

Jet Fuel Review

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JET FUEL Review

A High Octane Literary Journal

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Mission Statement

We seek to create a writer's community, publish quality writing and artwork, and maintain a blog connected to the literary journal site.

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A teal-colored jagged line graphic that runs horizontally across the page, passing behind the word 'POETRY'. It has a series of peaks and valleys, resembling a stylized mountain range or a signal waveform.

POETRY

A Father's Birth

His eyes float like eggs
fresh cracked in a bowl, glistening, wet, slipping
away from center, receding like bonds

broken. He comes to the waiting room, comes
quiet, comes with the image of blood spilling
like concrete in the street. Pray, he says. *Bring a priest*

to negotiate. Transubstantiate. But the women waiting
know it takes blood, bowls of blood, rooms of blood,
rivers and oceans, wombs of blood to create. She tears

like fresh paper, opens like Vesuvius, cascade of smelted
stone to destroy, to preserve. She could pull a train, peel
the earth's crust, shatter diamond houses. She breathes

gravity. He imagines she will break from the ground,
intestines and lungs spilling to the floor like
altar offerings, her heart following the flow of after

birth. He cups like a shallow dish, steadies with his hoof
hands, roof damaged, wind scarred hands. Twisting,
he comes, a war correspondent crossing borders,

knees bent to the ashed-scent of blood, carrying news like an armful
of dead soldiers, carrying the words on his back because
his mouth is full.

A Sound Like the Earth

Beneath the willow tree, leaves
tangle her hair. She flattens
her hands to the night. The grass
grows dew between her bare feet.

She leans into the train whistle.
Selfish to wish him shot or missing
a leg, to want a piece of him home to ease
the worry that only dog tags and a flag

will bear him to the back country again.
Her brother will not be among the soldiers
coming home tonight, patched and worn thin
like daddy's overalls at the end of summer.

She divines the night air for facts
but her great-grandmother buried all the family
magic decades ago. Standing in the fog
she holds the wind in her hands.

Remorse: a Cento

A film of mist clung to the storm window
He went behind it to make his last stand
The lightning tucked behind cypress trees

He remembers the bodies, he saw them leap
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space
From the windows, he heard the shots

The judges won't revoke their sentence
For anyone condemned to death,
For anyone condemned to life

The longer he stands at the edge
On the horizon now a kind of golden gate of sunset
All phantom and shadow, so silent

[Contains lines and fragments from: Wayne Miller, Robert Frost line, Victoria Chang, Martha Collins, Walt Whitman, Martha Collins, Weldon Kees, Jaime Sabines, Louise Gluck, Kathy Fagan, Tracy K. Smith.]

No More: a Cento

There is a halo of cold around you,
The sky above you darkens with rain.
It breaks the surface,
because these are not the nights of dreams galloping.

I jerk across time's dark ocean of heat
The flames of discipline
knife-scrawled across my back in sore, jagged letters,
like gasoline fire over blue tar.

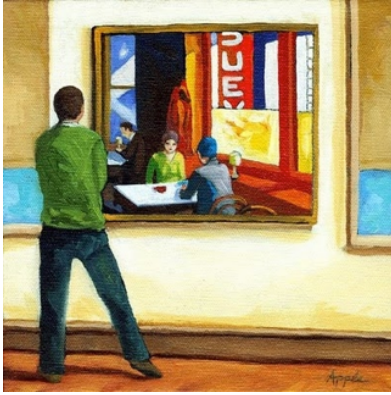
You knew the odds on failure from the start,
lucid, inescapable rhythms
flying in a green light,
distant from the darkened glade.

Suddenly nobody knows where you are,
worn down by the endless internal battering
with the shape of my silence to say
I have done what you wanted to do.

You say I'm a naysayer for refusing your form of sorcery.
Let's be honest.
I've really had enough this time.

[Contains lines and fragments from: Tess Gallagher, Traci Brimhall and Brynn Saito, Al Zolynas, Suki Kwock Kim, Tyehimba Jess, Li-Young Lee, Patricia Smith, Katha Pollit, Wallace Stevens, Kyle McCord and Jeannie Hoag, Sharon Olds, Charlie Smith, Bob Hicok, Sharon Olds, Simone Muench & Philip Jenks, Dana Gioia, Susan Browne.]

Moments with Edward Hopper



“Sizing Up a Painting”
Linda Apple

His left leg solidly planted,
His right leg outstretched and raised,
As if he is trying to look more deeply,
He peers into the Hopper window and sees

Two shop girls facing one another
Across a floating white formica table
In a sparsely furnished restaurant (so Hopper),
The Chop Suey sign partly visible through the window.

As though I just entered the gallery space,
I size up the painting and its beholder,
The viewer whose place too close to the wall
I will fill after he's done with his contemplation.

His sweater is the same chartreuse as one girl's blouse,
And I imagine that he sees the connection too
And wonders about her most of all,
This girl with the inscrutable face (so Hopper).

So now I'm thinking about "the Hopper"
But also thinking about the viewer
And the way he has guided my viewing
And I'm checking the color of my shirt.

Hungers

Ghosts rise and float above the envelope
that spins the mothy wind.

Tonight I hear something
starve –

Why do I shiver at the sight
of one thin nail?

Bolt the door. Fasten the window.
Draw the shade

down as the garden shadows huddle,
as an eyelash closes over a rose.

History

Tallies one more victim in the blast radius
when the pencil snaps. Cold wind, low sun. Exodus
of bedraggled clouds where the clock tower once stood.
No whittling knife, no means to free lead from wood
as a lone shape crosses the rubble—blurred, soundless.

The First Surfer

It must have begun with a stare
into the crashing water, a different eye
than any before, a version of the one
that scanned up a cragged rock face
before fitting a toe to a horseshoe crevice,
drying palms, straining for the next handhold.
Or the one who set bladed feet
atop a powdered peak, pointed
toward the downslope as a slow glide
accelerated into a fall.

That's how it must have been
that day on a somewhere beach,
the slip of cool grit between the toes
not satisfying enough, the breeze
seeming to quicken in gust on shore's edge.
Driftwood worn smooth by tidal lapping,
musty, slivered in urchin spines.
Belly-down paddle through the shallows.
Wide-set hammerhead eyes
slashing through the deep.

A breath of quiet must have followed—

the water column rises under the makeshift board,
the rider stands, balances, as if driven
by a sunken instinct surfacing inside. A seismic churn
sweeps into surf's curled mouth,
and the rider breaches an unending tunnel,
one others would enter, chisel in hand,
to chip away the eddying swirls
that vanish as soon as they are carved.

Visage

Hi everyone!
Who has taken black and white wigs
What's that song, did anyone google how
This week's topic is
A cronelike, crazy ass?
With my name: The shift key
I will be "empty." Rather than
Theoretical.
I am THE lifegiving documentary
About to get started, I am
Super festive tabloid
Searching for hyperconfessional subcultures
To detonate in the SKY
I will have many more fashions available
Between every saloon in town
Maybe a rhetorical move to hook up
I will cosign a trampoline as NIGHTLIFE
I will CALL it, esp if I dress as
The snarlier side of the postcard.

