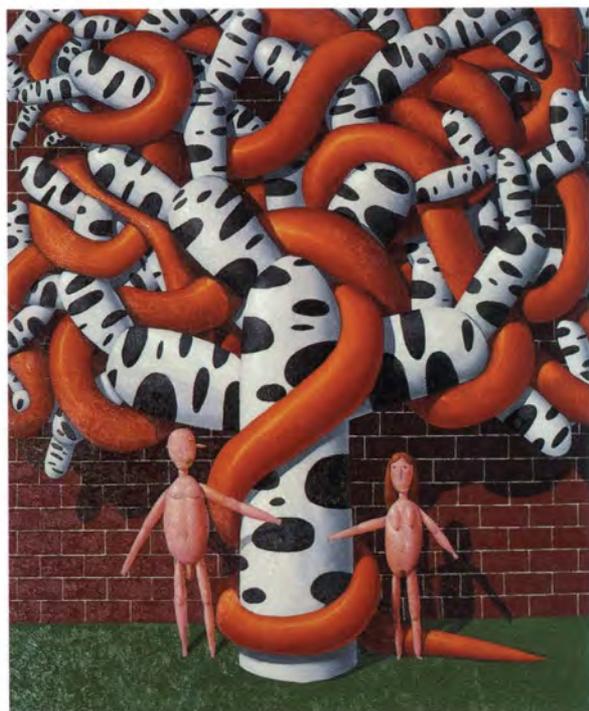


# New Orleans Review

Volume 27 Number 2

Fall / Winter 2001



**portable** (por'te-bel, por'-) *adj.* 1. Able to be carried or moved with ease: a portable typewriter.

2. Suitable for use in a portable manner: a portable generator.

3. Suitable for use in a portable manner: a portable typewriter.

**Bearable**;

**endurable**. -**portable** *n.* 1. A portable typewriter, such as

as

a light or small typewriter that can be

carried or moved with ease.

**prison** (priz'en) *n.* 1. A place where

persons convicted or accused of crimes are

confined; a penitentiary; jail. 2. A

place where

of a condition of confinement; forcible

detention. 3. A state of imprisonment or

captivity. - **prison** *tr.v.* -**oned**, -**ing**,

-**ions**, to confine in a prison; imprison.

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COVER ART:

*Tree of Knowledge* by Alan Gerson

FRONTISPIECE:

untitled photograph by Daphne Loney

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*Annunciation*

The subject is love  
sweeping down like the cold scent of snow  
from the top of the world.

This time  
it's an angel  
rushing through the doorway—

And what mortal wouldn't drop the book in her hands  
and lean toward such dazzlement?

—the woman's lips  
a keyhole O, the sudden leap of dark knowledge  
in her gut:  
    her stricken face,

the angel's finger, luminous as a minnow,  
pointing at her;  
the angel speaking in a cleft palate's  
garbled tongue. *Oh, the difficulty*  
*of human speech.*

Here is the story in all its gilded detail:  
the woman as heroine; a lovechild, sweet and tender  
as a grape. Later, their hearts  
dragged through sand by wolves.

What mortal wouldn't ball her fists and wrench her ear  
from those twin spectacles, love and grief?

What mortal wouldn't question the angel's ridiculous wings,  
overlarge, serrated, glittery as citrine or tin?  
Under its fluted gown, there's nothing—no belly, no thighs—  
a body composed of mist.

PETER COOLEY

*Autumn Reconsidered*

Measled, dog-eared, five-pointed, pockmarked, sere:  
how much it looks like what I needed it to be,  
the one leaf I'm tearing out of my windshield wiper now,  
no falling star but just the start of fall,  
a small start as September in the Gulf South imagines it.  
I hold it up to eyes of the green wind. Wind considers.  
I have just come from prayer, that chapel mine  
except for the crone who needs a circumstance  
to flatten herself before the Blessed Sacrament.  
Nothing is anything but Monday: rushing, traffic, running late,  
work ahead to banish what I'm holding on my palm.  
Prayer in my head, the mumble of the wind, the crone...  
The leaf refuses to be more than a small flame.  
I close my hand on it. Oh well. The ordinary miracle.

CHRISTOPHER HOWELL

*De Pictura*

The *Axis Visualis* is not the whole field  
of view. Beyond the central tree  
three crows are peripheral and forgotten  
by the man trying to find his way  
out of the painting on my wall.  
You might say the "eye of the mind"  
insists, with Plato, that light is knowledge,  
that the crows, being black, are nothing  
known, and therefore possibly in league  
with that darkened fountain at the heart  
of all imitations of loss.

Meanwhile, the man and I are non-  
transactional, since for two hundred years  
now he is turned away, falsely brightened  
by what he already knows: the way out

is that point of vanishment  
where mirrors devour themselves and seal  
light's purity away, like a bricked-up beacon.  
So I can't help his grey and blue form  
turn left and climb the stair  
as I could not help my grandfather,  
unplatonically collapsed on the kitchen floor,  
his spirit passing over my shoulder  
to a field (the field of absences?)  
with one bent tree and crows  
in the perfect stillness of flight.

*He Writes to the Soul*

I'm just jotting this note so you won't forget  
that though life is blue behind me and stony  
in the instances I pause for, I have beads and shells  
enough to hold back a sidelong toppling. Anyway,  
at every crossing I kneel and say "excelsior"  
and light a little fire in a jar and and drink it down,  
hoping if fire's a prayer no one will answer it just yet.  
But I guess that's clear. At first I thought I'd write you  
about the hemp-trap roses that grow by collapsing  
and bringing home whatever's trying to sniff them  
at the time, about what that means. Then I thought  
that's just peering at the innards of luck and no good  
comes of such haruspicy. So I guess I'll give you  
the news about the lake dark which is growing, too,  
and just yesterday began working up into the sky  
among softball and badminton of the angels.  
Lucky they were already wearing headlamps  
to bedazzle the fish up there! Lucky their suede rings  
keep their hands afloat, otherwise who knows  
how they'd copy down the braille God keeps sending  
like flocks of perforated swans. Some good news is  
the apple tornadoes are out of blossom now  
and have become zinc, which as you know  
says very little and requires practically no disaster.  
That's what Mom says, anyway, and she should know.  
She says she knows about you, too. She says  
you are the shade of something folded and alone

on a long leash of red pearls. And that God  
put you there because he couldn't help it.  
But I don't know, I think you're somehow related  
to this lake...like its language maybe, or like the idea  
of swimming, which I've always enjoyed. Well, that's it,  
I guess. Don't fret about my safety. If the weather  
doesn't suck its trigger finger while it hunts for time,  
or if something huge and golden lets me have its keys,  
I'll be okay. Lake or no lake, some days I feel  
perfectly disguised in front of you, like intention  
around an iceberg or sunlight on the skin of the rain.  
And I'm happy now, happy as a jungle, happy as a wisp  
of dreaming melon, and I cry only on your days off.

*Heavy*

## ONE

I tell Claire, I'll see you home. She says, You can't stay. I say, Who said I wanted to stay?

We take the M5 bus along the river, uptown. Riverside Drive is a wall of windows candescent over treetops. Boys and men in bow ties lean under stretched awnings. They stare at the Drive's bright seam of headlights, the black water, the folded cliffs of New Jersey. We slow at a hill under the spiraled crown of Grant's tomb and the red beacon of Riverside Church. This is my stop, Claire says. She stands up, holds the silver bar above my seat and looks down at me. Her black wavy hair comes forward around her face. She has small rectangular glasses and behind them gray-green eyes. She is pale. She is very pale. I want her to smile. I want her to tell me I can stay.

## TWO

Claire says, This is my building. This is my super. The super wears a sequined dress, tall heels. She tells us, Hello, tells us, There's a wolf in the park. I saw a wolf in the park earlier. The three of us look across the street into the dark stand of trees. The sudden outcrop of park splits the Drive in two, a curved expanse of grass, pine, and maple. The super hums, warms her throat. Explains that she sings at an after-hours club downtown. Hmmm. Hmmm. She taps the tip of her shoe against the step. A silent gliding town car comes for her. The driver steps out, walks around the car, opens her door. I saw a wolf, she tells him. Maybe more than one. He nods. Me too, he says, thousands and thousands.

## THREE

Claire walks ahead of me into the building. The foyer is a checked hallway hung with clouded mirrors. We walk between them, are multiplied, two of us, four of us, hundreds of us. I stand behind her, listen to the locks catch at her key. I follow her through room after room. She turns on every light. Her apartment is wide slats of oak floor, tall windows. She turns on a burner at her stove. Click, click, click, flame. She heats water, makes tea with crushed chrysanthemums and rock sugar. In my cup, whole flower petals rise to the surface, pearly white. She tells me her Persian name, the name her family calls her—Katayoun.

## FOUR

Katayoun opens the windows, moves the couch to face them, turns out the light above us. We look for wolves in the dark trees. Wind blows up the river, presses through the park, shakes the leaves until it is the sound of water falling. She tells me that in Ferdosi, her neighborhood in Tehran, there were everywhere dogs living in the streets. They rarely barked at anyone but they always growled at her. Her mother would tell her, Do not look into their eyes, or even at their eyes. They would wait for her after school, at her bus stop, three or four of them. When the doors opened, she would run into shops, exit through back doors. She tells me, You can't stay.

## FIVE

It is late when I get home to Brooklyn, to Bergen Street. In the gardens below my apartment there are irises in bloom, rows of strawberries, overripe tomatoes. The air smells of newly-turned soil. A screen door clicks open, shut. I hear the small puck of lip letting go of cigarette, a long breath. Next morning, thousands of starlings land in the trees, leave in a rush of wing and quivering branches. If she had let me stay, I would have missed all of this.

## SIX

I take the subway from Bergen to Katayoun. At 120th Street the train glides into light, sun falls through the scratched windows. The elevated station trembles as we stop. The super is outside Katayoun's building, polishing glass. I push the buzzer. Katayoun's broken voice moves through the slats of the intercom. She says, I'm coming down. The super asks me, Are you the new heavy? Just going to dinner, I answer. She winks. From the stoop, Katayoun and I watch bands of reds and yellows dissolve over New Jersey. Let's find the wolf, I say. We cross the street, enter the park through partitions of pine. There are picnic tables upended, marked with pools of tree sap. She points to an overflowing garbage can seared into slate rock. She says, This is where he finds his food. We wait for him. Katayoun tells me that the Alborz Mountains at the edge of Tehran would glow in oranges, yellows, and reds at night. From her roof in Ferdosi she could see the intense glow opening and opening. When she was small, she thought it was a fire and that the city was heated by flames. Nights when it was very hot, they would sleep in the courtyard. The dogs in the street would answer sirens and horns with willful howls. What they wanted, she knew, was to come into the courtyard and tear her skin from her bones.

## SEVEN

We don't go to dinner. We pass through the mirrored hallways, take the long flight of stairs to her door. In her apartment she passes light switch after light switch. She pulls open the blinds and we are covered in streetlamp light, marked with the imperfections trapped in the window glass—streaks and circles of captive air. I touch her shoulder, trace the hinge of bone and muscle to the other side. I put the back of my hand against her mouth. Her lips are cold and when she kisses me she tastes of chrysanthemums. She opens the windows. The super is below us, humming, singing scales. Katayoun says, You can stay a while, but you can't sleep here.

## EIGHT

When she kisses me good-bye, she says my name, then says, June. The train is empty. I walk through the cars, open and close the heavy metal doors, through rushes of tunneled air until I find company. A couple reads their own sections of newspaper, their feet touch. The train moves. I see my reflection in the dark windows.

## NINE

It is nearly morning when I get back to Bergen Street. It is close with trees and lit with weak, reaching lamps. Everyone on Bergen sleeps. I walk on the street.

## TEN

It happens like this for weeks: buzzer, tea, her bed, the sounds of the super returning—heels on the steps, whole songs from Rogers and Hart, Riverside opera—the elevated tracks, the subway, Bergen Street.

## ELEVEN

The Farsi-English dictionary I buy has no listing for June. The woman who sells it to me says, Not June—*joon*, my dear is *joon*, dearest, you know, like that.

## TWELVE

Here is full summer on Riverside Drive, Katayoun-*joon*. Heat rises in sheets from the sidewalk, from the blacktop. New Jersey disappears. You've told me that you and your parents would sometimes leave Tehran when it was hot, drive through the Alborz to *Darya-yé Khazar*—The Caspian Sea. You would sing all the way there. Here, the super is a gondolier, rows us up through *Darya-yé* Riverside.

## THIRTEEN

We pile ice in mixing bowls, sit them in front of a box fan and wait for cold air. You say, If I fall asleep, lock the door with this key and slip it back under. And that's all I have to do, but we both sleep. I dream that the train's elevated tracks shake so hard that the beams sway and touch the street. My subway car moves on, back to Brooklyn. Under the river, coral glows orange and blue. Bergen Street is choked with it. Any movement forward scratches deep into my skin. When I wake, Katayoun is still sleeping and it's still night. I hear the soft click of the super's town car door closing, her voice. The air is cooler now. A breeze moves in from the river. The ice in the bowls has melted. I watch Katayoun at rest, the slow rise of her chest. I close my eyes. I sleep. When I wake up, she isn't there. I lock the door and slip the key back under.

## FOURTEEN

I don't hear from her for a week. I take the train uptown to where I catch her bus, our bus, the M5. Silent and empty, it ferries me up the side of the river. I see the beckoning red light of Riverside Church. Katayoun's windows are dark. The bus keeps moving, uptown, uptown.

## FIFTEEN

I buy a map of Iran. I memorize the names of cities: Shiraz, Esfahan, Zahedan. I touch the letters that stretch around the top of Tehran: A L B O R Z M O U N T A I N S. I study the outlines of the Caspian Sea, find the roads that lead there from the city. I buy a city map of Tehran. In the lower right corner I find it—her neighborhood, Ferdosi.

## SIXTEEN

The trees on Bergen lose their green. At night, I can't sleep and I walk the street from end to end. I read my Farsi dictionary: *sangine*—heavy.

## SEVENTEEN

The newspaper reports that a wolf has been seen in the upper reaches of Riverside Park. I take the train to Katayoun's in the early morning. I tape the clipping to the beveled glass door of her building. I cross the street, into the park. Her blinds are open. Sun swims against her windows. The police claim that it is not a wolf, is only a loose dog. What do you think, Claire-Joon? I sit under the trees and wait for the wolf.

## EIGHTEEN

I find the steps to the elevated too numerous in the morning sunlight. There must be hundreds and hundreds of steps, millions. I turn around. I walk back to Claire's apartment. I write on the bottom of the clipping—This happened. This happened. I knew you.

## NINETEEN

On Bergen, cars parked closely touch each other. I walk in the middle of the street. The air moves. A tall girl passes close on rollerblades. I can smell her skin, her hair. I watch her disappear and reappear, in and out of the lights. Leaves drift down from gigantic trees.

ERIC RAWSON

*After the Words, the Thought, the Deed*

Henrietta: the last we saw her  
Was at September's denouement.  
She was mad with leaving  
And dark laughter.

When I say *we* I mean of course *I*  
And by *Henrietta* I mean  
Both a girl on a sign  
And the spirit

Of the womanly jacaranda  
And additionally someone  
Whose eyes I glimpsed in her  
Rearview mirror.

Henrietta: the obsolete sound of it  
Is novel to my ear  
And promising and sly.  
Birds would say it.

The last we saw her she was crossing  
Through the rain at seven a.m.  
To the coffee man's kiosk  
To buy the news

For her umbrella. She was as dark  
And wet as an aloe vera.  
Already I can see  
What she will mean

Many years from now. We will call her  
Henrietta, meaning regret,  
And will regret those days  
That felt like skin.

*What Comes Next*

On a bank above the Gihon a woman  
is digging up the remnants of a shoe,

excavating with a stick, then with her fingers,  
a heel, a tongue, the inner and outer soles.

Below her, the river is speaking of time  
and erosion, of passage and loss—a story

she does and does not hear. Balanced  
on her haunches, she sifts a deeper layer

of soil, unearthing a few grommets,  
a blunt, abbreviated nail. All that is given,

the river insists, will also be taken.  
But she is oblivious, distracted by a crow

in its vocal descent from the ridge  
to the branches of a pine overhead.

And when it fixes her with its brazen  
gaze, when it boldly repeats its alarm

she blinks once and bends again  
to her labor. Even as it vanishes

she forgets, as she forgets herself  
in this animistic place. On her knees

in the dirt, assembling the pieces, she wonders  
what sort of man, in what circumstance,

abandons a leather shoe. But it is late,  
the day has turned, and above the ridge

clouds are massing, low and laden with rain.  
And only now, in her haste to gather

the fragments and depart, does it come  
to her: how large the shoe, how large

the foot that wore it, as long and broad  
as her husband's. And what comes next

is the inertia of sadness, so that she neither  
rises to leave nor resumes her work.

MYRNA STONE

*One Thing and Then Another*

For an hour, first one thing and then another,  
the boy unthinking, crossing and re-crossing  
the room, building by rote and the single light  
of a lamp on the bureau a sort of sling

from duct tape and rope—the afternoon's  
intricate handiwork he spreads out at the foot  
of the bed near the girl who lies there,  
also unthinking. Outside, a raw wind

is rising, and across the street a woman  
has stepped out on her stoop, a push broom  
in her hands, her face partially obscured  
by a red watch cap and her upturned collar.

She looks, for a moment, into the distance,  
then begins to sweep, working down  
in increments from her concrete landing  
toward the asphalt driveway and the curb.

And now the boy is on his knees on the floor,  
the girl lighter than he's imagined, pliable inside  
her skin, her eyes the moss green of agate,  
large and unseeing. Soon, he'll prepare

for his father's homecoming, the knife,  
the rug, the floorboards scrubbed clean,  
everything perfectly in place in the closet,  
the girl wrapped and neatly suspended

beneath the slats of the bed. Soon, he'll watch  
from his window how the weather encroaches,  
how methodically, leaning hard into her broom,  
the woman, too, will finish what's begun.

*The First Four Deaths in My High School Class*

STEVE HUBER

died in Randy Neath's swimming pool. He was electrocuted. A short in the wiring of the built-in lights. This happened years before we went to high school, but we think of him as part of the class. At the reunions since we graduated, he is always listed as one of the dead on the memorial page of the program. Randy graduated. We talked about Steve at the last reunion. He played guard on my PAL basketball team. Randy's hair is still red, and he still lives in his parent's house. In the summers, he swims in the same pool where the accident happened.

HOLLY LOVE

died after she was out of high school and married. She might even have had a child by then. She was a high school teacher. Foreign languages. It was something sudden, something in her brain or in her heart, a clot or embolism. She had been in my class in grade school where she was a lieutenant on the safety patrol. Her job had been to raise and lower the flag every school day. Her best friend when growing up was Sheryl Faulkner, a neighbor, who went to Queen of Angels. Sheryl's husband, Don Krouse, died in a car wreck on a county road. He was our age and would have been in our class, but he went to the Catholic high school instead.

died with AIDS, but he killed himself before the disease killed him. A gun. We had talked on the phone only a month before he died. This was after college, he was living, then, in Atlanta. When I called, he was in the middle of refinishing a wooden door. He had just applied the chemical stripper, and he was letting it work while we talked. He said, "I'll let it work." We had met in junior high school. His real name was Ralph, and that caused some confusion when "Ralph Kirkpatrick" was listed, in our reunion program, as one of the dead in our high school class.

FRITZ SHUMAKER

died after killing his wife, Mary, who had been Mary Knight in high school. So, technically, Fritz was the fifth to die in my high school class. He shot himself with the same rifle he used to kill his wife, who I never knew. It was a large high school. There were over six hundred students in our one class. During the commencement at the Memorial Coliseum, it took a while for all of our names to be read. We graduated when platform shoes were in style, and everyone in their shiny red gowns walked carefully up the stairs to the stage. Fritz played the accordion, wore glasses, and came to my eighth birthday party when we both were in Mrs Hanna's third grade class where he sat, toward the back, near Debbie Saunders, Greg Street, and Mark Taylor.

### *Jackie Maher's Barrel*

Jackie Maher, he lived in a barrel, a tar barrel, a fifty-gallon drum that once held tar used by the County Council to tar the roads. On top of the tar, they poured crushed stone. That's how roads were made, then. Still are, I think. So I asked my mother, I was about six then, could I see Jackie Maher's barrel. It's only a barrel, she said, but I bothered her until she took me out to see it. I was taken by the whole idea of living in a barrel. Life couldn't be any simpler than that, I thought.

He didn't really live in it. He slept in it at night. But there it was, some straw and a couple of coats thrown in. He'd be off around the countryside in the daytime, begging. He didn't really beg. People gave him things, bits and pieces of food and he'd do an odd job for them, cut some wood or watch cattle, a bit of digging, mending a fence. He had good hands on him, took his time and did good work. He had a nice way about him, too. Many a farmer offered him steady work but he was restless and after a while he moved on. He always returned to the barrel in the evening. You could see him, cooking a bit of grub or boiling a kettle for a cup of tea. In the winter, when the days were short and 'twas cold and damp, he'd sleep more, his head to the inside, curled up. Nobody bothered him.

They tried to move him to better accommodation, the people who felt it was wrong for him to have to live in a tar barrel, but he said no. That was where he wanted to be and that's where he stayed. He became a bit of an attraction. People would walk up quietly and take a look at him sleeping, warning the children to be quiet or they'd get a clip across the head. But they were just as curious and watched him, wide eyed, and had to be dragged away.

To my mind, he had everything you'd ever want. He lacked for nothing, went his own way, wasn't a burden on anybody that I could see. He wasn't one to mix, or carry on a conversation, but seemed happy in himself, and people left him alone, other than a "Hello, Jackie. Are ye all right?" or "Bad day, Jackie boy." He'd nod his head or wave a hand and continue with what he was doing. He had a way with birds too, and they flocked around him. He fed them bits of stale bread and stuff that he found in his pockets.

He was there in the barrel for years, about a mile outside the village, a nice location, under a big oak tree. He had picked the location well. I suppose you get a good sense after years on the road. He hadn't put the barrel there. The Council had, empty on its side. Once in a while they kept a little gravel there, but mostly it was empty. I suppose Jackie spotted the possibilities and moved right in. The Council workers didn't object. They were mostly country men who worked on the roads and had known all their lives men like Jackie who moved around. You'd wonder what started them off to that life of wandering and imagine a great tragedy or a lost love.

The world is a frightening place for a lot of people. Others could care less. But as someone said, there's no two of us born the same. We fight our own little wars every day. A funny thing about Jackie Maher, nobody knew when he left or if he died. People would say, "I haven't seen Jackie lately, have you?" or "Any word of Jackie Maher, at all, at all?" The barrel was there for years after.

*son of a tree*

I walked into this world  
wearing grandpa's skin  
my ears were born  
two fires dying  
my eyes recalled  
by shrugs of steam  
mouth cut  
bottle glass  
my legs tugged at the lids of graves  
a glittering parade  
dog down an alley  
leather leash and woof  
moon pressing  
face on the window  
who is that knocking?  
now then  
touch a leaf  
have you been?  
poplar and sumac  
stripped down to skin  
the old man had been  
counting his wrinkles since last year  
see those antlers?  
I shot him  
I was shotgun  
in the white car  
I have ridden on the wheel well

of that diesel tractor  
vodka vodka  
o mercy vodka  
grandpa grandpa  
wheeling in the leaves  
we wrapped our hands  
round burning bottles  
the difference  
between us  
six feet

*bum song*

In the heights in Houston, the co-ops in Austin,  
the ghetto in San Antone...  
are you in Paris? A glass of wine.  
The red of a leg of a robin,  
the russet crutch of wine.

A catechism of smoke...  
Cigarettes. Word rolled like rain in clouds.  
They lay therein waiting  
to do a secret battle. To marry  
two cows and singe the rough brown hills  
with racing bonnets, petty hooves.  
Concussions to the domes of brambles who look like toothpicks,  
speak in ballads of hostel late nights.  
His black hair, your wild, wild Irish!  
Fit to roam up the ship rhythm of your hands,  
take napkins, hush birds, stop rivers, manhandle bread.

Muscle signals to the fly who comes  
by banished highways  
through coffee steam turnstiles  
in licks of flying  
to click on the bread  
until you flick her away.

In Mason City, in Minneapolis, in St Croix Falls, in Sturgeon Bay...  
Are you in Ladysmith?

Old haunts, polio street fights and fancy houseboat cars.  
Iron lung patients. The same old folks walking.  
They have a flex to their legs that does not come undone.  
They go from youth to old mean, bent from the tongue  
of the moon and the oxbow of stagnant memory. They walk  
in shiny white factory jackets or purple homecoming  
jackets or striped athlete jackets that spin together  
in a barbershop whirl 'til the tv sounds the commercial for *Get Your!*  
The collective size of the bottle does them in and they pop  
a flurry of aspirin to go.

Beat back the sun of an omelet sun,  
shies like a cat to a bigger cat  
or the dog  
or the dog shadow.

In Maine, Montana now, in Greece...  
You are in a place in my mind, I know.

It's sometimes a river to wet you,  
a desert to dry you,  
a mountain to raise you  
the canyon to take you down.

And I have seen your bones in a parched daydream  
and I have seen the savage mask  
of your two faces o  
O Catherine!

A B R A H A M S M I T H

You have all the plans of cowbirds in a field.  
You are as solid as the wind  
who pipes to mourn the deer.  
Your hair, when it was longer, was the strong old highway  
and as long as you ride:

I am a hitchhiker; I am a trucker; I am the old  
woman who sniffs the carnation of your brake light  
which stains the night, dear...  
You stain the night. You stain it.

*carrots*

thin rug of carrots  
on the road broken carrots  
children carry carrots  
like little torches  
one girl eats a carrot  
tops of carrots  
on the road a carrot  
carried by a bone-thin dog  
he is thin enough  
not to know  
the difference between  
vegetable and bone

the people on the bus  
begin to talk  
they speak and wave their hands  
they swarm their own faces  
with hard hands and questions  
they nearly fog the glass  
with questions  
they say carrots and carrots

but the carrot is mute  
pulled along  
broken by bus tires  
it is nothing  
if puppet if arrow  
if finger if gold

aztec men in crooked  
blue jeans and cocked backpacks  
bent by stopped trucks  
shove carrots into pockets  
pockets engorged with carrots

the truck on its side in the ditch  
pisses a yellow horse's mane  
the crippled windshield  
so many glass bits  
some of the glass is clean  
some of the glass is red  
like a pulled tooth

someone says lord  
someone says god  
someone moans

the bus driver kills the radio  
shoots a look  
at mary on the dash  
touches her statue  
like you would  
a child or a dog or  
the burro you wish to load  
with sticks  
from the mountains

a mound of carrots  
slumped out of the rear  
a child climbs unsteadily  
up the carrots  
a bent man points at a jacket  
a shirt and a jacket  
blood added to grass  
flies loafing above

a head of sweat cuts the spine  
aim and direction of a child's playing ball  
soft wonder it grows down  
the lomas of the spine  
the birds have begun  
to clot in the sky  
the carrots in the stomachs  
slowly lose shape

ANTHONY BUKOSKI

## *The Waiter Michael Zimski*

I

I, Michael Zimski, know philosophy.

