is the soft night air of the Hawaiian Islands
as from the lowering sun in the west, one long shadow of spar falls
in a single silent band across the green sloping runners,
disappearing into the wake, now nothing but light.

JEFFREY LEVINE

Antiphonal

> She took remnants of almost transparent yellow; lacy peach-colored teddies; slips, nubbly jackets made of the 'waste silk' spun from scraps of broken cocoons. —Grace Dane Mazur, "Silk"

You, too, are spun from scraps of distance, which own you,
while the eyes, wide with longing or desperation—

As if these overflowing—
[*Thousands of feet above, an attenuated finger of cloud pointed across the line where the street curved away.*] / / repeat

[*A cool, salty wind blew along the street.*] / / repeat

Suppose tears welled suddenly and dropped
warm, then cool, onto the ridge of the cheekbone.

And if these overflowing,
you would wipe them with a forefinger
lest they mar the silk, and in touching
move, and in moving—

[*A battered van with corrugated tin sides delivers silk flowers to the vendors*] / / repeat

[*A woman takes crosses, statuettes and prayer books bound in silk from a box and sets them out on a folding table.*] / / repeat

An iced bottle of mineral water appears before the peach-colored,
a breath past the almost transparent,

and a glass and a bowl of pistachio nuts set down
before you by a bar hand in a silk tie.

[*In the distance, in front of the courtyard,*
a gardener waters the drive, keeping down the dust.] / / repeat

If you reach for the water pitcher in the distance,
the silk moves, transparent, peach, as if these overflowing,
with your arm—

[*All of the pictures, rugs, chandeliers and wall hangings*
have vanished, while three boxes support a thick plywood board
on which are spread the remains of a lunch.]

Suppose it is not a tear that falls, but something else.

[*The floor is an open plain of marble.*] / / repeat

[*Across the square, musicians have assembled,*
arranging the music made of waste silk spun
from scraps of broken chords upon their stands.] / / repeat

Distance hangs there like an asterisk.
It wants to gather up something peach,
something transparent yellow,

as if, this overflowing.

MIA NUSSBAUM

[The Chapter of the Covered]

⋆

Where
is your face.

Where the spots
of your ancient.

Aloe and cassia, I inhale. Where
is your raiment. Where
the pockets
of myrrh.

We wait
in clefts

your auroras
away—

MIA NUSSBAUM

[The Chapter of the Kneeling]

*

My Lovingkindness,
you've lit the sycamores in Central Park

The paper lanterns are lovely,
the mojitos full of mint
and the grass—
you understand

You say to the sun, *sun come*
and to the moon, *moon thin*

I made an amateur's study of the intricate creasing
of hands—meshed geometries and windshield frost.
I long to be your amateur
—this *amore, amor.* I long to bow
at your creased fine feet. How beautiful the dead
dust stirring. How beautiful the feet.

BRYAN PENBERTHY

For Nicholas, in the Museum of the Confederacy

Your wife's a blur of red and bone, a smeared photograph.
She's dead, you're dead, I'm dead.
We're alive, meandering this small mausoleum, finding Stonewall's blood,

the sword Armistead waved past Pickett's Charge,
his last urge besting any of our pictures, our mawkish stories, outlasting
the dead and their deprivations,

their diaries swollen with earth, their words illegible. Time, old friend,
is a measure of distance. The camphored sky spills
dusk into the gaps between our cities, spreads a sepia patina over

the year's raw wound, heals into knowable scars.
The legend's right: we're dust. The medical room's orchestral ghost
plays rusted knives, suffering gone

to cobweb, boxes of metal and gauze, a document for every wounded cry.
My cry is wounded. My cry's a snarl
of twig and gray fabric, it's a thrush caught in crossfire, minié balls hissing tunes

from which there's no returning, no math
resolving. If we won't wake from the coming ether, these words
will have to stand. After all,

consider these props and reliquaries: here's Lee's tent, sparse; here's us,
a silver flask. Here's Pickett, twenty minutes
before his division's murder, in command and ornery. Here's a brick

apartment wall, cracks filled with plastic animals,
plaster covered in shadowboxes; here's to what little time remains.
If there are legends worth making,

make this one ours: that fevered want and words can drive the dark
to its amnesiac home. Beyond
the batteries that would saw us down and ruin every town that mattered.

PHOTOGRAPHY FEATURE

Reggie Scanlan

Michaell P. Smith at Chester Zardis' Funeral, 1990

Funeral of Chester Zardis, 1990

New Orleans Jazz Fest, 1992

Funeral of Louis "Big Eye" Nelson, 1990

New Orleans, 1988

Street Musician, 1994

Tuba Player, 1990

Woman Flambeau, 1990

Flambeau, 1990

Mardi Gras Indian, 1991

Mardi Gras Indian Boy, 1995

LAURA CAMILLE TULEY

An Interview with Reggie Scanlan

You grew up in New Orleans. What was that like?

It was cool growing up here. There was a lot of things you don't see anymore, you know, you don't have the vegetable guy come walking around, the bread guy. Everybody sat out on their front porches and there was a lot more of a neighborhood feel. People actually knew everybody on their block and they all helped each other out, did this and did that, visited with each other, that kind of stuff…the Quarter was a lot different back then. You still had all the strippers and everything, but for some reason it seemed more wholesome. As a kid at eleven or twelve or so, I worked at my great aunt and uncle's dry cleaners downtown and at my lunch hour I'd head to the Quarter, you know, walk up and down Bourbon Street, and it just seemed a lot cornier and kind of naïve.

How did growing up in New Orleans inform you as an artist?

If you're lucky enough to grow up in a city that has a huge community of artists that work in the field that you want to be in, which here is music, it's like it's spread out at your feet, like this gigantic buffet, and you can pick and choose as much as you want of it. I mean, you went to a funeral there were musicians playing, you went to a wedding there were musicians playing. Music was really kind of incorporated into your life, and I didn't know anybody that didn't have somebody in their family that didn't play something. Most people had a piano at their house and somebody played it. It wasn't just furniture. When you were coming up through school, everybody was in the school band. Everybody in my neighborhood had guitars and one or two guys could play them and showed everyone else

enough so that we could have a band—that kind of stuff. I could go see the Meters every night. I could go down to the Night Cap on Louisiana and see George Porter, I could see George French…you had options to see all this music and basically sit at the feet of the guy you wanted to emulate. And so as I came up, because New Orleans is kind of a small, provincial town—in the nineteenth century, yeah, it was the Paris of the New World, but that's, like, a hundred years ago—it really didn't take a whole lot for me to be able to start playing with people like James Booker and Professor Longhair and all these kind of guys.

You played with Professor Longhair?

Yeah, I did, for about a year and a half. I was playing with Eddie Money out in California—this was right before he was getting ready to get famous—and I got a call from Fess and he's like "I need a bass player, you wanna play with me?" because I had jammed with them once before that, and I'm, like, "I'm on the next plane, man." So, I told Eddie Money, and he said "I can't believe you're going to quit my band to perform with a college professor." I didn't say this, but I was thinking. "you know what? That's why…"

You also played with Earl King. What was it like for you to play with musicians who had really made it?

I was in Earl King's band for three or four years. It was really interesting getting to work with people whose music you'd learned from the outside, actually working with them and seeing how the process is. It was a real learning experience. Playing with Professor Longhair's band was kind of like grad school for me. To me, any bass player who can keep up with him is doing all right.

Shifting gears here, tell me about how you developed an interest in photography.

When I got to college, I took an art history course with a guy who, in the course of the semester, showed us a lot of work by Diane Arbus and a lot of work by Man Ray, and it was a real eye opener to me because I saw that there's a lot more to taking pictures than just taking birthday pictures with your family or going on vacation or, you know, a taking a picture of the president for the newspaper. I was intrigued by it, but I was still practicing the bass so much and didn't want to take any time for it. It wasn't until the early eighties when I was playing with the Radiators and we were on the road and the whole partying scene just got really old, that a friend of mine gave me a camera and some film and I took a roll that was so embarrassingly horrible I gave the camera back, tore up the contact sheet and thought, I am never touching a camera again. Later, when my wife, who is a botanical water colorist, went out and bought a cheap camera because she needed to have pictures of different botanicals, I started fooling around with it and, about three days later, I called up someplace in New York and bought a Pentax K1000, which is what everybody starts with, and basically hit up all of my friends, so that I didn't overwhelm any one person, about how to develop and print film. Then, as I was traveling, I started going to cemeteries because I figured it was a good place to learn composition, and it just kind of picked up like that. I was just learning as I went, learning from photographers whose work I liked. I kind of learned the same way I learned bass—I'd find a bass player I liked and I'd buy every album he was on—it didn't matter if the album sucked or not—if it sucked, I'd be, like, okay this is how you play bad music. So, I started looking for all of the photographers whose work I liked and, going back, I really got influenced a lot by the French guys, say, from the twenties through the sixties, Edouard Boubat, Robert Kappa, Rene Jacques, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Marc Riboud…all of these guys, who all seemed to have a very lyrical and poetic approach to what they were doing and didn't do a lot of manipulations with their prints. There was something in what they were shooting at that was the thing, and that appealed to me a lot because I don't like

a lot of histrionics and gymnastics, in playing bass or in photography, and that, you know, is pretty much how I learned.

Street musicians and flambeaus are often the subjects of your photography. Can you tell me something about why these images appeal to you?

Street musicians—I've always just liked 'em, you know? I thought it was cool that they were just out there with no gear and that it was really stripped down, like the way I play bass or the way I take pictures—things that are broken down to the basic elements. And, of course, it was at a time when the flambeaus were still happening the way they used to happen and I was, like, man, somebody ought to take pictures of them, and that was a learning process because I don't use flash, so, it's like, okay, how do I shoot this at nighttime and not get part of it blown out, part of it underdeveloped? You know, finding a balance. It was all a learning experience. Also, in the back of my mind there was something that was telling me, this ain't even going to be around that long, so, if you want a picture of it, you'd better go out and get it today, because you could see things changing—like with Mardi Gras—you could see insurance concerns start to come in where little by little either the parades stopped using the flambeaus or they started to use these propane tanks and stuff, so, the whole idea of somebody with, like, five gallons of kerosene on a pole, dancing around, splashing all over the place, that was getting to be history. And, to me, that was the really the fun part of it all, so I was, like, if I want to get a picture of this the way it really is, I have to do it now, because it might not be here next year or two years from now.

How would you connect your work as a musician and your work as a photographer?

I like things that are real simple because they seem to leave themselves open to more interpretations, and when there's less involved

in your work, it can appeal to more people. But there's this idea that Ansel Adams promoted, of the negative being a score that you orchestrate as a print, and I approach both music and photography like that. If I'm coming up with a bass line or the print of a picture, there's got to be a certain rhythm in the whole thing—in a bass line, your ear has to feel like it's being led in a certain, organized way, and your eye has to do that in a picture, you have to be aware of not letting your eye move out of the frame. And you want it to have a certain lyricism to it, too. A lot of the bass players I listen to are like that, like B. B. King or George Porter. And the photographers I like, too, they're just real simple and very powerful. It's a less is more kind of approach.

Your work post-Katrina—how has it changed?

For the first year, maybe a little bit after, Katrina is basically all most photographers here were interested in for a couple of reasons: first of all, anyone with a camera almost had a duty to go out and shoot as much as they could because, I mean, this is something that, if we're lucky, we'll never see again, but you really need to be aware of what happened, and also what didn't happen after it was over. Then, too, something like this really spurs people on to develop artistic ideas of how to deal with it. I think that's what most photographers who are serious shooters in New Orleans were, in one sense or another, doing. It goes from someone like David Rae (Morris)—I mean, he's the guy...if there's anybody whose work really shows what happened, it's his, because he's done more than anyone else—to someone who is not really interested in shooting the destruction so much, but uses that in their art for something else. But after about a year or so, I was just overwhelmed with it and made a conscious decision to get back to what I was doing before, which is just wander around wherever I am and shoot.

POETRY FEATURE

Jennifer Militello

JENNIFER MILITELLO

Conjugating the Void

And I was as cold as the cold root goes,
sources of calling and folded of shade,
knotted of weed and a loosening parting,
I was as cold as the sank ghost does.