Catching the Juice

A friend of mine from college leads a video tour
through a billionaire's apartment in New York City.
She crosses her legs and offers a *Namasté* in
the zen solarium, wryly models the salamander and
contends *this is the way a billionaire makes grilled cheese*.
It's too delicious. I can't resist a comment,
but when I label it "real estate porn", the comment
is removed — inappropriate, unacceptable.
Not quite shamed or even humbled, I gather
my wits to fully understand the obscenity:
the ten foot rain shower nozzle in the ceiling,
the hand-carved marble slab for a tub,
the oversized foot pool on the roof.
The man who owns it made his fortune in
chew bones, aquarium ornaments and
flea shampoo before he mastered the art
of the developer's deal. His lifestyle is
described as fully furnished, but I've been
in kitchens where none of the chairs match,
where the glasses crack, but they're still
run out among a comic array of utensils —
to catch the juice. Just like I should be
right now, catching the juice, pulp and all,
from those who've been freshly squeezed.
But it's too damned hilarious. I enjoy my
little luxury of the theater of the absurd.
I make my ballsy comments that offend
the unapologetically ambitious.
That's me over there standing in line for
a quick glimpse of the new shipment of
canned beans, laughing my ass off as I finally
figure out things end so badly for
the antelope because the lion
doesn't get the goddamned joke.

John Locke's Lion Dance

When the dancers enter a village,
they are supposed to pay their respects
to the ancestors. So should they bow to
the lowly rodent as the first mammal?
Or hearken back further in the fossil
record to our origin with the trees
so that we may dance
to the song of the seeds?

John Locke, I do not know if I am
an empty vessel, a blank slate for blaming
the power of the drum to call us
together in accordance with the regal
moods of the lion. I only know
I have been brought before you for
mimicking cats, for catching mice and
birds and dispatching their life, liberty,
and pursuit of happiness to the scrap heap
where the wills of animals wither.

But here come the acrobats to
charm us with their stunts,
their bursts and leaps in the streets,
their displays of strength
to chase away the silly Buddha.
See how the head shakes furiously,
determined to bring the crowd
to its feet and cheer the reach
for the red envelope that will be
brought back to the troupe.

John Locke, is your liberty the ability
to do what you want to others,
to make them taste the sweetness
of obedience? I am convinced
you must still be curious about how
your ancestors deferred to majesty,
their wide-eyed witness to
the earth dynasty, their allegiance
to all that is unseen, their admiration
for the old songs of the cycads
about the future of the chimpanzees.

Oracle

The mud doesn't know there's war.
That girl's hair can't cast a vote.
The leaves are neither rich nor poor.
It's water only if you float.

Blue won't save us. Red won't kill.
The dove calls, then calls again.
All rise and pay the missile bill.
Then bring the dead and wounded in.

A cup of air. One stone or two?
Fire locks the burning door.
The hurricane is black and blue.
Heaven's on the ocean floor.

Now comes to us the light's bright seal
Over earth's dark, patient love.
All lives are someone else's meal.
This third time I hear the dove.

Ecstatic

The day dawned gray, my lover sun long gone.
I was gray too: in gray nothing will grow,
And where there is no light I feel I'm wrong:
A song then sang through me: it's sound was slow,

And came like blessing, like a small, warm rain,
So circumspect that no one could complain—
And I stood up then on the earthy ground,
tall because at last my loss was found.

A bus blasts past, and now the sound dies out.
Quiet shouts. A bird applauds with twitter,
And in the pause there is no room for doubt:
No thing in this swirl of *now* is bitter,

And at day's apex a great height ensues:
A silent fountain arcs up, sprays and falls,
As earth recites each bright, wet bit of news
And I grow fat and vast in light's high halls.

Bee Sense

Safe from the crooked
thread of odor
that lured them away,
bees scan bower walls, listening
for a fissure to the garden.
One flits out among
orchidaceous irises:
purple tongues
loll from twisted petals'
velvet pincers. Darkness
tastes magnetic to black iron
bisons with chickadee
hides, dogged, honing,
fierce as mowers,
the real excitement
to which chimerical lovers
in the upstairs gables are deaf.

The soil might be moaning.
April ungathers pollen of lavender
that I can never smell, and listing
its big insects, her wind
can work like an ocean
I can't feel. Spring

sun ruptures in mimosa,
a leeching so gorgeous
my eyes drain. In the super-
luminous American night, the bees
levitate. Blinded,

I don't hear a dust of sugar
moths follow, soft
as waves, as furious flakes of light.

Coeur a la Creme

I stumbled upon
a stranger's blog
this photo of the soft-

set ricotta heart
plated with tea-
spoonfuls of rasp-

berry sauce she
holds her face
close to the plate

expecting no small
group for dinner
but a deluge

of chalked fingers
they mother her
a quiet sieve

the spray of primo-
cane bruised
ruddy at the pith

Crisis

This, too, my mother says, shall pass. Meaning not what was averted but what will be short-lived. This: a cornucopia of dust and pill-boxes—still-life on the nightstand she comes to swipe off. Replaces it with tinkling ice, straw like a concertina. Something there is that does love a wall, patiently waiting to hear what ails. So when she finds the loophole: she'll be there, my mother says, lock-stock-and-barrel. I'll be there with corkscrew and hammer. She leavens her bread so my joints dovetail. She's practiced the art of closing remarks. In the embankment, she shovels snow.

Ebrio de Trementina

men be

solid

rad

go

do

caderas

locamente cargado

*hips
madly charged*

Erasure of “Ebrio de trementina,” poem #9 in Pablo Neruda’s *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción de desesperada* (*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*)

Pensando, Enredando Sombras

Pensando

taciturno

men

to

violent

nostalgia

cantando

ale

*wordless thinking
tongue-tied singing*

Erasure of “Pensando, enredando sombras,” poem #17 in Pablo Neruda’s *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción de desesperada* (*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*)

En Su Llama Mortal

tal l
as a
que en

i

grandes

cosas ocultas.

magnético

*great
hidden things*

Erasure of “En Su Llama Mortal,” poem #2 in Pablo Neruda’s *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción de desesperada* (Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair)

The Hunt

Across the northern sky,
beneath the handle of the little dipper, Ursa Minor,
the bear cub, a cut of light divides
a moment, then is gone, then remains,
its afterimage a fading scar
against the insistent blue black. Distant
traffic across the East-West interstate
fades into the hum of powerlines, which itself
fades, and the quiet fills your mouth.

A scrap
of interstellar debris, incinerated
by the upper atmosphere, memorialized by synaptic
circuits retracing their steps. Look back, past
the field of switchgrass, the lone porch light
on the rehabbed farmhouse, the silhouetted oaks,
hickories, edging the Vermillion River,
straight into the dark. Let your eyes
adjust, then look up at no one part of the sky,
but at the trembling vast. Slowly, your gaze
ripples the light— the air,
heavy with sumac— a dart
in your periphery, compelled by gravity
to burn.

Clots

A mannequin gives birth to a jack-in-the-box,
says to the harlequin, "he has your thighs."

The harlequin lathers his mandible,
asks hemophilia how a shadow bleeds.

Her son born with polka dots ajar,
the mannequin sells teeth online,
posts ivories to inboxes.

Platelets tailgate the harlequin's stubble,
venerate a towel that proclaims him
Ashtray Salesman of the Year.

His wares clang like church bells
in suitcases, some the shape of heartthrobs:
idol menthol, Marlboro scrim.

He crowns a tourniquet, dams his chin.

The mannequin sends her son for repairs:
ten hours to a neck, sinew inclined. The boy
crouches, weasel smock and facile smirk.

You'd never know he started as twine.

She retires, ministers to the mouthless.
The harlequin expires. Parliaments twinge.

The kid asks about Pop.

She pauses, breath like formaldehyde
on the morning drive. "Son," she says,

"Your father was filtered, drummed the cigarillo realms.

Yes, once upon a Nicorette, humanity swirled.
Companionship loomed. Lineage bruised.

The things he accomplished with ash."