I needed my philosophical training when I got off a Superior Transit Authority bus at the end of the line one night last year. I'd quit a job as a garbage raker, moved to a new flat, and found a mailbox stuffed with unpaid bills. I'd waited by the docks for a bus. I'd turned middle-aged. I'd been drinking in a waterfront tavern, then drinking at the Polish Club, and at midnight, on the driver's last run, I rode out of the most broken-down part of Superior, Wisconsin.

"How can I get your job?" I asked the driver.

"Stay behind the yellow line," he said. "You're drunk. No talking to the driver."

At Belknap and Tower, no riders waited in the rain. At Belknap and Catlin, no midnight riders in rain that turned to snow. No riders clutching tokens in Central Park, or in the East End and Allouez neighborhoods.

I got out when the bus driver stopped at the Choo-Choo Bar in the Itasca area of Superior. He smoked a cigarette, stared at the night sky, then headed back in a darkened bus to the bus barn on Winter Street.

That night last year—decades after I left home for St Louis, tried the seminary, went to school in Chicago, dropped out, started up again, got degrees in comparative literature and Slavic languages and literatures, after working a million places over the years like Geno's Septic ("You Dump It, We Pump It") and Zenith Recycling, where I was head garbage raker—I finally realized I had enough

credits for a baccalaureate in Tough Living. Serenaded by empty box cars being shunted in the railyards, I walked the two miles back to my childhood neighborhood to buy a six-pack before closing time at Heartbreak Hotel.

The entire city of Superior, my neighborhood included, is a classroom for the study of failure. The curriculum for The Study and Analysis of Heartache comes from our citizenry's heavy drinking. We're Scandinavians, Slavs, Indians of all makes and models. The curriculum is also tied to our living on the shore of the largest freshwater lake in the world. Lake Superior alters our weather for the worst, makes us ugly. Step out the door, see old newspapers blow down the streets in a lake wind, wipe dust from your eyes, go to the Palace Bar, Isle of Capri, Captain Cliff's Bar, Lost in the Fifties, Al's Waterfront Tavern. Find the locals lined up for an eye opener at eight a.m. That, to a sensitive former academic like me, is Hard Knocks. When you can't find work and need to get yourself more depressed, listen in the hallway of your run-down flat for the neighbor guy to strike his wife, or she him. Add gray skies. Add fog, and in winter and into late spring, throw in bitter cold, and that's how it is in Superior, Wisconsin, at the Head of the Lakes. Every day I take a refresher course in how to be a loser.

Now imagine a young man named Burr Orkit, employee of the Huron Cement Company. Given his humble job of delivering lime dust in a dusty place, you'd think he'd dwell on the meaning of life the way I did on the bus to the Choo-Choo Bar. I mean, here he is, a twenty-two-year-old delivering dust: that which we will all come to eventually. But Burr, being carefree, does not think of mortality, of his place in the world, of other philosophical matters. He is a handsome guy. Six feet tall with good, sharp features, he'd walk up to you a little shyly, assuring you that you are okay with him no matter what. I always thought he resembled the Polish James Dean, Zygmund Cybulski, star of Andrzej Wajda's *"Popiol i diament... Ashes and Diamonds."* With his looks, Burr has the same

ability as Zygmund Cybulski to suggest an interior sadness. Over the months, he grew to be a beloved, dusty burr in this philosopher's side, I'll tell you.

I met him some time ago. I was in the Heartbreak Hotel having a beer when this young man beside me looks straight at himself in the mirror behind the bar and asks, "If I'm queer, wouldn't I think of men all the time?" He's a stranger and asking the question so I or anyone could hear.

"I don't know," I said. "All I think about is how to pay the rent."

"Just pondering things. I'm new here. I'm Burr Orkit. You got a place you can't pay rent on?"

"No." (It was a lie. I was hard up for money and a month behind in the rent.)

"Where is it? Where's the place you're behind on the rent?"

"Above us. It's an apartment," I said, pointing to a ceiling stained yellow from years of cigarette smoke.

During the four hours we spent drinking in the beer-and-smoke haze, I made him guess what I did for work. "You're an insurance agent. A doctor. A high school music teacher. A choir director."

"No, no, no," I said. "Better than that."

During a bathroom break, I talked to myself. "Confess to him what you are. He'll understand." Which I did when I got back to the bar.

"You're the District Attorney?" he said.

"Better yet," I said.

"What?"

"I wait on tables."

His jaw dropped, but he got over it. Drunk now, we confessed more to each other, such as do we go to Mass regularly and do we love women.

"Just because I asked that of myself in the mirror, I'm not queer, ya know."

"It's all right. This is Heartbreak Hotel. In here we are what we say we are."

"How 'bout this? My ex-girlfriend's in Kettle Moraine. I haven't missed her for one sec—and I've talked to a lot of girls in here and on the job already. I'm smart. I'm doing okay. One who comes in I've talked to is named Marnie Hudacek. See, I'm not queer. I'm a fun hunter."

"Me, too," I said. "I'm no doctor or lawyer, but an intellectual. I'll confess that the intellectual you see before you, he, I, overeat out of nervousness. At work I snatch a beet or a carrot off diners' plates on the way from the kitchen to their table. Once I swiped a whole pork chop from Mrs Pilsudski. When they're done eating and I'm clearing dirty dishes for Jan the dishwasher, I eat gristle and fat, too. I'm not health conscious. A hundred times a day I call orders back to the cook, Gimme the ham-and-egger, the roast beef plate, the pierogi special.

"There's more. Why am I telling you this? It's a Polish restaurant. I wear a Polish outfit to work. *Gorali* wear them on special days in Poland. *Goral* means mountaineer, highlander. The costume has a flat hat. It has a partridge feather in it. I don a white shirt, red vest with decorative stitching, red pants I barely squeeze into anymore, white, knee-length stockings. I wear black shoes, this old pair of wingtips. See how different gravies I've spilled have plugged up the holes in front? To be authentic I have to carry a mountaineer's walking staff. When I polka over to take an order, I say in Polish, Hi, I'm Michael."

"Boy, that's the confession of a fun hunter," he said.

I bought him a beer and stared at myself in the mirror. Before I knew it, he handed me half a month's rent.

Let me say we became very serious roommates after the heartfelt confessions in the Heartbreak Hotel. Without wasting words, let me go on to praise Burr Orkit. Let me dwell on him, on how his hair and eyebrows stood out to wonderful effect when he raided my closet to borrow my shirts with shades of purple and blue in them. If I could see him in the Heartbreak wearing purple again,

that Wal-Mart shirt! While we were roommates, he wore my t-shirts, too. He stood out from other laborers.

But it is November now. I'm troubled trying to get at an aspect of Burr. He had this look. How do you change a face, a look? In Burr's case his specialty was blue eyes that made him look shy yet mysterious. The look was natural, forlorn, drawing you toward it. This is the aspect of him that women, and I, found irresistible. Young women (Marnie Hudacek), old women (Mrs Schimanek, Mrs Podhale)—they wanted to help him, though what it was, or if he even had a problem, no one knew. It was the James Dean look, the Zygmund Cybulski look, that made him seem sensitive and troubled.

At six a.m. as I filled the salt and pepper shakers at the Polish Hearth or licked the tip of my pencil to take a breakfast order, my troubled young roommate with blue eyes was yanking a tarp over the bed of a truck and preparing to head out to Litchke's place on County Road C to do a man's work. Once spread with lime and seeded, a field will produce good hay. The load Burr brought of hydrated lime (no, it was RK Fines, Rotary Kiln Fines, another type of lime) helped sweeten things, helped neutralize the soil's acidity at Czerwinski's and Litchke's.

Burr was a traveler with dust, too. The company sent him to Eau Claire and to Minneapolis in a pneumatic truck, while I was stuck in Nowhereville-By-The-Lake. There I stood in Polish costume, Guest Check in hand, as he delivered far and wide what remained after dolomite has been processed into pebble lime, hydrated lime, or the other kinds the Huron Company ships out. He delivered his dust here, too, as I say, to the men who bulldozed it into the white piles you see in hay country out on Polish Road.

Imagine Burr Orkit a part of the whiteness of lime. He *did* drive for this company. He *did* deliver dust. But this is no tragedy. I don't want to imply by writing "Imagine Burr a part of the whiteness of

lime" that a lime tragedy is imminent. Really nothing so tragic occurred. Just a walk a young man took on a county road that passes empty fields treated with the RK Fines or the hydrated lime he himself delivered a month before, a walk during which, as always, I sat home waiting for him. It's my tragedy, if anyone's, I'm relating—the events of a life I should have prepared for but seldom did, which leads to my renewed interest in philosophy and to such strange introspections that trouble me awake and asleep.

In my drafty apartment tonight, I keep thinking that I've hurt and blinded people all my life...left them with the particles, the dust into which things disintegrate. For forty years I've served others the dust of my lost dreams, and now Mephistopheles comes up the stairs to the apartment where, walking staff parked in the closet, I, an overweight Ph.D. in a *goral* outfit, sit in the gathering dusk. This, if ever, is the time for thinking, when Mephisto makes his rounds, when winds sweep the lime-sweet hayfields, when light snow glances past streetlights and settles along curbs, when the sky is a white razor to my black thoughts. What, dear God, is Burr Orkit doing while I cry alone at home tonight? Tell me how I've come to let my fingernails grow so long.

This lonely night I think how, discharged from the military years before, I soon after got into spiritual trouble in a Catholic seminary, quit there to become like the perpetual student Peter Trophimoff of *The Cherry Orchard* (Russian playgoers call it *The Cherry Garden*), then found work teaching high school, quit that after four years, left for Minneapolis, became the perpetual student again, studied Polish and Russian, gained admission to the U, withdrew, re-entered, exceeded the limit for completing dissertations, and finally—at age forty-nine with balding head and graying hair—completed the dissertation and said to myself in Ukrainian, "*Proschaj i ne vertajsja*... Good bye and don't come back." What I want to know is why I never hung on to anything in life. This question is the theme of the second introspection the night has brought me. Now I'm

served the dust of life yet again, having it delivered to my door upstairs in the Heartbreak Hotel, where I sit in an unclean apartment.

In these rooms above the bar with the neon Heartbreak sign, we, Burr and I, once had a chair, a tv set, an end table with plastic drawer handles, a footstool for His Majesty King Burr, a floor lamp with three-way bulb, a bookcase for my philosophy books—Bachelard, Habermas, Kierkegaard—and for the one tome Burr Orkit ever consulted: *A History of the Green Bay Packers*. We had a noisy refrigerator, a stove, plywood cupboards. Except in the kitchen, which had yellowing linoleum, we had hardwood floors. I didn't mind cleaning the place with lemon-scented Pledge, if Burr would only shake out his clothes after work to cut down a little on the dust. We got on fine, each of us happy to have someone there.

The building is one hundred years old. Natural light shines through the windows. The outside has brown wooden shingles and faces Fifth Street in the little East End. The roof of Heartbreak Hotel slants backward from Fifth towards the alley. Burr and I had the front apartment. A merchant seaman named John Kalinowski and his wife once lived here. We'd find things he hid. (Beneath the linoleum, a port pass for the Shatt-Al-Arab ports in the Persian Gulf, directions for using a Sanitube for personal hygiene around the genitals.) Two windows in our living room and the two in Burr's now empty bedroom look over the street. At night the neon Heartbreak sign hanging outside the windows colors the empty rooms.

So many girls came here when Burr and I were roomies that Burr could have used a Sanitube. I told him if he wasn't quiet in bed with his women, I wouldn't bring him leftovers from the café.

To hide my annoyance when he walked in with some new girl, I'd laugh. "*Nie odmawiaj sobie radosci...* Don't postpone joy," I'd say then go to my room to imagine yet another hot babe rolling my t-shirt up his sun-tanned chest, pulling it over his head and off him, probably asking as she did, "Who is that odd fellow in the kitchen?"

Was the muffled laugh Burr identifying me as his grandfather? Were they laughing at me? Did he ever call me his grandfather, which would be impossible since I have never married and am only fifty-five?

Burr and women. The occasional thump against the wall during their casual evenings. His handsome face pushing into her bosom to smother his groans so I, the grandpa in the next room, wouldn't be disturbed. The click of the door as she left. Once or twice a month a woman from uptown came to see if she could make Burr vulnerable to her. The visitors left love struck, but Burr Orkit himself love struck? Never, not on your life. Burr'd wake up crabby for lack of sleep.

"Make me coffee," he'd say, stumbling into the kitchen. "What time she leave?"

"Three a.m."

Eyes red, chin rough with wheat-colored stubble, he'd sit in his underwear studying the weather. "I got a long day." He'd rub his face.

"When you get back, go to bed. Catch up on your sleep," I'd tell him.

"Didn't drink much, but I feel like shit. That one last night, her recipe took sixth place in the United Way of Greater Duluth Chili Cook-off. God, we're screwing and down hangs the award ribbon she was so proud of. *Sixth Place—United Way Chili Cook-Off*. Her name was Jillene. Hand me the coffee."

"Was she a sixth-place finisher?"

"I finished her five times."

That whole winter he went fun hunting, seeking fun. I know he was fun hunting that first year on Halloween, and All Soul's Day because I distinctly remember the diners talking about the All Soul's Day storm of 1968, when Superior got thirty-six inches of snow overnight. I was living in St Louis with Tim Crow. I know Burr Orkit was seeking fun on Veteran's Day 1998, too, because I am a

Vet. And during Advent he hunted fun because I talked to him seriously about the propriety of doing so before Christmas. And on Valentine's Day he did hunt fun and on Easter Sunday and on Memorial Day, 1999. He was a fun lover who'd go on and on without a worry for anyone but me. When he was home, he'd see that my hat was on straight. He'd hand me the walking staff, my *ciupaga*, on the way to work. I taught him to say "good-bye" to me in Polish.

## II

Then out of nowhere comes Rose Wells. When he brought her home, it worried me. She was no also-ran, I can tell you. For a week he talked about her. "She's not from here. She works in the country, putting in the pipeline. I got lucky. Never seen a woman so beautiful. I was delivering lime dust. I seen workers eating, smoking, taking it easy on lunchbreak. The truck says Great Lakes Gas Transmission. Zimmy, are you listening to me? Rose was leaning on a tire of the truck. She wore a hardhat, safety vest, light blue shirt, blue jeans. You listening? For a minute she looked like a man."

"Listening. Is your heart listening, Burr?"

"You know it is," Burr said. "Lemme tell you. I parked the lime truck. I stretched my legs. I made four trips by noon. Then there appear six or seven guys and a truck, Rose in the safety vest. They started in Alberta, Canada, moving through Czerwinski's on the way to the Lakehead Refinery.

"Can I get a drink from your water cooler? I asked them. She said yes. Because her hair was pinned under her hardhat, I didn't know until then she was a woman. The paper drinking cups had messages and reminders. Mine read, *Your Future Depends On Your Safety*. Above the message was a turbaned swami with hands stretched over a crystal ball. Hey, my future depends on my safety, I said. Your future depends on your safety, a worker said.

"Rose showed me her cup: *Safety Is Your Own Look-Out*, it read. A solitary eye on the paper cup stared at me. These things are really funny! I said."

"Please, Burr, you've told it a million times."

"I like to tell it," he said.

Since we'd become roommates, he'd had fifth- and sixth-place, once a tenth-place finisher named Maaret-Hannelle Laitala, a Finn. I grew seriously bothered with his talk of Rose Wells. I couldn't concentrate. At work, Harriet Bendis yelled at me for serving her pork hocks instead of pork sausages.

"I thought you were so bright with your smart talk!" she said. I wanted to brain her with my *goral* walking staff. I was worried. If Burr moved out on me, what'd become of the end table, the overstuffed chair, the vcr? Where would the Polish James Dean go?

When I finally met Rose face to face, I found a lot wrong with her. She was no good for Burr. Much too tall a woman. Shoulders too broad. Though she worked on the pipeline crew, she pretended to be naïve and pure. I didn't buy it. There was no accounting for his taste, though. When I was heating leftovers and he'd walk into the rose light of the kitchen and say, I ate supper with Rose, was I to tell him, You can do better in a woman? I suppose you don't want my suppers now? On the days after an evening out with her, he'd eat whatever I was preparing, even chili. Then he'd go straight to bed.

Workdays were long. Dirty dishes come in at a café. The dust never stops at a cement plant on the waterfront. Neon signs blinked on in the windows of bars with names like Dreamland, Happyland, and the EZ Bar. Burr would meet her, the Rose-Deep Well of Joy. Their first date was at Happyland. Happyland! Oh, they were so happy sitting in a booth confessing their secrets.

## III

Bay City is far away from here. It's in Michigan. That's where she—or where the company she worked for—was located. When she was here in the days of Happyland, the EZ Bar, and Dreamland, she ate supper in the café. Always with Burr. When I wrote the order in

the Guest Check, I'd say, "Then you won't be eating at home tonight with me?"

She'd shake her head for him. "No," she'd say. "You'll excuse us both tonight."

She gave me a souvenir paper cup. The two hands on it lay palm upward. *Your Safety Is Largely In Your Hands*, read its message. Looking at it, I wished my safety were in my hands. I fell asleep to the jukebox downstairs, a jukebox that has all old songs. I was losing Burr to Rose, who was in my kitchen playing cards.

When I awoke to "Heartbreak Tango," I knew they were spinning, twirling, dancing downstairs in the bar, the roommate and the girl.

I'll not deny she was beautiful to him and, I suppose, to a few others. She was also a woman practicing safety, which may explain her sitting aloof from the men when Burr met her, for by then she'd had enough of the talk you can only imagine from a crew of pipeline workers.

When free of the hardhat, her hair—the yellow of aspen leaves in September—fell to her shoulders. In the Heartbreak's dusky light, this hair shined, those eyes sparkled. The sun over the pipeline had darkened her skin. I won't make much else of her except to say that Burr Orkit, not being safety conscious, fell in love, whereupon he began worrying about the transitory nature of pipeline work. "If she goes, she goes," I told him. "Don't give up being a fun hunter."

When she telephoned and Burr wasn't in, I told her things, too. "You know he likes his fun, Rose," I said. "Whether with you or with me...it doesn't matter. He likes and needs it. He's a normal boy."

"What kind of fun does he have with you?" she asked.

"You know," I said.

"I bet you two go to movies and play Scrabble. I bet you watch football games."

"You know, Rose," I said again.

"You fight over the sports page, right? You yell scores back and forth. You tell each other sports trivia."

"No, Burr's more advanced than that," I told her. "He's a free-wheeling, natural lad who takes fun where he can find it," I said.

"Fun like sitting in bars, like shooting pool and meeting girls?" said Rose. "That's what pipeline guys do."

"Men do other things."

"What do you mean?" said Rose.

"I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, but in terms of fun hunting, I'm kind of a father-figure to Burr. He comes in when he doesn't get any from you and tells me about it. Then I advise him. I relieve him of the tension build-up you have caused him. He's uncertain after. He's always worrying. I tell him a pipe, any type of pipe, has two ends, and he can have and work both."

"Not with me he won't," she said, her voice rising. "I don't believe you."

"You may know him better, but I know I'm right. I know what we have. I know how he desires it." It was all lies, but it worked. The night the pipeline crew pulled out, their work over, Marnie Hudacek, a Heartbreak Hotel regular, called me from the bar downstairs. "He's getting drunk down here," she said.

Smudged black from the dust and smoke in the autumn sky, the moon rose large as the jukebox played *Heartbreak Tango*. Either the record was stuck or Burr himself was playing it on purpose. I didn't know why he was drinking more than usual, but I hoped if something had gone wrong in his life we could establish a routine, just the two of us.

At three a.m., I heard a commotion—Burr coming into the apartment and into bed. The hum of the bedside clock kept me awake. The dusty moon set. How was Burr feeling? As if my own heart hadn't broken those nights he danced the tango with Rose Wells.

"Burr?"

"She went," he said, hardly louder than the hum of the clock.

At the black edge of the room, I saw a white t-shirt appear. "Here. Can you find a chair? Do you need help?"

"I'm pretty drunk."

"Do you want me to heat leftovers?"

"She left. I was ... Did you say something to her?"

"No, Burr."

"The truck Czerwinski spread lime dust on his fields with is always unlocked behind the lime piles. Rose sits in there. We looked out at his fields and dreamed. No one could see us. Did you say something to her? A day ago, I was goofing around. I was asking her the question I asked you at the bar that time. I called after her when she jumped down from the truck. What're you doing? Where you walking to? Her face changed. She yelled something at me, called me a fun hunter with two sides to me."

"You better rest," I said. "You better eat leftovers. You know I liked Rose."

"The guys laughed when I went out there and asked if Rose went back to Michigan. Your safety is your own look-out," Burr said. "But my safety's in *her* hands. She has no phone number. Her pipeline won't give it out. Did you say something to her about me? I've been drinking so long I can't stand up."

Leaning against the wall, he made it into the kitchen. It must have been four a.m. Head bobbing up and down, he was crying, "Knowledge + Caution = Safety! My safety record's horseshit," he said. His head fell to the side. He got up, he came over, stumbled over, to the old *goral* at five a.m. I slipped out of my beaded vest.

IV

He awoke at noon sick of heart. With only a few hours' sleep, I was tired myself, yet happy. Rose was gone. No bothersome fragrance

left in Superior. She was better in that wild state and gone from here. I hoped we'd never see her again.

When I came in from grocery shopping, I wondered what Burr recalled of the night. He was pale.

"How'd I get in your bed?" he asked.

"I slept out on the davenport."

"Is it a workday?"

"I called in an excuse for you."

"I'm gonna be sick. Gimme a paper bag or something to throw up in," he said.

Downstairs, World War Three was beginning. Oh, how they turn up that jukebox! When Ed, the owner, steps out, the other bartender lets people do whatever they please—not one single check on customers' emotions and appetites down there. I knew from the music that Gob Goligoski was quarreling with old lady Sniadyak, just as I would know that Earl Malkowski was in the bar when *Cross Over the Bridge* played a hundred times. When Gob punched a Whoopee John Wilfahrt tune, D-7, Mrs Sniadyak got up from the booth along the back wall and played F-9, *Harper Valley PTA*. Spiteful people get to you. D-7. F-9. D-7. F-9. I'd go crazy if I heard them again, I thought, and pounded my *ciupaga* on the floor.

When I did, Burr shouted, "Oh, my head. Don't do that!" Then he got sick all over the blankets. "Take care of me, will you?"

I held him while he turned from pale to green. He was so sick that I think his lost flower came only dimly and momentarily to mind. You cure a hangover before you cure a heart. I changed his blankets then made lunch and rested.

Burr slept away the afternoon. At five, he muttered her name. At six, he ate a cracker, sipped leftover soup. At seven, he got up for a beer. "I'm shaky."

"We'll get us through," I said.

"What happened last night?"

"You hurt bad. I felt awful for you. Couldn't you love someone else?"

"What?"

"Do you want another beer?"

"Yes."

"Could you love someone as much as I could, Burr? Is that impossible for you?"

He didn't know what I meant. Still, I thought to myself, he must remember my healing touch if only dimly. He remembers it, but lets the Rules of Safety and Self-Preservation keep him from thinking of it. If he recalled my healing touch, then what? What would he think of himself? Now was the time for playing a man's game, now before he got more and more frantic over a pipeline worker.

After he dressed, in the moment before he opened the apartment door, he whispered "Wild Rose," which I knew was admitting he remembered the red vest of the night before.

v

After work in the lime truck, Burr Orkit lay stunned. No woman walked out on Burr, who in the bars was a preferred customer because of his good looks and subsequent drawing power over women. Because he was heartbroken for the first time, I knew he needed the extraordinary measures of an old custom. Who knows from what folk wisdom or superstition this custom arose? The placing of the fish over Burr Orkit's heart, the old treatment of centuries back, came a few days later. On nights when neither of us slept well and he'd wake me to give him something for his broken heart, the fish that resembles an eel, I'd say, "Shh—Close your eyes then." Laying a damp washcloth on his forehead, I'd sing, "*Zasieli gorali, zyto, zyto,*" which means the mountaineers sowed rye. "That's us, that's you and me, Burr—Polish highlanders looking for roses."

Supposedly, you skin the fish, dry its skin, and bury it in the earth overnight before applying only the skin—this is important, the

skin—to the brokenhearted. Instead, I placed the whole fish, body, skin, and head, lengthwise, running it from Burr's collarbone to his heart. I turned it the other way around sometimes so the old, dead eye stared back at the old intellectual.

When I suggested he roll over so I could continue his cure, he said, "Just don't leave. Stay here with me while I close my eyes."

"Feel the fish on your chest then. Feel it soaking in. You're going to be better. It's only been a few days, not even a week, and this custom is very old, so it's bound to work."

The tragic moments in that room were torture for me when my life depended on pleasing Burr Orkit. A singing mountaineer, I lost weight. And Burr wasted away! You'd think he was Ivan Denisovich in the gulag. How did he deliver dust in that frightful condition?

"When I first laid eyes on her," he'd tell me, "I'd never seen anyone so pretty and beautiful."

"Do you *have* to tell it again? It's four a.m. Go to sleep. She's left town."

If he kept recalling her, I'd lay my head below the tail of the fish and say, My future depends on your safety. As he talked he'd rest his hand in my hair. With me sharing the room, he'd forget she'd gone to Michigan. He had the messages to read from his drinking cups and someone to hear him say it wasn't his fault she'd gone. Then he'd fool himself into thinking she wasn't gone.

There is the suggestion of great, tragic love in this. So sick with sorrow, how could he know, in a dark room, which was the intentional sigh and which the accidental, as I laid the lingfish on him and the radiator hissed and spat water from its valve? Bare chested, he waited for me, for the interpreter of the old custom, to roll up his t-shirt to apply the remedy. "Rose, oh my Rose," he'd say.

"Awake, Alert, Alive," I'd say.

"Knowledge + Caution = Safety," he'd say. "Rose?"

"Yes, Burr," I'd say, "that's my name on this night of old memories, your Wild Rose."

VI

Then her scent. It returned in the form of telephone calls that a drunken Burr never knew about. "He's not home," I'd tell her. "He left town. He's with Marnie Hudacek, and they're *not* at Happyland."

"Will you tell him I miss him?"

"It'll do no good because I won't see him. You're aware of his drawing power. He's exploring other options."

After more calls with Rose crying when I told her, "He's exploring options," she only called once more. So, you see, in the end Rose Wells was just a quitter; a few lies from me and she quit on him.