And I was as real as the blue unraw,
as naked as amen, as awkward as old,
round as a grieving and ancient unfasten,
I was as real as the ill scrawl of love.

And I was as near as the first moon rounded,
as god-like as sinking and making of light,
as mired by law as the ignorant thousand,
as grave as the pages revisioned in time.

And I was as lost as the famine of living,
as cordless and horrid and envied and dead.
All of the my was a reason to take me:
I believed the lies the world made flesh.

JENNIFER MILITELLO

Identity Narrative

Do not eat from October's black hand, O my situation.

Are you still. Listen. Innocence: a seam to be stitched or split with a throw of omens. I lay me down, my soul to keep. I have sown my amen in the earth.

Sometimes, I live in the open. My heartbeat a lamb, my heartbeat I am bleeding from the mouth a heartbroken rain. The thin inches time will give me winter as I stand and watch. The small in me has anthems made of time's mouth made of thousands of beads.

I will read my more childish self to sleep. She will use locusts only for as long as they robe the fields with the feeding they were meant for. She will nest where bats nest, set curtains to burning, place a marker beside my name so that I might return.

Her heart, made of shale, lies in the mouth of a pious man. Its verses are stalls that keep the wind ceaseless. Its lamps cry light in the shape of young lovers as they two-step through the four rooms of God.

JENNIFER MILITELLO

Sound of Eye, Wind, and Limb

My infants slept when their bodies needed sleep,
impostors in luxurious gowns. My infants felt unloved
by others while others loved the man-made things,
as though they were dolls in a house.

One night, I dreamed wind tunnels
containing many small wheels, I dreamed
one form with many faces saying,
the wire cutters are all in your mind.

My children being melted snow, I was
never afraid of their perpetual motion.
Sometimes the suffocation broke me.
Sometimes the breaking was good.

One night I woke to their gentle fingers raising
my eyelid with the lashes while they looked into
my eye, not daring to come near, not daring to keep
their distance while its forged identity watched.

JENNIFER MILITELLO

The Zoology of Imaginary Joy

Then nightfall came while I was still
knitting it, hollowed with air and the velvet
of throats, riddled with grit and mossless

lengths, riddled with the remains of animals.
Carried toward this, by wind or by waking
among the reeds on a day it is raining,

a dustless fall of light. What is there
to bloom for here, what is there to do but pray
and save the emptiness for later, those lairs

toward October, no rinds, no sweet or seedless flesh.
The years fall open like petals or flocks, forked
or episodic, coffins of the wilderness to open

and become, sieve through which my roots seek
the sleeping lambs of answers, those fallow fields,
those clicking strokes of oars in place.

I would find the corridor and walk it to its end
where there is sure to be a window looking out
on the tidy yards of those who are craving.

This is the charred behavior. This is witnessing
within slow motion the going wheel of dreams
as its barns lean or buildings burn to the ground.

JENNIFER MILITELLO

Preventing a Relapse

If you begin with the moths,
their bodies marred to a dark vernacular,
their stars more savage than the excellent seas,

their sob of crows with coal-born wings,
their scansions of the lullaby rain,
their boneless worship longer than the wind.

If your luck runs out when the tide comes in.
If you pry the barb from the appetite beast.
If you hang the sky from its collapsed-rag wings,

their antithesis of candelabras.
If you sleep on a plain reed mat.
Linger with the sky the pigeons ask

while going down to their now-dry rivers.
If you let your skin feel the relent.
If you elegize the soft occasion.

Are glad for dusk that dances silence half to death,
one minute ordinary, delinquent the next.
If you let each moment fragment like the moon.

JENNIFER MILITELLO

Miserere

Raw materials, have mercy on us.

Life is a ladder at the last burning room.
The burning is burning no matter how sweet.

Day keeps circling like a dog to sleep.
Dandelions hanging with their parasols of dust.

May we despair by their dim cloth.

May our hands grow into ghosts of the open, the whole,
birds which land separately but fly up all at once.

May treetops weave a crown of thorns.

Grief unbuttoning its high-collared dress.
Change as a heron that strikes at the lake.
Death at the heels, herding.

Wind as a skin in that it passes.

May it rain.

May we rest between failures.

KERRY HUDSON

Cloverleaf

The Deacon's procedure has been scheduled: his foot.

A spur.

Pray for him, do.

Pray the podiatrist be at the top of his game, unflustered by domestic strife or market fluctuation.

Pray too for the fifty-two-year-old woman: her co-workers do not believe.

Pray for the makers of law in the capitol of Washington, D.C., that they may be guided by God's wisdom and sacrifice and full-throated grace.

Pray for the twenty-three-year-old son, he at the crossroad, tempted by the unrighteous, lulled by promise of gain without toil, soft days, fleshy sin.

Pray for the woman with disrespectful daughters, that they may be convicted of their attitude, may come to love the mother who brought them forth from the void, offering the breast for sustenance and asking for nothing in return. Nothing greater than the rare, small, soft moment of kindness. *This is so much to ask?*

Pray for the Pastor. He who has Church Trouble.

Pray for the forty-eight-year-old man who is to have surgery for kidney stones and the placement of a stent. Pray that drainage be fulsome.

Pray for the protester, martyr before the motion picture house, his placard held aloft to bar shut the gates of Hades and its celluloid tide of blaspheme, wanton debauch and world without compass.

And if there be the space left in your invocations, a moment more in your full day for the uttering of it, pray for me. Do not pray for

my plummeted property value. Do not pray for my loneliness. Do not pray for my canted world, full of history but lacking handhold, without purchase, without love. My needs are smaller in scope: batteries for the radio, a skillet, reprieve from the cranes. Those other burdens, though seemingly large, are but trifles. Addressing them would make approach to the unseemly.

The radio is old but serious. Fabricated of bakelite, material of the future, its design taken from superhero city buildings. Terraced curves and falling lines. It contains—my radio—experts of all manner. Choice soil for the propagation of exotic lettuce. Efficacious strategy for the repelling of noxious foreigners who scale the fence with aim to snatch our shiny dream. Showtimes. Many men of glorious opinion. The pulse of here and now. The mapping of our economies of want.

My radio contains God, who is neither large nor small. He who does not thunder. He who does not whisper. He who spins fair of the ersatz-stone knob.

And it contains his spokespeople, legions of them, those who help us in the directing of our prayer.

It is well built—my radio—but batteries fail; this is to be expected. And I don't go out. Not so much.

No teflon on the skillet. The newfangled tends to the unsettling. And, at the risk of the persnickety, aluminum is now thought—so says the radio—to be scurrilous, cause of the elderly's infirmity and wormholing of the past.

Rain has been plentiful. The retention pond rises, creeps up the bank. It's a problem. From above it must seem a fine silver dollar, glinting in the sun, cutting through exhaust haze, beckoning. A jewel in the vast expanse, the cranes find it beguiling; they cannot resist. They trumpet their pleasure, which can be noisome, which in turn necessitates the playing of the radio at increased volume, already turned high to cover the motorcar drone. This then hastens the draining of the batteries. And too, it cannot be healthsome, the

water—the retention pond's—being fed from the slopes of the highways and byways, the cloverleaf that surrounds us and rises to cut the horizon.

The cloverleaf came later. My house was first. Let's be clear.

It was Pappy's house before it was mine. A stubborn old coot.

To the amateur ear, the crane sounds very much like the turkey. Both effect a *gobble*. Still, I am baffled as to just what about the retention pond elicits their fondness. It has swirling films of opalescent rainbow oil and fuel stuffs. It leaves small, crooked lines of grease wrack, black sludge capable of ignition. It can be odoriferous, the fume of organic rot and petroleum byproduct. It is still—no pleasant lapping on the bank—torpid, flat, still.

Pappy and Mr. Peabody had them a splendid feud.

The house is beside the pond. Cranes gather, tiptoe about the edge, pull their feet out of the muck and bend them up and place them back down with deliberation and nonchalance. Upright and stoic, they do not look where they are going.

They gobble when they fly. It can carry above the traffic. And when they land they do not desist in their gobble, to help those who've not yet found their way. Once it starts there's no stopping. The first lands, attracted by the sun-glinting silver dollar retention pond, gobbles out its signal to the exhaust-haze sky and they come, landing in twos and threes, then sixes and nines. Cranes all over.

Gobbling.

Then one morning they leave, a grand departure, one circumnavigation of the cloverleaf—to give the slow or distracted amongst them notice, or perhaps a romantic dally, pause to savor the nostalgia of farewell. I don't know. A volley of random crap projectiles and they're away. South, to wherever they go.

Pappy's house is solid. He didn't fool around. Sharp, neat as a pin. A thing Pappy was wont to utter: *neat as a pin*. That and *clean as a whistle*. (He was stolid, not given to loquaciousness.) I do not know what about a pin is neat. I especially do not know what about

a whistle is clean, what with all the spittle, gathered and caked as it is.

What a sight—Pappy's house—to motorists traveling the ridge, pressed down, slinging through banked curves. Driving requires all due attention, but I imagine they are able to steal the glance, look down to the grassy bowl and the solid house neat as a pin. A storybook house, square sides and windows four-by-four; just so. Pappy's only affectation the disdain of affectation. There they go, good families traveling to places, little ones in the rear, faces pressed to glass, gazing out, down the grassy slope to the storybook house by the silver dollar pond edged with cranes picking their way about the shallows. Likely the sludge is not in evidence from the distance.

There is a chimney from which a thread of smoke will rise. I imagine it quaint. They must say to themselves: there's no stopping the future. They must say to themselves: there lives a stubborn old coot.

They built the highways around the house, graded the land and moved the soil and laid in the beds of gravel and clay and chert and asphalt and so there is a valley where there had been none. There are crests and ridge lines and the all-time muted roar of The Great Industry of Transport.

Do not slight The Great Industry of Transport. Upon it we depend. Every snack pastry and propane-fueled outdoor grill, every item of cutlery and collapsable ear muff, sports and leisure activity accouterment and size D-cell alkaline battery, every Calphalon Infused-Anodized Eight-Piece Cookware Set; everything at all was put within easy grasp thanks to The Great Industry of Transport.

And the princes of industry: stout men with grand flagons of pop, belt buckles the size of small eastern seaboard states, lumbering walk and prodigious gut. Do not mock them. They bring to you the stuffs of life.

A small price, the thread of grease wrack ringing the retention pond.

The fumes are heavier than air, sink to film the pond and the house.

The cranes stand unperturbed. They turn their arrow heads to the left, they turn them to the right. Their beady eyes give away nothing.

But the house was first. They needn't have built the highway where they did. That was Mr. Peabody's doing. He was a character.

Mr. Peabody had him a job to do. Director of Urban Planning and Civil Engineering. A single-wide of heady responsibility. Enough to make anybody crack.

They were feuding over a woman. Splendid feuds are always over a woman. Feuds can be over money, or pride, or just what color hat it is you wear when talking to god, or all manner of thing, but only the woman-feud can rise up and be splendid. Take an approach to the glorious.

Mr. Peabody loved Mama. Pappy loved Mama. They both had jobs to do.

Pappy's job was to woo Mama, claim her as his own, sire a line of progeny as testament; his gift to her: the future.

Though Mama was once heard to say that her role in this business of future-forging entailed endless expanses of tidying and cooking, the allaying of fear and bolstering of spirit, the tamping of excess and the brooking of fools. Not to mention, although she made free to do so, the laundry and soap scum, the baked-on crust and dust bunnies behind the seating and the oily residue and the ubiquitous crane guano, splatters found in remarkably unlikely places. While Pappy's role in the forging of the future—she went on to say—was a thing that could be likened, in both effort and duration, not to mention similarity of end-product, to the act of sneezing.

To this Pappy was mum, it not being anything to which *neat as a pin* or *clean as a whistle* were appropriate replies. He had been auditioning new phrases, the enriching of his arsenal—*ratchet it up* and *over the top*—but he was not yet comfortable with the wielding of

them. Change, once affected, is hard to counter; no call for haste. Nor was he certain as to which of his phrases might be germane to Mama's homogenizing characterization of his sputa.