Lunch Hour Reading

after Frank O'Hara

It's my lunch hour, so I go
into the drizzle that's the ocean sky
come down to the streets and if
I walked on sand this drear
would be expected but the pavement glints
from shine through a folded cloud
instead and a school of pedestrians silvers
across the intersection when the stick figure
lights up and the city rises into the grey.
Dark suits, neon green sneakers, bike cab drivers
with graffiti-ed helmets, and there on the corner
of Pike and 6th three Girl Scouts singsong
and shake blue and brown boxes in the air
like castanets. I turn right onto 5th
passing a man who plays half a cymbal,
an upside-down tin pot and a broken dish
with a pair of drumsticks. I want to dance
but no one else does.

The reading is at Elliot Bay Books
and the cab driver says in two, three hours
this place will be a festival.
The event is ticketed - who knew?
and sold out. They say it's all downhill
to the Brass Pig and I turn right again
onto Pike. A girl leaning against the telephone pole
calls to me by Broadcast Coffee. Turns out
she was Gabriel, a boy I crushed on in college.

In many ways
I don't feel any different from who I used to be.
My mother says at seventy
she still feels like she did when she was in college -
and yet who wants to be the same
as they've always been, who doesn't try
to change someone else? I walk a long way
and end up back where I started.
Like everyone else, my feet once dangled
from a highchair and walking was a miracle
that happened high above me.
I thought living was all about falling
and I guess it still is.

Vertebrae

All day I think about my father's spine.
What uprights him. His scaffolding.

That secretive warehouse of shelving
in the first Indiana Jones movie,

a box of vertebrae we collected
from the Texas ranchland

(some dead cow), points of attachment
where tendon and ligament tether

sheets of muscle and skin,
bleached tunnels for ropes

of nerves, whitened crosses
next to a hairpin turn,

the taper of airplane wings,
a kite tail curling back in the wind

taut on its cord, how a line
of poetry is an intersection

of two planes, the literal
and the figurative, someone said that

in a lecture, sliced an X across the board.
Kandinsky says what lies within

appears ugly only because unfamiliar.
My father coughs into the receiver

and clears his throat.
Let's say how one moves through space

defies the rigidity within.
A spine of river ice cracks,

noses up against the bank's edge,
folds beneath every night,

freezes over again. I saw him naked once,
startled, eyes open.

He stood in the doorway, bone and hair,
nail and cartilage, not a father.

Saved

The word suggests it is possible.

Why does my father save a box of bones, some dead cow

we collected years ago in the August heat of Texas?

A woodpecker hammers its beak into a tree

12,000 times a day without injury,
its skull protected by spongy cartilage,

and scientists want to design a helmet
similar and so strong it can save our own heads.

After the avalanche,
my friend was buried forty five minutes.

She could not have been saved.

A man flips each shoe off and up into his hands, keeps walking

barefoot through warming grass saved all winter under snow.
Last night's rainstorm blew away the winter birds.

Now summer is in this air hovering
above the expectant rushing ground.

I'm listening to this morning's world that exists without her.
A carpenter on a tall ladder buzzes an electric sander

over a window frame, saving the wood from rot.
The trick is that bone does not attach beak to skull

as the bird pecks at fifteen miles an hour. The trick
is that there isn't a trick. Maybe he saved the box

because he knew what I didn't as a child,
that what we had that day wouldn't last,

toeing vertebrae free from the hard dirt with his boot,
pointing out the fragment of pelvis

for me to lift, to carry home. We want to rectify the endings.
The prom corsage saved under its lid

is the skinny dip at a summer midnight, the girl forever
bending back against the boy's arms as if

night itself was lost to the abandonment of her neck
and her knowledge that he can't help but pull her upright again,

shining with that primal youth that can't be rescued.
Years ago

my father and I spotted a Pileated Woodpecker;
we studied its stats in the guide book, the soaring dip, the red-tipped crown,

the mad beak drilling holes in our dead trees. Who knew we'd salvage
that staccato echo for our own myth?

Some people plant baby teeth in the garden
or thread them on a necklace. The wedding dress saved

in its hermetically sealed box. Kindergarten finger painting.
Fresh cut flowers dying in their sugared-water vase.

A braid of hair snipped and pinned to a bulletin board
like a wreath or a shrunken head. Sometimes an object is too precious –

Embryos. Sperm. Organs are donated. Eyes.
Taxidermy.

At the Bates Motel, Marion opens the old woman's closet,
dresses saved on their hangers, turns to see under the bedclothes

the bird claw hand. A body.
Saving requires being able to imagine what we can lose.

Archived letters. Museums.
Wildlife Refuges. A locked box.

The string on the finger – what is it for?
The wedding dress fades. The daughter never marries.

The key is lost, the necklace of teeth
left somewhere in a drawer.

Hush – do you hear the bones, rattling in their box?
The roots, bracing themselves for spring?

Compression Fracture

My childhood was one thing
and then it was another.

My father awoke and his seventh vertebrae cracked.
His spine,

 a vulnerability he didn't know
 he carried. A turtle shrugs deeper

into its shell. Water chatters
down a chain of stones
 and pools in the low spots.

My mother's heart
 doesn't know how fast or slow
to beat, what's for its own good.

When I imagine the ninety-year-old woman
 I will be, my bones close in, each joint misaligns,
even my hair clenches.

 These fractures take time.

Gregory Orr writes that life
 is about becoming
rather than being, verbs rather than nouns.

Who I am now
 is the only place from which I can measure
my knowing.

 Things catch up with us –
 in the dank murk of my lungs
 a beastchild moans as it shoulders
through the silence.

They are Taking the Animals Out of the Offices

one by one.

Taking away their badges.

Wiping their heart rates clean

from the monitors & cutting

all the wires.

& the animals fidget, trying out their legs

& the animals inhale exhale

testing out their rabbit lungs,

gather up their riot & tender & resign

the sick light

of their desk lamps,

tearing up their blotters.

They are done with this pitch

& toil;

done with this ache of industry begotten luckless,

fluorescent in the trenches —

the burrow & stink of it

the long & the short of it

the supply & demand of it

the patent applied for & pending of it

the blood & the bile & the skin & the milk of it

The animals are leaving

the offices one by

one

& they run

& they run

& they run

& they run

&

The Swill of Sleep

"It's sad to fall asleep. It separates people."

--Jean Seberg, *Breathless*

Each body is a bouquet of mishaps
jagged with breath. When we sleep, we tip over
the jar of our dreams and end up
backstroking through the muck of ourselves:
European airports and dark bodies
falling from the sky: the subconscious
an aging perfume giving off its musky odors
and sweating fedoras. Darling, it's sad
to be a soul phyllo-doughed in skin: we breathe
through the apparatus of ourselves
when we wake and when we sleep.
Enmeshed in scars, Aston Martins,
and back lots weedy
with regret, how can we ever
be with anyone
but ourselves? A kiss
is a false conference of voices, a swerve
in the day two faces briefly make;
a shivering bridge
attempting to support
the breath's weight.
Don't get me wrong, I relish
the martini swill of sleep in my mouth:
its smoky lavenders and dusks of daggers,
its sisters and fathers cursing
from behind the brocade curtains.
The mind is always on trial.
Every decision we make a *pas de deux*
we dance alone across a ballroom.
Sleep, darling, is a gash:
a giddy depth we didn't know we had.

Poem with a Train in it Traveling to Constantinople

1. A poem is saddled with breath, with its mints and paprika. A poem is the Europe I slip on in sleep like a dress: its well-thumbed tapestries, its paint-chipped back alleys, the ever-present smell of plumbing and espresso. It is the meandering dialog that swims backstroke beneath my skin. It is my Picasso striptease, my Josephine Baker harem of sequins.