The formerly fun-seeking trucker grew weaker and weaker. The black mark of worry colored his eyes. That's when I should have introduced Mephistopheles to him. It's interesting how the first scent of loneliness makes certain people change. This was a different side of Burr than the mysterious movie star side. Here, ladies and gentlemen, was God's lonely soul in the apartment on East Fifth.

From that time when we shared secrets, from then on, everything we did was for Burr's benefit and mine. When we talked about Rose all night, in the shadows I was Rose and he was Burr, then he was Rose and I was Burr. In the morning he'd forget. He put me in charge so he could forget. I took charge.

Then he didn't trust me. On a night after a month and a half of shrinking himself down and drowning in my shirts, he asked me, "Is this philosophy?"

"Yes," I said. "Nihilism."

Neither his voice nor his face, but Burr's eyes said to me, "I was stabbed by a Rose. You said something to her."

There was a sudden shock of recognition in Burr Orkit's eyes. Why the sudden change, why the clear sight when there was around us a paradise of dreams—the color of evening in our rooms, the downstairs jukebox, the healing touch of this Wild Rose?

"I trusted you," he said. Over and over he said it like *Jealousy* playing on and on. I pretended not to hear.

"Let's try the fish," I said.

"I trusted you. I'm not a two-way fun hunter."

I played it right through Rose Wells' last call with a week-old stinking lingfish hidden somewhere in my room and with the jukebox stuck on *Cross Over the Bridge*. Burr, resting in bed all the time after work, couldn't concentrate. His dark eyes saw my gesticulating hands and smiling face as though it were a local call from Januszka, the dishwasher, and not one from Rose Wells calling long distance.

"That was Jan at work wanting to know what's up," I said.

"No, I've been stabbed is what's up," he said.

"You're imagining. Go to sleep. I'll get the fish."

As I looked about for it, he said tomorrow he was heading to Czerwinski's lime piles.

"What are you going to find out there that's better than right here?"

"Something... anything. Maybe roses."

The next day I thought how foolishly Burr was blaming me for everything. Loneliness is a cold wind in the chambers of an empty heart. People do almost anything to warm that lonely room. Burr did. Why should *I* suffer for that?

I made it through breakfast and lunch shifts. At home in my uniform, I took a break. For ten minutes I sat on his footstool to rest my feet when, believing I heard Mephistopheles, I opened the apartment door to find Burr Orkit.

"Don't come in with all that dust on. Shake it off you first."

"I'll shake *you* off all right," he said, pushing me aside.

"What, Burr?"

"I know what you've been doing. Goddamn, I'd kill you if I didn't love someone named Marnie."

"Let's sow rye together, highlander."

"No more highlands. No more. You lied. I was out at Czerwinski's. If you tell anyone about that fish you put on me...I hate you."

"Of course you'll hate me if you can't love. You've seen, maybe in the mirror in the lime truck, what roses do. But please sow rye with me tonight."

His face whitened. "You tub! You don't make sense," he shouted. "I must have been drunk all these months. You're a crazy, pathetic fatman. I should stab you! I looked in the mirror all right. It showed me to get away from *you*, Fatso!"

He grabbed my *ciupaga*. I said, "No, not that!" His face growing icy, he smashed the walking stick over his knee.

"Go to work with *these!*" he said. "Use them as crutches, you goddamn loser."

He snatched my hat with the partridge feather and stomped on it. I was in tears.

"I'm praying for you," I said. "Listen, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God..." But before I could reshape the hat, he was gone through the heavy door.

I looked for him. I saw Mrs Sniadyak stumble into The Heartbreak as Gob Goligoski stumbled out. Back at work, I stared hopelessly from the kitchen when customers entered. At four fifteen, Mrs Bendis and her sodality crew stopped in. They looked at my gravy-stained wingtips, then talked about my premature baldness. I could only lean forward on the two short sticks Burr'd made of the *ciupaga*. My heart was an empty room. I didn't hear a thing the ladies ordered.

"Zimski," they asked after ten minutes, "where's supper? We have sodality meeting."

"I'll get you a stinking fish fry," I said. "I'll serve you anything. How about used fly paper? How about the bowl-of-grease special with ant cups for dipping? The main entrée is shit. Don't know if there'll be enough. Jan's been bound up lately." Hearing them gasp in surprise at tonight's dinner specials, hearing the bell over the café door tinkling as I opened it, I hobbled out of The Polish Hearth forever.

That's when I saw the bus had left from the safety zone on East Fifth and that I was the cripple of my last introspection, which was on love and why I've never found it. With a weak soul and a crushed heart, I walk with two canes. In my Guest Check, I write my last order over and over: BURR ORKIT. BURR ORKIT. BURR ORKIT. BURR ORKIT.

Now the streets and the iciness of them stab me. Right through my flabby belly I feel them. Into my heart cuts the white razor of nihilism.

Listen! Mephisto's turning his key. I gave it to him as part of a deal. Hear his breathing? See the door shake slightly?

In the minute before the door opens, let me confess I gained back my weight plus an additional fifteen pounds when Burr ran off with Marnie Hudacek. They went to North Dakota and returned in a week, married. When I encountered them at the fish market, he said it again, "I should stab you."

It got worse. The next time I saw them (broken hearted, I was hobbling along on my canes) he pretended not to notice me. His not knowing me by face or name wounded my soul. I hurried home to my empty rooms above The Heartbreak. Crazy, broken-hearted me, I banged my canes on the floor and pounded my feet when someone laughed or the jukebox came on downstairs. After a day of this, the bartender telephoned. "Cut it out, Zimski," he said.

"You're causing a disturbance." He said I was also a visual disturbance the way I looked these days. I banged the telephone receiver on the wall.

An hour later, a policeman who'd been listening undercover downstairs, handed me a ticket. "I'm disorderly in my conduct because my thoughts are disordered," I told him. When he left, I pounded again. Rose had killed Burr, and Burr had killed me. Now he'd kill Marnie because he couldn't love after Rose. This was something to make noise about. What's left for Burr Orkit? What's left for Michael Zimski, crippled with canes? There's nothing but dreadful sounds in the night, dread of an hour when they stop, dread of a night when the NEON HEARTBREAK HOTEL sign goes out and the sign stands in darkness.

In these last weeks and hours of a waning century comes the devil. I have my canes ready. At twenty-three, Burr Orkit sits alone in someone else's truck behind a mountain of lime while his youthful bride eats a bowl of buttered popcorn at home and watches *The Maury Povich Show*. I've traded Mephisto to know these things about them. In the end, isn't this how we all go, married, unmarried, young or old—hidden from others, broken hearted, dreading the close of day, dreading the last mile, the final receipt? Burr got enlightened in a lime truck. I've become enlightened, too. All day and night the jukebox is stuck on a new one: *Who Put the Bop in the Bop-Shu-Bop?* I go on pounding.

With yellow teeth and the palms of dirty hands, I pull down a window shade to hide myself from God. He's the One Who Put the Bop in the Bop-Shu-Bop. My fingernails are so long and curved I can't do much at all with my hands. I can't go to work. Who'd order from a waiter with filthy nails? I sit in darkness all day and stare at the vase of roses by the phone. Rose Wells sent them from Michigan. I wait for eviction. I wear a waiter's uniform. I'll leave in style when my time comes. The vest is stained. The shirt stinks.

Dead roses blacken in a vase. "*Zasiali gorali, zyto, zyto.*" I hum *The Eviction Waltz*. Oh, Burr, You Beautiful Highlander, didn't you know I could have helped you through it? Oh, if you'd let me, I could have fixed it all right for us, Burr.

I would have made our suppers.

I would have done the washing.

I would have taken three jobs and given you my tips. I'd have wrapped you in such fish skins.

Oh Burr, Burr, there is no need to hand me down my canes like this.

ANGIE HOGAN

*No Return Address*

You know where to meet  
me. Bring more German  
wine, a dry Riesling.  
I am down to Heaven's  
Hill, flat bottles creeping  
up every wooden wall.  
That twine string, still here,  
and your knot,  
around my neck. The wasps'  
nests, burned, a leftover  
can of gasoline buried  
in the straw. More  
of the upstairs floor  
fell in, leaving one corner  
square, a sturdy sleeping  
spot. Please come  
soon, before my lilies  
freeze, with the morning  
dew, to ice. A knife-thin  
hatted man, come to fish,  
is the only face I've seen  
for weeks. Not a soul  
but you could find  
me in this sunken  
house. Through the rain,  
through cracks in the roof,  
I watch the moon

hiding. Yes, come  
and bring that gingham  
quilt now. I'll  
tell you when  
you're getting warm.

*To Meredith in December*

You are in the South  
of France. Tell me: how  
does it feel, putting the clank  
of our language into the beautiful  
mouths of girls whose names rise  
and fall—*Simone, Allegra*—  
foamy as the ocean? You  
wrap your tiny string  
of lights around another  
place, in words I can't  
understand. I have heard  
you twirl them like red ribbons  
on your tongue, have watched  
your candy-cane legs hang  
over cushions, hook a room.  
But this isn't about sweetness.  
I miss your stripped-  
down poems, that voice  
salty as sand.  
On the train—  
*Avignon to Carcassonne*—  
you remember  
something, an empty  
loft, and raise your fingers  
to the window, shape oily-eyed birds.  
They watch you inking French  
into a journal, watch you

hold yourself, your rearrangement.  
My translation: *They seem to leak  
black tears...*

*Making Rain*

You do not recognize the knock.  
Blonde knuckles, syncopated—  
desperate on your red wood door.  
You do not recognize the knock, but  
you know who he is  
and you let him in without looking.  
You never expected this.  
The right thing is on your stereo—  
like you would imagine it, if you would  
have imagined it. Miles Davis, Bill Withers,  
John Hooker: take your pick.  
His lips press you out  
of the doorway of your blue  
duplex, circle you around  
the couch. The room looks wilder  
on your back on the coffee table:  
spiced smoke rising from the dented candle,  
wax slipping onto your freshly-mopped  
hardwood floor. And for once  
it doesn't matter. You don't give a fuck.  
You know how to undo  
a belt buckle with your teeth.  
You know who he is and you let him in  
without looking. And then you look.  
You're still on the coffee table  
or the floor now: take your pick.  
It doesn't matter. You knock

against each other desperately.  
Blonde fingers spread.  
Your new blue bra has disappeared  
behind the stereo, behind  
the right music. You don't give  
a fuck. His lips press you, un wrinkle  
your body. Years ago you learned  
to lean a hot forehead against fogged glass.  
Even if you would  
have imagined it, you never  
expected this.

*Matinee: A Love Affair*

In the absence of traditional cinema we three floundered from theater to theater, bleary eyed, numb around the heart. It was the winter we wondered where all the crows went. The city was so white without them. We hid from it in lobbies and bathrooms and under marquees, rummaged in each others' clothes for warmth. We did not speak for two hours at a time, then let it out all at once, our breath visible before our faces.

All the ushers knew us by shape—the trench coat and the toboggan and the girl with the scarf trailing into the horizon—and we knew them too, had been them before, had cultivated a stalk of corn when it grew up from the grate behind concessions, its hands imploring the false light. But it's not false. In the darkness of the theater we reached for it too, stretching our fingertips up just to be a part of it, a brief shadow. Walking home we would see ourselves silhouetted against a building by approaching headlights and smile, then cast our eyes down over it, trying to affect a forlorn posture before the car swept past.

Nothing romantic was lost on us. It was like we were in remission from something terminal, or like we were recovering from something narcotic, or like we didn't have anywhere else to go. We cried at the end, through the credits, not because the movie had done what it's supposed to do, what it always does, what it can't help doing, but because it was over.

In the coffee shops we would repeat them word for word, sitting across from each other, the toboggan smoking, the trench coat folded on the back of the booth, the scarf rolled into a muffler, a filter for the smoke she would never complain about, and then we

would slouch off at dawn to our stations behind the counters of video stores, on the second floor of bookstores, on the phone selling impossible items to people who needed impossible items.

It goes without saying that we loved each other in such a way that in our individual beds we imagined the other two there, only they had their winter clothes on under the sheets. In the perfect theater there's total darkness, just a finger of light pulsing into life on the screen, and the images that collect there are more real than a city snowblind without the necessary contrast of crows, so that you never want to lean up out of your seat, listen across the coffee shop to people who bunched over with you, saying things like *it was all they hoped for and less*.

The corn we grew we ate raw, with imitation butter and pretzel salt. We gathered in the projection booth, celluloid passing by all around us at twenty-four frames per second, just fast enough for the still image to blur into motion, into magic. The theater below us was empty but full of sound. We swore then never to leave it, to become part of the carpeted walls, the sloping floor, the ceiling, forever unseen.

After we had to leave for other jobs, we still came back to walk the rows and the aisles, the empty cups and smuggled bottles snapping into our hands of their own accord, the whole place hushed save our breathing, our wonder.

In the natural light of day we blinked through the park. It goes without saying that the crows returned with the melting snow. We didn't shed our clothes, though; they covered our gaunt ribs, hollow stomachs, the physical evidence of our emotional need. One day finally when the manager was pretending to sweep around us we opened our mouths for him like birds, heads tilted back over the movie seats, and in return he asked for our ticket stubs. We smiled, closing our eyes in pleasure, defeat, *aptness*, then emptied our pockets in great heaping handfuls that fluttered down through our

fingertips for him. We waded out, our sodas held high above our heads. Whatever spilled we didn't go back for.

In some places the crows live generation after generation behind the theater, feeding off uncooked kernels until they can eat nothing else. That's where we're going.

TERRANCE HAYES

*masculine*

(an anagram poem)

The word some dudes claim came  
first. Delved from the plus & minus  
system God used to slice  
open himself. Or the smile  
of old deacons in the Amen  
corner during the part of the Easter Musical  
where Mary Magdalene has to clean  
the feet of Jesus to beat a stint in Hell. And the malice  
in the Angel of Mercy. And the mean  
streak in your father's work belt. The gram of vein & muscle  
that tipped Babylon's scale.

*Mother to Son*

He was whole evenings  
sometimes & pet names,  
he was whole breaths  
changing into steam—  
we'd never leave  
the front seat. I'd straddle him  
& the odor was black & new  
& someone pushing inside.  
The radio dial  
was a strip of green light  
& his fingers turned  
my nipples until the music  
eased out of me.  
He was a palm full  
of tiny deaths, desire  
spilling cell by cell  
& desire swimming upstream.  
He was whole years, Son,  
& even at this moment,  
he walks through your face...  
After he'd return me  
to my mother's house  
I'd stand in the darkness  
of the back yard with a hose  
between my thighs.  
It was on one of those nights  
that you were conceived,

& with me then,  
as I fanned my dress  
until the water dried.

*Origin of the Days*

SUNDAY: day of sun, a word old as religion.

the fishermen lean their rods  
among broomsticks & boat oars,  
slap rough hands together & pray  
nonfishermen will die.

Also: the iridescent furious & something filial.

MONDAY: from the prefix mono. Alone. Single. One.

Also mononucleosis, after kissing a fish with one mouth.

Also: day of the moon when the o is shuffled or eclipsed.

Also: moan day as the week begins to unpeel again:

the bed moans, the bones moan.

TUESDAY: for pairs. Shoes. Feet. legs.

For courtship: two eyes that see differently:

Left eye says, The moon is like a skull.

Right eye says, The moon is like an egg.

Also, of course, for the number 2 day.

Also for immediacy, as in, I love you 2day and 2morrow we wed.

WEDNESDAY: Behold! the wedding of the weekdays.

Tuesday stitched to Thursday.

Also derived from wedge.

As in something that serves to split, part, divide.

THURSDAY: as in thors day or thornsday

meaning the hammer god will save us from the roses,

the crude love left over from Wednesday.

Also: Thirstday. Meaning I cannot afford a drink until payday.

FRIDAY: Fishfry day. Some fish on your plate.

Breaded skin & fish eyes gawking from trash.

Fish! my father would say, Men fish!

Meaning you are not a man,

if you don't work & writing is not work.

Your tongue is a fish out of water.

You nearly die of thirst.

SATURDAY: for the god of farms & a haloed planet.

Also for evenings on the town: a lady's satin

evening gown, the nightclub sashay.

But mostly for satellite tv. As in a satchel full of time.

As in stars. As in saturnine. Meaning, I just sat

on the dock of the bed all day.

ED SKOOG

### *The Flamingos*

Aunt-hats set on stilts  
at the entrance to the zoo.  
Felt-tip beaks bent heavy with ink.  
What their necks spell  
is a long hiss, like *Siegfried Sassoon*,  
but these know nothing of war.

Wild, at hint of gator snout, they flood the air.  
Here, with flight feathers clipped each year,  
the world becomes a clipped patch  
to stand on and ignore the gesturing child,  
the tigers pacing beyond the fence.

With a clipped imagination, I, too,  
could glimmer beside the green pool  
and into its filth sink upside down my head.  
Coming back, the flamingo seems surprised.  
A church group comes. Ever attentive,  
they see God in this ornament freed from lawn.  
I admit: stray strands of paradise hang down.  
And I stare a long time, like an alcoholic:  
seeing not to see, but get sunk.

ED SKOOG

### *Honeycomb*

While the tropical storm keeps us rich  
in darkness, and whirls on its point,  
my neighborhood shuts tall windows,  
lets in cats. Instead, I drive into wilderness,  
or semi-wild, along the logging road,  
to outwait the crisis in Prosper's shack  
safe on stilts sunk deep in animate muck.

Prosper was my father's mentor in some  
business long closed. Rounding ancient,  
he lives without others inside a drone  
from real bees grown between his walls.  
He's given in to them like giving in to  
a side of himself. Through a glass panel  
Prosper cut to separate self from bee,  
we watch the hive from kitchen chairs.  
Prosper has developed a theory of order  
gleaned from living inside four walls  
and watching hexagons endlessly repeat.  
"I don't feel much like going into it,"  
he says, pouring coffee into whiskey.  
Alligators eat hours beneath us.  
Even they, I remember, build a hill.

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Even they, I remember, build a hill.

*The Age of Being*

## I. NAY AND CARRIE, IN THE HIGH GRASS

Out in the high grass the two girls were, Nay and Carrie, hidden in the secret part, the smooshed-down place they thought no one would ever find, the hot high sky bright blue above them and the dry grass taller than them, rustling and whispery, yellowy brown. Out in the high grass they lay on their backs, their feet and elbows just touching, no breeze stirring, their faces flushed and their eyes squinty with sweat, staring up at the sky without clouds, the blue glare filling their heads. Their dresses were wrinkled and sticky and itchy. Their hair was banded, thick, willful, both of them blonde and sun-bleached. They were fifteen years old, the daughters of farmers both of them. They had no secret boyfriends. There was just them, and the field, and this ring in the center of everything.

"Let's play fashion model," Nay said, closing her eyes.

"Okay," Carrie said. "You start."

Nay said, "I'm in Bermuda. It's my very first shoot ever. And all of the other fashion models are jealous because I'm so beautiful, and all of the photographers just drool."

"They drool," Carrie said. She wanted to sound mocking, but her voice came out wrong. It was a grown-up voice she hadn't known was inside of her until then.

"Well, they do," Nay said. "They just drool and drool, so much they almost can't take pictures. Because I'm tan and I'm beautiful and they just drool and drool."

"But it's your first shoot," Carrie said slowly, "and you don't know all the bad things that can happen to you. Some of those photographers are terrible. They try and talk you into posing for

*Playboy*. They tell you about all the money you could make. They tell you about all the *Playboy* girls who went on to be movie stars."

"Oooh. And I'm tempted."

"You are, but I'm there, and I'm a model too, and I've been doing it for years and years. I'm still famous, just like you will be someday soon, but I'm not jealous. And I've seen girls make that *Playboy* mistake. So I whisk you away from those sharks. I whisk you right away."

"You save me," Nay said.

There was no wind. There was no wind and the sun was very very bright above them.

"I save you," Carrie said. "I save you."

And then the dog burst in amongst them and they both sat up straight and gasped. Something hot fled through them. They stood up quickly, elbows and damp hair, eyes blistered white. And then the dog was all tail and teeth and tongue and paws, just a puppy, black, and friendly.

Nay knelt down, she looked almost relieved, and she petted him and kissed his wet nose. He licked her face. She giggled, and cuffed him, and pet him some more. She liked dogs, although she didn't have much luck with them. Carrie stood still at the edge of the circle. She suddenly didn't like Nay all that much. She didn't like how quick she could be friendly with some strange dog in what was supposed to be their secret circle. She knew that was stupid, thinking that way about Nay petting some dog. But still. There was something about Nay that was like a light switch, on and off just like that, not caring about who for or when. Carrie was ashamed of herself for thinking that way about her best friend, but there it was, and she knew it was true, and it made her sad. She smoothed her dress down and wondered what her brothers were doing. Probably still out in the fields with the tractor, or maybe this late in the afternoon they were fixing things around the barn and yard, nailing up new shingles, replacing rotten boards. She looked off into the tall

grass that was not anymore quite taller than she. She looked for the path of the dog, his rippling wake. What she saw was something black and rounded bobbing far away at the top of the grass.

"Nay," Carrie said. "Someone."

Nay looked up at her, her eyes bright blue and bland. She turned back to the dog and began tickling it again. The puppy rolled ecstatic in the flattened pale grass.

"Nay," Carrie said. All at once she felt just terrible, awfully sick to her stomach, so bad she almost doubled over. She did let some sound out. She just had a bad feeling about everything, about Nay and about her brothers out working somewhere, and about the black speck floating out on the grass. She looked all around. It was all just high yellow grass till the tree lines. You could see everything for miles. You could see anyone coming, and you could see anyone running away.

"Oh, Carrie, hush," Nay said, scolding her like she was the puppy. "You do get hysterical."

It was something Nay's own mother said to her, and it always made Nay want to put her fist through something, do someone somewhere some real harm. Saying it to Carrie made her feel better somehow, more grown-up. She liked that feeling.

"You do get hysterical," she said again. "You do go on."

She turned back to the dog, and scratched him behind the ears. She felt something hard at the tenderest part, the fold of skin by the head. It was a tick, bloated and dull brown. Soft bile rose up in her, equal parts sun and Carrie and self, a dark confusion. What did she want? Why did she keep acting this way? Why was there always something scabrous hidden in the corners? She swallowed hard. Then she slapped the puppy away. The puppy shook its head in bewilderment and then wagged its tail and came at her again. She really hit it this time, not even looking, she couldn't even look at it. She was looking up at Carrie and she whacked the puppy good and it yelped and bolted out of their secret place and she saw the same

yelp happen in Carrie's eyes. Nay turned away. The sun just kept on with beating down. She spit into the grass and got up and smoothed out her dress, her back to Carrie. She thought maybe she would cry. She thought maybe Carrie was already crying, but she didn't want to turn around to see. She didn't know what should happen now. She didn't know what would have happened next if the Kick-Man hadn't suddenly appeared in the circle.

The Kick-Man was tall and very very thin and he always wore a round black hat wherever he went. Everyone knew him. He was Funny In The Head. The Kick-Man couldn't walk the street without kicking something, or someone. Once he kicked the mayor right in the shins. He was always kicking the trash cans or the parking meters or baby carriages even sometimes. He was a scandal. He was beyond Hysterical. He was as close as the town of Chase had to Dangerous. He might do anything, someday.

He stood there, quiet in his black hat and his workshirt and his blue jeans and his Keds. Nay couldn't even tell you how old he was. He looked old, but that might just have been because he was crazy. He looked at both of them. She felt Carrie inching nearer to her. Sweat poured down from underneath the Kick-Man's hat. His face was red and doughy and unpleasant. That was another of her mother's words. But the Kick-Man was unpleasant. Nobody knew what he might do.

"Dog," is what he said.

Nay flushed. She could feel herself going red in the face and chest. He knew. He'd seen her, and now he was going to kick her. And Carrie was just *hovering* behind her, not helping one little bit. Nay was caught. She was out here with just Carrie hovering, and she was caught.

It was Carrie who pointed in the direction the puppy had gone yelping. The Kick-Man looked at Carrie just like a normal person would have. His eyes weren't crazy at all, they were blue too like Nay's, exactly like Nay's, and they were clear too, and they glinted

with knowing. He knew. He knew what Carrie had been feeling. She expected him to wink, to break into song, to recite a love poem. She hadn't known that you could be like the Kick-Man and still be normal. He touched his hat and gave them both a little half-bow and walked right out of the circle.

Carrie watched him go. Right out of the circle. Just like that. You could be like the Kick-Man and you could still be normal and you could walk right out of the circle any time you wanted. She hadn't known. Why hadn't anyone told her? Why hadn't anyone told her anything?

"When'd the Kick-Man get a dog?" Nay said. It was not what she wanted to say. She didn't know what she wanted to say.

And then Carrie walked right out into the field. All around her was a terrible rustling. The air was so thick, and so rich. She kept walking. She listened for Nay to say something, to call to her, to follow her, but of course she didn't and Carrie had known she wouldn't. She knew Nay was over. Carrie knew that for herself there would always be fields, with places that would never remain hidden, and that wasn't going to be true for Nay. Carrie knew that the barns she entered would always be dark, that the voices of men would slither even into her dreams and hiss and spit and bubble there, taking her away from what she wanted to be. She knew the Kick-Man with the black hat and the friendly dog was out in every field, his face impassive, his eyes as bright and dead and distant as the moon.

But you could always walk away. You could hate the Kick-Man and you could be like him too. You could be like the Kick-Man and you could vanish.

## II. JEROME AND THE KICK-MAN, IN A DOG FIGHT

And now everything was about the dog. The dog he followed, the dog he lost, the dog he kept chasing through town. The dog he

caught in the sunlight of sunny days, on corners, in doorways, in alleys. His dog. The dog the man called Cooper Cantwell gave him. He found the dog not a hundred yards from the secret girls he'd left behind. He found the dog shivering in the hot bright sun, oh so frightened, by the side of the road that bordered the field. He thought about going back, finding out why his dog was now quivering. He picked up the dog and petted it to make it stay in his arms. The dog that smelled strong. The dog he would never kick. Did one of those girls kick his dog? No, no. Just say no to the Kick-Man. Just walk away. With the dog now, he should just walk away. And like that, he did. It was easy. He crooned to the dog while he walked. To the dog he sang the vagabond blues in the wee wee hours of the morning. The dog that made him Sinatra. The dog he loved. He walked the dog he loved away from the girls and out down the shoulder of the road that led to town. Everything now was about the dog.

Because of it, he was not the Kick-Man at this moment, walking the dust-heavy road. His name was Jerome. He was the Kick-Man sometimes, but not always. Not every time. Some days he thought the Kick-Man would never come back, he woke up that much Jerome. Some days he was almost Only Jerome. With the dog he was Only Jerome and it felt good.

He did not know *where* the Kick-Man came from. He *did* know *when*: the day in the stable when he was Jerome mucking out stalls and the ugly brown horse exploded in hooves that rained down upon him and unhinged his head enough for the Kick-Man to come sidling in from wherever, bringing the black hat, weaving like a snake deep into his brain, that day. That day the sunlight quivered down through the dust motes while he lay there feeling the Kick-Man cross his legs and hunker down in his head, the sunlight, the blossoms of sunlight like flowers in his hands, that was the day. But before that he did not know where the Kick-Man lived.