Mr. Peabody's job was to direct the highway committee to build the exchange on top of Pappy's spread, necessitating purchase by the Great State and its deftly-wielded *Eminent Domain,* and thusly the running off of Pappy and his wooing ways to places farther away than here and Mr. Peabody's beloved Mama, who was no Mama at the time, but was pigeon-toed, demure, hands clasped before her, knee-length skirt, open-sandaled, and moon-face pretty. A doe shadowing onto the midnight shoulder, alert and chary. Liable to bolt at nothing.

Men would go to great lengths. Move mountains.

Things tumble down the slopes. You'd be surprised.

I'll be sitting, listening to the radio. *Live From the Met.* Or *Focus on Our Father.* Or *Counterspin*. Sometimes *Architecture Today.* Hunched over, the volume low so that the batteries might be spared. There'll be a scudding noise. Or a threshing. Sometimes a tumble. Then a splash. That or a clatter and abrupt *dunt* as the tumbled-down thing collides with one of the four-square walls of the house.

There have been coolers of high gravity beer made by Trappist monks. Each with a cork and serial number. Shook up and ready to go. There have been boat cushions. There have been Swiss-cake roll snack pastries and baby strollers. Once there was a fishing pole and a tackle box, which was encouraging but proved not useful. There was a kite and a bottle of oxygen and *The Complete Works of Lord Byron* in seven volumes, save for—according to the table of contents—*The Bride of Abydos* and *Prometheus.*

There was a can of insulating foam that spurt out like shaving cream, expanded with promise and grew rigid.

A set of bed linens fluttered by. I reached out a hand and took them from the wind. A pastel floral motif. Properly—remarkably so—sized.

Proof of God, it might be argued.

Of course, generally what tumbles down, the detritus of The Great Industry of Transport, is rubbish. The flotsam and the jetsam. Cellophane wrap and wax-coated paper cups. Shreds of rubber and the gravel scatter of safety glass busted up.

Once a perfect bale of marijuana tumbled in. I was outside, saw it ejected from a black vehicle on the ridge, imperious and traveling at great speed. A rear window smooth-slid down, it vaulted out and up, ejected smartly in a lazy arc, hit the slope, bounced on its corners in haphazard starts and fits, until it settled not five paces from where I stood, between the house and the edge of the retention pond. This elicited some interest on the part of the cranes, who I had been feeding, but for their own welfare I thought it best confiscated.

Good days.

Pappy was not a garrulous sort. Sometimes there was a fire under his skin, but this never trumped his taciturnity, was not cause to mumble and chatter and go unseemingly on. He had his phrases and on the main they did the work.

His mind set to a thing, it was not accomplished with windy elocution, but deed.

That's how he won Mama, who moved into the house with her one trunk of effects and commenced to tidy. And when, fueled with spite, Mr. Peabody's bulldozers began to tear up the pastures, sending up billows of soil that settled on her doilies and arrangements, lacy curtains, duvets and collection of porcelain figurines, she bent down and tidied the harder. Mama tidied her life away.

Mr. Peabody miscalculated. Pappy wasn't to budge. He fought back, measure for measure. They thought he was jockeying for a sweeter deal, the old coot. He found himself a fancy lawyer who talked fast, wore silk suits. Pappy was able to hold title, the little bit with the house.

It is said to have been an ugly time.

Once a whole car rolled down. The cranes scattered. It settled on its side. Little puffs of dust and astonishment. I extracted one soccer mom, air-bag dazed, ponytail undone. She cried, wide-eyed and unsure of who I was. We drank calming tea on the front porch. Her breathing got regular. She turned philosophical, shrugged, paused, giggled, returned to weeping. The police came and the tow truck came and everything got hauled away. The cranes settled down.

After Mama moved in Mr. Peabody went mean. Passion clouded strategy; the plan as drawn was kept, and that's how Pappy, from the bottom of his grassy basin, came to occupy the high ground.

Mama was freer, not so lousy with silence. She'd sit me on her knee and speak. The cloverleaf was completed, and the retention pond grew with the first storm and didn't stop. Everything became ordinary. Mr. Peabody passed into irrelevance, though not until after a brief spell of calling on Mama when Pappy was off to places where he would go. He'd come early, bright sun, nothing untoward. Pappy was big on the doing, but Mr. Peabody was shiny with his accurately chosen words. He didn't need any menu of stock phrases; his were concocted there on the spot, hewn from the turgid air, built to spec as called for by the moment. Beautiful words, hearts could weep. Lugubrious as approaches go, especially when held up to Pappy's get up and go, but also inexorable. So iced tea and biscuits and hands on the table and redemption and a bit of seeing things from far away and what-all else. Pappy never knew, but Mama told me because I would listen. There's more to this, but it can't matter now. Trifles.

Mama said you wonder if you're walking in the wrong direction. Mama said that sometimes you fly so high that everything looks pretty no matter and she said that so what, I am who I am.

I've been thinking about getting a puppy. A bird dog, maybe a Brittany or a Gordon Setter. Expressive, gregarious, good with children. There's a show on the radio, goes on all about it.

Forget about that skillet. Batteries too. I'd be better off. The radio speaks fine and true, batteries or no. Good box of solace able to drown out an army of migrating fowl and any sixteen wheeler skreeling by on route to the big electric city. I don't need to get closer than I already am.

And something of worth will be jettisoned soon; any day now it will tumble down to me. This will happen, no need for prayer. I'll be waiting with open arms.

The world is full of bounty.

New Orleans Schoolgirls, 1986

ALISON POWELL

Laying on Rogers Road

Intoxicated girls, they lay their bodies down
on hard black tar at night so their electric bodies,

illuminated white fishes, silver, only half-scared,
rolled there in lane-split blackness like eyelashes.

They lie on the pavement at a hill's peak, Joan
of Arcs, farm across the way with workhorses

tamping the ground to emphasize their sureness
of it. To the left side of those girls—petal-creatures

fingering their bracelets—stood one house encased
on all sides with an aluminum caravan of cars, still

as skulls, and one persimmon tree which did nothing
better than drop rot. Stretched out on the road,

they wait for nothing, they share nothing in spirit
or goods. So quiet, though—

un-annihilated by stinking oil, by steel.

ALISON POWELL

"King," "Queen," etc.

I love airports as they are: stinking, octagonal, full
of men at the end of their rope. The house I live in

is a vinyl-sided box, a blue not robin's egg, but straight up
paint. In my well-swept place, I water the scale-infested

orchids, I hear my heavy neighbors. I like my baths
encroaching, hot, unlike the sea; my wine sharp and apples

sharp, gasoline lung-dulling. Once, I had a lover
whose world was fantasy, he imagined everything royal.

The house had to be a castle with moats, in the water
he sought threatening teeth. Hovering over me

as though a battle raged, exhausting with his bombastic
anthems and chase. He's a world traveler these days,

with spun-sugar girls, ghosts making anything he wants
from wind. I worry about the pale boy, this costumed silly—

because I believe simple years will outdo his grand-
standing. We'll all swallow the real and terrible dirt.

REBEKAH SILVERMAN

Precepts III

"Happ" was the Middle English word for "chance, fortune, what happens in the world."

Happenstance: a small chance, a small fortune.

The torso stuck with electrodes tightly as a pomander.

Cracked dirt and grass sparse as hairs on an arm.

They are waiting for something, and then later—forks and spoons everywhere. She wakes up crying on the kitchen floor.

Later, at a small party, gin and ice in a cup. A radio plays. A car pulls up in front of the house.

Instinct: to wait for the object of obsession to walk past,

a reflecting pond blown like rippled glass, the bar of soap floating.

The fabric stretching in all directions.

REBEKAH SILVERMAN

Precepts VI

On one hand, those braided grass stems, a tuned transistor radio.

On the other, each finger pricked with a needle.

On one hand, the hill behind the house. The widow's walk lit by the moon.

On the other, the window's glass puddle at the sill.

On one hand, this story. Told before, or again.

On the other, that hunger.

On one hand, the plaster stenciled with lines, shredded paper on the floor.

On the other, those twins' hearts, one in each hand.

On one hand, the night like an aerial photograph.

On the other, the night like a foreign language.

ADAM REGER

The Jumble Puzzle

"WAHROR"
❑❑○❑○○

The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle rushed to the hospital to be with his son, who had been hurt in an automobile accident that he, in fact, had caused. The man's stomach ached at the sight of the handcuffs shackling his son to the railing of his bed, hurt more by that than by the tubes running into his son's nose and arm.

The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle spent the first night with his son, who was unconscious. Early in the morning, he went home and slept. In the afternoon he rose and went to his drafting table and worked there until the evening. He usually worked several days in advance but this time he completed a week's worth of puzzles.

Each Jumble puzzle consisted of an incomplete phrase, a small cartoon that provided an oblique clue to the completion of that phrase, and four words, their letters scrambled. When unscrambled, those letters that appeared in circular, as opposed to square, spaces created a bank of letters that, when rearranged correctly, completed the puzzle phrase.

After finishing the puzzles he went through them, checking his work while thinking of the drive back to the hospital, picturing the busy stretch of road leading up to the big bone-white hospital building, and the fast-food restaurants there, considering at which he would stop before going in to sit with his son.

"HRLCOE"
○❑○❑❑○

The old man, a retired Navy officer, had gotten almost no sleep the night before and was trying to describe to his wife the reasons why. Uneasy dreams, he said at first, but as he stared silently into the back of her flannel nightgown—she stood at the stove, stirring a pot of cream of wheat—he was able to follow the chain of events in the dream. He had been soaring a few feet above the road, whipping down the hill toward the gas station, and at the intersection he had lingered, looking at his reflection in the darkened window of a tailor's shop. His sagging face had been pale, his eyes puffy. The old man's hands had hung below his face in the reflection, disappearing behind a line of words: "All Garments Stapled and Compressed." Now, at the kitchen table, he thought about these words. The old man was ready to dismiss them as the garbage of dreams, except that he found himself troubled by the word, "garment," and did not realize why until his wife had set his breakfast before him and sat down herself.

The word had been in his thoughts the day before: it had been one of the four words in that day's Jumble puzzle. Except that it had not been. The sequence of scrambled letters was RTMEAG, and there were only boxes enough for a six-letter word. "Garment" had occurred to him again and again, accompanied by frustration that grew steadily into exasperation. The Jumble puzzle that ran in this newspaper was a good one, and unlike the syndicated puzzle that appeared in the bigger papers it had never, that the old man could remember, featured a freakish or unknown word, no foreign currencies, no medical terms or archaic English words. For the first time in many years the old man had given up on the puzzle.

The old man had wandered down to the senior center and played a closely contested game of bocce with a few other men. It was an unseasonably warm November day, and this was likely to be the last game on the outdoor court until spring. The long, concentrated tension of the game wiped the Jumble puzzle from the man's mind.

At noon he returned home and after lunch helped his wife bring winter clothes and their heavy comforter down from the attic. In the evening he had gone to bed tired, but after his dream he had not gotten back to sleep.

Now he knew that he would spend the day irritable. The old man could see his hand shaking as he brought the spoon to his mouth. He answered his wife cautiously, shortening his replies to her questions as if afraid of what he might say.

The old man opened the newspaper. During the time that he had lain awake, it had occurred to the old man that with each day's Jumble there came the answers to the previous day's puzzle. He had never before needed to consult the answers, and it was only pride that kept him, once the birds began to chirp wildly next door and the spaces between the bedroom blinds lightened, from rushing down to the lawn to retrieve the paper and open it to the funnies page, where the Jumble puzzle was printed. Now however, the old man could not suppress his eagerness and let his pale finger run down the column of Jumble spaces to the previous day's solution. He breezed by the three answers that he knew, until his gray fingernail landed on the word: GEMART.

The old man stared hard at the word.

After a minute, the old man got up from the chair and went to the bookshelf in the next room, where he took down the dictionary. "Gemart" was not listed. Before "gemeinschaft" was "Gemara," defined as a part of the Talmud, with variations including "Gemarist" and "Gemaric," but not "Gemart."