A poem is a fussy, catch-me-if-you-can geography. A Mediterranean sneering with ions—the local flora fluttering like some celebrity waving her neatly-buttoned ivory gloves out of a car tinted with second guesses. Only astute poems make regret look attractive.

2. And this poem? Is it made of fragrant summers stitched with citrus mirrors? Rain kicking a soft *can-can* against the window's pale applause? Perhaps it's a B-movie replete with an indecisive heroine and a casino's art-deco gambling scene. A poem can be riddled with make-up remover and leather satchels, cerulean French boyfriends and pink plastic handcuffs. It sashays with a line-up of bathing suits, swaying against whatever you thought you might do before the age of forty. It is a city in ruins, the green sweating vines clawing your ankles as you climb to the top of the collapsed French fortress—the one with salmon-striped lizards slipping across its stones and an iron ship rusting like some lost cause in the nearby ocean. I've decided this poem has a plot and a cadre of rented Peugeots. Also, a large black bird that blots out the occasional cloud, its body a glossy cough dividing the sky. Just now, someone hums to herself a Viennese waltz. Her heart is a pale, hiccupy pocket watch. She's on a train to Constantinople accompanied only by her valise and a rushed litany of unevenly-lit magenta windows.

They Say the Uterus is the Shape of a Pear

I wanted to play with blue she said to me;
and explained how she happened upon
the boats bottom-up on a beach in Thailand
and approached them, hoping to paint
their faded patterns, their braided vines
of blue and gray, their tired,
chipped faces. Can the face capsize like a boat?
I think not. The face can barely
float—perplexed, sweating bloom on the neck's
awkward stem—so unlike the egret I saw
a few nights ago. Let me move like that,
dear God, up there in your palace
of quivering clouds, let me step
through the shivering, unsure fields
of an evening's water—my neck
a snowy decanter of light, my body poised
on the edge of an appetite—
and be content with that.

The body is a landscape of its own
making, a damn Monet with its various lilies
winking and waking, surfacing from some
algae depths I'll never know how to dig
to the bottom of. *Revise that:* it's a landscape
with its colors and irrefutable facts
dipping in and out of me, like the blue-bird I saw
one Virginia afternoon migrating
between bushes—its wings a lavender door
opening and closing, a sustained blue breathing.
There could be lightning storms inside us,
and we wouldn't know. The body a random spiller
of secrets, a grumpy gambler. There could be
tanks rumbling through bruised orchards, French Riviera
terraces, Tiger lilies and dead birds—lying one eye up—
still as a stone on the pavement. *I wanted to play with blue.*
I played with wanting blue. I grew a blue I could play with.

Today, mandolins are in the rain, an orchestra
poised and ready to play. I know there is a stack of nights
waiting to be unstacked, a darkness looking to be
deposed. I know I could be speaking out of turn.
Each morning I wake up to an egg-shell glow

floating down from the wooden ceiling,
to the birds dangling their voices
like bright necklaces in the air—a performance
they seem sure of. I dreamt last night I had a job
I hated, that it drained my day of swimming pools
and daylight, of skinny dipping and the cilantro-lime
vinaigrette of the sunset. Could the body survive
an emotional biopsy and live to tell about it? They say
the uterus is the shape of a pear. They say the skin
is the saddest body part of all. If you extracted
a sample of my fear, Mr. Surgeon, and placed it
on a slide, would it be cloud-covered or lucid
as a Bermuda sky? *I played with blue wanting me.*
A blue wanted to play with I. Or would it slither about,
elusive as a minor spy? The trees now all have alibis—
proving they were at a particular place at a
particular time. I wish I had a story like that.
Instead, I watch the clouds brighten outside. I watch
the birds drop their voices, their
dampened violas, as if in hushed surprise.

Poirot

Could a mustache really be an ink spill
fastidiously pruned on a man's face? Who
knew Belgium could produce a parcel
of gray-paisley ties, spats and patent leather
shoes shining so sprightly a cabaret girl
could coif her hair in their twin
black mirrors? His chest a Cornell box
of silk vests, bow ties and turn-
of-the-century buttons—a dandy's scarf
winking from a jacket's pocket. If murder knew
its adversary would be a perennial bachelor
with OCD, would it ever relax its jagged
tools and relentless blood, now pooling
like a rose-colored dahlia across a woman's
breast? How matter-of-factly he now stands,
poised over the beauty who drank the wrong gin.

Decupidas

There are no birds in this poem:
no poets were damaged in its
creation, although that would
be no great loss. If your lover
malfunctions, make sure there
is no fire in the nether cavity,
or you may need to reboot.
If your heart is broken, try
suede or clean, oiled
full grain thigh-highs.
When you wake in tangled
bedding from dreams
of bog-bursts and lost
lovers submerged and
glossy like black birds.
When you make love in
the back of an old hearse,
you will be bitten, new
pain will open and drip
unto the floorboard. When
you fall for your friends, they
will love you anyway but
you'll need air for the fresh
flora in your lungs. For love
pains, take ibuprofen but
don't call in the morning.
Notice that there are no
swallows or magpies in
the poem. Wonder why.

Poem for the Sad Dress

When I put myself inside a circle there is circumference & the wonder
is God. He hides beneath a silver clothing rack but I can see

his black shoes beneath the hanging dresses. God knows
I'm hiding too, behind the woolen coats & pricetags.

We want to be felt, but differently. I want to be unfolded
like origami paper or like a navy dress in its perforated gift box.

God wants to be felt like tissue paper, wrapped
around a new champagne glass. Someone's hand

reaches for a dress within the rack & finds my body instead. I let
her pet me like a cat. She doesn't know

the difference, although my body makes promises
about the softness of promises. God says

Let your body be itself but another woman has already
pulled him from a hanger. His black shoes

dangle helplessly around her neck. God looks
happy. His little fox-face ripens.

You would think we had something better to do,
but we don't.

Drowning

I was saving myself.
What else could I save?
The surf upturning my ankles.
My face drank light.

The broad smell of horse above me.
What I could own I packed.
Here again my poverty, riding itself.

Floating is dispossessed.
What is free within me wakeful.
What I want, I want because hunger
dissolves me. Some hollow drinking me.

The dark counting me with its fingers.

I cannot know whether there is enough. Salt-bridled,
my body keeping surfaces.

What overcomes me eventually is the water.
Tin fish at my belly. Here I am a magpie,
beaking silk in the nets.

Here is what its death might taste like:
dark mass, drowning animal.

The decision to climb abroad.
My hands in its mane. A brisk net of
stars.

A house of need within.
Knowing no good will come of this.

Pyramid

"The pyramids' perfection became their imperfection."

— R. Rosen

This morning is a blue
envelope, ungummed
so that I'm a perfect
letter. Turns

out no thieves
removed me
brick by brick in raw
Egyptian wind, nothing
calculated

in the false maps
staggering my inclines,
nothing cut, nothing
uncut. The inside

outside. Only
the heat, almost
invisible,
pulling stones
away.

Like a butter
colored lizard
doing push-ups in the
dust, knowing up,
knowing down.

If even a pyramid
can move in opposite
directions, ousting &
objecting to perfection, there
is no chance this alphabet

can save me, no home
in the bright
morning, no safety
in myself.

Of Wakefulness

I tried hard to carry you as well.
The weather turned warmer mid-December
and we watched the bamboo wilt back up.

Something about your city stays heavy.

Settles deep. I realigned all my clothes
and trimmed the excess, a gesture
I meant to carry to you.