After that day he was Jerome and he was the Kick-Man. Next dawn he walked into the stable and kicked over the oat bucket nearest the door. He smelled the horse dung and the scummy water and the field mice and the stale hay and the heaving sweaty horse. He smelled everything in the world. He kicked the stalls. He went into the stall of the ugly brown horse and the horse saw not Jerome but the Kick-Man and rolled white eyes. He kicked it. He kicked the horse, and kept kicking it; soon both he and the horse were kicking each other, and the sides of the stall; there was a clatter and panic in the stable; the other horses screamed in their fear. The Kick-Man, the Kick-Man, the Kick-Man he was, until they came and pulled him away. And it was mostly Kick-Man from then, sometimes Jerome feeling sick with otherness and guilt, but mostly just Kick-Man and never Only Jerome until the dog.

The Kick-Man smelled otherness in the man called Cooper and the Kick-Man did not want the dog, wanted to slap it out of the Cooper-Man's hands to the ground and then kick it high into the air. That was what the Kick-Man burned with, but when he reached out he was Jerome and he took the dog and held it to him. He could not say what he wanted to: thanks, thanks, Only Jerome thanks you. He croaked a syllable instead and he saw that Cooper knew, because Cooper smiled and turned and walked back down to Kokosing Road. And so it was Only Jerome and the dog.

And he remembered the water and he remembered the dog food and he remembered the peeing and pooping outside. He did not remember the leash until the dog ran ahead of him one day in his driveway and then he ran after, croaking what he thought were the words: stop. stay. stop. stay. He felt the Kick-Man flexing while he ran, and he had to stop, he was afraid the Kick-Man would come back just as he reached his dog. The dog kept running. Jerome had to run after, then felt the Kick-Man again, and stopped. He chased the dog all the way into town like that, stopping and starting and

stopping. Finally the dog sat down in the middle of the road, wagging, waiting for him to scoop it up. That was the game the dog decided to play and Jerome could not remember how to stop it.

That game brought him out into the field, into the bright sunlight he once clutched in his fists, into the circle where the girls were, and out again. He thought the girls leaked riddles as much as he did. Some days the whole world posed riddles.

On the road into town now, the heat rippling up, locusts buzzing in the trees, animals rustling in the ditches, the dog squirming in his arms, the riddle of the world was this: what will you come to? The sun, fractious, creeping belligerently across the passive sky, promised him the passage of time, day after day that he would have to possess and protect the dog. And himself. The road, rippling and rheumy and sly, asserted the truth of the now: he was here, a place between two places, suspended and breathing and not alone. What will you come to? Who will rule your heart? Who sits in your skull holding the reins? Oh, what will you come to and how do you mean to get there? Who will you be? Who will you be when you come to the end of things? Riddles exploded out of the brush, fluttering all a-panic before his eyes. The dog clawed at his arms. It began a low whining.

As if in answer, behind him, the road growled low. He turned around. Far back the heat was disturbed. The road was gathering something far back in its gullet, stoking it, stirring it, letting it build, waiting and waiting and releasing it, letting it explode up out its throat: the red angry storm of an automobile thundering up upon him, clattering vengefully forth, the immediate answer to all of his riddles.

The car bore down, red and smoking, the windows dark. The dog struggled violently. He hugged it fiercely. And the car shrieked past spewing stones and exhaust and his dog bit him on the arm and he howled and the dog leapt free and sprinted down the road after the car.

Only Jerome sat down in the dust by the side of the road and let himself cry, and when he was done, The Kick-Man stood up straight as a divining rod. He told his forearm to stop throbbing, and it did. He pulled the hat low over his eyes. And the Kick-Man began the brisk walk into town.

The Kick-Man stopped on the edge of Chase and threw back his head and flared his nostrils and inhaled noisily, snuffling, sucking in air. This is what he smelled: sperm, aftershave, fish eggs, fear, pine, shoe polish, dead possum, menstrual blood, beer, curry, baking potatoes, an infected wound, an old man dying of liver failure, sweat just about to be washed away, the vomit of babies, many different dogs, Jerome's among them, seven dozen cats, a woman contemplating an affair, new upholstery, sawdust, spearmint gum, cigar smoke, lemon drops, feces, exhaust, exhaustion, hope, twenty different kinds of love, suicidal impulses, scabrous feet, squished grapes, a dead mule, thirteen ghosts, and at the last, the man who drove the car that almost ran him down.

The Kick-Man smiled. He put his hands in his pockets and loped towards the center of town.

The Kick-Man saw the car first, parked in front of the bank. It was red, bright cherry red, with smoky windows. It was all clean lines and low angles. The Kick-Man smelled the owner nearby. He circled the car. He let the righteous fury build inside of him. He calculated weak spots in the metal. He stopped by the driver's side door, and aimed, and kicked, and he felt the metal crimp beneath his sneaker and then the car spoke.

It said, quite loudly: "This car protected by Viper. Back away."

He had never kicked anything non-human that spoke. He frowned. He kicked the car again, and again, it spoke: "This car protected by Viper. Please back away."

He was furious. He kicked it again and again, and the car said, "This car protected by Viper. Please back away. This car protected by Viper. Please back away." He circled the car, kicking at the doors

and the tires and the bumpers. Still the car kept commanding him to step away.

"Hey," said a voice and he smelled the owner. He crouched and snarled. "Hey," said the man, who was dressed in a suit and running out of the bank. "What are you doing to my car?"

"Kick-Man," said the Kick-Man.

The banker stopped five feet from his car. The Kick-Man smelled the confusion on him, and an immediate fear, and a deeper fear, too, a pungent oily fear seeping out of his armpits that the Kick-Man knew he'd carried all his life. The Kick-Man smiled. They were all afraid of him. It was so good to walk the earth. They all feared the Kick-Man when he walked into town. He stood up out of his crouch and walked slowly towards the banker.

"Kick-Man," the Kick-Man said, smiling.

"That's my car," the banker said uncertainly.

"This car protected by Viper," the car said. "Please back away."

The Kick-Man grinned and kicked the banker in the shin.

And then the banker blinked, and the Kick-Man smelled something changing, the oily fearful smell transmuting. A dog barked, and that damned Jerome made him turn his head and there was the dog, sitting by the car, and then he smelled the oil of the fear bubble away and leave the hot flaky smell of anger, like burnt pastry it was, the banker's anger, and the Kick-Man knew he should move.

And then the banker punched him. Before the Kick-Man could skitter out of the way, the banker hit him so hard in the nose that all of the smells of the world shut off and blood slid down his face and shirt. The banker hit him again, in the temple, and he fell to the pavement. He tried to get up and couldn't. The banker started kicking him, over and over again, him, the Kick-Man, and he couldn't get up. The strings were cut. He heard the banker shouting something above him. He heard a car door close and other shouts and people running and he couldn't smell anything. He'd lost everything. He saw sunshine exploding out of the gutter. He heard

horses thundering on the asphalt of the road, coming to drag him away. He reached out for his hat. But then he felt Jerome uncurling inside of him, shy as a new flower, and after that he didn't know anything ever again.

### III. COOPER AND EVELYN, IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMETHING

At the exact moment that Carrie said "I save you," for the second time, Cooper was lying on the bathroom floor, battling gravity. Was it old age or marriage that had unstrung him so? He struggled to rise. He was wearing his slippers and nothing else. What if Evelyn walked in? How would he explain this to her?

This was one of the many forces that had worked on Cooper Cantwell's marriage: gravity, lightning, love, death.

Gravity plucked at every tendon, and more. His jowls sighed, his teeth clattered out of his head, the skin slid dreamily around his bones. Some days gravity brought him to his knees, heavily. He would suck air on all fours and wait for the pull to relent. Evelyn saw this only once and rushed him to the hospital which cost them too much and came to nothing. After that, Cooper fought gravity whenever she was around. Sometimes he was dizzy and cross-eyed from the effort of staying upright, and when she spoke to him he smiled with his eyes closed and his teeth clenched. And gravity groped at the house, too. It squawked and buckled and trembled around him. He struggled to stay upright in a house that lurched like a ship. He should not have married so late in life. If he hadn't, he could have feuded with gravity alone, without the embarrassment of a spectator, however benign.

Many other forces swayed through their lives.

Their wedding bed had been blessed by lightning. That first night shy as swans they folded into each other, bound in sheets that now were theirs. He was sixty-one and his body was suddenly alien. The wind whickered up when he entered her, and a thick rain clattered

against the panes. Lightning split their darkness; thunder bowed down in the night. Closer it came, the lightning sharp and the thunder struggling after, faster. They kept making love, they paced the storm, closer, faster, close. The air hissed; the storm unbent. Then it was there, the bolt that split the oak outside their window and leaked into their room. Blue fire danced on the four brass bedposts, sparks fluttered out of their open mouths, they jerked like puppets and he came, and she did too, and they screamed lightning and their love and then it was gone and that was their first time together, that was the awe that was left lingering in their bodies.

From the lightning came the love.

Cooper did not understand his heart. He did not understand how he could have lived so long without Evelyn. He'd met her when he was sixty, newly retired, so frightened of his life that he'd bound himself in the prosthetic limbs he'd sold for forty years. She wasn't even half his age, and still she chose to be with him. He did not understand how he'd kept himself so long from love. He'd always thought he'd loved his mother and his half-brother Hawthorne, but after he met Evelyn he realized he'd spent decades avoiding every entanglement the world had to offer.

And even in the throes of love he heard the keen of death in every single one of his dreams.

His long-dead brother Melville and his recently-dead mother Jenny came to his dreams carrying a deck of cards and a box of poker chips and they sat down at the card table he was sitting at and then the floor was there, supporting the table and the chairs and their weight in the chairs and then the floor ended at four white walls that sprouted windows, dark with night and tree branches clawing up on the glass, and one door with peeling red paint closed with a bang, and above them a low ceiling grew and threw down a tendril that was a swinging light, and the thunder outside rattled the chips that were on the table and Melville said, "Deal," and Cooper did. He dealt to his brother, eighteen and whole and not yet

gone to war, and his mother, who was young and so pretty it made him look away, and to the man he realized he did not know, sitting to his right.

This man had a clerical collar and was dressed all in black. He wore a black hat pulled down low on his forehead. He leaned back in his chair, his muddy black boots propped up on the table. He did not look at his cards as they fell, one two three four five. He looked at Cooper. Cooper saw a glitter of distaste in the man's eyes. His mouth worked, grinding up unspoken words. Cooper, unnerved, picked up his cards. The ace of spades, the seven of babies, the queen of hair, a pair of jokers. His mother started crying. His brother spoke to him and no sound came out. He woke up. And every time he woke up, he turned to Evelyn's sleeping self and held her, and in the holding they both grew aroused, and eventually they made love.

And then over the months of their marriage these ghosts slid out into the world. It happened most often in the mornings, when he was in the bathroom: the first time he had been in the shower and gravity swirled up out of the drain and clung to him, pulled him down to the porcelain bottom that swirled with water. Then Melville poked his head around the shower curtain, his glasses fogged with steam. Cooper could not see his eyes. Melville withdrew. The water beat down upon him. He felt as though his skin would peel wearily away. And when he was resigned to it he felt freed and got up and turned off the shower and stood naked and shriveled and shivering in the tub. He pulled open the curtain. He was alone.

Every time he was pulled to the floor thereafter some spirit would come sidling in. When it was his mother he felt shamed and struggled to cover himself. When it was Melville he tried to start the conversations of the sick, gruff and self-deprecating. And when the man in black bent down to look him in the eyes he felt something terrible seize in his chest.

So far this morning none of them had come to visit him. He was hoping it would be Melville. Instead, there was a knock at the door.

"Coop?" Evelyn said, rapping steadily. "You okay? You've been in there a long time."

"I'm just fine, honey," is what he tried to say, but gravity sucked the words right out of his mouth and puddled them on the floor by his nose.

She opened the door and saw him bound to the floor. "Oh my God, Cooper," she said. She crouched down beside him. He felt so ashamed. He didn't want her here now. He tried to say that, but again gravity plucked away his words.

And then she lifted him up and carried him into the bedroom and dumped him on the bed. She was saying "Oh my God oh my God oh my God" over and over. He felt a little bit better on the bed, a little bit further away from the gravity, but she was already slipping on his boxer shorts and then lifting his upper torso and sliding a t-shirt over his head. He still wasn't free from the awful pull. He tried to tell her that she should probably put some shorts on over his boxers, but the words hung fuzzy in the air. She lifted him again—how light, how old, how inconsequential was he, that he could be heaved about so?—and rushed him to the car. "It's okay baby it's okay baby it's okay baby," she said as she threw the car in gear and sped out their long driveway onto the main road.

And damned if he didn't feel better. Maybe the pull of gravity lessened the faster you traveled. Maybe that was the lesson of love.

"You should have put shorts on me," he said.

She was grimly determined, eyes fixed on the road. "Fuck your shorts. You're going to the hospital."

"I'm better now," he said.

"You were stroking out on me, Coop! You scared the hell out of me!"

"It was just gravity," he said.

She started to cry.

"I'm sorry," he said. "It's just gravity. It wants me down on the fucking ground. But I'm okay."

She kept crying. He didn't know how she could see to drive. Up ahead, far in the distance, he saw a tiny shape on the shoulder of the road.

"Evelyn, I'm sorry," he said. "I can't exactly help it."

"I'm not ready," she said. "I'm not ready for you to die. I still want babies. I still want us to have years and years. It's not fair. I love you so much."

"It's only gravity," he said. "I'll be here for a long time." The tiny shape was growing larger, a girl with her thumb out. "Ev, pull over," he said. "There's somebody up there."

"I've got to get you to the hospital," she said.

"Okay," he said. "But I'll live for another half hour. Let's help out, huh?"

He saw the muscles in her jaw tighten. "No way," she said. "Don't do this to me."

He reached out a hand, smoothed a blonde hair back. "I'm afraid," he said. "I'm afraid if we treat me like I'm dying, then I'll die. Please?"

They could both see the girl: pale blonde hair and a white wrinkled dress, her head slightly bent, holding her shoes in one hand and biting her lower lip. "Oh, honestly," Evelyn said, and pulled over. She reached behind Cooper and unlocked the back door.

The girl slid in. She sat in the middle of the seat, and smoothed her dress carefully over her tanned legs. She folded her hands on her lap. "Thank you," she said.

"You shouldn't be hitchhiking," Evelyn said.

The girl nodded. She looked out the window.

"Okay," she said. "Where to?"

"Chase," the girl said. "Not so far."

Evelyn pulled back onto the road.

"We're going to the hospital," she said, looking pointedly at Cooper. "We can drop you."

"What's your name?" Cooper said. He turned halfway in his seat. He couldn't tell if the girl looked angry or sad or scared. Something ticked across her features, though.

"Carrie," the girl said.

"I always liked that name," Cooper said.

Evelyn shook her head slightly and goosed the gas pedal.

"Why are you going to the hospital?" the girl said. She didn't look at either of them. She stared ahead at the road, the fields whipping by, the low blue sky.

"I have troubles with gravity," Cooper said.

"Jesus," Evelyn said. "Stop saying that. Will you please just stop it?"

They were all quiet then. Soon they were driving up the wooded hills just before Chase.

"We're kind of in a hurry," Evelyn said. "Can I drop you anywhere?"

"Sure," Carrie said. "I'm sorry."

"Do you know what you're doing?" Cooper asked her.

"No," the girl said. "Do you?"

Evelyn pulled into a free space in front of the Village Market. Across the street, in front of the bank, a crowd was gathering. The girl got out, and so did Cooper, though not easily. The crowd shifted, and he saw his brother Hawthorne kicking a man who was lying on the sidewalk. Again and again, savage kicks, to the chest and stomach and head.

"Hawthorne," Cooper said.

Evelyn got out of the car. "Cooper, please," she said.

"That's the Kick-Man," Carrie said, and she ran across the street. Cooper followed her, as fast as he could.

Carrie pushed at Hawthorne and then fell on the Kick-Man, covering him with her body. Hawthorne stopped. He looked around at the gathered crowd and saw Cooper tottering towards him.

"Look at my car," Hawthorne said. "Look what he did."

Carrie was trying to help the crumpled man up. His face was bloody. His eyes were vacant. They both kneeled on the sidewalk, the man leaning heavily against the girl, smearing blood on her white dress. It was the Kick-Man. Cooper had given him a stray dog just a month before. The Kick-Man wasn't all there. Cooper liked him immensely.

"Sorry," the Kick-Man said. "Only Jerome. Sorry."

"What's *wrong* with you?" Cooper said to his brother. Evelyn came and kneeled down next to Carrie and the Kick-Man, and began wiping the blood from his face.

Carrie was crying. "He just wanted his dog," she said.

"His dog?" Hawthorne said. And they all saw it sitting by the car, wagging its tail. When they looked at it, it stood up and barked once and ran away.

"What's wrong with you?" Cooper asked again, but before Hawthorne could say anything, gravity grabbed Cooper by the shoulders and heaved him down to his knees.

"Cooper?" Evelyn said. Hawthorne stared down at them blankly.

"Cooper?" Evelyn said. "Cooper?"

The crowd shifted uneasily around them and Cooper heard a hawk scream somewhere far above.

"Cooper?" Evelyn said, and he felt her arms go round him; he felt her holding him up against the awful pull.

#### IV. HAWTHORNE, ALONE IN A FAST RED CAR

Hawthorne drove right past the Kick-Man standing by the side of the road and truthfully did not see him. All he let himself see was the double yellow line in the center of the road.

Some days Hawthorne drove fast because he felt large forces converging upon him, and some days the faster he drove, the more he felt those titanic seething forces gathering. Every day, he felt as if each moment would be his last, and so he had bought a shiny red car and installed a state-of-the-art alarm system and put in a teeth-rattling stereo system and drove as fast as he possibly could.

He was no idiot. He knew that this was some expression of grief over the death of his mother, but really it felt like it had little to do with her. Does grief ever have to do with the dead? He mourned because it was a world without her. He sorrowed because he lived in a universe with death stitched into its fabric.

He'd always known it, he'd just forgotten the knowledge. Think: five years old, he's on his father's shoulders, it's evening, warm, mid-summer, they're walking home after one drink (Pepsi, which he pretended was just like his father's one beer) at the Village Inn, the stars dull stones in the still-light sky, the barn swallows chaotic above him, his father singing Hank Williams while he does a little shuffle step: "Move over nice dog 'cause a mad dog's moving in." And his father's heart stops in mid-shuffle and he pitches forward and Hawthorne falls, it takes forever, in mid-air as he falls forever he *knows*.

He was one heartbeat away from heart attack. He was just one good cell away from cancer. He was a half-second from meteors descending, psychos with guns, Mack trucks without brakes. He would wake up in the night and throw on a coat over his underwear and drive, fast. The glove compartment was stuffed with speeding tickets. He was in danger of losing his license. He could never drive fast enough.

So he did not see the Kick-Man and he did not see the dog. He did not see the fields around him, the speckled cows, the dark horses bending their long necks down towards the earth. He did not see the forest begin, and he noted only clinically that the road became steep and curved, up into the town of Chase. He thought

about blowing off work, just driving, out and out and out, away from everything, and instead, almost by habit, he pulled into his space in front of the bank. He turned on the alarm and locked the door and went inside to his office.

He ignored the tellers and the other loan officers and went straight into his office and locked the door. And he sat behind his desk for an eternity, trembling. Then there was a knock at the door.

"Go away," he said.

"Mr Cantwell? I think you should come out here."

"No way," Hawthorne said.

The knocking persisted. "Someone's attacking your car."

It was time, already. They'd caught up to him. They'd caught him because he'd stopped.

"Call the cops," he said.

"I already did," said the voice. It was a teller; he couldn't think who.

And he was just going to sit there. He meant to. But he couldn't stop thinking about the car, his new car being destroyed, and somehow it made him think of crumpled bodies, and somehow he was brushing past the teller—John, why couldn't he remember a name like John?—and out the door and there he was, that crazy man, they called him the Kicker, and he was indeed attacking his car, and his car was arguing, the alarm was going off over and over, "This car protected by Viper. Please back away."

"Hey," he said. "Hey. What are you doing to my car?"

The psycho crouched down and actually snarled at him, and then said, "Kick-Man." And there it was: pin-wheel eyes and spittle, feral snarls and violent bones, everything he'd been afraid of since his mother died, since his father died, it was all pouring out of this lunatic crouching by his car. "Kick-Man," the lunatic said again, a deranged mantra.

How had he gotten here? Why in the world had he come out of the bank? "That's my car," he said, but he didn't even mean it, hell,

this Kick-Man could have it. As if in pitiful answer, the car said one more time, "This car protected by Viper. Please back away."

Why had he ever thought he could protect himself from anything? Why had he ever thought he could outrun the lunatic impulses of the world? He'd let the Kick-Man walk right up in front of him.

And the Kick-Man smiled a slow horrible smile and kicked him in the left shin.

He didn't know why he did the rest of it. He felt his shin ping with pain, and he knew he could never escape. And then he was suddenly furious. He was not going to die here in the street. He was not going to topple like his parents. Never. Not like this. He punched the Kick-Man in the nose and then in the temple.

He couldn't explain it: even years later he couldn't put it into words. But on that day at that moment he knew that he had death on the ground, one form of death, and he couldn't stop kicking and kicking. "How do you like it?" he screamed. "How do you like being afraid?" And then he screamed things that weren't words. He was lost to himself, even when some part of him knew that it wasn't a psycho beneath his feet, just some bum now, that death had never really been there, he still couldn't stop hammering away until he heard his brother saying his name.

And then everything was quiet. A girl in a white dress was trying to help the Kick-Man. He didn't know where he was, or what day it was, and then he did.

"Look at my car," he said. "Look what he did."

And the Kick-Man was saying something slurry and human and sane. And Cooper stood before him, gray faced, sweating, saying "What's wrong with you?"

The girl said, "He just wanted his dog."

"His dog?" Hawthorne said. And he saw it by his car, and it was just a dog. It ran from his terrible gaze. He looked down at the sidewalk. There was blood on his shoes.

"What's wrong with you?" Cooper said again. Hawthorne wanted to say, I don't know. Help me. Please help me. But before he could, Cooper's face went wrong and he fell to his knees, and Evelyn was there clutching Cooper, saying his name over and over again.

"Call an ambulance," he heard somebody say.

Hawthorne stood uncertainly over them. He did not know what was going to happen next. He did not know what the next second held. And then he did, and he dropped heavily to his knees, and put his arms around his brother and Evelyn. He joined them all there on the pavement, the five of them supplicant in the still hot air, waiting, silently, for the next moment, and the next, and the next.

JAMES SCOFIELD

*Birkenau*

I.  
*disembarking the cattle car*

my memory is well broken

i try to gather a few memories but  
they seem halted by a hedge of time still

eighty of us we stood four days peering  
through slats two buckets no room in that tin  
box for women or children to rest their heads

you must bear with me those times must be built up  
i am albert grinholtz that much is sure  
my wife rosa our daughter ala taken  
we were when the trellis was full of early roses

five by five they marched us out an orchestra  
played what? then i knew i remember our  
old men tipping their hats we marched barbed wire  
tall stanchions bending toward us guards humming  
march little shoots everywhere discharging life

i saw inside a car a puppy they  
had been trimming trees the buds were dumped  
stacked lying in heaps so many children  
the sky low soft a rosy hue lovely  
that's my girl over there on her tiptoes

ii.

*remember me, whispers the dust*

there was a man staring at my ala  
a herd of naked gypsy girls passed by  
ala blushed this man began to laugh he roared  
with glee i shook my head hard but ala  
stuck out her tongue he was Mengele this man

at home sunday smoke quiet streets sitting close  
to stoves bread in the ovens one morning  
they hanged a boy too light he was and took  
too long to die a lesson another bout  
of efficiency their sincerity is shattering

eighteen hour days so little food our eyes  
grew dull veiled we could see through our skin  
thin papery rosa my lovely wife  
who never raised her voice screamed at a guard  
his eyes they were as dark as an old lake

she is before my eyes still her trampled  
trunk dragged by the dead hair gone touched by them  
now unreachable no birds now no butterflies  
only beetles crawling on the backs of the dying  
life feeds on life no fiddle no books nothing

the children mad with hunger yesterday three  
broke into the morgue cut off a buttock

and ate now thirty rammed into a shed  
another lesson my ala there we  
all pray to a heaven steeped in darkness

two days so very hot too weak to scream  
soft sounds scratching once i heard such sounds  
a sealed bucket of water full of kittens  
to the other children they give to each  
a piece of candy no not yesterday

today i have no home here during the rains  
a water pipe performs outside the window  
a parody of blubbering woe with  
funny sobs and gurgling lamentations  
interrupted by jerky spasms of silence

from *Meditations on The Très Riches Heures*  
of Jean, Duke of Berry

v. *Mai*

In a wood that is now  
a Paris street  
the Seine close by

the men on horseback  
searching for laurels  
in celebration

of inflorescences  
births beginnings renewals  
and the green

delicate green *princesses*  
in the malachite livery  
of spring

are they unconfounded  
by the brass trombones  
the piercing flutes

the blood-red trumpet blast  
the duke's musicians  
exhale into the miraculous

springtime air  
a fanfare for  
the merciless births

vii. *Juillet*

Arcady  
is far away  
there are no gods

no pipes  
no nymphs  
there is a shepherd

and a woman  
shearing pale-white sheep  
the bent mid-summer

reapers reaping  
their yellow wheat  
their sickles

poised above  
unbundled sheaves  
and waiting

upon the ground  
the staves or crooks  
of the shepherd

and that woman  
so blue  
so beautiful

ix. *Septembre*

Again  
they will have wine  
the purple

Angevin grapes  
again  
are ripe

gathered  
purples masses  
in peasants' baskets

or baskets  
on that wagon  
pulled by brown oxen

or loaded  
on the backs  
of those donkeys

all too impatient  
for harvest's  
end

an Angevin  
peasant eats  
a grape

xi. *Novembre*

Hogs among the trees  
search out acorns  
a harvest

beneath crowded oaks  
their branches  
heavy with leaves

mostly green  
their edges yellow  
as fat

brown acorns  
littering  
more open ground

are devoured  
by another crowd of hogs  
greedy unchecked

a swineherd draws back  
with a stick  
what a picture

ancient oaks  
dying leaves  
acorns for hogs

*The Pigeon Cove Festival of Lights*

It was the winter of light, that Christmas in the Pigeon Cove cul-de-sac when we filled our street with wattage and joy. There were six houses, six families inside them and we mirrored each other. New cars were bought at the same time, the drive from the dealership back home like a funeral procession, a line of brand new shiny cars, driving to the same place. We were happy and safe in our group, our wagon train of houses circled around to keep out everything wrong, to preserve something unspoken and pristine, almost holy, on our street.