The old man paused, thinking. He found the page that ran from "gel" to "general election," and looked at the word "gem." Perhaps "Gemart" was a compound of "gem" and "art"? This Jumble puzzle did not usually use compound words. The old man frowned at the definition of "gem," which provided no help, and then closed the dictionary and replaced it on the shelf.

The old man returned to the kitchen and finished his breakfast. Without looking at the troubling word again, he completed that day's Jumble. It was simple, as it had always been before.

Afterwards, the old man left his house, walking the four blocks to the senior center. Overnight the temperature had dropped, and gusts of winds circled him, slapping the legs of his pants from side to side. When he got to the senior center he did not go to the lounge or game room but instead went to the library. A few thoughts had been brewing in his mind, and now he obtained pencil and paper and began to write.

The old man wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper in which the Jumble puzzle appeared. It began pleasantly enough, complimenting the newspaper on running a Jumble puzzle that was superior to the more famous, syndicated one, and went on to explain the troubling word and make a request for some explanation. But then, the old man wrote a third paragraph to the effect that he could not be grateful for the Jumble puzzle's general excellence if it were not also consistent, that it seemed somewhat rotten of the newspaper not to check its work more carefully—or, if the word was not the result of a mistake, for the person who made the Jumble to suddenly begin using words that were not at all common, and *not even in the dictionary!* The old man felt justified anger and excitement as he finished the letter and signed his name, throwing in, below the signature, his rank of chief petty officer and "USS Indiana," the name of the ship on which he had served. This would show them, he thought; they would know that one man was paying close attention. A feeling of accomplishment came over the old man as he folded the letter, addressed the envelope, and bought a stamp from the young lady at the front desk. She offered to add the letter to the outgoing mail, and as he handed it to her she smiled.

"ESDITSRS"

❍❑❑❑❑❑❍❍

Twelve letters arrived in the mail five days after the erroneous Jumble puzzle had run. The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle computed this: each letter, forwarded from the newspaper, had taken two days to arrive; each individual letter must have also taken two days to arrive at the newspaper office. For this to have happened, he determined each of the letter writers must have written his or her letter the very morning that the answer to the erroneous Jumble puzzle had appeared.

The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle pulled his file for the day in question and was chagrined to see his error. He spent the afternoon drafting a form letter explaining the error. He had worked with the elderly—he was sure all of the letter writers were senior citizens—for a year during college and had learned to deal with them, nodding and listening to their complaints, then apologizing or agreeing and sending them on their way. Well, he thought, he'd listened to their complaints—and two of them had also reminisced wistfully about the word puzzles of their younger days, and about their long streaks (now ruined, the letters implied) of answering the Jumble correctly every day—and now he wrote a letter denigrating his absentmindedness, deploring it as inexcusable, and solemnly promising closer attention in the future, promising the same quality product which he was proud to know was a valuable part of their lives. He sent a bundle of letters to the newspaper, so they could forward his response to these people. He spent another half-hour writing a handwritten note to the newspaper's editor, apologizing for the lapse and promising closer attention in future. This was the first error the man who wrote the Jumble puzzle had made in many years of writing the puzzle, and he expected this would be the end of it.

Because of the time he had already spent responding to the flurry of letters, the man who wrote the Jumble puzzle was annoyed by the sight of yet another letter in the next day's mail. It seemed like piling on, a kick in the ribs when he'd willingly lain down. He realized it was simply a matter of timing, that the writer of this letter—another old man, he ascertained immediately upon reading it, noting the same neat but shaky lettering, and the same looping signature (with military rank and ship name included), as those of the day before—had gotten his letter out later than the others. But he found that this too annoyed him, suggesting a torpor that did not prevent the old man from taking him to task for his carelessness, as the letter emphatically did. The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle reread the letter. At the start of the first reading his hand rested on the handle of the filing cabinet drawer in which he'd filed his form letter from the previous day. By the end of the second reading, his free hand was clenched and he had decided to write this man a personal letter that would put the matter into perspective.

As he wrote the letter, though, the man who wrote the Jumble puzzle found it lurching uncontrollably into howling rage. He crossed out a profanity, but even without it the letter was cruel: "... do you realize, sir, that when you are in the ground a part of your legacy upon this earth will be that you wrote a nasty letter because one man made one mistake in a puzzle that certainly occupies no more than five minutes of each day of your life?—Although judging by your vocabulary perhaps the Jumble does take you quite a long time." The letter went on from there, and although it did make him feel better, the man who wrote the Jumble puzzle decided that this letter writer would receive no response. He wrote the words "For internal use only" at the top of the page and added the letter to a file marked "Correspondence."

But as he settled at his drafting table to begin the next batch of Jumble puzzles—his son's preliminary hearing was approaching

and he wanted to work as far ahead of deadline as possible—the old man's letter stuck with him. Phrases from the letter bubbled to the surface: "worked hard all my life," "unconscionable sloppiness," "consummate gall." The last phrase happened to be something an English professor of his had used often, and it returned more persistently than the other phrases, repeating itself in full and in the rhythm of its syllables. The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle worked through all of this, sitting at the drafting table without break or interruption until late in the evening.

"VLESAOB"
❑❑❍❑❑❑❑

The old man had written an anonymous letter to the township regarding the bamboo stand maintained by his neighbor. The tall shoots provided a refuge for birds, and he and his wife were sick and tired of being wakened at dawn each morning by a symphony of chirping. That the township had allowed this was a disgrace, a sign of a more general decline of civic pride and discipline in this country. The old man had served in the navy, and been in the big one, WWII, and he had a sense of pride in his nation and his home. All of these things and quite a few more he had poured into his letter.

Five days later, just after dawn, the old man was awakened not by the birds' song, but by the growl of a chainsaw. When he went to the window the old man saw his neighbor, a tall, scrawny man with a patchy gray beard, outside in his bathrobe and slippers, hacking at the stand of bamboo.

His wife begged the old man to go out and make the neighbor stop, or else to call the police. The old man resisted, but finally he dressed and went outside and asked the neighbor, as cordially as he could, what was going on. The neighbor yelled over the noise of the chainsaw that the township had threatened to fine him if the bamboo shoots were not removed. He smirked and yelled something

that the old man could not hear. The old man cupped his hand to his ear and shouted "What?" and the neighbor repeated the unintelligible phrase twice more. When the old man still did not catch it, the neighbor switched off the chainsaw. The noise receded abruptly from the old man's ears, the silence of the morning rushing in. "Someone wrote them an anonymous letter," the neighbor said, an indignant smile twisting his face. "Somebody who couldn't tell me face to face what the problem was." The old man said that was terrible and the neighbor laughed and said, "This is why some people hate government—because other people depend on it so goddamn much." The neighbor's face was red and his voice was like a snarl,. The neighbor started the chainsaw and returned to hacking at the bamboo shoots

Three days after the bamboo grove had been cut down, when the silence in the morning was glaring and the old man could hear the sounds of tractor trailers on the state highway, the first strange Jumble appeared in the newspaper.

Since the nonexistent word had appeared, the Jumble had been the same as ever. The words were of average difficulty and the puzzle questions and answers were lighthearted and amusing in their usual slightly corny way.

But today was different. The cartoon to the right of the puzzle showed a frail, frowning man stooped over a drafting table, head halfway turned towards a fat, hairless man with jagged white eyebrows, hollering out the words "You loused up, you half-wit!" with both fists clenched over his head. The clue was "When he didn't take his medication, the old man was a…"

The old man completed the Jumble uneasily. The first, traditionally easiest word came up "crank." He frowned. The second word was "pariah," the third "bile," and the fourth "tattle." He slapped the pencil onto the kitchen table, but a moment later, curious, picked it up and shortly solved the puzzle. "Bitter pill" was the answer. The

old man stared at the page for a moment. Then he got up and went out of the house without his jacket, though it was quite cold. He walked around the block, shivering and quaking with fury. By the time he came back into the house his wife had refolded the funnies section and replaced it in the paper, and the old man did not look at the Jumble puzzle again.

He went through the day indignant, but did not mention the source of his indignation to anyone. All day, brow clenched, the old man challenged his belief that the Jumble had been directed at him, and all day his belief was upheld. The old man skipped his nighttime stretches and went to bed angry.

The next morning he woke angry and stiff, and downstairs, at the kitchen table, the old man turned to the funnies page with a feeling like nausea. But the Jumble cartoon was nothing like the previous day's, without any figure that resembled him, and the old man was relieved. "Whatcha doing today, Bill?" a fit-looking man astride a stationary bicycle called to another. "Crunches, Tom—all day long!" replied the other man, reclining on a mat with his knees bent and hands behind his head.

The old man wondered if he had been wrong about the previous day's puzzle. Perhaps each day's subjects and words were random and the apparent relation of his life to yesterday's had been a simple, if astonishing, coincidence. The clue to today's puzzle was "The man who had nothing but free time was…"

As the old man unscrambled the words his pulse quickened. "Gall," was the first word, then "sloppy," "tirade," and "bulbous." His heart beat rapidly, but his curiosity demanded that he also answer the puzzle. "Ab-surd," was the answer. He clenched the pencil in his hand as if he meant to break it.

The old man walked to the diner without telling his wife. He ate lunch there and talked with an old friend of his, a white-haired man who had been bussing and cooking and hauling out trash for nearly

forty years, and the feeling of being trailed by something invisible diminished. But the old man had to walk home, and the stinging wind made him feel hunted. The malevolent Jumble puzzle was haunting the old man and made the whole day seem empty and frivolous: absurd. He watched television and ate dinner with his wife, who was upset with him, and whom he knew would not speak more than a few words to him until the morning, when his offense would be forgiven. The old man waited for enough fatigue to accrue that he could sleep.

The next day, the old man rose well before his wife, before the sun had come up, and brought the paper in from the front lawn. He grasped the dew-wet bag in which the paper had been tossed and imagined he could feel some portent of what was inside.

The Jumble cartoon featured a fresh-faced teen, in paper cap and apron, leaning out a drive-thru window. "Here's your order, sir!" the teen said. "You're beautiful, kid," said the driver, a sunglasses-wearing big shot in a fur coat, cell phone perched beside his ear, as he accepted a paper sack from the teen. "Even the consummate Hollywood dealmaker was _____ for the small transaction," the puzzle clue read. The old man's stomach clenched. He sat at the kitchen table. "Annoy" was the first word; the old man felt shaky, and a flash of hot and then cold swept across his forehead. "Fury" was the second word, "letter" the third, and the last was "gout." The old man sat back in the chair, reeling as if from a series of punches. The words felt blunt and punishing. The word "gout" troubled him as the word "bulbous" had, the words seeming to suggest that if he did not have gout, or a bulbous nose, someone wished that he soon would.

The old man set down the pencil. The sun was just coming up and the world outside seemed still and empty. With the removal of the bamboo grove, the very possibility of birds seemed to have

disappeared. The old man solved the Jumble—the word was "grateful." As soon as he had solved it, the old man went upstairs and got back into bed beside his wife. He lay there, unsleeping but with his eyes closed, long past the time when she woke and went downstairs. Only when she came to check on him, wondering if he was sick, did the old man rise again and begin the day.

The next morning, the old man awaited the Jumble puzzle with shaky resignation. He contemplated giving up the puzzle, to perhaps take up the crossword puzzle, which he found frustrating. While his wife dished out his cream of wheat, the old man opened the newspaper to the funnies page.

The cartoon had an imperious-looking judge frowning over his bench, gavel raised menacingly. "Sir, I find you in contempt!" the judge bellowed. In the foreground, a scruffy, hawk-nosed prisoner in striped jumpsuit and cap slumbered in his chair beside a flustered-looking attorney, a crescent of *Z*'s escaping the prisoner's gaping mouth. "In their dreams, all men are _____," read the puzzle clue. The cartoon seemed inoffensive to the old man, but he was wary. He set to work unscrambling the words.

The first word was "felon." It sent a wave of alarm through the old man, but after a second of looking at it he calmed. The second word was "condemn," which got the old man's notice. But the third word was "vehicle," and the fourth—an odd one, which took the old man a minute to disentangle—was "chasten." The old man looked at the column of unscrambled words. They were only words; four strange words picked from nowhere. The puzzle answer took him only a minute: it was "innocent."