Caffeine buzzed and sitting on a park
bench, you say *my hand is in my phone*
and mean it.

I mean this too.

The leftover necklaces are hanging
from the ceiling fan. I never turn it on.

I never thought of landfills until
I ran out of room, now
I hold this mess and wonder
where else you've learned to keep secrets.

I'm just looking for a way to stay awake, really.

Like the birds in half-dead bamboo,
so silent when I approach them, yet when I leave:
a painful racket still shaking up my soul.

On days with birds I think I'm too good
at being modern. I need a new affirmation
where I will say *my hand is in my phone*
and I am holding myself and I will
call you back.

Night Out

Rather -

my breath, as if seeking out hollows or making them. Young enough, the night trips over itself, its motions, limbs crying of fatigue for the day. My cousin finds herself smoking in the wrong apartment. My grandmother slips a rosary into my pocket for the way home and I throw the beads like breadcrumbs across the sidewalk. Try this for a paradox: a ship drowning in itself, passengers floating above the holy wreck.

Rather -

the walls still crumbling around us. I spill vodka, something cheap, and break a shotglass with an errant hand. Some days everyone plays God. Over the edge of the balcony, my stomach spills out and I regret not undressing sooner. My cousin drops her cigarette and holds my hair back. We are both in the wrong apartment now. We try to go home but a weeping woman clutches our way back between her fingers, asking to kiss a Hail Mary from our lips.

A teal-colored jagged line, resembling a stylized mountain range or a series of connected 'V' shapes, spans the width of the page. The word 'ART' is centered over this line.