That winter, the Christmas season, my father came out of the attic with a box marked X-MAS DECO. He had noticed the other men all carefully hauling boxes of decorations out of their garages and onto their front lawns. We were the newest family to Pigeon Cove, our first Christmas there, and my mother was worried that a lot of lights were thought of as tacky, something not done. My father said he'd be damned if he was going to let anyone tell him how to celebrate the holiday season. He stepped outside into a slowly increasing glow of light. The other husbands already on the roofs of their houses, design plans and staple guns in hand, testing each strand before they tacked it to the house. My father looked down at the box of lights he held, the heft of it too light, inconsequential, and he got into the car and drove away. Our house suddenly seemed dim and quiet as the other houses flickered and brightened with each tested strand of lights, the glowing circle of electricity broken only by our family's house.

My father returned from the store with enough bulbs to illuminate a baseball field, strand after strand that he produced from the

car like a magician trailing colored handkerchiefs. We stood in our driveway and watched the Christmas lights pile around our feet and rise, football field lengths of filament and glass. The other men in the cul-de-sac looked away from their own work to stare at my father, wondering how much more was stuffed in our car. What are you doing honey, my mother asked him, what is all this? The car finally emptied, he began untangling the strands, carrying them over to the front yard. This, he told her, this is getting in the spirit.

The men worked all night. We children ran from yard to yard while they yelled at us to be careful. I stayed close to the Stewart girls, all six of them, and I fell in love with each one as we wandered through the cul-de-sac. They had red hair in varying shades of fire, from slow burn to four-alarm blaze, and freckles that ran across their noses like Braille, tiny dots of information. I wanted to trace my hands across their faces, to learn the secret each one would whisper on my fingertips.

There were the other kids as well, the McAllister twins, silent and knowing, always nodding their heads in unison. They seemed constantly aware of something the rest of us were not. The Roland kids were older, the brother and sister in high school already, sitting on their porch steps and reading, oblivious to the construction going on around them. The Markowitz boy had nearly drowned in the lake that summer and was still water-brained, what had become his normal demeanor. He was wide eyed, surprised, as if still trying to figure out how he passed out in the water, slipped under the surface, and managed to end up here, back in his normal life. Julie, the Breckenridge's child, was blond and pale. She was what I imagined when I thought of winter: pure and even and blinding. She never spoke, talked with her hands and eyes though her parents kept taking her to speech therapists who all said the same thing, either she will or she won't.

We were all quiet though, for children, all amazed into a hushed reverence. We stayed silent and awed as we ran in ever-expanding circles, like objects trying to break free of a planet's pull.

The women peered out the windows of their houses, waving to each other. They shrugged their shoulders as the men and children stayed out in the night, their dinners all collectively getting cold. The wives finally came out into the street as the men, now finished, smoked cigarettes and drew more designs on their sheets of paper. They whispered and pointed at the houses, trying to figure out what spaces they had neglected to cover in lights. The houses sat unlit and dark, humming with potential.

Finally, in the black of night, past all our bed times, we gathered in the middle of the cul-de-sac, in the street, and watched as each husband flicked the power to his own house. They came on one at a time, moving around the circle in a steady burst of light. We had to shade our eyes from the concentration of brightness, the sheer power of the Christmas lights that burned out at us. And we could feel the warmth on our cheeks from the glow of our houses, even in the cold of the winter night. The men gathered again in the middle of the street and shook their heads. A word was on their lips, and passed quickly like a breath, in unison. *Brighter.*

They took off work, cleaned out the stock of Christmas lights from every store, made diagrams of parallel circuits to get the most out of every light. Mr Roland tossed the Santa Claus and Reindeer plastic figures from the roof of his house. Too much space, he said, it's taking away from the lights. In fact, everything except the lights were taken down, wreaths and hollow plastic snowmen. The Markowitz's menorah in the window was replaced with a new model that used bulbs instead of candles. It's the festival of lights, sweetie, he told his wife, tradition can only do so much.

We loved it. We watched our fathers pin more light to the houses, adding rows and rows of brightness, finding places we

didn't know existed to illuminate. We sat in the middle of the road on an old mattress we hauled out of the Breckenridge's basement, and stared at the lights. We squinted into the glow until we made the lights dance, made them blur and move and jump around inside our brains, and it was wonderful. We huddled close to each other, our cold skin pressed against each other, watching our houses burn from the inside out.

We had to stay out of the road once the people started coming, driving in slow, creeping lines that snaked all the way back to town. They followed the dim glow of our houses until it got brighter and brighter. Once they arrived, they did not want to leave. They hesitated, turned off the engines of their cars and just stared until the cars waiting behind them honked their horns. Our mothers dressed us up in our church clothes and made us stand on the porches and wave to the cars, until we finally had to go to bed. They made hot chocolate and candied fruit and gave them out to the motorists who lingered, not wanting to leave. It seemed to us, staring out the windows of our bedrooms as we fell asleep, that the string of cars' headlights in either direction was an extension of our houses, of our lights. We went to sleep thinking Pigeon Cove was somehow bigger than it really was.

The news reporters came. They interviewed our parents but the fathers would only grunt, look away from the cameras, and say something about getting into the holiday spirit. They did not want to talk about it. It seemed almost disrespectful to discuss the need for the lights, like it was something deep and intangible that had no reason to be spoken of.

The Power Company allowed the electricity drain because the town had never seen tourists like this before. The diners and hotels filled to overflowing every day because of the lights of Pigeon Cove. Other subdivisions rotated nights where they were without electricity so we could keep burning. The school rented out buses

to take people to the cul-de-sac as traffic had become too backed up to allow everyone to see the lights. People waited in town for a bus to stop by and pick them up and take them to the place they could already see, shining like gold. The houses around ours sat dim and cold, as if abandoned.

The men added more, setting up wide sheets of aluminum to reflect the light even further out, as if propelling it at you like bolts of lightning. My father found a way to create a connection of lights that held bulbs as big as floodlights, lights that could signal planes down from the sky. They covered our lawns with a netting of bulbs, rolled out lines of Christmas lights onto the grass. They spent hours every day changing the bulbs, keeping the connections flowing.

They had outlets running everywhere so as not to overload the power. We were not allowed to have any lights on inside the house once night arrived. It took away a degree of brightness from the outside lights. We started spending the nights at each other's houses, away from the fathers and their planning and the mothers and their disbelief. We saw stars in our heads all the time, little pinpricks of light that never seemed to leave us. We looked at each other and saw our bodies glitter like precious jewels, the lights always around us. We were slowly falling in love, becoming iridescent, melting into each other.

One man interviewed by the major networks had tears rolling off his cheeks after seeing our houses. It's like staring into the truth, he said, like everything else has burned away and only the most important single thing in the world is left. And the reporters asked him what that one thing was, leaned closer with their microphones. I don't know, he told them, it was too bright.

We all watched the buses drive by our houses, saw the popping of people's flashbulbs as they took pictures. They never seemed to understand that none of the photos would come out, that there would only be blurs of light, overexposures. But perhaps that was

what they wanted. We stayed away from windows after a while, wore sunglasses like the kind they give old people after cataract surgery when we walked to each other's houses. We set fire to tissues in a metal trashcan and watched them burn down to ashes, lifting up in the air as the heat carried the particles away from us. We wondered what would happen if we caught the house on fire, if anyone outside would even notice, be able to tell the difference.

It was twenty-four hours of daylight for us that winter. The nights became even brighter than the days, the lights clicking on the minute the sun fell behind the horizon. We had no sense of time, would lie in a single bed, bodies draped over each other and it felt like we would sleep for days or not at all. There was no way of telling anymore. Even our mothers gave up trying to remember time, would keep watch over us during what they assumed to be the night, very much afraid.

Our fathers added more lights, attached spotlights to the roofs that would swivel back and forth in the sky, crossing over each other. When they all met at one point, it would illuminate the sky so much that we thought we could see through the atmosphere and into the cold, blank face of space. A crew of Russian Cosmonauts radioed back to earth that they could see a white ball of light coming from the United States, something smooth and bright and warm. They pressed their faces to the windows as they circled the earth, waiting for the next chance to stare at it.

We talked even less after the lights came on. Even the parents ceased to communicate in anything other than gestures, faint movements of eyes and mouths. There was no room for anything other than the brightness. Whatever we said was rendered unnecessary by the light.

We stood in the middle of the road, equidistant from all the houses, and there were no shadows of our bodies. The light enveloped us and there was nowhere for our shadows to rest. We would

stand in this circle. The travelers would move past us, not even seeing us, and we would pretend that we were the only people in the world, that this light was all somehow for us, and we would return to our homes with our skin browned almost to red, our faces warmed like fever.

We missed Christmas that year. It came and went without our thinking of it. A news reporter asked Mr Miller about the purpose of the lights, what it was all about. Mr Miller was tired of explaining. It's about the goddamned baby Jesus and all that, he said, the birth and the star in the sky and the shepherds and all... all of that. And when the reporter told him that Christmas was over, Mr Miller ran back into the house and wrapped up his children's old toys in newspaper and placed them beside their beds while they slept.

The Power Company told us they could no longer give us all the power we were using. They needed it back. People were still coming, some for the fourth and fifth time. One woman went blind from staring at it for so long, simply burned her sight down to nothing. We had not been out of Pigeon Cove since the end of November. We did not really believe that there was anything actually out there beyond us anymore.

Our fathers cursed at the power company. They purchased generators, gasoline-fueled monsters that hummed and rattled to keep the lights going. Still, we knew it would not last. The police created detours to keep people away from the house. We sat in our houses and waited, stared at the brightness and wondered how long it would last, how much longer we could depend on gas and metal, wire and filament.

All of us went to our own house the night the generators all began to wheeze. Each family sat together in their living room and waited, saying nothing, not remembering how. We only sat and listened to the noise of the generators, but something else too, the

ever present hum of the lights. The tiny sound of electricity moving, being changed into light, hummed inside our bodies like our new hearts.

Then the rattles came, the cha-chunk sounds of the generators finally losing power. And slowly, almost imperceptibly, the lights outside dimmed, losing wattage an increment at a time. And finally, though we could not tell how long it had been there, we noticed the darkness. The blackness surrounded us, filled the space outside our houses, and our fathers hung their heads. Our mothers cried and we ran to the windows to see.

And then, together, we stepped out into the night, into something that felt completely removed from everything we had ever known. It was like being born, finding ourselves in a new, strange world. As we walked around our yards, listening to the hiss and pops of the dying bulbs, we could not yet imagine if we had come to a place that was better or worse than before.

*Accidental*

Briefly come to, badly hurt,  
 you can guess how it is: your death  
 croons oo to you motherly  
 morning before you can flail one numb  
 muddy fist or kick,

& even though the ochre gully's  
 stout trees hold like help  
 & the creek bank holds its  
 locked rocks to locked  
 rocks like help, your own

other hand lets go what good  
 grip you had of the ground;  
 blood you need drains  
 down the clogged weeds & clears  
 itself through a blue

watery gravel until it rinses to such  
 purity that no  
 innuendo of body remains.  
 You may extricate now  
 from thankless tasks—but the one

you took upon yourself  
 in a mishap of mind, in ground fog  
 (when, apparently, a long shade  
 backed off & fingered your wet  
 lip, hush): that one presses on.

*Nimbus*

Moonlight woke me;  
 could've been a prowler, or  
 what else is the fear for?  
 So spoke Nance in her nightie  
 & headed out to the hall landing,  
 & there, to satisfy herself, she stomped  
 her slippers into the long mist

of a wedding where it slid  
 importantly down the stairs  
 in a retinue of insipid tunes  
 eddying from every room, hers  
 too; *but I think of you all the time*  
 mistress of festivities, snitch  
 fingering in the silver—

& to clear her eyes' mind  
 of the linens & stains & relations  
 from the wrong side, strangers,  
 she felt back to a spigot in the bath,  
 certain to run either hot or cold!  
 If she would just turn her hand, why,  
 then, water would rise.

*Inhumane*

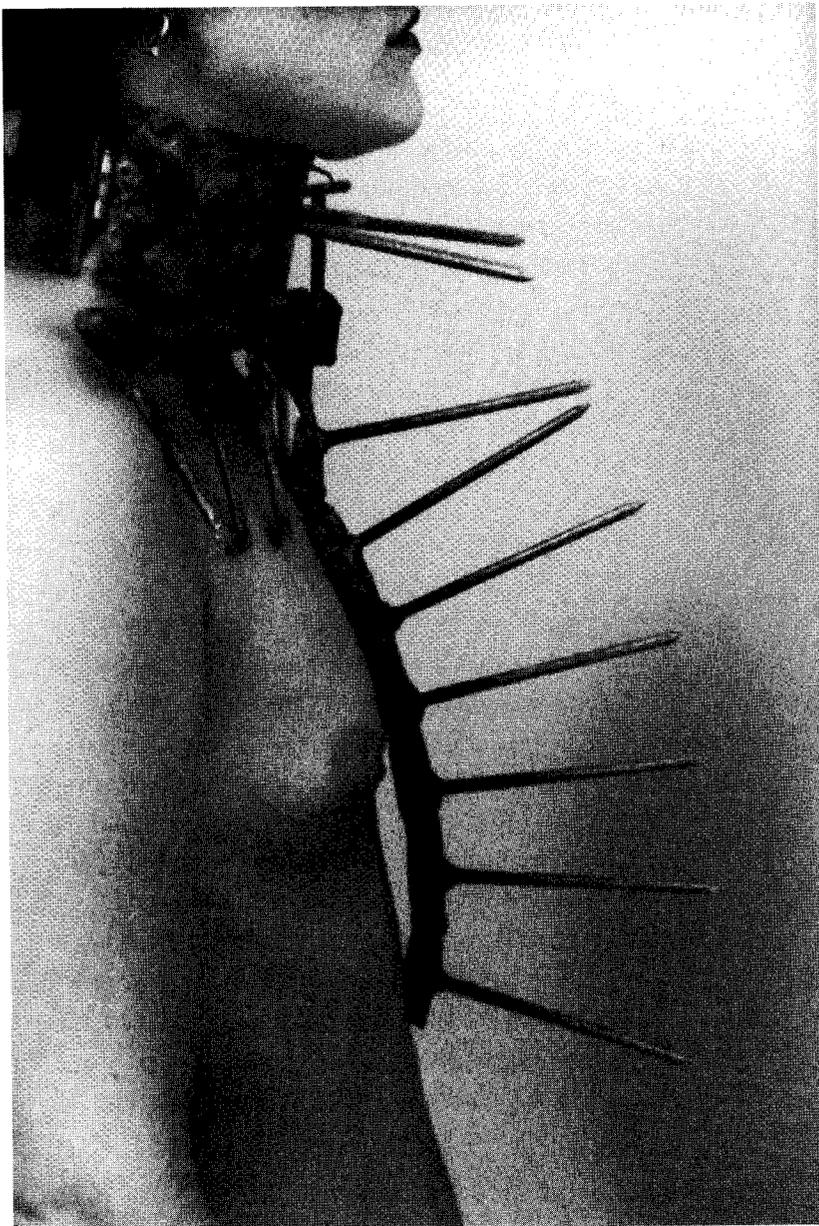
Monkey-lightning cranks  
down the rungs of the usual dark  
night of the soul. *Strike you, you  
wish*, hisses each of several consecutive  
sentences, one per each  
million or so victims, mistaking for me  
my alter ego, the punk convict,

even as brilliant electricity,  
halowise, fires around the protected,  
harmless hairs of his head. I smell you—  
ozone edge, sulfur. Frazzled institutional  
calendar, picked over, volunteers execution  
dates nobody else wants; who rubs  
me out every time I pencil myself in?

When did even the crickets quit my yard?  
Harsh garden: thieving bunnies, the ones kids  
ambush for fun, dispatched in earnest convulsions—  
guard, go dig me up a bunch of them!  
But lickety-split lasts, lasts,  
persists, protracts. Convict, the gifted escapee,  
consults the yellow nails of his underhandedness

(may they rise by their moons in spite),  
and so he clambers up, bravo!, to rip &  
ricochet among the livid silver

linings of perfect crime, a skill,  
a skull, a skeleton, modus operandi I'd  
think to mimic myself, only drop to quadruped:  
may the brute force condescend to me.

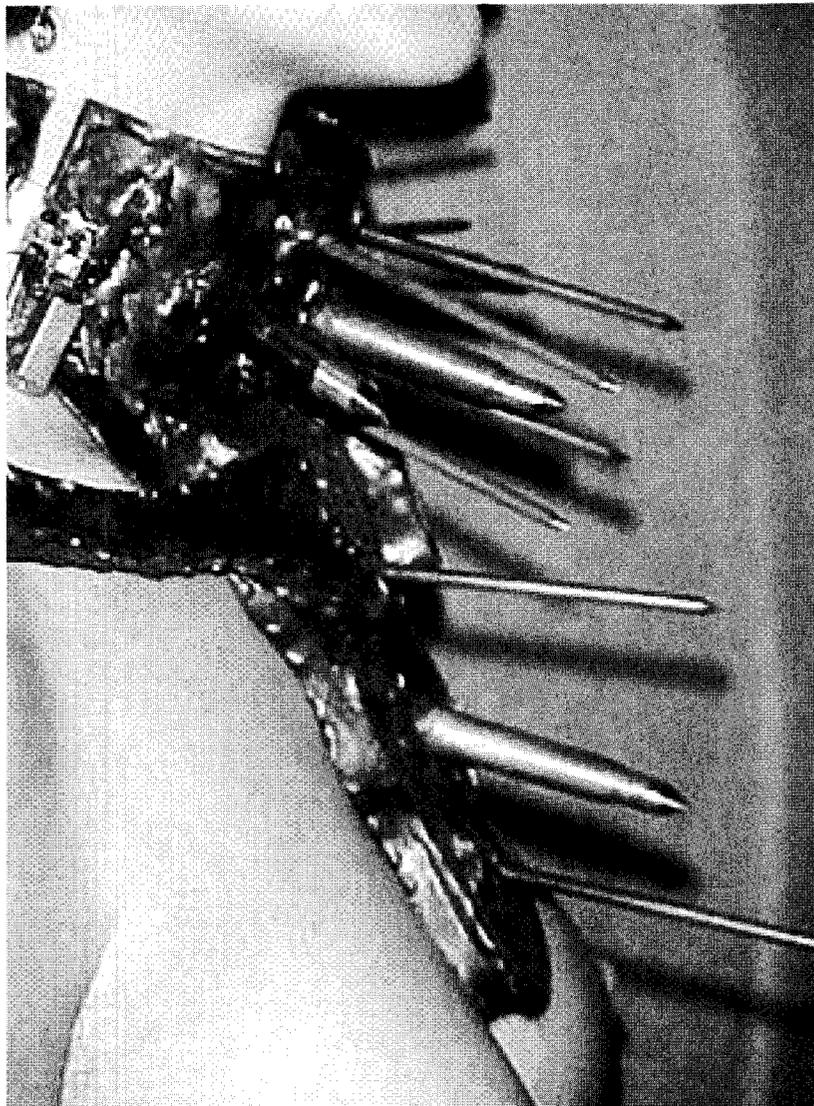


LAURA CAMILLE TULEY

*Our Lovely Prisons: The Performance  
of Female Perversions in Daphne Loney's Sculpture*

There is no question that New Orleans artist Daphne Loney is, by instinct and inclination, a feminist. That is, that Loney exhibits a native understanding of those innumerable cultural oppressions which burden and inhibit the feminine sex. More to the point, that she is able to connect the private neuroses and self-disfigurement by individual women to the pressures and constraints of social convention. There is, further, no question that Loney is a sensitive reader of the human psyche in its simultaneously erotic and destructive aspects. That she suggests an appreciation of life tending towards death, and of the "death" that is essential to the movement of life. In other words, Loney is able, in her work, to reflect both some part of what it means to "become a Woman" in the West, and a taste for the incongruous nature of psychological life. Unlike many a feminist, however, Loney does not seek to cleanse or straighten the twisted fruits of feminization. And, unlike a psychoanalyst, she does not look to heal her subjects (or herself) of social wounds. Rather, Loney's aim is insistently aesthetic. She accentuates the work of culture—to the point of perversion—and, in so doing, she enjoys.

Loney recently exhibited a series of interactive sculptures at the Jonathan Ferrara Gallery in New Orleans. Fourteen wearable and outlandish collars of metal, copper, wire, and glass, trimmed with bullets, nails, medical and domestic instruments, were mounted on tall metal stands, resembling emaciated figures. The theme of her show is two-fold: the psychological prisons that women erect for themselves in order to perform and function by the prevailing norms of feminine etiquette, and the ways in which women defend



themselves from the frequently toxic effects of these same norms. The pieces are three-dimensional representations both of these prisons and of women's defenses against them. Organized into several clusters, the titles of the fourteen sculptures reflect their subject humorously, critically and inventively. Loney is quick to note that the show is not about the oppression but the participation of women in their own confinement. "I think a lot of these images have to do with how women purposefully make themselves uncomfortable in order to be attractive. It seems a phenomenon that women have no problem with."

The first cluster of collars facilitates, while exposing, the perversions compulsory to women's unending self-maintenance. *Apparatus That Enables One to Sew Their Friends' Eyes and Lips Shut*, to which a magnifying glass is attached with two metal holders containing needles and threads, alludes to the commonplace complicity between women. "Women are their own worst enemies," Loney observes—from simple gossip about, to blatant sabotage of, other women in both professional and private arenas. The piece facilitates (or recommends) the fantasy of sewing shut the lips of one's "friends," thereby repressing critical and distorted interpretations by those who threaten to undercut one's "progress" within a patriarchal society.

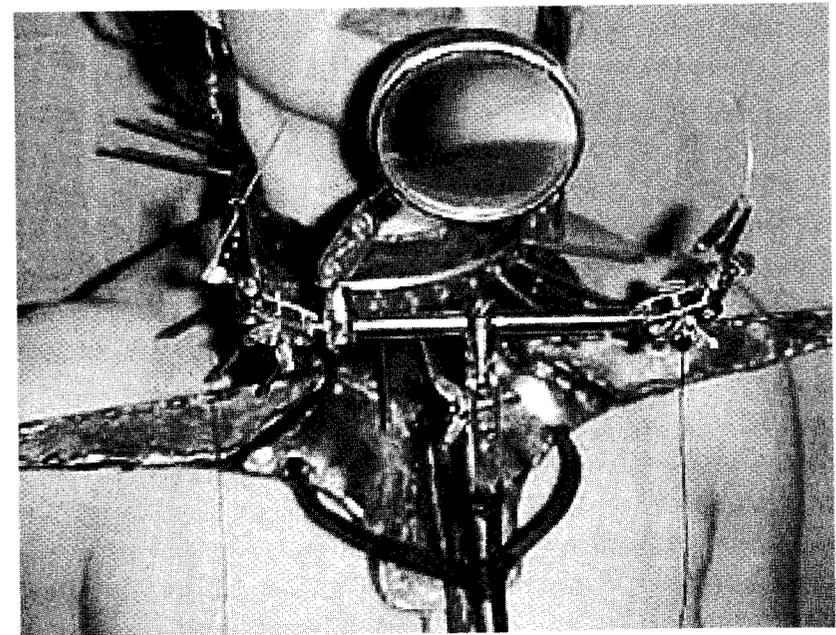
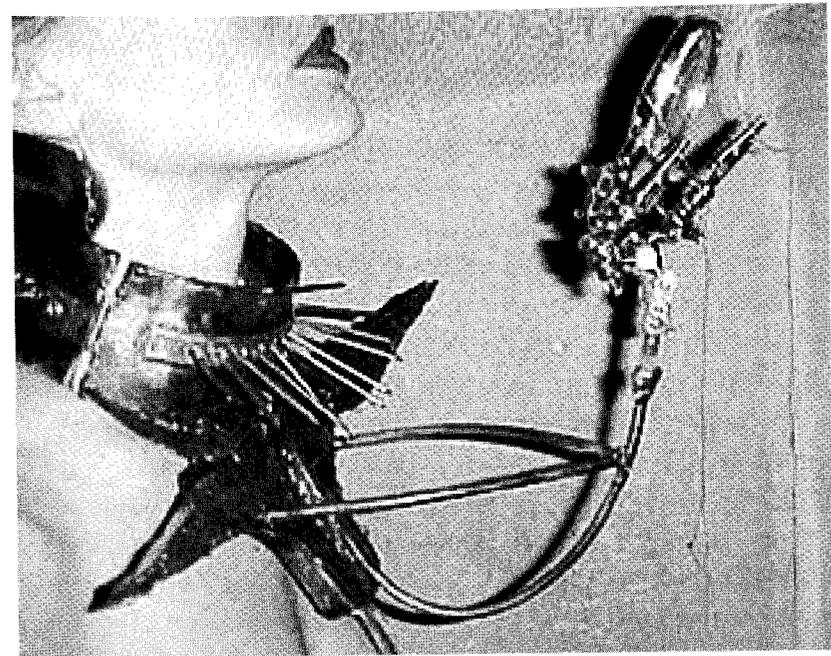
*Everything That is Necessary to Perform Cosmetic Surgery on Yourself*, is a collar complete with a set of tweezers, scissors, scalpel, needles and thread, dissecting hooks, hemostats and a small mirror that extends from the neck at face level. This intricately encumbered assemblage cites women's compulsion and obligation to remake or repair themselves on the bases of age, fashion, and environment. Loney reflects that, although the piece comments on the ultimate futility of such rituals as plastic surgery, it is not meant as an indictment. "I have no problem with cosmetic surgery, if that's what

makes you feel good. I meant more that we're constantly reinventing our appearance and, as a woman, you have to be able to do that in order to survive."

In *Apparatus That Enables One to Give the Illusion of Confidence While Causing Yourself Discomfort*, Loney identifies the tendency of women to assume unnatural, often uncomfortable and traditionally male characteristics in order to project an image of confidence. The piece is adorned with large spent bullet shells in combination with large nails, both objects which symbolize, rather pointedly, the illusion of phallic strength.

Loney's almost too clever *Device That Enables One to See Your Words Before Making An Ass of Yourself* is a collar composed of two dozen small nails with a large magnifying glass protruding at the throat. This relentlessly knotty choker would, if it could, encourage its wearer to censor her speech by inducing closer self-reflection. Its composition suggests the need for vigilant discretion in self-expression. Although she claims that the piece is non-gender specific—that it was, rather, inspired by her own habit of thoughtlessly airing her opinions and, thereby, frequently offending her interlocutors—the focus on the need for decorum is tellingly sexed. As Freud reminds us repeatedly, civilization demands civility and restraint—in a word, good manners—of all of its members, but the guilt and stigma associated with unseemly, insensitive and, well, "asinine" conduct are peculiar to *ladies*, whose job it is, by convention, to maintain a proper decorum.