The old man looked at the puzzle for several minutes. He was certain within the first several seconds that the puzzle bore no relation to him. But the answer bothered him and he continued looking it over, searching for the joke between the cartoon and the completed phrase. The cartoon prisoner had a sleazy, hardened aspect to his

features that seemed to suggest he was guilty of whatever was accused, and at the same time a look of such peace that he did indeed seem innocent.

The old man's wife brought his bowl of cream of wheat and sat down. She remarked that it was supposed to snow heavily in the afternoon and through the night. The old man looked from the Jumble puzzle to her, his attention still tenuously affixed to the rectangle of newspaper lying on the table. He seemed to be refocusing, looking at his wife for a long moment before answering that yes, he had heard something about that; yesterday, at the senior center, some men had been talking about that. The old man looked at his wife for another moment before adding that perhaps they should make an early trip to the supermarket to make certain they were not caught unprepared. His wife agreed, and the old man suggested that they go immediately following breakfast, and he could sense the feeling with which he'd woken draining from him, as he and his wife began composing a list of the things that they would buy at the store.

"❍❍❍❍❍ ❍❍❍❍❍"

The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle filled his shopping cart with frozen pizza, chicken nuggets, and, on an impulse, a half-gallon of ice cream. These had been virtually the only foods that his son had liked eating, up until around the boy's twelfth birthday. He wondered if he were being corny, buying these foods for the days before and after his son's trial, later in the week. Writing the Jumble puzzle, which demanded constant corniness, had numbed him to the line that separated the banal from the sincere.

He decided that it did not matter, because it was a gesture his son could not miss, and he steered the cart into a checkout lane. Despite it being only mid-morning, the supermarket had grown busy since he'd arrived. He stared past the people in line, through the bank of windows at the front of the store at the brooding, slate-gray sky.

The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle had been only dimly aware of the weather alerts. He examined the items that other customers were buying. In front of him, a young man was stocking up on bottled water, with a few packages of ground beef stacked in his cart. Ahead of them, an old married couple had laid their items neatly over the black rubber belt, evenly spaced as if to avoid the items' touching. They were buying milk, eggs, two loaves of bread, peanut butter, half a dozen cans of soup, coffee, cream of wheat, batteries, a gallon jug of bottled water, bacon, butter, raisins, apples, and a bunch of bananas. The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle wondered briefly if there were other items, staples, that he should have picked up.

Though it would be several minutes yet before he reached the cashier, the man who wrote the Jumble puzzle removed his wallet. With it came a loose thread that dragged up his entire pocket, dumping at least a dollar fifty in change. The coins hit the tile and scattered.

The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle stooped down and gathered up all of the coins he could see, lingering, crouched close to the dusty tile floor, his flushed face lowered.

"Sir?" The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle turned, forcing himself to smile. A middle-aged woman, two spots behind him in the line, handed him three coins. "You dropped these."

"This too," said the younger man immediately behind him, dropping a quarter into his hand.

"Sir, here is your change," a rasping voice ahead of him in the line called. The man who wrote the Jumble puzzle turned and the old man stood with one gently quivering hand stretched toward him, a quarter, two nickels, and a scuffed penny lying in his open palm. As he tilted his hand to dump the change, the old man smiled widely, his blue eyes enormous through the thick lenses of his glasses. "Slippery little devils, aren't they?" the old man said.

"Thank you," the man who wrote the Jumble puzzle said, searching for a joke to volley back. He read the front of the old man's blue baseball cap, which had "USS Indiana" embroidered upon it in yellow. He forced a dry-sounding laugh and said, "Yes. You're right. It's like a prison break."

"You'll have to put them in solitary," the old man said, chuckling, as the man who wrote the Jumble puzzle slid the coins back into his pocket. "That'll teach 'em." Smiling, the old man turned toward his wife and the front of the store.

The words on the old man's hat seemed familiar to the man who wrote the Jumble puzzle of something, but he could not think why. Possibly he would remember later, on the drive home or while cooking a frozen pizza, cutting it into small pieces and carrying it upstairs to his son. He had never been to Indiana, and had not been in the Navy. He watched the items sliding through the red eye of the scanner, wondering.

SUSAN RICH

What Do You Remember from Before the War?

> Srebrenica, Bosnia, the world's first United Nations Safe Area, was the site of the worst case of genocide in Europe since World War II. In July 1995, over a period of five days, the Bosnian Serb soldiers systematically murdered over 7,000 men and boys in fields, schools, and warehouses.
>
> —*Srebrenica: A Cry from the Grave*

In the summer there was always music
as we wandered Srebrenica's gardens
the Eyes of Beautiful Water moving like mystics.

Suitors offered tulips, Italian lipsticks.
We'd kiss and tell, comparing different men.
In the summer there was always music

as we made love, our magic word spelled *picnic*
in fields, forests, waterfalls and often
the Eyes of Beautiful Water waving like mystics.

Cleansing our faces in those fountains lit
our so-called spirits, forged a passageway within.
In the summer there was always music.

So that July, when the news turned cryptic
we'd meet at midnight, tango limb to limb.
The Eyes of Beautiful Water flowing like mystics.

We hoarded joy, each day more surrealistic —
massacres, guns, Serb mortars and violins.
In the summer there was always music.
The Eyes of Beautiful Water disappearing like mystics.

ROCCO LUNGARIELLO

The Ones We Marry

My Italian father taught me
that the best women love real
men—ones who pull their pick-

ups over in December on dead
dark roads to lug broken pieces
of trees into their trucks. And no

matter how heavy the stumps
are, he says, if they are the size
of ships, if they are anchored to

the sea, pick them up as if they had arms—
lift them with satisfaction. Remember
though, he says, as she screams through

the window *get inside you're crazy!* that on
the inside, she now loves you enough at
that moment, when nothing is heavy, to love

you until you can't lift yourself—even if
and when she forgets your name—even
after you burn those broken trees.

JOSHUA MARIE WILKINSON

what you wish to return to will not leave you unmarked

You will build a ship with pigeons & a city of rope. You will listen with your pockets emptying. What you forget is up to you. What the pigeons do at the end of the story is up to them & the lure of the wind. What you lose cannot be recovered if the light is wrong. What you speak will always have the capacity to break you. If this is clemency, I'm learning to be aligned with its torque & needles, with the glug of its voice through water.

JOSHUA MARIE WILKINSON

a brief history of the developer

The sun began to graft into us drowsily as music pushed on the bottoms of our feet & men gathered in the clearing, felled the animal they sought, then broke from their circle quietly. This happened before the fires took the trees to charcoal, before the white fish were locked in the ice of the fountain. I am the boy who took the pictures you've seen. This is my sister who developed them without her gloves on. These are her hands.

NOAH MICHELSON

Awful

And all that time I was living with an honest
to goodness god and didn't know it. There was

too much doing, too much that would be done—
model sea battles to mop up, sea serpents to wrestle

and spank, Poseidon's mangy bitter sea foam tail
caught in the bathtub's drain again; Osiris torn

to pieces, in piles, on top of the coffee table,
the destroyer, the destroyed, the burden

of the burden of proof, his penis somehow ended
up in the aquarium and was eaten by the goldfish

before I could fish it out; Jesus in the hallway forever
in front of the full length mirror refusing to lift

a finger, feathering his hair, honey through
his fingers, rehearsing the China White faces

he saves for anybody in particular; Shiva sitting
behind his drum kit, still undressed in his tiger skin

loin cloth this close to dinner, can't be bothered,
the notes spattering against the walls, his songs

the warm, sluggish wash of waking from a dream,
and you sleeping through it all—barely visible

through the cracked bedroom door—glimpse of
the sheet and your skin, the cement and the sky,

the nipples you would never let me kiss
hovering at that nearly definite horizon.

NEIL THORNTON

Homecoming Out

The second most common and unanswerable question I'm asked by straight people is, "How long have you known?"

It's tough to pinpoint an exact time, but when I was thirteen or fourteen I started ripping underwear ads out of Sears catalogs, sneaking peeks at my sister's Chippendales calendar, and looking under "G" for "gay" and "H" for "homosexual" in every card catalog, encyclopedia, and psychology book I could find.

The most common question asked by everyone, gay and straight, is "When did you come out?" It's a subtle variation on the first question, and harder to answer. If "coming out of the closet" is defined as the time when you announce your sexuality to the outside world, then this is the problem: coming out is a continuous process. I have to "come out" every time I meet someone new.

When I was fifteen, my best friend Billy Zeppetelli spent the night, and after three painful hours of "I think I'm…oh never mind," I told him and he told me, and then we totally failed to even kiss or anything.

The next day my mom (who might have been listening at the door) asked, "Are you?" and I said "I think I might be." The usual tears and fights and psychologist appointments ensued, and Billy never got to spend the night anymore. By the time I turned sixteen, several more of my friends knew. However, when people ask "When did you come out?" I usually think of another moment altogether.

In the middle of my junior year of high school, I transferred to The Putney School, a very small progressive coed boarding school in southern Vermont with 140 students, small classes, organic food,

and barn chores. Putney students were much more liberal than the students in public school, but they were also smart, articulate, impetuous, and outspoken to the point of brazen rudeness. Rather than talk behind people's backs, my peers at Putney said everything directly to each other's faces, often with devastating acuity. As soon as I walked on campus, my new-wave clothes and musical tastes, my behavior, my sense of humor, and my beliefs came under constant scrutiny and attack.

I went back into the closet, slammed the door, and bolted it shut. Several times, I was confronted with pointed questions about whether or not I was gay, but I admitted nothing. I barely spoke to my roommate, and tried not to be in the room whenever he was changing. I developed an obsessive crush on Geoff, a blond muscle-bound sophomore from Germany, who had the upsetting habit of walking around the dormitory in his underwear.

I so desperately tried to suppress any effeminate mannerisms that I became unbearably twitchy. The simplest actions, drinking coffee or waving hello, became so impossibly loaded with tiny corrections (Watch the wrist! Drop your pinkie!) that my hands shook constantly. Simply admitting my sexuality might have explained my quirky behavior. As it was, no one knew what to make of me.

The following summer, after two weeks of looking unsuccessfully for a job, I landed in paradise, a small summer-stock theater in rural New York where I was an unpaid apprentice and the youngest person in the company. I was delighted to discover that a good seventy percent of the male cast members were gay and unconcerned with statutory laws. Needless to say, I learned a lot that summer. But that's another story.

I returned to Putney a very different young man. Nobody noticed. Armed with newfound knowledge and experience, I made up my mind to be honest with anyone who asked, but no one did. I stopped

trying to hide my effeminate mannerisms and was surprised to discover that I didn't have many, so I adopted a few. Nobody noticed. Or perhaps they did and they just didn't care. I moved from mannerisms to broad hints, even addressing some of the male students as "gorgeous" or "stud." They thought I was just being funny.

But other things were brewing. I wasn't there, but I heard it started with a handful of boys in a dorm room talking about girls (imagine faded t-shirts, torn jeans, bare feet or threadbare Converse sneakers, long hair or hand-shorn mohawks, Hendrix posters and tapestries on the wall, maybe an electric guitar or snowboard in the corner, the smell of spilled bong water). Most of the discussion centered around the relative physical merits of the girls on campus: attractiveness, breast size, proportions, etc. One thing led to another and one of the guys got the bright idea to try to rate every girl on campus based on looks, vulnerability, and virginal status, and then rate the boys on how far they'd gotten with the girls. They called it the "Girly Game."

A score sheet was created, printed, distributed to the men on campus, and promptly discovered by some female students.

All hell broke loose.

The girls reacted to the Girly Game with ferocious abandon and righteous fury. No male on campus was safe, including me. We all denied having anything to do with it. Shouting matches broke out during dinner. We sat through endless special assemblies on the dangers of sexism, how rating women based on their appearance was disgusting and degrading. Relationships ended. Several young women shaved their heads in protest.