ART

Isolation



Isolation 2



Oxytocin Report



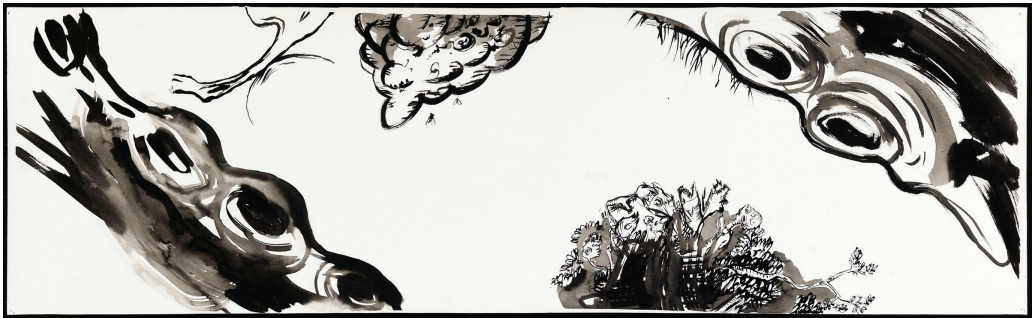
Samsara Continues to Equal Nirvana



Secret Obstacles



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Untitled Plaster



Nude I



Nude II



Nude III



Seated Man



Chelsea



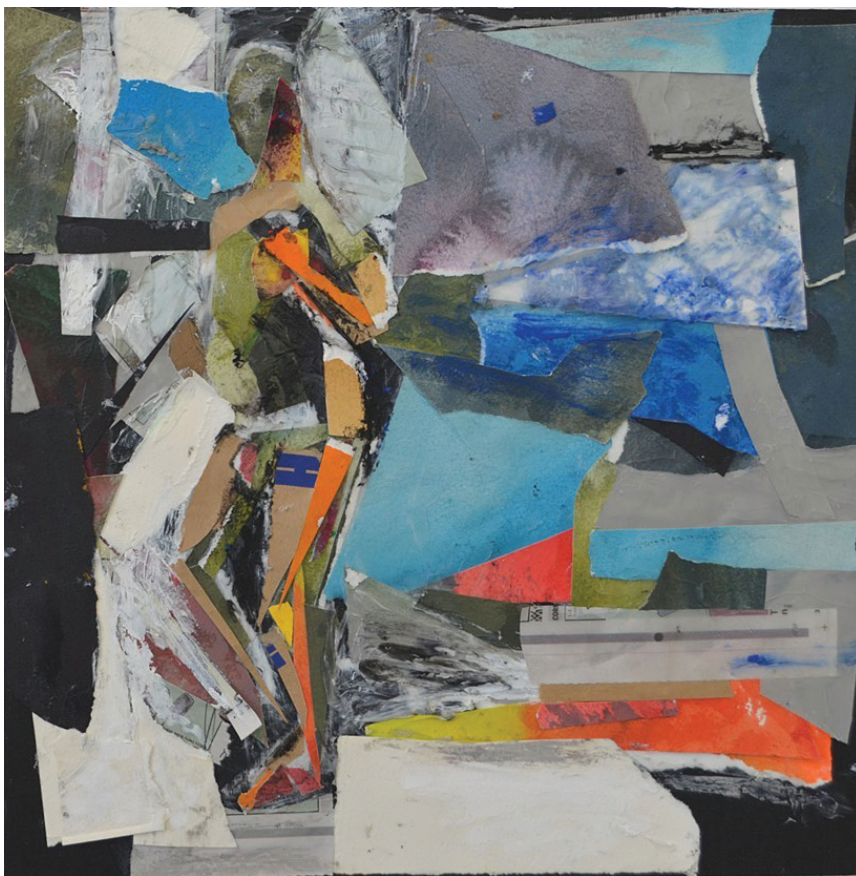
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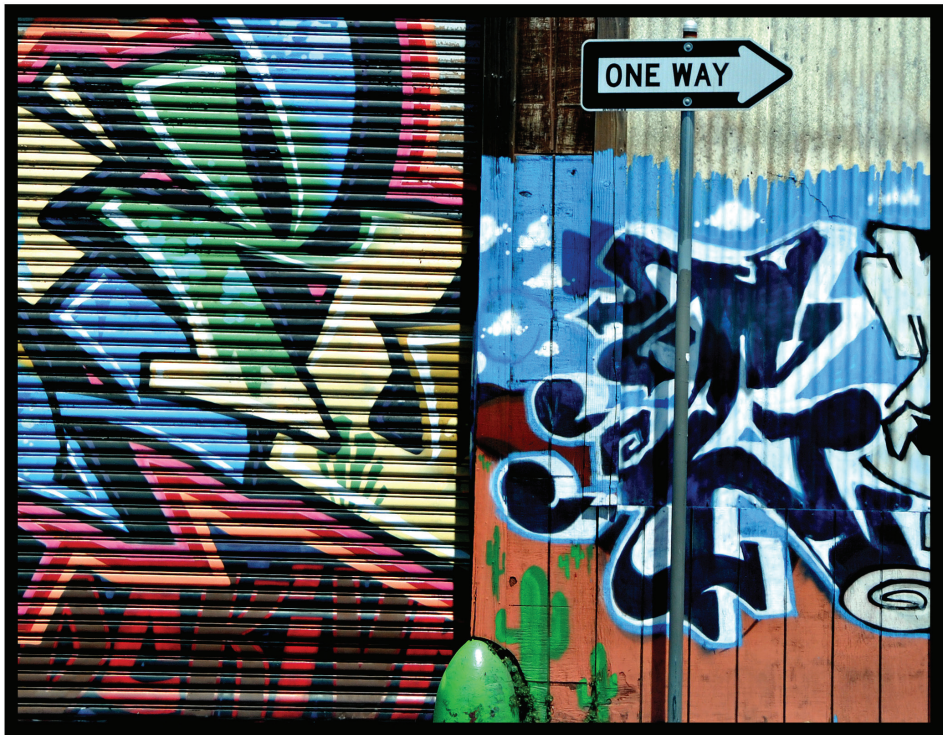
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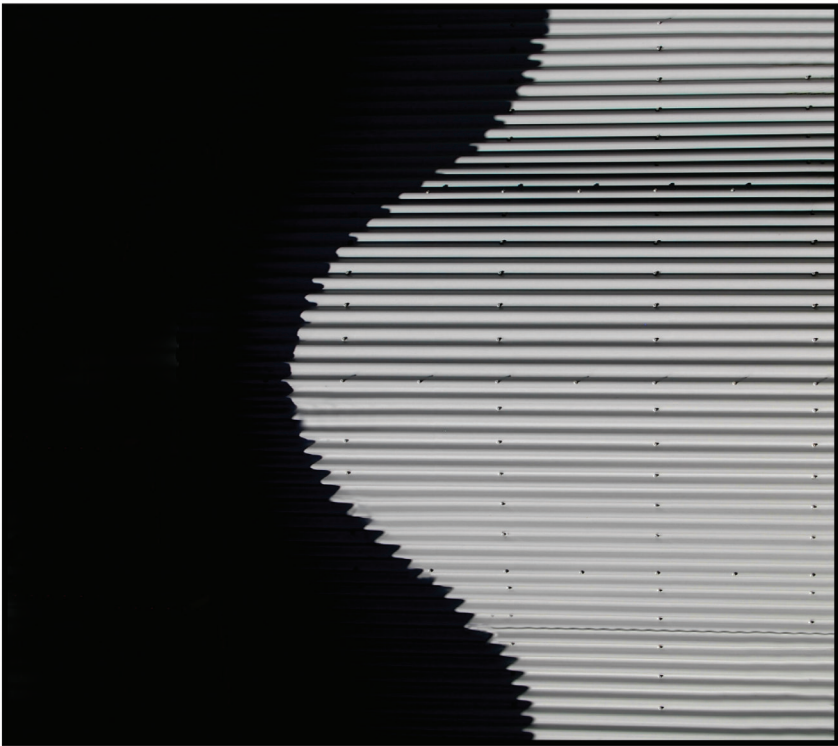
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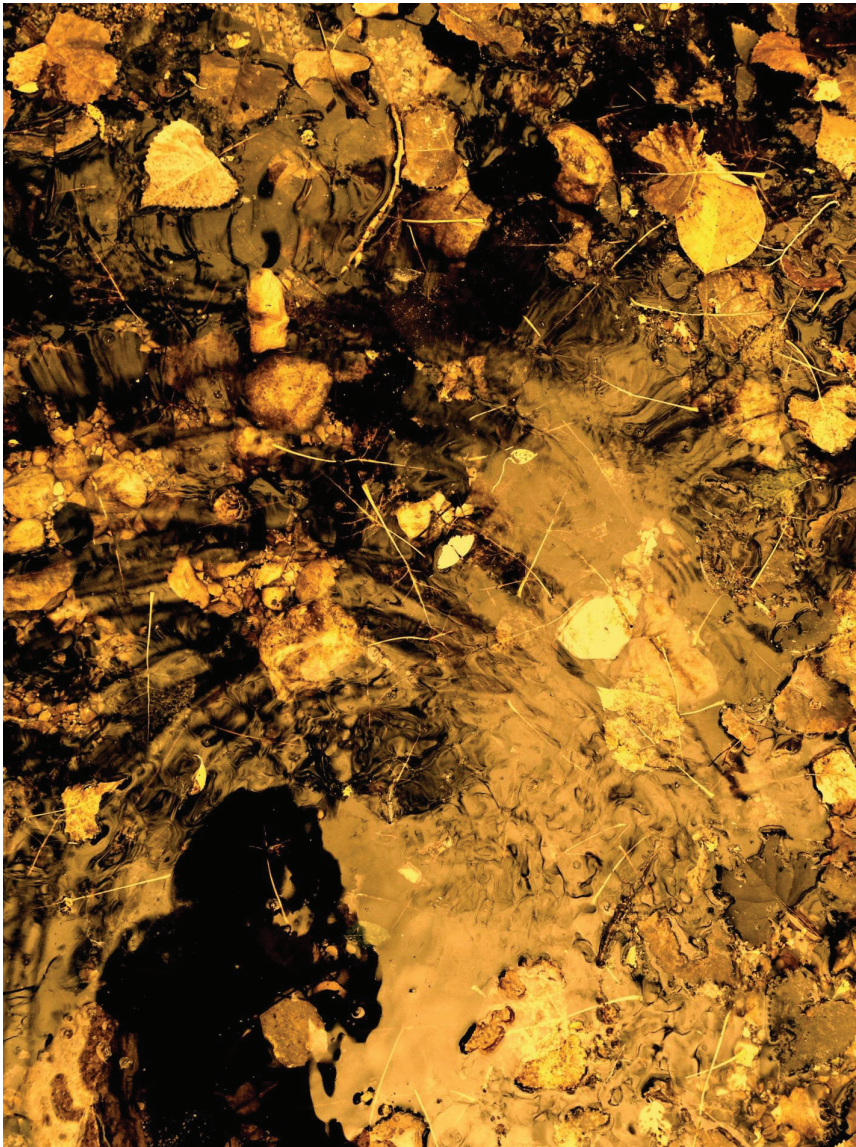
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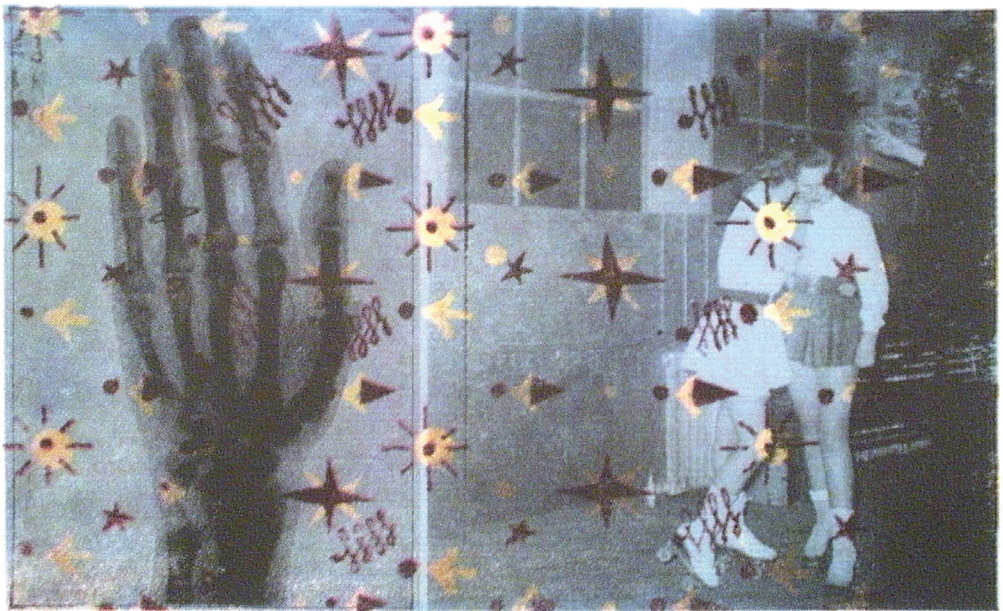
Leaves 1