The next three pieces in the series, *Device That Attractively Prevents Physical Contact From Strangers, Friends and Family*, *Apparatus That Enables One to Carry With Them The Paranoia of Being Violently Assaulted* and *Device That Prevents Anyone From Compulsively Hugging You*, reflect defenses that women develop to navigate and supplement the normative prisons they have erected with the aid of cultural cues.



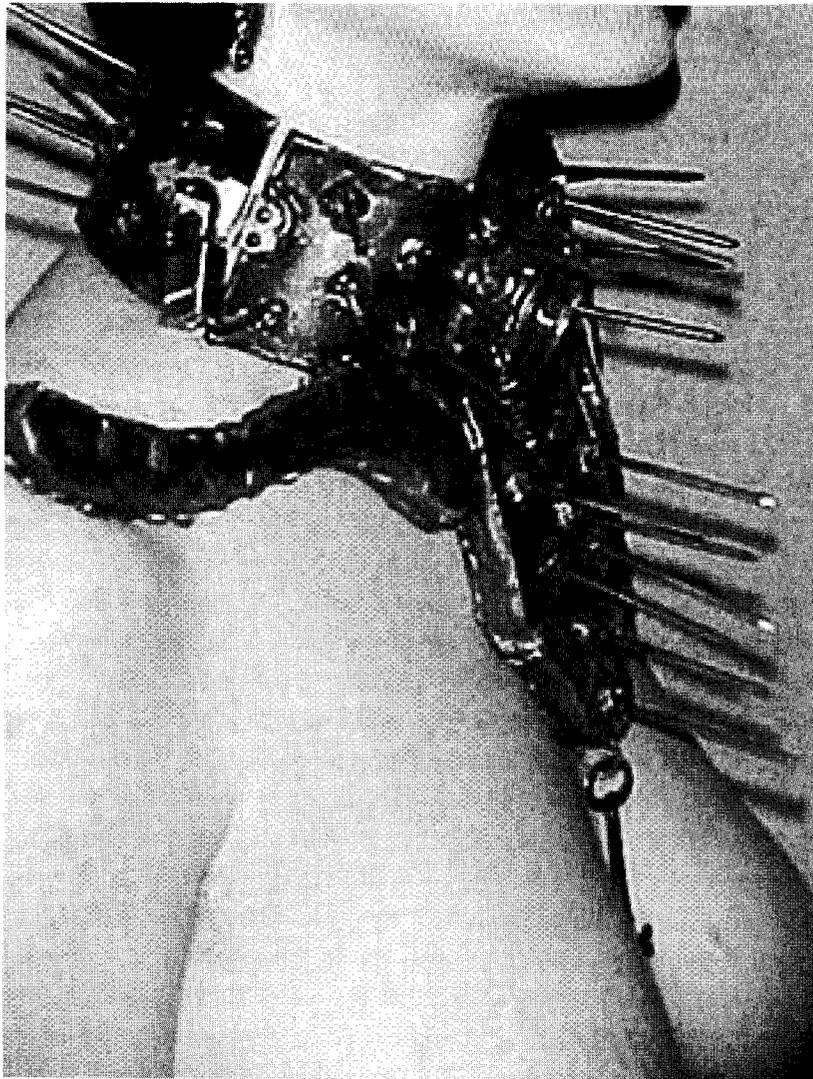
*Device That Attractively Prevents Physical Contact From Strangers, Friends, and Family* is an imposing neckpiece with two-foot extensions, each of which ends in an attached nail. Loney conceived of the piece just after her father died of cancer, a period during which she felt the need to avoid extended contact with other people. To justify doing so, she explains, she constructed an arsenal of elaborate excuses, effectively fending off the slightest threat of prolonged exposure to another human being. On a socio-political level, the work evokes the white lies to which women frequently resort in order to politely deny others access to them or otherwise protect themselves from the social obligations which often frame their lives.

*Apparatus That Enables One to Carry With Them The Paranoia of Being Violently Assaulted* is another massive sculpture, constructed of hollow copper tubing with lengthy extensions, tipped by bullets that turn back on the wearer. The work targets (sharply) the paranoia to which women are prone by virtue of their vulnerability to violent crime. Loney suggests that women fuel or accentuate that paranoia ("carry it with them") through their own anxiety and projections, born of oppressive social conditions. Loney: "I've noticed that over the last couple of years, being a single woman, as you start to get older, you become very aware of your surroundings. For example, I recently got a big dog and I now carry mace. I've even considered carrying a gun, which I would never have considered before."

In *Device That Prevents Anyone From Compulsively Hugging You*, a chest plate with large protruding nails, Loney satirizes women's tendency to show excessive and often contrived physical affection (i.e., social hugs or society kisses), in order to cement relations with members of their caste. This imposing piece wards off any unwelcome "toucher," and reveals the artist's (and probably many people's) hidden reluctance to engage in such spurious hugging rituals, which can ultimately perpetuate duplicity among women. In other words, it embodies both a critique of and defense against the performance of affected manners in the service of class.

The last cluster of collars more or less repeats, with comparable ingenuity, the architecture and content of the collars that precede it. *Exercising Minimal Effort to Restrain Oneself*, a simple neck piece with wire mesh, embodies the delicate perversions characteristic of even those seemingly "functional" women. "There are no bullets on it, no spikes," notes Loney. Rather, this relatively discrete, almost pretty piece illuminates the light discomfort or tasteful contortions that restrain us all, regardless of our projected level of adjustment; in other words, Freud's civilization and its embedded discontents revisited. "When you're wearing it, it's not like you can really forget for very long that you have it on because you can't bend your neck, you can't really function, it catches on your clothes." In essence, the collar reveals the fact that everyone is subject to neuroses; some of us are able, quite simply, to disguise or wear them more attractively. Or, in Loney's words, "no one is really free of hang-ups, some are just better than others."

A long, gently sloping, spinal column with nails protruding from each vertebrae, the dramatic *Apparatus That Enables One to Have a Backbone Even When One Feels or Appears Spineless* marks Loney's own struggle to develop a less obliging personality, to be less generous. Once again disclaiming any larger social content, her personal struggle is symbolized through a seemingly concrete solution—a new or reinforced backbone—which, nevertheless, indexes very succinctly a peculiarly "feminine" vice: niceness. Women are traditionally celebrated for their nurturing capacity or "natural" proclivity to connect with others, whether that be in simple conversation or via their assumption of caretaking roles. Of course, such habits are far from reflective of simple hearts or pristine motives. More over, while there are those feminists who have attempted to reclaim this historical aspect of women's identity as essential to formulations of sexual difference, most have reclaimed their natural right to self-centeredness and desire (i.e., to claim a space of their



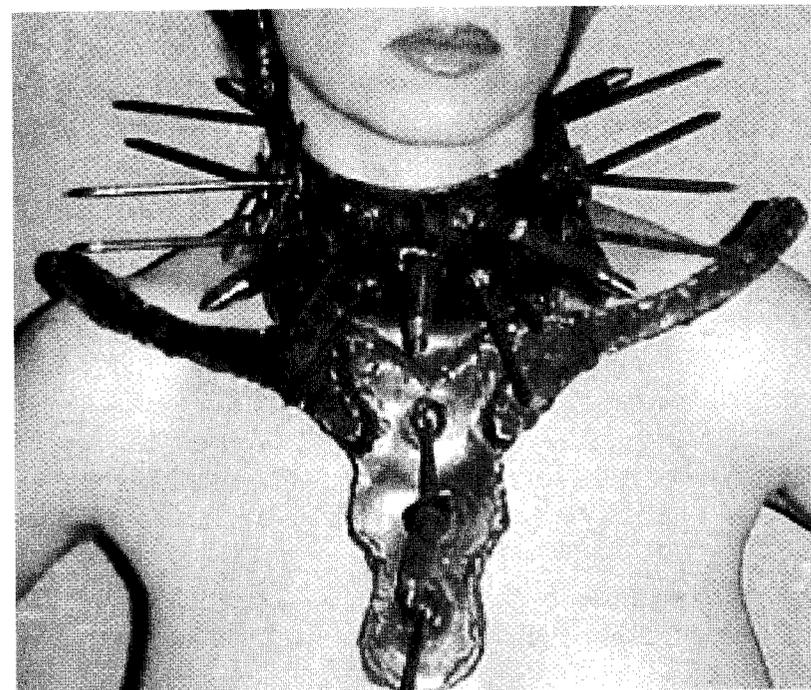
own, their own careers, the right to choose whether or not to reproduce, et cetera). Loney is concerned, in this piece, with a similar prerogative: the right to refuse. "I have a really hard time saying no to people because I like to help people out and I've always assumed that they won't take advantage of you... to the extent that last year I even bought two sets of things—my loaner tools, my good tools; my loaner camera, my real camera..." Now she can wear a well-wrought spine by which to fend off exploitation, which is what the collar councils, symbolically, to similarly spineless women: armor yourselves.

*Brace That Stylishly Prevents One From Biting Their Nails* marks and pokes fun at the shame associated with obsessive-compulsive behavior. Loney confides, "I was a nail-biter my whole life. Now, because I am aware of it, I notice people who do it nervously, and then catch themselves doing it and blush, even though they don't know that you've seen that...it's just so strange to me that you have these weird little habits that are probably just bad for you—you probably shouldn't bite your nails because it probably isn't good for your teeth and makes your nails hurt—but which contain such a negative social connotation." The piece, which is a smart-looking collar with handcuffs closely attached to the neck, is Loney's response: a stylish means of repressing what Freud would call an "hysterical symptom" (a restless libido rearing its head). Moreover, this chic sculpture highlights our collective unease when faced with the disorder implied by a lack of control (the Greek sense of chaos as an index of death). In parodying our frantic attempts to batten the hatches, Loney's art again poses the question of whether our efforts to identify and suppress allegedly "bad" or "indecent" behavior might not be integral to functioning "well."

Her last collar in the series, *Device That Prevents One From Wandering About Aimlessly*, addresses the universal problem of (self) distraction and proposes a remedy. A collar chained to a cement block, the

piece allows its prisoner only a limited sphere in which to circulate, thereby curtailing the possibility of moving off, as it were, in a different direction. Loney: "I think that we have these absent-minded wanderings, that we do it in relationships, we do it with our families, where we don't ever get to the point, we kind of dodge things, avoid responsibilities, avoid having to pay the bills." The chain, she notes, provides only about ten feet in which to move and on which to focus. In short, once again, the problems of culture are deferred by rituals of containment (i.e., by the work and works of "civilization").

And so, despite her clear observation of the futility and self-annihilating character of those psychological prisons to which we commit ourselves, we are left with an apparent endorsement of repression. Repression to the point of perversion. I think it would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the artist does not recognize the inevitable transgressions which are, by definition, produced by convention. She is, quite simply, celebrating a third drive in addition to eros and thanatos, what Lacan names *jouissance*, or enjoyment, an affirmation that takes one beyond the mere pursuit of pleasure and self-preservation. In a way we want things that in another way we do not want. *Jouissance* can, and often does, reside in the pleasure or joy women (and men) derive from discomfort, in the nonsensical pleasure we receive from pain. Loney: "Like all women, when we do these things to ourselves we try to make them as attractive as possible." The point for women, and the point for Loney, appears to be to make our suffering pleasure look normal. Aesthetic. And maybe it is.



*Plus Pijouns*

Creation by committee. Inevitable meetings with desultory angels, long hours, stale coffee. This one had a unique vision of the watery world: mollusks, coral, half-plant, half-animal anemones.

Adrift. Moving from one spongy form to another. Endless sequence of identical reflections. As with lovers, moving from one apartment to the next, one lover to another. No more than drifted.

A break for errands. Retracing steps to that errant catalogue of cloud formations. That distinct autonomy of theirs. Trip to the promontory to glean stray bits of falling light, like the last ripened fruits.

And pigeons. Pijouns. Nothing in that spacious complex hinted the least passage of time except by dereliction. Plus pijouns. In history to come, some interview peasants, blacksmiths, country priests. The local pronunciation of a particular phoneme or slight syntactic variation.

Time-worn, wind-worn dictum.

In that last hour, a billion vacant bedrooms, swept clean, shutters opened, shelves emptied. Vases for all the flowers to come. It being December, no flowers yet. And no small drop of spirits.

There are days even a god wants no more than to pitch hay, milk goats, make goat cheese in those churning wheels—just to come a little closer. Farmhouse with single corkscrew of blue smoke rising from a chimney pot. No heritage to obliterate. No history.

Here's where you might want to incarnate Magdalene. Walk with her beside the scythes, sickles, plowshares. Let her, for example, exult in a sylvan scent. Morning, hear her bathing. Facial cream over that tall, mineral forehead of hers. The granular brown of her repeated, self-searching glances. A nearly hallucinatory presence filling the radiant oval.

Let's suppose a language. Gallo-Romanic breath relics. Words circulate like precious currency, evanescent gold. Char. An entire lexicon devoted to nothing but grain. More char.

Sawdust. Woodsmoke. Like you. With Magdalene's hand you measure altitude. Bless you, she says, over and over again. Meaning nothing spiritual. Meaning the harm is washed away.

Promise me out loud, she demands, this Magdalene. Your mind on the moon, you sign anything she gives you.

*There's a Hole in the Screen*

The night has disappeared into my cat.

She carries the message in her teeth. In the dark, few are in love,  
many breathe.

Bach was right. Joy is all in the desiring. Oh Jesu. There was blood  
on my hands, a broken glass, a million shards, a dozen wounds.  
There, a quill, an inkwell filled with spores from which grow  
fugues. All night, they lie in state. One touches them, that's all.

Make a note. Plant next time no annuals. How they suffer up your  
*freude!* Basso. Contralto. Duo.

What's present are many of the insteads. It is not too late to wonder  
about them. There is one now, suspended in the bilious wind. Bil-  
ious. Take a reef. Hard alee.

Okay. Inclusion is profligate. Omission offers up its own rewards.  
Take another reef. Reach.

Well, enough of figurative passions. I have never been defeated so  
completely. If a fog can be light, then I am ready to return to my  
kabbalist. He who sanctifies the exalted, and so on. Lest your atten-  
tion go grievous, I have bandaged up my hand. You there. Above.

The fog burns off, I am told, each morning. Here is a morning, fog  
facing east. Your face in it. Desire, I say. Justification, I say, and  
mean of course in canticles, I love, you love, they love.

Dove?

Word.

Unword.

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*Winter Fugue*

Wittgenstein meant in the head the problem is there's no place to point.  
When I turned to the window I saw the door of the crackhouse was open.  
When I saw your green eyes, when I was sure the wild snow would  
Send us into the ditch, would send us searching for a narrative in the dark,  
I saw the signs of four of five lifelines divide easily into the evening.

When I turned to the window I meant this problem of snow was mown  
Before, meaning your green eyes swerving over the alcohol in my head,  
The lawn of Wittgenstein, the one narrative you brought the pillow for.  
I drifted in and out of the music, you whispering, *the eroticism of winter*  
*Is in its sleep, in the smoke of the houses drifting into the dark.*

The weather was personal, was about us in the way it sent no one into it.  
The sureness of pointing this out—that the swerving nerves in my head  
meant to say  
Something is drifting in the air of the car, that the story of division was just  
another  
Story, that I turned from the window to turn into your whispers—  
Meant the sober blood I wintered in was not dark to the problems of  
eroticism.

We drove through the dark city, beyond the rows of bars, the anonymous,  
identical  
Buildings that collected on the outskirts, across the divisions of electrical lines.  
Into the narratives of snow and alcohol I turned. The pasts in the head.  
Where the drifts of accumulated wrongs slept in false fields of pity.  
Into the black hours of windows, where your voice reflected into another life.

*A Similar Fire*

The story is elsewhere.  
I never heard/felt *flow*.  
The horse you mentioned  
Darkened in the next sentence.

I know there was black fire.  
Trouble. Woe or worse.  
A man squatted in the shadows of it.  
And spoke your words of love.

Yet a similar fire squatted in love.  
Where I spoke in the shadows of *you*,  
It was black in the words.  
And I lessened my leaning.

The leaning was for the sky.  
(It was not for love, nor you.)  
By my less-leaning, I think  
I meant almost nothing.

*The Wheels' Steely Motion*

Tonight I propose my shoulder blade—  
the small slash of your name  
sleeps in that stunted wing's  
modest shadow. Run a hand  
along its hollowed slough.  
Let your palm burn with departure.  
Let it blacken the woman draped  
along the curve of your neck.  
The breath of our train's ashy riggings  
calms the world finally. Our train dreams  
my dream: the bones of your hand.  
A track of your flesh. The wheels'  
steely motion presses your body's  
light into marrow. My face  
from the window of the engine  
steams across the telling. Together,  
we rattle off your edge into  
nothing, black air, endless fortune.

*My Body Repeats Itself*

I dreamt you were a silver tree  
clamoring with birds. The shell of a beetle  
on the underside of a sodden leaf  
understood everything about what we are—  
not body anymore, not flesh. Are you  
awake? I don't know what I touch these nights  
in our bed. A smooth hull. Waxing or waning  
something. My body repeats itself and repeats  
itself and then you are just skin under me.  
Even our fireplace is filled with other fire.  
The cat sifts through ash in our garden.  
I don't want an ending, but it is here—  
burning bush by the shed, wrecked car  
in the grass, birds fleeing, their nests breaking.

*Madonna In The Dust*

Lady Rain stood in front of her reservation shack, wrapping her arms around her five-year-old son, Mooch. "Be good today," she whispered. "Be a good boy." She brushed her fingers over Mooch's silky, black head, tugging gently. "Almost long enough for braids," she said. She'd fed Mooch a good breakfast, washed his face, bundled him in new, cheap blue jeans three sizes too large. "I'll see you after school," she said, coaxing a smile from Mooch.

Mooch shuffled across the kindergarten classroom toward plastic chairs arranged in a semi-circle. He sat in a chair at the circle's edge, hanging his head until his chin nearly touched his chest.

Mooch found a scrap of paper and a crayon. He doodled his dead sister's name: *Maggie*. Then he folded her into a tiny square and tucked her in his pocket.

Mooch covered his head with his hands. Reaching back a thousand years, he conjured a Lakota lullaby, which he crooned under his breath. A blonde girl sitting beside him tapped his shoulder.

"It's your turn," she whispered.

Mooch ignored her. He chanted louder.

The kindergarten teacher's fist curled around her pencil. A smile froze on her face and she marched across the classroom.

"We're all sharing today. We're all getting to know one another. Please tell us your name, and something special about yourself."

Mooch lifted his head. He gazed up with pale, gray eyes the color of cemetery stones.

The teacher sucked in her breath. Her smile, hard as a mirror, fell to the floor and shattered. Seven years worth of bad luck.

Mooch grinned. *Poor white lady and her broken-mirror smile*. It rained bad luck for miles around the reservation.

He was nearly six years old. He knew her thoughts. He was not blind. His gray eyes saw everything.

"Hello. My name is Mooch," he said. "I make marijuana."

Of course, his name wasn't really Mooch. His name was Vincent Rain. Everyone called him Mooch because he panhandled dollar bills, charming them from his parents and everyone else.

"Begger boy," Lady said. She passed cash into Mooch's small hand, whatever she had extra from the check. Uncle Sam subsidized Mooch's sweet tooth. Mooch smiled a forest of withered, black stumps.

Lady peeked inside her emptied wallet. "I don't need new shoes, anyway." She stitched the busted-out holes in her sneakers using red embroidery floss. "I got me these handmade moccasins."

She turned her ankle this way and that, displaying embroidered Keds that were every bit as pretty as plastic moccasins imported from Taiwan. "See? See my handmade moccasins?"

Mooch didn't make marijuana, either.

"Marinara," Lady explained into the telephone. "He makes that marinara sauce, on account of someone give me that Italian cookbook. We make it together. With tomatoes," she added, and hung up on the kindergarten teacher.

Lady and Charlie Rain laughed that night. Together in their lumpy bed, they laughed themselves sick, repeating the story often, the way parents do. "Marijuana," they told each other, wagging their heads in disbelief. "He told her that he made marijuana!"

They stretched out the joke for ten years, right up until Mooch got himself arrested.

"You shouldn't take candy from strangers. Didn't your mama ever teach you that?" Mel Crowfoot, the tribal policeman, hefted a

Lady woke wet faced from these dreams.

When she told Charlie about them, he stroked her hand and sighed. "Sometimes, Lady, there ain't no *why*. Sometimes, a thing just is, and no sense to lay the blame on yourself."

Lady disagreed. She knew why Maggie died.

Lady'd sat quietly at the clinic while the Indian Health Services doctor set a broken nose. She waited patiently while the doctor ate his lunch.

Three-year-old Maggie, hot faced, a furnace in Lady's lap, whined like a puppy. By the time the doctor laid hands on Maggie's swollen belly. Her appendix had burst. It was too late. They buried her on a Saturday afternoon.

"I should have barked louder," Lady whispered. Oh, she knew why Maggie died.

Maggie died, and Mooch's gray eyes, like cemetery stones, marked pain and time.

"Lady Madonna," Charlie called her once. "Like the song."

"I ain't no Madonna," said Lady. She'd seen pictures of smiling Madonnas. They dripped gold jewelry and gold crowns. They wore clean, expensive-looking robes. Chubby Christ children perched on their laps.

*Motherhood ain't like that. Motherhood ain't clean happy babies and a smiling face. Motherhood is putting your little girl in the mud too soon. Motherhood is a devil inside your boy.*

Lady imagined Christ hanging on the cross. His anguished mother sobbed at his feet, a mother in the dust, weeping for her child, weeping for the one she couldn't save. And Lady, a Sunday School prizewinner, remembered that Christ had asked his mother, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

"Good question," Lady said. She blew her nose and dialed the Phoenix House. Maybe they had a bed open in detox for a boy with no insurance.

DAVID HERNANDEZ

### *St Mary's Hospital*

This one cradles his broken arm and sings to it  
a lullaby of moans. This one's all wrinkles and bones,  
flopped over an armrest as if put to sleep.  
This one gets up even though she says her legs  
are numb, two bags filled with sand, and shuffles

toward the receptionist. My body's half ache,  
half dizzy, a teaspoon of glass whenever I swallow.  
Two hours until the intercom says my name.  
I float beside my wife like a balloon tethered  
to her wrist, through double doors and into Room One.

There's a gurney. I lie across it. The doctor  
strolls in with his white coat, his white teeth,  
and peers into the sick cave of my mouth.  
*Tonsillitis*, he says. A nurse brings her pinprick,  
the antibiotic's blue inferno. An unbeliever,

still I think of Jesus, a handful of mud in his palm  
fluttering into wings. How I'd love to see him now,  
robe skimming across the tiled floor, hands loaded  
with healing. To witness a bone unbreak itself,  
the elderly woman jolted back to good health,

her new heart an apple polished against his sleeve.  
My throat cured, his touch a necklace I'd wear outside  
where the healed are shellacking their bodies  
with sunlight, where St Mary's is vanishing  
at the end of the lot, one skyward brick at a time.

*Black Boat*

Crows flew in and out of August,  
that month translating into grand.

No matter how sick the body,  
the voice wants to be heard.

I heard you call twenty years after we parted.  
Summer in the mountains, I looked up

from weeding, but there was only a crow.  
That said, your dying began,

stopped, and commenced. The year spent.  
Black boat with a red sail set into motion.

It was so still the day I heard you say my name;  
nobody but the solitary crow.

Some years start in black and white,  
and by October scarlet sinks in.

Leaf and sky were the shades I came to know  
with you. Now I keep a space in the pines

for the sun to slip through.  
Why did we settle, uneasy, rock heavy,

but not of rock?

At dawn, deer snort outside my bedroom window,

and half asleep I mumble, Oh hush  
as if to a child.

Brain filled with mountain air,  
metabolizing old organ awake to scold again,

demanding even of these deer.

LARRY PRESTON

*Farmer Descending A Stairs*

At right angles his dry brown shoes take 1935 with them  
like a pail of oats spilled before soybeans  
long before straight and handsome as twenty-five  
as pinstripes counting the days after Saturday night  
and before slipping and sliding his breath away  
twitching the left side of his brain moving foreclosing  
words he couldn't think of *and what'll you give for it?*  
*What'll you give for it?* square shovels scoop shovels  
1949 Allis Chalmers spark plugs perfectly gapped  
fifteen-thousandths of an inch the thickness of a dime  
*And what'll you give for it* Two thousand miles and  
palm trees life hereafter a bucket of water ammonia  
and newspaper hands without warts Southern Comfort piss  
distilled yellow with 1000 mg of goodness filling the right  
side of his brain slipping and sliding and bottoms up  
stuttering like red blood cells thirsty for black coffee  
sweet corn The hard frost it must have been 1955  
or before or 1973 amazed at the abundance  
corn oil gasoline cinnamon-flavored oatmeal  
straight from the farm Stuttering at the edge of 1983  
his rhythm is off counting down and his left ankle  
anticipates the rain He remembers nothing precisely

LARRY PRESTON

*A One-Time Craps Player  
with Seed Cap and Fresh Overall*

Seven's cold stare stays out of sight the way  
December lake water below two feet of ice  
and almost freezing waits by itself. More, yes,  
oh God, he wants more than eighty stumbling acres  
over the Adams County line. Two days  
at eighty-five miles an hour and the center line  
leads to a neon ocean with a certain tide  
coming in. Downtown Las Vegas. The Four Queens,  
Binion's Horseshoe, The Golden Nugget.  
Every morning he looks across the damned  
shimmering lake as the arms of wet stumps  
play reveille or taps, there's no telling, and  
the landlocked sun's always late or wet or frozen in place.  
He places five blue chips next to the Pass line,  
twenty more on the four, six, eight, and ten,  
and hits them all, one after the other.

JAMES DOYLE

*The Ironworkers' Noontime*

They wear their own skin  
for shirts at lunch break  
and stand in the wide shadow  
of the factory so the sun  
can't take any more sweat  
from them than the furnaces  
did all morning. It is 1881  
and everyone has a serious  
hat on, everyone owns two  
pairs of brown or black pants,  
every slick arm roils with  
seven layers of paleness, one  
for each day of the work week.

Behind their bare backs, iron  
by the ton waits impatiently  
for those who can muscle it  
out of its dark stupor  
and into the proud morning  
of the next hundred years.  
The ironworkers look around  
and see there isn't all  
that much in the new world  
not made by them. The whistle  
goes off, so they put on shirts  
stitched over and over again  
by sisters, wives, mothers,

grandmothers, and form a line  
beneath the tin smokestack sky  
back to what really needs them.

JAMES DOYLE

*Perhaps There's a Headstone*

so green with moss  
and the bayou's soft gristle  
it appears to be growing,

and the season when trees  
rise in white cobwebs from the swamp  
appears to be spring.