And then, for a brief moment, I managed to upstage it all. It happened one night at "the Pit," a small lean-to that served as a smoking area and the axis of the school's rumor mill. It was nine o'clock, an hour before we had to be in our dorms. About five of us sat on

the grass next to the hut and talked idly. I don't remember what the actual topic was, but I assume it was sexism, or maybe just sex.

I must have dropped another one of my hints because Erin, one of the more beautiful and fierce young women in the school, turned to me and exhaled a long stream of smoke. "Neil," she said. "I have to tell you something. And I don't mean this in a bad way, but we're all so sick of your shit."

I started to protest but she stopped me. "I'm going to ask you two questions, okay? And I want you to promise that you'll tell the fucking truth."

I looked around for support from my peers. They all raised their eyebrows expectantly. "Okay," I said, trying not to sound as nervous as I was. "Ask away."

"Question number one: Are you attracted to women?"

"Yeah," I said. "I guess."

"Okay," Erin continued. "Question number two: Are you attracted to men?"

I should have taken a dramatic pause, but I didn't. Before the words had completely left her mouth I said, "Yes."

No one seemed all that surprised.

Erin smiled. "Thank you," she said, and led everyone in a polite round of applause.

Within seconds, someone asked, "How long have you known?"

I lived in a small dormitory with nine other guys. The dorm, which used to be a private home, was the furthest from campus, a ten minute walk down a dirt road (or a five-minute walk across a cow pasture). None of my dorm-mates smoked, so I thought they wouldn't know yet. But in the hour between my confession and my return to the dorm, all nine of them had found out about it, and apparently from different sources. I was impressed.

At breakfast and at lunch the next day, my sexual orientation

was a featured topic of discussion all over the dining hall. I couldn't help but be a little proud to have single-handedly overshadowed the whole "girly game" debacle. After lunch, my English teacher, a gruff, grizzled, and somewhat feared ex-boxer, called me into a private corner.

"Word has it that you're, uh, you know, AC-DC," he said.

"Yeah," I said. "I am." I half-expected him to tell me that I wasn't, that I was confused, or that it was just a phase.

"Well," he said. "I just wanted you to know that if any of the guys give you any shit, you just come to me. I'll handle it."

"Thank you," I said, "but everybody's been very cool about it."

And they had been cool, and continued to be so. More than anything, my classmates seemed to be fascinated. Everyone had a thousand questions, most of which I had no idea how to answer. I was only seventeen, and despite the experiences of the previous summer, I was still relatively naive. I was forced to return to the library, looking under "G" and "H" again.

I managed to keep a few things secret, particularly my lingering crush on Geoff, the blond German. He and I had become fairly good friends, although he did make a point of telling me that he was straight.

Early the next week, during assembly, Gabriel, the head of the social committee, made a special announcement. To the soundtrack of "Rock Around the Clock," Gabe, in a letterman's jacket and greased hair, bounded onto the stage and announced that the following weekend, the Social Committee would host Putney's first-annual homecoming dance, with a live band and a 1950's theme. Ballots for homecoming king and queen were to be cast by Friday afternoon.

Everyone groaned and booed.

I should explain something: The Putney School has no football

team, and rather than having a homecoming in the fall, the school hosts an annual "Harvest Festival," featuring craft booths, baked goods, contra dancing, Greek harvest pageants, and silly lumberjack-type games. It's attended by tourists as well as alumni, and the students think it's obnoxiously quaint. Most of us used the day off to sneak into the woods to get high and drink beer with locals and recent graduates.

The homecoming dance, one week before Harvest Festival, promised to be a huge failure. Nobody had heard of the band, nobody felt like dressing up, nobody ever went to dances anyway, and so nobody planned to go. I certainly didn't.

Of course, one insightful young woman with a shaved head brought up the fact that we had just spent the past few weeks hashing out the inherent dangers of social institutions like beauty pageants and prom queens. In public schools, homecoming kings and queens were elected primarily on the merits of physical attractiveness. How could we elect a homecoming king and queen in the wake of the Girly Game scandal?

During one dinner, I was busy picking chunks of tofu out of my salad, listening to yet another discussion of these issues, when I idly remarked, "Then maybe I should run for homecoming queen."

My table exploded with laughter. People from the table next to us leaned over and asked, "What's so funny?"

"Neil's running for homecoming queen!"

I suppose you could call it a word-of-mouth campaign.

At Saturday's lunch, the day of the dance, Gabriel called me aside. "Neil. I really hope you're not offended by this, but I tallied up the ballots and…" He trailed off, looking at the floor, trying to find the words. "You won by a fucking landslide," he said.

After we stopped laughing, Gabriel, bless his heart, offered to

give the crown to my female runner-up, who had received all of six votes.

I thought about it for half a second, and shrugged. No one was going to show up anyway. "What the hell," I said. "It'll be something to tell the grandkids."

I spent the evening shaving, showering, spiking my hair, and getting dressed. I wore (remember, this was 1987) a crisp oversized white shirt, a silver bolo, a paisley vest, and black pleated pants. I even dusted off my suede boots for the occasion. A voice in my head kept shouting, "You're insane. Don't go. You're never going to live this down, especially dressed like that." The voice wouldn't shut up, so I shut it up with a paper cup full of cheap vodka and hiked across the cow pasture to the main campus.

Much to my surprise and terror, the assembly hall was packed. Most of the student body and faculty had shown up to see what would happen. Many were wearing the ragged jeans and sweaters they had worn that day, but some had raided the Salvation Army in town, and were dressed in poorly-fitted, garish tuxedos and prom dresses—many with work boots and ski caps.

The band wasn't half-bad, so I danced with a couple of girls, who now regarded me as "safe." The time crept by interminably. The longer I was there, the more I began to think that this was all a very bad idea. I could feel my heartbeat in my fingertips. I looked for Gabriel, hoping I could take him up on his offer, but he was nowhere to be found.

The moment finally arrived. Gabriel appeared out of nowhere, took the stage, and borrowed a microphone from the band. "And now, the moment you've all been waiting for!" He held up two envelopes. Cheers, whistles, and applause filled the assembly hall.

The drummer struck a quiet drum-roll. Oh shit, I thought. Here we go.

"Your 1987 homecoming king is…" He opened up the first enve-

lope. "Geoff Goodmansen!"

I hadn't considered this possibility—the one person in the whole school I had a crush on was going to be the king. My face went cold. Geoff walked onto the stage, waved and blew kisses to the cheering crowd, and bowed his head to accept the cardboard and glitter crown. I wanted to bolt.

But I told myself, It'll be okay. All I have to do is go up there, accept my crown, and it'll all be over.

When the applause died down a little bit, Gabriel held up the second envelope. Before he could say anything, everyone started cheering. He had to shout into the microphone to be heard. "And, by an unexpected landslide, your 1987 homecoming queen is…" He pretended to fumble with the envelope for a few seconds. I could already feel hands on my back, pushing me toward the stage. "Neil Thornton!"

The roar that went up was deafening, and it got louder when I hit the stage. The band was thunderstruck. Gabriel put the cardboard crown on my head and locked me in a bear hug.

Geoff also gave me a big hug, a kiss on the cheek, and took my hand in his as we waved to the audience. It's almost over, I thought. Try not to fall down.

Gabriel quieted the crowd. "And now ladies and gentlemen, it's time for a very special…spotlight dance." He handed the microphone back to the lead singer, who was nearly crippled with laughter.

What? What!? Geoff started to lead me by the hand off the stage. As the opening chords were played, I turned to Gabriel and shouted above the music: "What fucking spotlight dance, motherfucker?" Gabriel just smiled, waved, and pretended not to hear me.

I allowed myself to be led, mortified, into the center of the room. The band started into a slow country song called "Give Him a Chance." For Geoff's sake, I tried to keep him at arm's length as

we danced, but it was too stiff and awkward for both of us.

Finally, Geoff said "oh come here." He pulled me to his chest, wrapped his arms around my waist, and rested his head on my shoulder. I closed my eyes and hugged him back. I knew it was all in fun, but it was kind of nice. My head was swimming so much I could barely hear the song, or even the cheers and wolf-whistles of the crowd. There I was, dancing a slow song with my arms around the cutest guy in school. What could be better than that?

But what happened next was better than that. After a few verses, the novelty of watching two men dance together wore off. Two guys broke out of the crowd, clutched each other melodramatically, and began an awkward waltz. Not to be outdone, two girls entered the circle, and then two more guys joined in. My bearded history teacher grabbed the lacrosse coach and started to tango. A few moments later, the entire school, including some of the faculty, was dancing in same-sex couples.

Laughing, joking, arguing over who would lead, switching partners, stepping on toes, dipping and spinning each other, the students and faculty of the Putney School danced around us, boy-boy and girl-girl, having a grand time, relishing in a moment that couldn't have happened anywhere else.

Many years, three cities, and four serious boyfriends later, I've managed to "come out" to almost everyone I know. But even now, I sometimes find my voice faltering a little as I insert the word "gay" or "boyfriend" into a conversation for the first time.

On the other hand, after that night, after donning a cardboard-and-glitter tiara adorned with the word "queen," and after a hundred straight people stepped into my universe for the length of one song, throwing me their version of the perfect coming out party… after that, telling one more person doesn't seem like such a big deal.

MIKE ROLLIN

We grieved

then we laughed, shaking.
After that, more crying, then
what's more than grief, what's
a small joy thrown into a long defeat?
And someone offered an oar and called it a thread
and someone said mother and meant pride
and someone dropped a bowl and called it open.
You smelled ash on your hands
and called it a summons,
you put it under your pillow, you left
names to the living.

ALISON TOUSTER-REED

Making Sculptures

I smooth the clay on the batterboard.
My grief shouts out a name
and shapes the human figure.
Rounded like the hump of a whale,
his head inside is hollow.
I have worked to the end of time.
Now the grief is simple and pure:
the man will stand overnight like a brave soldier
facing surprise on the indifferent face of death.
The studio's gray people tell
each other about human lives, I think. Pale
and moist, they never fail
at knowing that we real men know
how completely the same
grief that causes them to bend
in our moving hands bends us low.
My working fingers climb
up the armature and down into the heart
of all the cool raku, calling out for the one
now almost live, ready to share
in his own form of limbo
whatever I desire to start.
There is no longer any air
between us: carefully I touch his breath.

ALISON TOUSTER-REED

Model

a love poem

You are my buccaneer of choice.
You took me fishing in the boiling
water of a red lake and we saw
a blue dog barking, fire-breathing
and brilliant. All the redbirds
on the water's edge were standing up
like regular people, waving
and talking and flicking light
like bright flames from the nostrils
of horses. You are the reason
every painter sees the eye
looking at what it is seeing:
me, washed in light, safer
by the very reason that I have.

KNUTE SKINNER

Woods

There was a thump
and then a scratching.
A dog, I assumed, not a man
stretched out on frozen stones
and reaching.

I read my book,
a history of Moorish Spain,
late into the night,
feeding the fire.

The scratching had,
after a pestering minute,
stopped when the dog moved on—
weakened by cold and hunger—
to take its forlorn petition
to another's threshold.

In the morning I found it hard
to force open the door
and hard to step out the doorway,
blocked as it was.
And then I had to walk,
having no phone,
an ice-covered trail, through the woods,
and all the way in to the village.

CARYL PAGEL

Flames, A Finale (In Which the Spark Catches)

The click (of key)
I hear at first
is muffled—a
wall-deep cue. Trem-

bling plea to me
it sounds, it sounds—
ringing. Tolled, lock
sends out siren—

it splits, splits, it
splits (to ear, to
err in echo.)
I scan the room,

see blue-night framed
with wood. Walls grow
in. They yellow;
they wave, plum-singe.

The house burns. No
mark's left dear, smoke
blots my eyes—smoke
tethers my hands.

How quiet spark?
How quiet the
breath that raises
a blaze? After

all (barn: ruined,
fox: back, horse: shot,
field: razed) I do
not choose to beg.