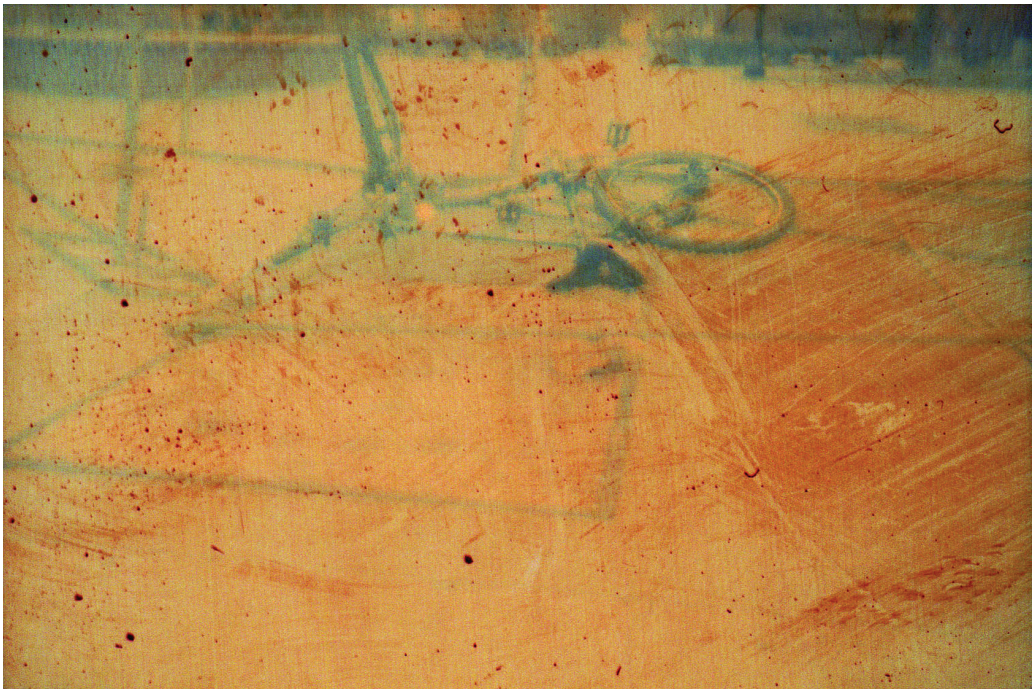
Leaves 2



Secrets



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Untitled 2



Shaun Reynolds

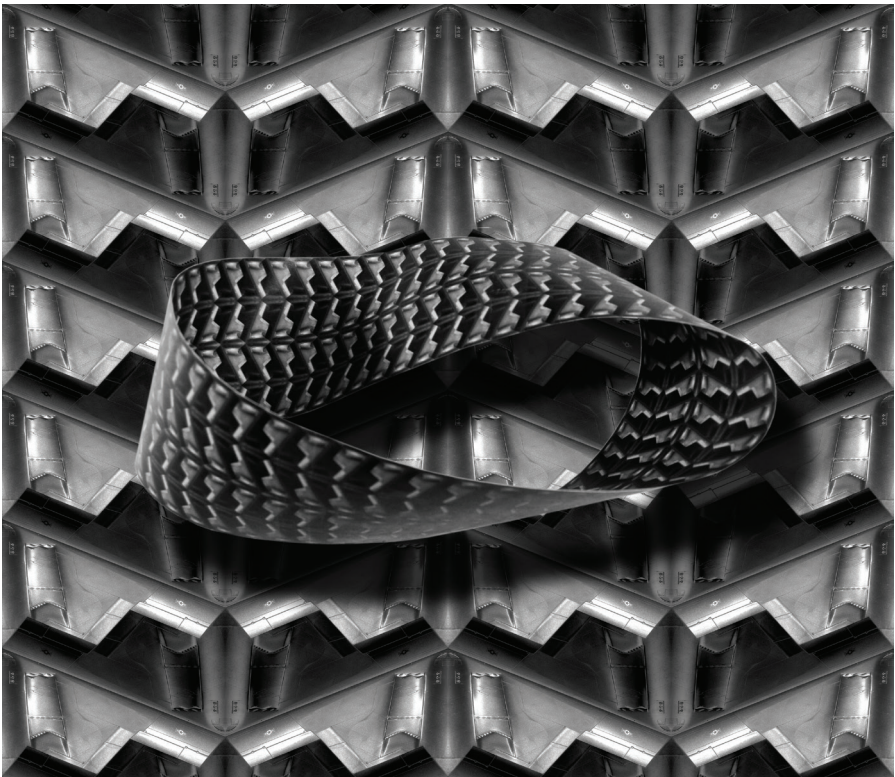
Beauty's in the Eye of the Beheld



Western-ization



Infinite Jetst



Hummingbird



Petals Lost



Civil Disobedience



En Corps



Hair-raising



Refuge



Beyond Measure





FICTION

Mother Scarecrow is My Mother

An Autumn day full of plums. The crows are a frantic carousel riding the horizon. There is nothing on my mind, except maybe the gnats that are coming to nibble my flesh. The sky is a pumpkin wearing a burgundy robe and the clouds are grim masks. I wish I wasn't so alone with all this beauty. I wish the crows would have left behind some of their feathers today so I could've put them in my hair and felt fascinating.

But they apologize for it with resonant, serene cries as I approach mother scarecrow. I am only out here to change her blouse and paint her sticks. Kneeling, I chew at the veins in my wrist and dab my fingers into the wet wound. "Just for you, mama." I whisper as I paint her arms. "My own blood, my own paint. I'd give you my heart too if there was one to give." A breeze surprises her posture and makes her body creak. Her hay makes an eerie noise, and her stony eyes throb my heart with an ugly thrill.

I remove her lavender blouse and dress her in a mustard one with azure flowers on it. The crows chase the old blouse as I toss it high into the air. I am jealous of the colorful leaves that cling to the distance behind my mother. Why can't I be that lovely, that dramatic in appearance? Why must I have black, unkempt hair and malevolent blue eyes? "Ah." I sigh, my body sagging towards the ground. "So hideous. I need you, mother. You shouldn't have sliced your arteries. You shouldn't have bled all over me and left me to mourn the scarecrow I have made out of your remains." I look up. Something has touched my face. Mother is stroking my cheek bone and rubbing my eye lashes. But she is breaking. Her tree limb arms are chipping as they admire my face, and there is a miserable moaning coming from her button mouth.

I rise, frantic, desperate. I wrap my arms around her and weep. "But tell me I have not made a monster of you!" I sadly whine. A crow screeches so loud that I fall backwards in alarm, and when I search to see what's the matter, I see a group of crows fighting over my mother's old lavender blouse. My mother abruptly slaps me, and I become so sensitive that I do not rise again to beg for her compassion. I lay in the cold, coarse grass and have visions of my mother the night she set her blood free. Maybe I shouldn't have changed her blouse I think. Maybe I should have buried her beneath a tree.

Story Telling

Okay, so I met Alison at an AA meeting. We went out a few times for coffee, for ice cream. She was doing pretty well then, so she invited me over for dinner to meet her mother, Jacqui.

What to say about Jacqui? She was overwhelming, loud, funny, talked about herself non-stop. Alison told me she was bipolar. Up or down, on or off. Jacqui was having a manic episode while we were having jerk chicken.

Then Alison started drinking again. She hit the bottle, hit the bars and hit the road. No one knew where she was. Jacqui started calling me three and four times a day, weeping, sobbing, said she couldn't leave the house, the phone, couldn't get dressed, couldn't bathe herself. A wicked bad depressive episode obviously.

It was fall, October. We were having a stretch of days as crisp as Macintosh apples. Trees were a crazy quilt of color.

I stop telling my story and look up at my friend Patrick to see if he is following it. We are drinking espresso at my kitchen table.

Patrick says, "We are all the stories we tell."

"Even the false stories?"