So I tell myself  
nothing is ghostly in the year 2000.  
The minutes, one after the other,

are as flat and palpable  
as the slap of my palm  
on the grove of water

where you disappeared.  
The small waves I have sent out  
will interest the local reptiles

not as a widening circle  
of tiny markers or other disturbances  
in a cemetery

but as the way another  
brushes over skin  
in a place where the graves

are indistinguishable from each other  
and from the living  
so I can imagine you as both.

SUE OWEN

*Old Gumbo Recipe*

Put in okra that thickens  
things up as only mud can,  
when it sets its mind to it,  
stuck-in-the-mud soup,

or up-to-your-neck-in-mud soup.  
There are spoons and animals  
that won't even fight it,  
but would rather swim away,

muskrat, alligator, snake.  
The plot and the dark  
roux thicken the brew then,  
as if this were a troubled

swamp right in your pot.  
I haven't mentioned the salt  
and the pepper, allies in  
spicing soups up with

their own one-two punch.  
I haven't mentioned the clouds  
of flour fuming on the horizon,  
or the leftovers, old bones,

and their pathetic scraps  
of meat that you must never

forget, or they will come  
back to haunt you because

this is a gumbo about memory,  
and the need for continuity,  
and the power of breath  
behind it that makes us stir.

*No Donkeys: A Manifesto*

There will be no more donkeys in my poems. Imagine that, a poem without donkeys. Although donkeys have become an irreplaceable feature of our literature these days, I believe that the literature of donkeys has plummeted into the realms of exhaustion.

A donkeyless poem has undoubtedly been considered, but never properly executed. For who among us has been brave enough to look into the eyes of the literati and proclaim: the time has come for a change. This is not to deny the gradual advances we have witnessed, and who am I to mock their importance.

For example: The reader of the more innovative journals will note the latest trend of removing the donkey from the opening words of a poem and placing it into a subservient role in the latter stanzas.

Reading these daring works, I tremble with anxiety and trepidation, and I think: perhaps I will see no donkey. But then comes a metaphor involving an ass in a snowstorm and all my hopes subside.

Harold Bloom: "A poem is not a poem without some fleeting hooves, coarse hair, long ears and a stripe down the center of its back."

Or this from the latest *New Yorker*:

Last night your mother called to say your donkey  
had been found in a brothel on the edge of Times Square.  
It hadn't shaved in weeks. It had lost its job and  
was dancing with Portuguese hookers.

While I admit that one could not be human without giving some thought to the donkey, the time has come for us to declare: No Asses In Our Poems! No Asses In Our Stories!

Don't get me wrong. Some of my favorite authors wrote solely about donkeys. Henry James, for instance. Hawthorne and Melville. But those were different times. What our culture was informed by then, we are surely not informed by now. The donkey no longer suits us.

In closing: if our literature is to continue to evolve in a relevant manner, the writer of the present age must free himself from the shackles of donkeydom. And in the process he will free us from the archaic notion that the donkey is a narrative necessity. Writers of the present age must not contribute to this chain of donkey-driven ambiguity.

We must say: Be gone with you, donkey, here your hooves will trample no more!

JOHN RYBICKI

*Tire Shop Poem*

What we're all doing is dancing,  
gliding under the undercarriage

of this car, our hands trenched  
with oil and winter slop that stings

down the neckline of my shirt,  
teeth in my pocket because

it's Christmastime and there's  
Fannie May chocolates on the

front counter. Try to stop  
the flesh and it wiggles out

from inside your gloves and  
smashes itself against hubcaps

and rubber—Cooper Cobras  
and Tiger Paws—those snare

drum skins we slap, tire after  
tire just to listen to something

solid ringing back. Then I catch  
this Adam upstart go red hot

with the beat and clang  
of pry bar and rim clamp

and swivel deck and hiss of air  
he might with his own breath be—

lips to each valve stem—  
blowing these tires up

onto rims so he can lie down  
at night with so many people

rolling around this city, riding  
on his breath over snow,

riding on his breath over leaves.  
I catch his dare and rubber roll

a tire up my calf and pop the  
center cap and clamp and spin,

hammer lead weights onto rim  
after dizzying rim, lug nut

smash and flick the pry bar  
from one hand to the next,

Fred Astaire in a tire shop,  
where we slip into our animal

skins and become a great engine  
of men, where we slap our

boots across all that slop,  
to outdistance fire, to outdistance

that burning bush  
that follows us everywhere.

J E F F H A R D I N

*After So Long Taking the Same Road*

this morning he has turned, not far from home,  
onto a road which sneaks along a ridge a while,  
then presents a bridge, one lane and ancient,  
over a dingy river and on through fields. This early,  
a fog erases much he'd wish to see, but every few yards  
a break appears and offers plowed dirt or bluff,  
and he feels redeemed to be on earth—a sentiment he would  
surely deny if word got back—for it's been years  
since a smell so thick of honeysuckle came over him.  
Like the Holy Ghost, he thinks, nectar throated.  
Such a scene, he knows, is presence in a way we aren't,  
and remarkable now are zones a spirit passes through.  
Each word, in its own way, is a form of Amen.  
Though later, facing what the workday wants of him,  
time feels not at all enlarged: neither stray nor lucid,  
neither stirred nor unruly nor beseeching nor apt.

*Katabasis in Jag*

What you gain is a quick piece of fish  
Poorly prepared, let's say inedible  
But you're hungry.  
You're poor, too, down to  
Two point three if you cash in now,  
Which could be tricky.  
You gain Euro tunes, a prick of a  
Mixmaster dispensing found brands of  
Retro effrontery, anonymity, a loyal  
Horse-faced boob pledged to a nasty abuser,  
Two beauties spending way too much time  
Sifting through tunes on a halter-top-high jukebox  
The brunette of which you'd give your  
Titanium eye-teeth implants for if the  
Prick poured you one more ounce of Chivas  
Without your having to ask for it.  
And a host of Eucharistic possibilities.

Ah, but what you lose! Biblical sole from  
Acid Al, Andy's majestic Scotch sours,  
And the courtship of an artichoke  
As George cajoles the duck.  
Blueberries with Eddie whose static lips hail  
Hail-fellow Jim whose hernia burst,  
Teddy's booming punch lines  
When—*annus mirabilis!*—the bolthole gapes  
And Mulligan the Juggernaut

Straight from the Two Man March  
Blasts in to cleanse the world  
Of falsity and cant.  
Brunetteless, you gasp and fall face first  
Into the suck and comfort of  
A double decaf Jamaica Jamoc.  
How can one replicate that?

Behind you the past slips away.  
Before you the fog bank approaches.

*Glam Affect at the Met*

Ankh-Haf and Ipep, Memi and Sabu,  
Pepi the First and a Queen, Pepi Two...  
knickknack dead buried with beer, bread.

Guys stride away from the base, their wives  
posed with palms in prim support, stiff  
as the fifties—hieroglyphs hint at issues.

Stodgy gods: Ra, Hathor the Cow,  
Qetesh, Ptah, names like sneeze or spit,  
Egypt itself like spit in a dry climate.

In one sculpture hunk returns touch,  
hand draped on a breast impossibly pert,  
already old stylish lying about lift.

Na-Wab and Nury—iconoclast kids,  
turned trove themselves, alarmed, guarded  
under glass, rock and the rock-ferried *ka*.

Canopic kingdom sixties, hip commitment,  
bare feet evenly free of the stone.

*L'oeuf Forty*

This is Nank at The Crutch, every bit as handsome as in youth—I say better looking, the devil: yellow paisley bandana, folded triangular, tied doo-rag style over his healthy head of hair, salmon colored Le Coq Sportif, sleeves tailored extra large for flow and a sharp flag-like snapping after he strokes the ball from the ground, bright white tennis shorts, long enough for a comfortable stretch, slide, or dive, short enough to expose muscular thighs pumping upon any given move, ankle socks white with miniature black rooster insignia, shoes clean, minimal wear, light, reinforced with fluorescent pink durathane by Nike.

This is Nank at The Crutch: man of thirty-five sitting on a bar stool, drinking his third Miller draft, sandwiched between a knobby elbowed factory foreman and two lovely-enough out-of-work factory blondies. Light of day would burn this place blind, don't you know, but the red neon thrown from all corners—across pool tables and jukebox, dartboard and booths, liquor bottles and bar top—makes for sure sweet wallow and first-rate conversation.

This is Nank at The Crutch.

Me, I say.

College by birth, education by habit, tennis instructor by profession, nothing by merit. This is me at The Crutch, Nank, a lover and a baseliner and a humanitarian and, now, a concerned etymologist and conversationalist.

"Is *slough* really a word?" I say, interrupting the two out-of-work factory blondies.

They'd been discussing how to shed the world, how to let its woes run off your feathers like pond water from a mallard's back.

Something about the men in or not in their lives, the crappy work they can and cannot get. "Just slough it off and move on is what I say," the more brunette of the blondies had said before sipping her shot.

"I don't know," she says to me, furrowing her brow, confused. Then suddenly confident, "Sure it's a word. I just used it, and we all understood it."

She's proud of her usage, of her explanation. She has the right to be so. *Slough*. Slough it off like dead skin. Like a snake periodically casting off its old and dry scales for a clean coat around the sound flesh. Like *He managed to slough off his smoking habit*. Like shit from a duck's ass. Slough, baby, the woes of this world and let's drink another round.

"I think it's a great word," I say. "I'm glad you used it here today."

Both blondies, the lesser and the blonder, nod to one another, smitten.

The knobby-elbowed factory foreman had been sucking on his Bud the whole time, working it through a straw with a slurping usually reserved for children and their malts, lurching between his seat and me, talking fast on a cell phone. Something about Brownie's being staked-out, then busted. Something about a gambling ring the owner must have known about, but didn't stop, and so now his wife should meet him here or wait fifteen minutes before heading to the Green Lantern for early happy hour.

"Tell me—I'm Nank," I say, "about Brownie's and the cops and the bust." Tell me, I say, like I'm a regular here and just haven't been in to drink for a few years because of a near fatal accident. Something with water skiing and a shark. Or a motorcycle and a tractor trailer on I-95. Tell me, I say, because I've never been in here before and I'm here now at this moment.

And he does.

He shows me a thin manila card for laying bets, explains the spread, the under/over column, what to circle and why. He whispers to me and the two lovely-enough blondies the name of his bookie, *Shake* (because the upper portion of his pear-shaped body wiggles when he laughs hard or soft), and gives us the skinny on the black box behind the dumpster behind Brownie's where picks are dropped and picked up. He gives us the lowdown on the very tall, mustached man who usually sits right there at the end of the bar, above where they keep the liqueurs, those sticky-sweet syrups for shots and coffee delight.

"He's one of them," he says. "Always sitting there in his navy blue coveralls. Not *Bigley* like the patch says, but a detective undercover in here to gather talk against Brownie, then file a report. You'd have to notice, even from where you're sitting, the man never had a lick of smudge or grease *anywhere*. A mechanic with clean nails ain't no mechanic."

The blondies love his closing saw, the breathless way he told his story to the end. These girls love Nank's strict listening, how I rocked with interest, as if hinged, to and fro. They bob their heads in unison like Pez dispensers with shocking blonde bangs. They smile for real, even though they've heard it all before. The factory foreman is a regular. They are regulars. They all used to work the same shift at the factory. Brownie's has been raided before.

We drink.

We keep drinking until our mugs, tumblers, and cans are empty. Until the blondies split up, cut a quick swath around their stools, and position themselves flank left, flank right, sandwiching the factory foreman and me, Nank. They order a round of Buttery Nipples for all and the bartender, a deft-handed god of quick mixing abilities, complies.

"To Brownie sloughing it off," says the blonder blonde, thrusting her shot glass high.

Arms raised, we drink and laugh and give handsome compliments until the round is done. Then the place quiets again with the electric hum of neon. The factory foreman slips out the double doors, leaving a shrinking slab of sunlight on the bar floor. And the out-of-work factory blondies lean closer to Nank, tongues liquor bloated and licentious, wanting to know why the funny getup and hat. Then, after formal introductions, wanting to know about racquets and strings, about double faults and tiebreak scoring, about Grand Slam tournaments and the let cord rule.

Yes, this is Nank at The Crutch. Me.

But O, Tess! She who's the suffix and prefix of my every thought. Tess, my reckless reckless wife. Never innocent, always proud. Tess, grace of my eye, apple of my tree, à la mode of my heart and pie.

Tess, O Tess! Nurse to be. Who else? Body jutting, lean and long. Your peaks and tips so sudden. Who else could work a twelve-and-a-half-hour day in latex gloves—fingers in asses, lips lightly pressed to the cheeks of the old and sick and vulgar, the wise and dying and dead? Could leave clinicals for the arms of a disposable lover, speed home after to page through *Bon Appetit* and whip up a dish of Phantom Curry Oleo—veal medallions so choice the meat would drop in half at the sight of any dull blade, the jade green poblanos still harboring their white-hot ouch—drink four longnecks, love me like an anaconda in candlelight—every exit and entrance mine in the pitch night—then disappear from our bed before dawn's blue light? Each time with you is a toothpick wedged between my front teeth.

Lovely lovely lovely Tessa, what about poor Nank when you leave? Say, for instance, Nank earlier today? Don't you wonder or care or want to know?

Here: This is Nank in the raw morning, in bed and alone and angry and lonely in his purplish robe. He's counting his short fingers

on each stubby thumb, opening and closing his little kitten paw hands, and thinking of your young boys: their big thumbs; their towering index fingers; what size gloves they must wear; what size racquet grip might fit in their mitt-like fists. Four and a half? Four and five-eighths? Bigger?

Nank sits up, reaches to the bedside for his cigarettes, blue hue from the tv swaddling the room (or was that dawn?), and then he's back on that flight, Delta 2131, a 737 departing West Palm to Charlotte for the Men's Hard Court Nationals, the day of your first leaving, Tess. You abandoned Nank for a young, big-thumbed deejay (with thick, princely digits too, no doubt, to warp, scratch, and mix his vinyl way from rave to rave, house party to house party).

Just when Nank was on a run, up twenty-six ranking points to crack the top hundred after a barrage of five-set victories! Every dump on the circuit with tattered, wanton nets, flawed cement, and the promise of main draw play saw the likes of his sweaty face during those grueling summer months. Opponents and line judges saw Nank's calves in peak shape but you wanted music! Not even music, just gimpy synthesized sounds. Disposable pop and pilfered samples.

There Nank is, taking a long drag off his Camel Light, remembering: how the plane was cleared for takeoff but not flying, how it must have taxied for hours, no coffee or complimentary peanuts for the passengers, how a window seat's nothing when the only thing below is a runway full of lusty young boys tending luggage, how any one of them could have been a deejay, could have been your deejay (it's not a lucrative occupation, it requires a second job), how he could have jumped right down from the wing, could have hijacked a baggage car, stolen down the runway, trailer writhing behind, toward any one of those boys, toward anyone shaved clean to the rubbery face of youth, how he could have battered them good

to the ground, and, once down, could have slaughtered them with disparaging looks that meant other, more distasteful things.

I say that was me in bed in my purplish robe. Nank, man who rises early just to make sale of himself like a used car.

O Tess. What you do to Nank in the morning.

As bad or worse as in the young afternoon.

The temperature rising—humidity too. Nank a sweating mess of tics and jerks while he smoked and squashed the butts in a coffee cup. Yes, this was Nank stalking you, Tess. Cutting the engine and waiting outside your lover's apartment. The man with the green thumb and a deep love for mangroves. An arboriculturalist of golden intention and fine repute. He scours the fringes of highway rest stops for broken limbs and ailing twigs, I've heard, attacks woody neighborhood parks with wide black tape and tremendous gauze.

Hands behind my head, elbows spread wide, I sprawled out beneath the orange tree in his front yard, waited for him to come out. I waited to see his arms around you like brown on his precious bark and soothed myself with one of his fallen oranges. Peeling and eating, I tossed the rind this way and that, reveling in my well-baked plan: When *aren't* chainsaws on sale? Those heavy-duty powerhouses *not* twenty to thirty percent off at Home Depot?

I got up, opened the car trunk. With both hands I swung it to the curb, pulled at the cord and braced for the kickback. "Behold," I readied to say, "cuckolded Nank in his tennis attire! Here to fell for love!"

Ha! No tree could stand in my way. I could hack the world to trunks for you, Tess, leave the stumps and their respective forests burning in my wake. That is if I could've gotten the thing started, had remembered to buy gas. Instead, Nank tugged and tugged at the cord until the young afternoon was fading, and he happened to

see neighbors on the phone inside their houses, probably calling the police. At which time he decided it might be wise to get far away from that tree and apartment, far off to a bar, or to the club, and fast.

And with a farewell to all (and a sunglasses check) I am off for the club. Out the double doors and into the blinding sunlight and onto the highway, leaving the lovely-enough blondies and fleet-handed bartender until next time.

Tipsy Nank speeding and switching lanes to make back some time and change.

Tipsy Nank trying to make it to the prim ladies by two o'clock.

Tipsy Nank, Head Pro in smart shorts. Mr Nank now in charge. Nank the hagiographer. Nank on the clay courts of Del-Air Country Club, Delray Beach, Florida, home of the once-funked, now defunct Lawrence A. Sagel: man not of instruction but knowledge, man of strategy, man of economic stroke production and the pocket elbow tuck for ripping net play, strength conditioner, builder of teen confidence and the potential of Nank's all-court, all surface game. My Teacher.

My lovely Tess, soothing nurse to be, help me to be half the living body Saint Sagel's spirit left behind. O true Tessa, drafter of care plans, taker of temperature head to toe, tune up the sour orchestra plucking in my head, steady my racquet and guide my hand while I feed the rich and tanned bright yellow balls. Gather my bandy legs when I take Court One with a shopping cart full of such ammunition, adjust my bandana, check the sun, knock a little dust from my soles, and rally the troops round for drills.

"What will it be today?" I say. "Fence to baseline and back, fence to service line and back, fence to net and back?" In response to which there are groans and bahoos and wet tonguey sounds. For the growing older, each new day ensures not just aging and potential discounts, but newfound reservoirs of venom.

"Get off it, Nank. Let's just pair up and play doubles," says Margaret, maid of sixty-two, wife of three, mother of multiple lawyers, owner of the finest overhead smash and top spot on the women's fifty and up ladder.

"But ladies..."

"Oh, go drink a Coke in the pro shop, Nank," says the lowest seed, Peggy, doctor's wife, oldest daughter of a Pennsylvania steel tycoon, designer of contemporary weddings for South Florida debutantes and trendy holiday trinkets: gold leaf chocolate menorahs and such.

Then they're a whirling gaggle of pleated tennis skirts and dark veiny legs. Rowdy and vocal in their sagging bloomers, with their Wilson Sledge Hammer racquets and face-lifts and frosty dye jobs and blue rinse, they make for the water cooler under the court-side cabana.

Nank could be discouraged here. Nank could be broken in his loose shorts. Nank could be any smug cat who suddenly, shamefully sees for the first time that he's been wearing the same outfit for years. But I see how the ladies drink up quick. How fiercely they swallow, crush their paper cups, take the court hydrated and, under Margaret's command, face off, popping balls chest high across the net with good intention, slight angle, much sweet spot, and some accuracy. Margaret and Peggy, Thelma and Sabina, Irene and Ruth, Bonny and Virginia, Jane and Vilma, Ethel and Josie, Susan and Marka, Leslie and Adrienne, all punching ferocious volleys with sharp backspin, their elbows tucked, their bodies compact and square to the net.

They are stolid backboards. They are steady old beach palms that bend and bend storm after storm.

They make my heart swell then shrink, then swell and shrink, like a close love-forty call caught on replay, shown over and over

again. The yellow fuzzy thing round, then flattening, then oblong as an egg. Then back to a full ball.

Then over again.

Yes, I say, as handsome as in youth—better, you know, Nank, Nank could be on the verge here. The verge of something he's not going to take anymore—and then will take that much more of. Nank is on both sides of a cliff, not just hanging from the edge. He's the sturdy tree on the ledge and the roots that squeeze through the rocks and soil above the water so far below.

This is Nank. Me, I say.

*First Mantilla*

In the empty rehearsed space little else  
And more gathering to press a name to  
A spectre halo of moisture  
Today  
The assembled left to right  
The assembled huddled close and shivering  
If ever there was mention of before now  
Comes this in so familiar a way  
It went further and further coming out  
The assembled the applause the other side

*Third Mantilla*

Labial of wind pursed but no longer a sound  
This engine of breath small words in print  
Alighting something came down  
If only to thrive the mist  
And waking from the dream make room for the dream  
Water vapor or mist  
Image not the image however circuitous  
Bangle of condensation it held  
Words stray light  
The motion of this going on like this

Excerpts from *Topics in Experimental Photography*

We are so many loose women. And drunk  
on oranges. The priest canting them,

*Oranges*

*begat oranges. On the night when he was betrayed,  
he took oranges and said,*

*"You there! Eating  
the skins of oranges!" The doors! The doors!*

Timid altar  
sending incense up to Caesar. Greasy  
air slick with candlelight. One of my seven arts,

peeling,

some aphasic reassembly of light and fruit.

---

in Orbis Tertius  
glass crows pry  
orange skins, leave  
pliant citrus bones  
on windowsills  
in Orbis Tertius.

---

hair glazed to his red chest, shirtless  
Harry Truman eats oranges on Miami Beach  
with Chris Glomski and Winston Churchill, laughing,  
binding their pathological scrapbooks.

---

O Aphasia,  
how would I love thee? open mouthed,  
without sound my back to a bowl of dusty fake fruit  
world grows unfamiliar surrounds you  
light hands you to me she  
will only photograph my reflection  
what remains of light

its flat taste.

SIMON PERCHIK

★

The door knows why it opens  
and still you're not used to it  
could be a sound from the forties

gutting this radio  
the way all skies darken  
fill with distances

—you listen for the slow turn  
the Earth never forgot  
though a hidden crack

keeps the room from exploding  
and costs you nothing  
has already started its climb

spreads out — with both arms  
you begin to crawl  
and not yet an old love song.

TAJ JACKSON

*Insomnia*

Out of perspective,  
I made the blind side holy.  
What else could be done with it?  
It is much more  
intrusive than bacteria,  
than any peace.  
The wrist is an apex.  
The traffic jams of those falling into sleep  
are a volunteered claustrophobia.  
Starlight is the reverse  
of its evergreen blast. The dark embraces  
worry netted with hope.  
I sing, and vowels finally lift  
the transparent, the boulders inside air.

*Correlation*

The killer is language. The killer is language for sunset, sherbet, and the airplane hanging still. Sunset, sherbet, and the airplane hanging still beside the profound cloud the killer is language for. Vast space is language for a field, a sky, a terrain, and a hue, the killer, and hewn. The killer is hewn from the romance of slow boxcars. The killer is vantage point, a weekly rental, large window, an old dusty building the hue of a bad turn, overpass, triangular switches of light. What if the killer is. What if the killer is infinite and infinite the geometry of the visage. Not a wrong done, not fertile, knots of conversation on the street the killer is knots of after dusk. Correlation, the killer, sound of the chalk-white moon curve or any sensation linear, color of a thought. Color of then the chalk-white moon curve because the killer is language for. Was the platform going backward or the killer going forward. Are there any moments of stasis, say, when the killer and his environs intersect. The convergence of asymptotes or the intersection of deficit and bountiful, the killer is language for momentary.

*My Favorite Apocalypse*

Catie Rosemurgy

St Paul: Graywolf Press, 2001.

Reviewed by Andy Young

The title of Catie Rosemurgy's first collection of poems, *My Favorite Apocalypse*, is a timely one. The idea of a favorite apocalypse, and the implication that we might choose among several, is intriguing. These poems are about endings—of childhood, of lives, of relationships. "I listen for the end," states "Steel Blue" at the end of the persona poem of the same title. But despite this focus on finality, this is hardly a collection of gloomy foreboding. On the contrary, it is a book that examines the delight of the flesh and the blazing arc of light between its beginning and end.

If we turn to the Greek root of the word apocalypse as "revelation," we begin to see Rosemurgy's take on it. Her poems seek to reveal, to stretch our perception of things. While the poems, like any successful poetry, take on a deepening resonance when re-read, they also work in first readings, crackling with a charge that leaps out and zaps.

Absent from this collection is the obsessive I I I and you you you as subject. There is an "I" and an implied "you," in most of the poems, but the I shifts and widens. In one poem, the first-person speaker is Jesus' lover; in another it is the voice of a lake confessing to its shore; and another, a mistress who kills Fidelity in a hunting accident. While the material must, at least in part, be mined from the author's life, one does not put this book down knowing much about the details of Catie Rosemurgy. And this is one of the many refreshing things about the collection.

"Festoon," the book's opening poem, is in the voice of someone involved in a love triangle on the day of her lover's marriage to another woman. The poem, appropriately laid out in triplets, finds the speaker imagining herself as the bride, and in two lines, lives a life with the groom: "I deliver his baby. I set out / his vitamins, and my hands are wrinkled." She only imagines the person who is marrying him when she sees her through his eyes. "But I don't know her. I know his mouth. / I could be his mouth. / I kiss her deeply. She is as bright inside / as a lily." And here many of the book's concerns are laid out: the near impossibility of love, the escape imagination provides, the idea of luminosity.

The characters of Billy and Grace weave in and out of the book, making up twenty of the book's fifty-three poems. These poems, which follow the relationship of a couple, come in couplets, with a Grace poem followed by a Billy poem, each with its own distinctive personality. Reading them is like being a friend of both people in a couple and having them on separate phone lines wanting you to lend an ear.

Grace's poems are in the third person for the first part of the collection, then slip into the first person. Her voice comes out sprawling, with long lines that span the margins and stretch over six, seven, stanzas, sometimes several pages. Appropriately, we first encounter Grace sprawling on a couch: "Her face pinches like an outfit she looks good in / but wears only to take off." Grace continues to sprawl throughout the book—on ice, on the hood of a car, and in titles like "Grace Lies in Her Tent and Talks to the Psychiatric Experts She Saw on tv" and "When She Gets Home from the Grocery Store and Notices the Fireflies, Grace Lies Down Next to the Driveway."

Billy, on the other hand, is more contained. The Billy poems are always in the first person, with shorter lines, and in the form of loose American sonnets. His titles often serve to tell his story: "Billy Pretends to Understand Grace," "Billy Watches from the Garden,"

"Billy Recalls It Differently." He spends a lot of time imagining he is invisible. The poems explore the edges where we break off from one another, the things we keep from one another, the words and worlds that live in our skulls. In "Billy Sees Stars," he states: "She doesn't know, / but I hold her and I brag to the sun."

The narrative follows the demise of their relationship. Grace begins to feel "like a lousy present" and moves into a tent in the backyard of the home she and Billy have been sharing. In one of the most interesting poems of the book, "Grace Lies Down to Write Her Boyfriend a Letter," Rosemurgy, in short staccato sentences, breaks down logic and language to show Grace's desperate state:

It's a thin line between happy and sad,  
and you are that line. Dear Line.  
Dear Deadline.  
Dear Calendar.  
Dear Friendly Reminder.