But still, I know
no prayer or form
with which to stay
so I start with

your name: *Mister.*
The spark catches—
Master—on wall's
paper, *Muster*—

leaping up: *Mast,*
Mutter, Most, caught—
Mess, Melt, Mate, Mine.
I beg—*Mend*—I

call clearer—hear
it: *Mind, Matter,*
Mean, Missed. Motor,
Most, Monster, Make…

The walls curl in.
My god my ghost
I've spent a life
preparing—

Notes toward an Apocryphal Text [poems by Alan May, images by Tom Wegrzynowski] Port Silver Press, 2006.
Reviewed by Jake Berry.

Alan May has reinvented the prose poem in a language entirely his own. Drawing from a rich well of experience and a visionary imagination, his first collection is quite unlike any other poetry one is likely to find in bookstores or on the internet. Similarly, Tom Wegrzynowski has drawn from the vocabularies of medieval symbolism and modernism to create a series of paintings and drawings (published here in color) that suspend contemporary notions of what painting should do. The result is a fascinating volume of work that challenges our preconceptions and strips us of our comfortable delusions.

A book with an image like the one on the cover (described below) is sure to get our attention and when the first poem is titled "Self-Portrait with Loaded Weapon" we quickly find ourselves in dangerous territory: "I opened a hole in my throat. A song came forth." Indeed it does, and strange as the song may be, May's skill in singing compels us to follow the tune. With a sardonic, revelatory wit, he writes at the razor's edge of singing.

Every poem is charged with an element of risk that sings the irrational, but each one reads so cleanly and swiftly that the spell is on you before you recognize its power. May's ability to manipulate description beyond its capacity perpetually transforms the images and gives the poetry a resonant haunting authenticity. He never abandons the reality at the heart of the piece. Reality, and a hunger to discover its depths are the engine. The poems surround you like a cloak of heavy weather. To read them is to breathe them. Consider

the opening section from "Light Coming Through the Shape of the Moon."

> The lantern swung at the
> end of its rope the blue
> coat floated on the surface
> my grandmother's hair in
> long white strands I was
> nine this is what I
> remember spread out like
> a fan in the blackness
> around her

Is this stunning image a transmutation of actual memory, a child's memory retained in all its vivid magic, or an invention by the poet? Throughout the first section of *Notes* we encounter poems that appear to be drawn from memory. They tell us about the way the family functions, or dysfunctions. This family operates at the bizarre extremes. At first one thinks of these extremes as aberrations, but perhaps it is at the extremes that family is most vividly experienced and retained in memory. These poems recall the violence in the work of Flannery O'Conner, but go even further to the total disruption of family as the ordained basis of the social structure. The nuclear family has gone to the nukes and the final war is raging.

> …my father breaks
> through the brush Mack
> turns aims has the hammer
> back "Better hurry" he
> says "I'm getting anxious"
> my father pale as a dove
> says nothing the barrel six

feet from his face I turn
my back and wait for the
shot to open a hole in my
head run all the way home
bring my brother back the
shells

Perhaps what we are witnessing in these poems is the destruction of the self that is essential if one wishes to work with some measure of orginality. Rather than distorting reality, these violent accounts make it emotionally available by destroying the common delusions. With its title, *Notes* reminds us of Wallace Stevens' great poem "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," but if the poetry of Wallace Stevens takes us toward the end of the mind, May's poetry displays what follows. Words become primal elements that release charges of energy and pathos.

Wegrzynowski's art also originates in a place beyond prosaic modernity to imagine the word in a more fundamental way—image as unmediated language. Theriomorphic and exaggerated human shapes function in the domain of symbol and magic. The jester/fool figure on the cover appears to be part animal, part human. We might take the animal face to be a mask, but in one human hand it holds a mask of a human face and in the other hand a feather. Is the animal face yet another mask? What is more genuine, the human mask of the animal beneath it? The figure stands in a dark hallway that only deepens the mystery. It serves well as a cover image because it prevents us from settling on any concept of meaning that might limit the infinite possibilities of the work found inside. The combination of poem and imagery throughout the book results in the world exposed when our safe lenses are removed and our selves exposed when our masks are removed.

In such a world, the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, known as the riddler because of his mysterious epigrams, is no longer so confusing—to say that "war is the lord of all" makes sense here

because violence exists not so much as a disruption but as the condition of primary conflict that may indeed be our point of origin.

There is a dark absurd humor in these poems and images that suggest what lies on the other side of the gallows, the hanging tree. As in the Hanged Man of the tarot, a reversal of how the mind works is at play. *Notes* seems to ask, "How can I continue in such a world?" As in "Tree," one of "Three Dead Letters":

> If I look at this tree for
> more than a moment, I
> will want to hang myself.

The second and third sections of *Notes* move into the broader sphere of political power and religion as a tool of political power. In "El General" the narrator's rise and fall is no less absurd than the hunger for power itself.

> Then came the armadillos
> in the armored car. By far
> their cigarillos burned
> brightest. They placed the
> pearl studded pistol on my
> thigh, next to cellular
> phone and pocketed
> politicos.

Again and again May takes us beyond the brink to look back at the disastrous joke we make of ourselves when we mistake the artifices of society for the real world. With a masterful sense of play, the poems and images of *Notes* wrench us from our small inner dramas into a world where everything is at stake and reality is revealed by a mask that perpetually removes itself, eluding us as long as we grasp for it.

Sunflower Brother by Sam Witt
Cleveland State University Poetry Series, 2007
Reviewed by Katie Peterson.

Sam Witt's second collection begins with a quote from the English Romantic poet-madman William Blake, and the book takes its title from the showy Sunflower of that Blake poem, "who countest the steps of the Sun." Blake, famous for the beautiful but deranged metaphysical nursery rhymes of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience,* is also rumored to have spent hours sitting in his backyard for hours on end listening "for Eternity." Witt's been doing the same thing. The poems of *Sunflower Brother* combine natural and domestic detail-work, the paying-attention that is the heart of good poetry, with an uncompromising higher vision. A kind of Southern Gothic boy-next-door, Witt embeds ordinariness in a poetic voice of great range and magnitude. He risks, at every turn, not only the embarrassment of sincerity but the unfashionable awkwardness of an absolute love of, and attraction to, beauty. Lush and intimate, these poems think it's their birthright, and ours, to seek the heights. "The sun comes and goes with our name / on its lips," writes Witt in the poem "The Kiss" on the last page, and the eighty-eight preceding are filled with similar inspirations.

Sunflower Brother pairs a pastoral setting with images of fire, explosion, irradiation, and burning; both sets of images are equal parts creation and destruction. Witt's voice always feels fresh from, and flushed with, loss, and his elegies—poems written for the dead—not only acknowledge death and limitation but try to reinvest the mourning self with life. The result can be both beautiful and direct, whether the poet addresses a deceased relative, or speaks more generally to what he perceives as our decaying world. Often, it sounds more like Witt's been reading Keats than anything from his own century. Consider these lines from "Stepping into the Light," an elegy that has Witt looking at a deceased friend's farm:

Now that the morning has broken its veils
Into dew, a low mist dropped at the base of the pylons;
Now that the apple blossoms are half-opened
Around me, sugary and blind, half-sealed
With their own black juices

Nothing about this poem is ashamed of being poetry: it would rather dash itself on the rocks of excess than restrain itself. This bucolic vision is stained by the "black juices" of loss, and the poem in its entirety moves through moments of memory, praise, and elegy in search of the energy of renewal. It's impressive that Witt can write lines like those above, and then continue with such quietness and meditative composition at the end of the same poem, "I sit up quietly into my body."

Witt's voice can also be dead-on, scary, and confrontational, and it can turn from intimate description to intimate accusation in a second. Consider the following lines from "The Blood Orange:"

The blood orange is human
In 3 ways

Its meat is abundant
With burst burgundy veins
Its sweetness resembles
A kind of bleeding

Like you
It smiles when cut

In all cases, Witt's formal risks (which mostly take the form of an emotional excess that tends towards melodrama and overgrown descriptions of glades and rivers) come from, and reflect, acts of deep emotional engagement. Witt's love of beauty, and his hunger for it,

stay at a level of raw need and, so, leave him to speak from the ruins. In such moments, elegy turns back on itself, and the self has to face its own losses. Often, Witt finds himself, by the end of a poem, both defending himself and explaining himself to the dead, as in the wonderful "Fireflies:"

> Can't you see I had to tear myself break down
> & blow apart like dandelion-fluff that glows
> as the air moves, a celebration
> of scars, unknitting themselves into diaspora,
> into a new skin for us,
> in this show of sulfurous life.

It makes sense that fire and smoke and ashes are so seductive to Witt, and appear so frequently in *Sunflower Brother:* he's the most perishable thing here.

Readers looking for poems that are both companionable and challenging will admire the way in which *Sunflower Brother* goes forward into the difficulty of life and loss armed with poetry's familiar tools—memory and melody. But a world in which the self feels so much, so strongly, can be isolating, and that isolation has consequences not only for the poet but for the reader: sometimes the pleasures here appear unremittingly dark in spite of the rich harvest of diverse images, and sometimes the concerns of the book tend towards the hermetic rather than the intimate. Still, it's canny and astute of Witt to realize how such a way of being, the traditional and Romantic way of poetry, seems to have gone underground in a world consciously animated by more social and political concerns. In "Confession," he writes, "There's a name for it, / when I reach out to you and find myself alone, / not helplessness or self-hatred exactly." The name for it, of course, is poetry.

CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHEN AJAY has published two books of poetry: *ABRACADABRA* and *The Whales Are Burning* from New Rivers Press. He has traveled widely in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. His poems have appeared in *The Paris Review, The Progressive, ZYZZYVA, Ploughshares, The New York Quarterly, India Currents, Poetry Northwest, The Hollins Critic, The Christian Science Monitor,* and *Prairie Schooner.* He has been a writer in residence at the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo and the Djerassi Foundation. He has received the Major Hopwood Award for Poetry, the PEN American Center Grant for poetry and the Rinehart Foundation award for creative writing. He teaches at the California College of the Arts in Oakland, California.

BRITTA AMEEL has an MFA from University of Michigan, where she was a Jane Kenyon fellow and received several Hopwood awards. Her poems have appeared in *CutBank, Hayden's Ferry Review, Fugue, jubilat,* and *Controlled Burn.* She lives and works in San Francisco. "Anatomy Lesson" is a variation on a theme by W. G. Sebald.

KAREN LEONA ANDERSON is a graduate of the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop and the recipient of a Rotary Scholarship to New Zealand, and has had work published in *jubilat, Verse, Indiana Review, The New Republic, Fence, Volt,* and other journals. She is currently writing a dissertation on poetry and science in Ithaca, New York, where she helps curate the SOON reading series.

JAKE BERRY is a poet, songwriter and visual artist. His latest book *Brambu Drezi* (Station Hill, 2006) contains all three volumes of the long work-in-progress together for the first time. His work has appeared in journals, anthologies and online for over two decades. He lives in Florence, Alabama.

J. MATTHEW BOYLESTON is a PhD candidate in creative writing and literature at the University of Houston. A native South Carolinian, he received an MFA from the University of South Carolina. He has taught at Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania and at the Malahide Language School in Dublin, Ireland. His poems and essays have appeared in such journals as *Harpur Palate, The Spoon River Poetry Review, GSU Review* and *The South Carolina Review.* This summer he will read at the Great Writing Festival at the University of Wales.

ALLEN BRADEN has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and Artist Trust of Washington State. Last year he was poet-in-residence for the Poetry Center and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and also won the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize. His work is published in *The New Republic, Virginia Quarterly Review, The Southern Review, Best New Poets 2005,* and elsewhere. This is his third appearance in *New Orleans Review.*

KIM CHINQUEE's fiction has recently appeared in *NOON, Denver Quarterly, Conjunctions, Notre Dame Review, Fiction, Mississippi Review, The Pushcart Prize XXXI,* and in other venues. She teaches creative writing at Central Michigan University.

NICK COURTRIGHT, an Ohio native, currently resides in Austin, Texas. His work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *The Iowa Review, The Florida Review, Redivider, Denver Quarterly, Barrelhouse, Ninth Letter, Court Green, The Portland Review, Salamander, The Literary Review, Harpur Palate, Zone 3,* and others.