Somewhere around the middle of the book and the unfolding of their story, "Billy Talks of Daybreak," and it appears that Grace has moved back into the house. "I'm strong because / I lift Grace, ... I'm funny / because Grace laughs," says Billy. Now everything seems hunky-dory again, but it isn't clear if or how they have reconciled. Mostly, though, it doesn't matter. There is so much singing between them—together or not—that it's fun to just sink into the language of their broken love. Check out "Billy's Vision of Grace:" "She's the color of sand by day, the color / of the bottom of a well at night."

In addition to Grace and Billy, there are many other characters and their attending vices peopling these pages. There are adulterers quoting God, Mick Jagger, Elvis, legs opening and being opened, Townes Van Zandt and Merle Haggard lyrics, talk of guns and the

Devil, guys in bars—all the elements of a fun night of drinking whiskey, feeding a good jukebox, and listening to the story of a new friend's life.

In "1, 2, 3...I'm Perfect Starting Now," Rosemurgy pokes fun at skinny girls: "I got a skinny girl's boyfriend to look at me / like maybe women near death were overrated." Many of the poems have an intense focus on the body, down to the innermost muscles and bones. In "Twelve and Listening to the Stones," a girl describes tightening her "insides" in a kind transcendental Kegel exercise: "My house disappears below me. / The dark moves inside me like hands."

*My Favorite Apocalypse* is not afraid to tackle difficult subjects. In one poem, a girl survives a friend's suicide. Another poem sings "The Return to Skin" of a woman surviving domestic abuse: "What do you get / when you cross a sunset / and a ghost? Besides longing. / You get the desire to start over." Rosemurgy's twist on the syntax of the old-fashioned joke is typical of the kind of angle she uses to save such poems from didacticism and keep them as engaging and surprising as the ones on lighter subjects.

And one of her favorite lighter subjects is light itself. In "Iceblink," the speaker says, "The glow in my bones / is out tonight...I shine strong enough to prove / no lovers exist." Another poem states: "She said I had a hot candle inside me / and I had to use my body / as a disguise." The book's longest poem, "My Mom's Cobalt-Blue Glass Collection" is a touching family narrative as seen through blue glass, "the color of a girl turning into light." The speaker says, in the middle of the poem, "Once I had turned into light / things came easily to me."

I sometimes felt shut out of that light, wondering what it meant to turn into it. Has this poet been given a kind of grace I have not? The final line of "Grace Lies on the Ice,"—"We all know it."—left me wondering, What do we know? Did I miss it? But the irrever-

ence of Rosemurgy's voice and its tone of simultaneous familiarity and urgency save it from preciousness. She refuses to take herself too seriously, and, in the end, I am convinced when she says: "I'm no priestess, but I made a life for myself / out of things that shine...."

*Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions*

Maurice Manning

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001

Reviewed by T. J. Beitelman

Against a backdrop of contemporary American poetry that often privileges disembodied "speakers," and books filled with miscellaneous, stand-alone nuggets, Maurice Manning's first collection, *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions*, stands out. This year's Yale Series of Younger Poets selection is a work rich and textured in interwoven narratives, characters, and myths. Its influences and precursors are an eclectic mix—the strange bedfellows of the so-called "Southern Gothic" and (as W.S. Merwin points out in the introduction) a Berrymanic blend of tragedy and comedy, with a smattering of prophetic blackface. Manning's book is kissing cousins with the verse-novel stylings of Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, and it has not a small Biblical influence. It is a book about the very biggest ideas: love, God, heartbreak. At the same time, it achieves a kind of newness, a newness in the return to the power and problems of story, both personal and universal.

The book begins by creating the milieu and establishing a cast. The poem "Dramatis Personae" lists the characters we will be encountering: God, The Missionary Woman, Sissy, Black Damon ("the pastoral comrade"), Red Dog ("the sure-fire antidote to the

devil”), the devil, assorted other minor characters, “a nearly invisible long suffering mother,” a “withering grandmother born in place called Thousandsticks,” Mad Daddy, and “Lawrence Booth, bull’s eye boy.” In this poem, Manning not only establishes his project, he provides his reader an anchor. It is an anchor the reader needs because, while this is a book driven by narrative, it is anything but linear.

The story is, in fact, an exploded one. We know the characters early on. There is a violent and mostly despicable father (“Mad Daddy is the man with the shotgun full of history, / the horse and the flame, and the domino shoes.”). Booth’s resultant psychic diaspora seems clear enough. And we know the setting with all its trappings, the Kentucky hills, the 1970s or so. But there is always the sense that the story itself can never quite be told. Not in its entirety. Not from start to finish. In “Seven Chimeras,” Manning writes:

The way Booth makes a story:  
 Never know the beginning;  
 Uncover pages hidden under river  
 Rocks. The rocks contain a mineral  
 Called unforgottenite. Watch out for snakes.

For Booth—and, by association, Manning—this business of telling stories is a dangerous one, imperfect, with important parts gone or forgotten in an act of self-defense. Faced with this daunting task—to make sense out of one’s own narrative without the luxury of having all of the pieces intact—Booth turns to metaphor and frenzied collage. In the same poem:

The way Booth makes an orchid:  
 Combine one bluebird with nine fencerow  
 Pokeberries; crush together and hang  
 Thirty yards away in half-light.

Manning privileges a representational notion of art, especially as it relates to an actual lived life. Realism and memoir give way to myth and dream. Fiction yields to poetry in a worldview where one thing more or less equals another. Manning often manages to make the connections between the two, however oblique, carry an astounding and unexpected resonance.

In “Proof,” for example, one of the many formally unconventional poems in the book, Manning gives us a quasi-mathematical proof (complete with a hand-drawn graph) in an attempt to establish certain truths as they relate to Lawrence Booth and his life:

Theorem: If a boy’s memory is locked onto an illuminated grid, then he will spend his life looking for the skeleton key in vain.

Prove: The existence of Hell.

Statements	Reasons
1. The slope of Mad Daddy’s money clip is zero.	1. Given
4. The volume of mercury poured on Booth directly corresponds to the graph of his need.	4. Red Dog’s parabola
7. The sphere of love exists tangent to the sphere of sin.	7. $\infty$

*Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions* is a representation of the real-life metaphors of mind and memory. It mixes the age-old primary colors we think we know—Boyhood; Trees; Snakes of all kinds; a Faithful Dog; a True Friend; Lust, Love, Woman; Poetry, Fiction. The result on Manning's brush is something else entirely. Lavender, for instance. From "Affirmation":

Booth's mouth: a chamber full of lavender kisses and one  
passionate

Diatribes about the merits of fishing and rivers in the  
hometown

Leap-frogging over exuberant blue rocks...

... The serious question:

Who is responsible for this terrible patch of violets?

A family history, fraught with pain and the constant threat of implosion, is transferred to memory. That dark memory is transformed again into something else. Manning again calls to mind Ondaatje, who wrote in the acknowledgments to *Coming Through Slaughter* (a hybrid of poetical fiction and actual events) that he had changed some of the facts of his story "to suit the truth of fiction." *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions* makes a similar case—that our most important truths can only be accessed by way of transforming them into metaphor, juxtaposing unlike elements. For this book—a first book—the transformation is nothing less than an ascendance.

*The Blue Guide to Indiana*

Michael Martone

Tallahassee and Normal: Fiction Collective 2, 2001.

Reviewed by Josh Russell

In less able hands the premise of Michael Martone's *The Blue Guide to Indiana*—a faux travel guide to the Hoosier State—would likely result in little more than a postmodern one-liner. What Martone's talent provides instead is a wild catalog of what makes the Midwest truly the Midwest: the Trans-Indiana Mayonnaise Pipeline, the first parking lot (and the patent lawsuit it caused), the first Lovers' Lane™, recipes for Pork Cake and Snow Ice Cream.

*The Blue Guide to Indiana* lists nine other books by Michael Martone, including *Gary on \$5 a Day* and *The Rough Guide to French Lick*. Sadly, only two titles on this list exist outside of this Indiana: an award winning collection of essays, *The Flatness and Other Landscapes*, and the story collection *Pensées: The Thoughts of Dan Quayle*. Not listed are Martone's other story collections, *Alive and Dead in Indiana*, *Safety Patrol*, *Fort Wayne is Seventh on Hitler's List*, and *Seeing Eye*. In the seventeen years since the publication of *Alive and Dead*, Martone has in his fiction perfected a dynamic hybrid of 1980s dirty realism, playful experimentation clearly influenced by John Barth and William Gass, and obsessive attention to the literal nuts and bolts of Midwestern life. *The Blue Guide to Indiana* is his blue-ribbon example of this hybrid.

It comes as no surprise that Michael Martone chooses the Great State of Indiana as his muse. Its state flower is the peony, its state bird the cardinal, its state motto "The Crossroads of America." These facts are not to be found in *The Blue Guide*, but they provide the best answer to the question of how Martone is able to do what he does in *The Guide*: from outside, Indiana appears to be as close to a blank page as you can get.

It is this outsider-looking-in-through-the-eyes-of-the-over-informed-insider point of view that makes *The Blue Guide* work. Good guidebooks assume the traveler knows next to nothing about the place the guide describes and *The Blue Guide to Indiana* is a good guidebook. In the first pages, we find this helpful warning:

It seems very likely that many times of opening for museums and sites given hopefully in the text, coupled with general remarks in the Practical Information section, will be found incorrect. At the time of writing not even official publications would be held responsible for accuracy. The "Standard Times" has been subject to constant alteration and exceptions, depending on whether the desire of the authorities to open longer hours or the staffs for shorter hours and higher wages had the upper hand. This has already led to sharp rises in entry fees and unforeseen failures to open at all, a situation long familiar in Italy and Greece.

The Crossroads of America is transformed by this single glib paragraph. Suddenly Indianapolis is as exotic and unpredictable as Athens or Rome, this warning a handy decoder ring. Are you ready to experience a state in which live both Bakunin anarchists who fled Boston after the Sacco and Vanzetti trial and the nuns of Our Lady of the Big Hair and Feet? Ready to visit Eli Lilly Land and ride *It's a Prozac World* with its piped-in songs co-written by Philip Glass and Dr Joyce Brothers? *The Blue Guide to Indiana* can take you to these hotspots, and to The Gateway to the Cross Highway where "No fewer than nine hundred thousand separate crosses line the road." These crosses, *The Blue Guide* explains, "do not all represent local traffic altercations but seek to dramatize the total number of Americans killed in or by cars over the past fifteen years." (Elsewhere in

*The Guide* we're informed that the first fatality in the nation associated with a traffic light occurred in Fort Wayne.) Most amazing is that throughout *The Blue Guide to Indiana*, Martone's ventriloquism of matter-of-fact guidebook voices makes the truth of entries like these seem eerily possible.

*The Blue Guide to Indiana* is funny, but more than just a smart gag, it's a loving tribute to a state that on first glance has little to claim by way of authentic culture. The "Art" section, for example, is less than two pages long and offers only one notable native, PBS painter Bob Ross. But again Martone uses aspects of the guidebook's form—here its attention to even the most mundane details—to transform a lack into a boon: When in Muncie, check out The Musée de Bob Ross and be sure to dine in the Happy Little Tree Café.

*The Blue Guide to Indiana's* publisher, Fiction Collective 2, is better known for titles that have cost them NEA funding, and it is to be commended for expanding its editorial tastes and bringing out this amazing little book. Michael Martone's homage to his homestate is at once fun to read and fun to think about. It's rare that a book this smart is also this enjoyable. It would be foolish to plan a trip to Kokomo, Michigan City, or West Lafayette without carefully consulting *The Blue Guide to Indiana*.

## CONTRIBUTORS

T. J. BEITELMAN'S work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Colorado Review*, *Third Coast*, *Quarterly West*, and other journals.

ROBERT BOLIEK practices law in Birmingham, Alabama, where he also serves as Adjunct Professor of Lawyering and Legal Reasoning at Samford University's Cumberland School of Law. His poetry has previously appeared in *The Formalist*, *The MacGuffin*, *Hellas*, *RE:AL*, and *Edge City Review*, among others.

DANIEL BORZUTZKY is a twenty-seven-year-old Taurus. His work has appeared in *Columbia*, *LVNG*, *The Journal of Experimental Fiction*, *3rd Bed*, and *The Minus Times*. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

ANTHONY BUKOSKI lives in Superior, Wisconsin. His story "Pesthouse," which appeared in *New Orleans Review* in 1997, received a Pushcart Prize xxv Special Mention.

RACHEL CONRAN is currently at work on her first novel.

PETER COOLEY'S poem "Autumn Reconsidered" is from his seventh book, *A Place Made of Starlight*, due out from Carnegie Mellon in 2002. He has had poems recently in *The Nation*, *The Southern Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere.

JIM CULLINANE obtained an MAW degree from Manhattanville College after retiring from the Transit Authority. His thesis, the play *A Love So Blind*, was produced in Ireland in June 2000, and in the Irish Arts Theatre in Manhattan in July 2000. His work has been published in *Inkwell Magazine*.

GARIN CYCHOLL is minister at Gethsemane United Church in Chicago. Previous poems have appeared in *LVNG*, *—VeRT*, *moria*, and *Skanky Possum*.

LAURA DIDYK has her MFA from the University of Alabama. She is currently a seasonal staff member at The Omega Institute in the Hudson Valley. Her work has appeared most recently in *Fence* and *Quarter After Eight*.

JAMES DOYLE retired after a career in teaching. He has work coming out in *West Branch*, *The Iowa Review*, *Nightsun*, *Eclipse*, *Connecticut Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Rattle*, and the *Green Hills Literary Lantern*.

ALAN GERSON has a BA in philosophy from Boston University, an MFA from the University of New Orleans, and a JD from Tulane Law School. He was the visual arts director of the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans from 1981 to 1985. He practiced law for three years before going back to art full time. Currently he teaches in the Visual Arts Department of Loyola University and is represented in New Orleans by LeMieux Gallery and in New York by Caelum Gallery. His work has been featured in the *Louisiana Bar Journal*, *New American Painters* and the *National Maritime Law Journal*. His book, *Habeas Circus*, published by New South Books, is a selection of watercolors satirizing the legal profession.

DANIEL GUTSTEIN'S work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *TriQuarterly*, *Fiction*, *The American Scholar*, *StoryQuarterly*, *The Penguin Book of the Sonnet*, and several other publications. A former economist, farmhand, editor, and taekwon do instructor, he teaches creative writing, and students with disabilities, at George Washington University. He has received two work-study scholarships to the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and has been a finalist for the Bakeless Prize in poetry.

JEFF HARDIN teaches at Columbia State Community College in Columbia, Tennessee, where he lives with his wife Starla, and their two children, Storie and Eli. He is a graduate of the University of Alabama, and has poems appearing or forthcoming in *Ascent*, *The New Republic*, *The Laurel Review*, *Nimrod*, *Poem*, *The Distillery*, *New Millennium Writings*, and others.

TERRANCE HAYES' first book of poems, *Muscular Music* (Tia Chucha Press, 1999), won a Whiting Writers Award, and a Kate Tufts Discovery Award. His new poems have recently appeared in *Harvard Review*, *River City*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, and *Callaloo*.

DAVID HERNANDEZ's poems have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Passages North*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Prairie Schooner*, and in the anthology *Another City: Writing from Los Angeles* (City Lights). His chapbook collections include *Man Climbs Out of Manhole* (Pearl Editions) and *Donating the Heart* (Pudding House Publications), winner of the National Looking Glass Poetry Competition.

ANGIE HOGAN, originally from Parrottsville, Tennessee, was a Javits Fellow and a Henry Hoyns Fellow at the University of Virginia. Her poems have appeared in *Third Coast*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Phoebe*, *Poet Lore*, and others. She currently resides in Virginia where she edits a humanities database.

CHRISTOPHER HOWELL received his second NEA fellowship in 2000, and made his second appearance in the Pushcart anthology in the same year. New poems may be found in recent issues of *Field*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Third Coast*. He teaches at Eastern Washington University where he is editor of *Willow Springs*.

TAJ JACKSON lives in New York City.

STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES is twenty-nine, has one novel out there (*Fast Red Road*), one in-press (*The Bird is Gone*), a couple still in manuscript, and stories placed all through the alphabet: *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *B&A*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Cutbank*... (this publication will fit in well with his little *Open City*, *Phoebe*, *Quarterly West* run). He lives in Shallowater, Texas, and teaches at Texas Tech University.

JOSHUA KRYAH currently lives in Iowa City, Iowa where he is the poetry editor for *The Iowa Review*, and a radio announcer for WSUI AM 910.

DALE M. KUSHNER is the founder of The Writer's Place, a literary center in Madison, Wisconsin. Her poetry has been published in *Crazyhorse*, *The Ohio Review*, *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Salmagundi*, *Women's Review of Books*, and elsewhere. Her collection, *Another Kingdom*, was translated into Serbo-Croatian and published in Yugoslavia. Ms Kushner is a recipient of a Wisconsin Arts Board Grant in the Literary Arts. Her interest in Carl Jung has taken her to the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich for intensive study. She is currently at work on a novel, *Lower than Angels*, part of which has been published in *The Literary Review*.

JEFFREY LEVINE's first book, *Mortal*, *Everlasting*, won the 2000 Transcontinental Poetry Award from Pavement Saw Press. His poems have won the Larry Levis Prize from the *Missouri Review*, the James Hearst Award from *North American Review*, the 2001 Kestrel Prize, and the 2001 Mississippi Review Poetry Award. His work has been published in *Ploughshares*, *Antioch Review*, *Poetry International*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Quarterly West*, and *The Journal*, and he has been nominated six times for a Pushcart Prize.

DAPHNE LONEY received a BFA in photography from the University of Texas at Austin, and an MA in Art Education from William Caery College. She will complete her MFA in sculpture at the University of New Orleans in 2002. Her work has been exhibited in New Orleans, Texas, Mississippi, Chicago, and New York.

MICHAEL MARTONE, an orphan, was born in Story County, Iowa, and was raised there by five women—seniors at Iowa State College, majoring in Home Economics—in what was then known as The Home Management House. The Home Management House, a free-standing, prairie-style bungalow on the edge of campus, served as a laboratory and practicum for the graduating students who lived there their final year. Monthly, the students took turns performing and being tested on various tasks. One would do the house cleaning; one, the shopping for food and the preparing of the menus; one, the making of clothes; one, the managing of the household furnishings and finances. They were given “money” by the Dean, and they then purchased furniture and food from the college store, their budgeting and interior decorating skills rigorously assessed. One student each month was assigned the baby—bathing it, dressing it, feeding it, changing it, rocking it to sleep each night. The baby, a month after birth, was selected from the new batch of orphaned infants at the county home outside Nevada. Swaddled and placed in a wicker clothes basket, the newborn was driven over to the school by a sheriff's deputy and a home matron, and there handed over to the new class of students who gathered expectantly on the house's freshly painted front porch. The college newspaper always sent a photographer to record the arrival, five excited coeds jointly holding the bundle. Martone was one of those babies. He remembers nothing of his first year of life in The Home Management House. Shortly afterward, he was adopted by the Martones—a childless couple from Indiana, who died in a car crash when Martone was a junior majoring in ice cream at Purdue. Orphaned once again, he

learned of his natal care during an aborted search for his birth mother. That summer he secured an internship with the Schwann Company, a door-to-door distributor of frozen foods and convenience items, and returned to Iowa to drive a route truck over the rural farm market roads. His clientele included many farm women who had majored in Home Economics, spending their senior year in The Home Management House. He would coax from them their stories of their time there as he sat at kitchen tables writing up orders over expertly prepared coffee and home baked quick breads. Once, he was shown a clipping of the baby's delivery to the house, the picture grainy and the paper yellowed with age. From the various reports he pieced together, Martone became reasonably satisfied with the identity of four of the five students who nurtured him that first year, and he spent the rest of the summer and most of the fall—he took a leave from Purdue—searching for what he began to believe were his mothers. Two turned up dead. He visited the grave of the first near Lake Okiboji. From a payphone at the Jones Café in Eldon, he talked with the still distraught husband of the second who refused to see him. As they talked, it became more difficult to hear the husband's perfunctory replies, and Martone realized that the farm was still on a party line. As the widower's neighbors, one by one, began to listen, the voltage on the line would drop. This helped to explain the taciturn response. The man, trained by years of such eavesdropping, now coupled his answers to his obvious grief. Martone never could find the other. The trail petered out at an abandoned farm near the Quad Cities. He did have a chance to speak with one of the women who now farmed new Turin in western Iowa in the loess hills, who remembered him as an easy baby, saying she should know since she had four more of her own. She couldn't recall the fifth girl's name, so was no help there. She said her real strength had been in the kitchen. She hated to clean and could not forget boiling the diapers and watching them freeze on the line out back of the house that winter. She was happy

that one of her months with the baby had been in the spring. She was already engaged to her future husband and they would marry that June. "I'd sit on the porch," she said, "and rock you in the chair I bought with the play money." She would hold his little hand up and wave it at the students passing on the way to class. Martone stayed for dinner and met the rest of the family including the oldest daughter, who was then a senior at Iowa State University where she was a majoring in Home Economics. Martone later married her, against the wishes of her parents, in a small civil ceremony at the courthouse in Nevada near the ruins of the old county home.

SUE OWEN, Professional-in-Residence at LSU, is the recipient of the Governor's Arts Award for Professional Artist of the Year in 1998, and the author of *My Doomsday Sampler* (LSU Press, 1999).

SIMON PERCHIK has poems in *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, *The Nation*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *The New Yorker*, among others.

LARRY PRESTON is a professor of political philosophy at Northern Arizona University. In addition to his book entitled *Freedom and the Organizational Republic*, his articles have appeared in the *American Political Science Review*, *Polity*, and *Journal of Politics*. He is a recent graduate of Vermont College's MFA in Writing program.

ERIC RAWSON's work has appeared in numerous publications, including *American Poetry Review*, *Commonweal*, and *Ploughshares*. He lives in Los Angeles.

JOHN RONAN is a poet, teacher, and journalist, as well as an award-winning scriptwriter, children's author, and tv talk show host. His work has appeared in *Southern Poetry Review*, *Threepenny Review*, *New England Review*, *New York Quarterly* other publications. He has

published two books of poetry: *The Catching Self* (Folly Cove, 1996) and *The Curable Corpse* (1999). In 1999 he was named a National Endowment for the Arts Fellow in Poetry. He lives in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

JOSH RUSSELL's novel is *Yellow Jack* (W.W. Norton, 1999). He lives in New Orleans and teaches at Tulane University.

JOHN RYBICKI's first book of poems, *Traveling at High Speeds*, is out on New Issues Poetry Press. He has work forthcoming in *The North American Review* and *Many Mountains Moving*. His second collection of poems, *Fire Psalm*, is searching for a home.

GEOFF SCHMIDT's first novel, *Write Your Heart Out: Advice from the Moon Winx Motel*, was published last fall by Smallmouth Press. He's an Assistant Professor of English at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. Thanks to his daughters, he's obsessed with all things Pokemon. You can email him at [geschmi@siue.edu](mailto:geschmi@siue.edu).

JAMES SCOFIELD's work has appeared in *The Sewanee Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Boston Literary Review*, *The Owen Wister Review*, *Yellow Silk*, and *Harper's Magazine*. He received the Anna Davidson Rosenberg Award for Poems on the Jewish Experience and a National League of PEN Writers Award in 2000 for "Birkenau." The poem is on permanent display at the Holocaust Memorial at Auschwitz. His first book of poems, *30 Poems*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1999.

SHAUNA SELIY currently lives in Northampton, Massachusetts. She teaches at the University of Massachusetts, and is a writer-in-residence in a Writers-in-the-Schools program in the Berkshires. Her work has appeared in *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *EM*, and *Teacup*.

ED SKOOG's poems have appeared in *Slate*, *Fine Madness*, *The Laurel Review*, and previously in *New Orleans Review*. New work is forthcoming in *New Zoo Poetry Review* and *Poem*. He has an MFA from the University of Montana, and teaches at the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts Riverfront.

ABRAHAM SMITH is a native of Ladysmith, Wisconsin. He has performed his poems at Taos Poetry Circus, the South by Southwest Music Festival, and the National Poetry Slam. His work is forthcoming at *CrossConnect* and *Poetry Motel*. He resides in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

KATHERINE SONIAT's fourth collection, *Alluvial*, has recently been published by Bucknell University Press. *A Shared Life* won the Iowa Prize and a Virginia Prize for Poetry. She has received Virginia Commission for the Arts Fellowships, the Faulkner Award, and a Jane Kenyon Prize for Poetry. Her work has appeared in such journals as *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Amicus Journal*, *TriQuarterly*, *Boston Review* and the *Virginia Quarterly*. She is on the faculty at Virginia Tech and lives in Blacksburg, Virginia.

MYRNA STONE's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Green Mountains Review*, and *Poetry Northwest*, and are forthcoming in *Nimrod* and *Midwest Quarterly*. Her first book, *The Art of Loss*, was released earlier this year by Michigan State University Press, and earned her the title of 2001 Ohio Poet of the Year.

ANDREW R. TOUHY grew up in Ft. Lauderdale. He holds an MA in literature/creative writing from Ohio University, where he was co-editor of *Quarter After Eight: A Journal of Prose and Commentary*. He is currently a freelance writer in San Francisco, and at work on a short story collection, *Buoyant Places*, and his first beard. E-mail him at [nank73@hotmail.com](mailto:nank73@hotmail.com).

JAMES WAGNER's poems have appeared, or are forthcoming in *The American Poetry Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *3rd Bed*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *5\_Trope*, *Grand Street*, and elsewhere. He teaches an online poetry workshop through Syracuse University.

KEVIN WILSON is a twenty-three-year-old native of Winchester, Tennessee. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Oxford American*, *Shenandoah*, *64 Magazine*, and *The Vanderbilt Review*.

FRED YANNANTUONO was born in Yonkers, New York. He studied Latin and Greek in high school, literature and psychology in college. He has been a businessman, programmer, truck driver, landlord, tutor, dishwasher, and a film festival director. (It was a very small film festival and a very large dishwasher.) He's married with two kids. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Brooklyn Review*, *Flyway*, *Illuminations*, *Lumina*, *Nightsun* and *Portland Review*.

ANDY YOUNG's work has appeared in journals such as *Exquisite Corpse* and Dublin's *The Stinging Fly*, on broadsides, in jewelry designs, and in electronic music. She received a fellowship from the Louisiana Division of the Arts in 2000. She lives in New Orleans where she writes and performs her poetry, teaches creative writing at the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, and continues to attempt to fly in her dreams.

MARTHA ZWEIG's first full-length collection is *Vinegar Bone* (Wesleyan University Press, 1999); *What Kind*, her second book is forthcoming, also from Wesleyan. She has an MFA from Warren Wilson, and received a Whiting Foundation Award in 1999.