C. DAWN DAVIS was born in Atlanta, and has always lived in the South. After graduating in 1970 from the University of Georgia with a BFA in photography, she began a career as a portrait photographer, and also began painting. She is represented in Atlanta by Aliyah Gallery, and by Galerie Dalray in New Orleans. Her work is collected at The Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans.

MARK DECARTERET's work has appeared in the anthologies *American Poetry: The Next Generation* (Carnegie Mellon Press, 2000), *Places of Passage: Contemporary Catholic Poetry* (Story Line Press, 2000) and *Thus Spake the Corpse: An Exquisite Corpse Reader* 1988-1998 (Black Sparrow Press, 2000). A chapbook, *(If This Is the) New World,* was just released from March Street Press.

CHRIS DOMBROWSKI's poems appear or are forthcoming in *Barrow Street, Colorado Review, Crazyhorse, New Letters, Ninth Letter, Orion, Seneca Review,* and *Joyful Noise: An Anthology of American Spiritual Poetry* (Autumn House). He is currently writer-in-residence at Interlochen Center for the Arts in Interlochen, Michigan.

BEN DOYLE's first book is *Radio, Radio,* published by LSU Press.

MARK EHLING lives in Minnneapolis, Minnesota. More of his work can be found at newcarriage.com.

JUSTIN GARDINER lives in and out of Oregon and received his MFA from Warren Wilson College. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *ZYZZVA* and the *River Oak Review.*

SARAH ESTES GRAHAM has graduate degrees in poetry and theology from Harvard University and the University of Virginia. She teaches a composition course on International Politics at the University of Virginia. Her book, *Fall Gently to the River,* was a semifinalist for the 2007 Dorset Prize.

CHRIS GREEN has an MFA from Bennington College. He's an editor for *RHINO* and also founder of Green Horse, an organization linking poets to political activism and literary service work. His chapbook, *Conceptual Animals,* was recently published by Sheltering Pines Press. His first book, *The Sky Over Walgreens,* will be published by Mayapple Press in August, 2007.

DANIEL GUTSTEIN lives in Washington, D.C., where he is visiting assistant professor of creative writing at George Washington University. A collection of short/short fiction, nonfiction is forthcoming from Edge Books in 2007. His work has appeared in *TriQuarterly, New Orleans Review, Ploughshares, River City, Barrow Street, American Scholar, Prairie Schooner, Seneca Review, Quarter After Eight, Third Coast, Poet Lore, Fiction, StoryQuarterly, Other Voices, Bellevue Literary Review, The Penguin Book of the Sonnet, Best American Poetry 2006,* and aboard metrobuses in Northern Virginia. He has also worked as an editor, international economist, farm hand, tae kwon do instructor, reporter, theatre arts educator, and disabilities professional.

K. A. HAYS' poems have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *The Southern Review, Black Warrior Review, Mid-American Review, The Florida Review, Gray's Sporting Journal, The Missouri Review,* and other magazines. She is also a fiction writer and verse translator whose work has appeared in *The Hudson Review* and *Gulf Coast*, among other journals, and whose short stories have been twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She spent a year reading English literature at Oxford, graduated summa cum laude from Bucknell University, and in 2005 received an MFA in the Literary Arts from Brown. She teaches fiction and poetry at Bucknell.

SMITH HENDERSON is from Montana. He currently lives in Austin, Texas where he is a Michener Fellow at the University of Texas and where "Blooms" earned finalist honors for the 2007 Keene Prize. His work has most recently appeared in *American Short Fiction*.

KERRY HUDSON moved to North Carolina after graduating from the University of Florida's writing program. He has had stories published in *The Sun, Columbia, Confrontation, Emrys* and other journals and is currently completing a novel. By day he constructs sculptural furniture.

MICHAEL HUDSON lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana where he works for a truck equipment manufacturer. His poems have appeared in various magazines over the years: *The Iowa Review, Mid-American Review, Columbia,* and several times in *New Orleans Review.*

CHARITY KETZ's poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Beloit Poetry Journal, Bellingham Review, American Literary Review,* and *Artful Dodge.* Her chapbook, *Locust in Bloom,* was published this January by Poet's Corner Press. She lives in State College, Pennsylvania where she works as a figure skating coach and choreographer.

HAESONG KWON, originally from Inchon, Korea, lives in Northampton, Massachussetts, and attends the MFA program at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst. He is a former poetry editor for *Cream City Review,* and has poems in *Good Foot* and *Oxford Magazine.*

JEFFREY LEVINE's second book, *Rumor of Cortez,* newly out from Red Hen Press, was nominated for the L.A. Times Book Award in Poetry. Levine is a past recipient of the Larry Levis Prize, the James Hearst Poetry Award, the Missouri Review Award, and the Transcontinental Prize from Pavement Saw Press. He has new poems in *Agni, Harvard Review, National Poetry Review, Barrow Street, New Orleans Review, American Letters and Commentary, Virginia Quarterly Review,* and elsewhere. He is Editor-in-Chief of Tupelo Press.

ROCCO LUNGARIELLO is a Connecticut native currently pursuing an MFA in poetry from Bowling Green State University where he also serves as an assistant editor for *Mid-American Review.*

NOAH MICHELSON received his MFA from New York University. He has most recently published work in *The New Republic, Cimarron Review, Swink, Beloit Poetry Journal, Fourteen Hills, Bay Windows, Bloom,* and *Small Spiral Notebook.*

JENNIFER MILITELLO has new work forthcoming in *Boston Review, Denver Quarterly, Green Mountains Review, Indiana Review, The Kenyon Review,* and *Prairie Schooner.* She is the author of a chapbook, *Anchor Chain, Open Sail* (Finishing Line Press, 2006).

TOMAS Q. MORIN studied at Texas State University and Johns Hopkins University. He currently has work in *Margie* and *Blackbird,* and forthcoming in *Ploughshares.*

MIA NUSSBAUM is a 2006-2007 Provost's Postgraduate Writing Fellow at the University of Iowa. Her poetry will appear in the August issue of *The Iowa Review.*

CARYL PAGEL's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *DIAGRAM, Octopus Magazine, Coconut,* and *Denver Quarterly.* She currently lives in Iowa.

BRYAN PENBERTHY's debut collection of poetry, *Lucktown,* won the National Poetry Review Book Prize and will be published in 2007. He was the recipient of an AWP Intro Award and his work has appeared in *Crazyhorse, West Branch, Bat City Review,* and *Poetry International,* and online via *Blackbird* and *Verse Daily.* He lives in Charleston, South Carolina and works for a nonprofit organization. For more information, visit www.losttimepoetry.com.

KATIE PETERSON is a regular contributor to *New Orleans Review.*

GLEN POURCIAU's stories have been published in *Cimarron Review, Mississippi Review, New England Review, Ontario Review,* and other magazines. One of his stories won *Ontario Review*'s Cooper Fiction Prize.

ALISON POWELL's poetry has appeared in journals such as *AGNI, Black Warrior Review, Meridian, Poet Lore, Puerto del Sol,* and others, and appears in the anthology *Best New Poets 2006*. She resides in San Francisco.

ADAM REGER lives in Pittsburgh, historically significant to fans of professional wrestling and zombie movies, where he is wrapping up an MFA at the University of Pittsburgh. He is working on his first novel.

SUSAN RICH is author of *The Cartographer's Tongue Poems of the World,* which won the PEN USA and Peace Corps Writers Awards. White Pine Press recently published her second collection of poems, *Cures Include Travel.* She lives in Seattle, Washington, but has worked in Bosnia, Gaza, and South Africa.

MIKE ROLLIN lives in Minneapolis, where he received an MFA from the University of Minnesota. He has worked as a teacher, interpreter, and community organizer. He has recent poems in *Bombay Gin, Atlanta Review,* and *Northwest Review.*

REGGIE SCANLAN was born and raised in New Orleans. As a bassist, he has been working professionally for thirty-five years. He has worked in the bands of Professor Longhair, Earl King, James Booker, Eddie Bo, and, during a two-year period in the Bay Area, with blues artists Charles Brown and Sonny Rhodes. He is a founding member of the Radiators. A photographer for twenty-five years, he works with black-and-white and infrared film, and prints his images in a traditional darkroom. His work has appeared in galleries here and abroad, in books, magazines, and on CD covers. His work is in the New Orleans Museum of Art and in private collections.

REBEKAH SILVERMAN lives in West Lafayette, Indiana where she is the Editor-in-Chief of *Sycamore Review.* Her work is forthcoming in *RHINO* and *The Southeast Review.*

KNUTE SKINNER lives in County Clare, Ireland. His latest book of poetry is *Stretches,* from Salmon Publishing. *The Other Shoe* won the 2003-2004 Pavement Saw Chapbook Award.

NEIL THORNTON was born and raised in Schenectady, New York. He has a BA from Carnegie Mellon University and an MFA from the University of New Orleans Creative Writing Workshop. After fourteen years in New Orleans, most recently teaching English at the University of New Orleans, he has moved to New York City.

ALISON TOUSTER-REED's poetry has appeared in journals in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, including *The Threepenny Review, The Midwest Quarterly, Poetry Wales, Poetry Australia, Oxford Magazine, Queen's Quarterly,* and *University of Windsor Review.* She has won the Merrill Moore Award for Literary Promise, an Academy of American Poets' Prize, and the Indiana University Foundation Prize in Poetry. She was the first person to earn a doctorate in original poetry at Vanderbilt University. She is also a sculptor, and has had several showings of her work.

G. C. WALDREP's collections of poems are *Goldbeater's Skin* (Colorado Prize, 2003) and *Disclamor* (BOA Editions, 2007). In 2006-2007, he taught creative writing and literature at Kenyon College in Ohio.

ROBERT PAUL WESTON's fiction has appeared in literary magazines on both sides of the Atlantic. He has been nominated for the Journey Prize in Canada and the Fountain Award in the United States. Forthcoming stories will appear in upcoming issues of *On Spec* and *Postscripts.*

JOSHUA WILKINSON lives in Austin, Texas, and is finishing work on his second collection of short stories. This is his third appearance in *New Orleans Review.*

JOSHUA MARIE WILKINSON is the author of four books: *Suspension of a Secret in Abandoned Rooms* (Pinball, 2005), *Lug Your Careless Body out of the Careful Dusk* (Iowa, 2006), *Figures for a Darkroom Voice* (with Noah Eli Gordon; Tarpaulin Sky, 2007), and *The Book of Whispering in the Projection Booth* (Tupelo, 2008).

SAM WITT's first book of poetry, *Everlasting Quail,* won the Katherine Nason Bakeless First Book Prize in 2000, sponsored by Breadloaf, and was published by UPNE the following year, and he received a Fulbright Fellowship to live and write in Saint Petersburg, Russia. He has participated in poetry festivals at Druskininka and Vilnius at the invitation of the Lithuanian government. He has been a resident at the Breadloaf Writers' Conference and at Yaddo. His poems have been published in *Virginia Quarterly Review, Harvard Review, The Georgia Review, Denver Quarterly, Colorado Review, Fence, New England Review,* among other journals. His second book, *Sunflower Brother,* won the Cleveland State University Press Open Book competition for 2006. He currently teaches at Whitman College.

WILLIAM WRIGHT is author of *Dark Orchard,* published by Texas Review Press and winner of the 2005 Breakthrough Poetry Prize. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Beloit Poetry Journal, North American Review, Cimarron Review, Poet Lore,* and *Phoebe,* among others. He is co-editor of the Southern Poetry Anthology series (with Stephen Gardner) and is a PhD candidate and teaching fellow at the Center for Writers in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

CORRIGENDUM

The poem *Anatomy Lesson* by Britta Ameel was first published in our last issue, volume 32:2, inadvertently missing its last two pages. It appears here in its entirety beginning on page 10.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The *New Orleans Review* is made possible thanks to the support of the Department of English, and the College of Humanities & Natural Sciences, at Loyola University New Orleans, our subscribers, and our patrons who include:

Shannon Cain
Grace Clerihew
Douglas Ebbitt
Brian Fitzgerald
Frank Groves, Jr.
Juli Henshaw
Carey Herman
Peter Hodgson
Ashley Schaffer
Frank Scully
Sophia Stone