"Yes, even the false ones." He sips and nods, so I continue.

As I said, fall. Beautiful cerulean skies. I think about Jacqui, depressed and housebound. Granted, I do not know her well at all, but I decide to call her up, suggest an outing. In AA you learn how to care for others in trouble. So I call her and invite her to go paddleboating with me on Dow Lake, something I had wanted to do for a while. I remembered going paddleboating with my dad on Jackson Lake at the Tetons, and it was a joyous memory, the boat one even I could handle, more like riding a bike than piloting a boat.

That Saturday I drive out to the lake. I have my little Yorkie with me, and he is wearing his life jacket. It is a perfect day, sunny, chilly, clear. I scan the park and see Jacqui approaching.

Okay, Jacqui is a big girl, maybe three hundred pounds. And she is dressed as if we are about to go explore the Amazon, a camouflage jacket, outback hat, a duffle slung over her back. But she is smiling. Better manic than depressive for boating.

It rained the night before, so the attendant is bailing our boat. Jacqui is on some talking jag that I cannot follow about photography and boating gear. She is still ranting when the attendant summons her to board and she steps right into the drink.

The clumsiness is not her fault. We are both recovering from leg injuries. Jacqui has broken her ankle three times in three years. I lost the use of my left leg for four months; no one can tell me why.

Jacqui tries again, and this time pitches headlong into the boat. I toss her gear on the console, and board with Little Dog, and the attendant launches us.

Jacqui starts unpacking her gear. She has *provisions* for us – jerky, bottled water, hard biscuits, granola bars, energy drinks, and for Little Dog – biscuits, pepperoni. She also

unpacks flares, waders, flashlights, foul weather gear.

At the deepest part, Dow Lake is three feet deep. If we capsized, we could walk to the shore, but so be it.

Little Dog seems content, eyes closed, wind ruffling his fur. Good thing because I quickly realize that the weight imbalance has me working double-time. I push the pedals hard, but we keep circling. Jacqui's approach to pedaling seems laid back, even lackadaisical. I wanted a workout to strengthen my leg, but this may prove more than I can handle.

And all the while she has a monologue going, commentary on the lake snakes, the weather, other boaters, some passing fishermen who are swilling beer and laughing as they pass us, pointing. That, she misses.

She talks and I grind away at the pedals, trying to get us underway and out of the loop. Her stories – something about an Evangelical sister who torments her for being a fallen woman, another about a neighbor who left her a half-eaten cake when she was convalescing, another about a bad brake job on her vintage Caddie. The stories went on and on, and I couldn't find the connective thread. Sometimes I worry that I do not live in the narrative of the external world.

Patrick rises and pours himself another espresso.

He says, "But we have inner lives."

"That only lasts for a while," I say.

He rubs his head, laughing and rejoins me.

This is when Jacqui decides that the paddleboat is a photo op. She plops down on a forward gunwale, portside and starts snapping at Little Dog and me. Of course this really throws the boat balance off and I am huffing and pedaling and chuffing, and we are taking on water. The boat is supposed to be self-bailing, but the water is coming in too fast. I grope around for a bailer, no go. I empty one of the emergency bottles of water and squeeze it trying to siphon up some of the water.

Squeeze, pour, squeeze, pour.

Finally I tell Jacqui that she has to get back in her seat where she merrily begins attacking the emergency food supplies, smacking down three health food bars, three dry biscuits, a turkey jerky, and two bottle of water.

After an hour my leg and I have had enough, so I aim for the landing. Jacqui is disappointed, but I explain that I cannot keep up the pace alone.

Of course, she is impulsive. Her theme song could be, *This Manic Moment*. As we approach, she tries to jump for the dock, knocking her gear and Little Dog overboard. Panicky, he dogpaddles around the boat until I make a good swipe and fish him out. I do not care about her gear. That is her look-out. Once on the dock, she lies on her stomach, loon laughing, and trying to lasso it, and yelling, "Yee haw."

Patrick is laughing sympathetically.

A long afternoon, funny in the re-telling, not so funny in the living of it.

Before we part, Jacqui says to me, "I do not know where Alison is, but I do not care if she comes home or not."

I do not know how to feel about that. After all, I do not know what they went through together, a bipolar mom, an alcoholic daughter. But on the drive home, wet Little Dog

in my lap, I cry. I realize that I won't call Jacqui again, and I am thinking about Alison – drunk, lost in herself and outside of herself, in danger perhaps, in bad company, trying to find a story-line, trying to find her way home. We are all just trying to find our way home.

I cry a little now in the re-telling.

I say, "I worry sometimes that people are not entirely real to me. I mean, they are but they aren't."

Patrick takes my hand, says "It's okay," then, "Overweight manic-depressive borderline stranger, her gear, and a small dog in a boat. Don't you see?"

I look up. I don't see.

"That's how you know that you are a fiction writer. You got in the boat. We always get in the boat."

Waiting, I guess, to see how things turn out.

Killer Instinct

How I hated those shoes. They were long, narrow, black, ugly and a size too big so that I could grow into them. My feet slid around, making running difficult. And when you're an eight-year old boy you're running all the time. It was my father's idea that I wear those shoes—even though they were just supposed to be my church shoes—to school. Shoes were expensive, my father said. He wanted for once to get his money's worth. "But what about gym?" my mother said. "He has gym most days." My mother was on my side. But this was my father she was dealing with. He gave my mother the look that said there was no argument. In fact, there was never an argument about anything, not with my father. He looked down at me. "You're wearing those shoes to school," he said.

We were in my room. On my bed our dog Molly lay, watching us. She was a seventy-five pound Doberman Pinscher my father bought from a breeder the year before. She waited for his command. He gave it. "Come," he said. Molly jumped off the bed and followed my father down the hall. My mother left too, without so much as a sympathetic look in my direction. I was all alone.

I dejectedly sat down on my chair, put my folded arms on top of my desk and my face on the back of my hands. My mind swam in the injustice of my father's order. I couldn't quite put it all together how wrong it was. I just knew that his command was over the top unfair. I could see nothing but suffering ahead for me as I would be the only boy in the whole school not wearing sneakers. I could already see the faces the kids were going to make at me. Their laughter entered my ears louder than I could bear.

Tears welled in my eyes and snot was streaming out of my nose by the time I heard the barking coming from down the hall. I didn't get up though until I heard my father's yelling. I wiped my face on my sleeve and cautiously made my way down the hall, through the kitchen, to the breezeway. There my father stood, dressed in several old jackets. He yelled at Molly. "Attack!" he said. "Attack, you lousy mutt! *Come on.*" He held out his arm inches from her bared teeth.

My father saw me in the doorway. "I'm testing her killer instinct," he said. "That's why I wanted a Doberman. You never know when we might need her to go after someone. Watch this," he said, stepping towards Molly. He clubbed her on the snout with his forearm. I flinched and stepped back as Molly jumped at my father, grabbed onto his arm and wouldn't let go. "That's it, that's it, dumb dog," my father said, swinging her, on his arm, to the side. With his other hand he reached for Molly's leash on the end table. With it he whipped Molly's back. "Let go, let go," he said. I flinched again and turned my body to the side, trying somehow to protect myself from what I saw. Only once before had I seen my father whip Molly. That was the time she ran away and didn't come back until night. Molly shook in the corner of the garage as my father whipped her with the leash, my father saying over and over, "Damn dog, damn dog!"

Molly finally let go of my father's arm. She now tried to bite at the leash as my father brought it down on her. "Let's see how tough you are," he said. "Come at me, dumb dog. Come on." Molly growled through her big, sharp teeth as if she wanted to kill my father. I'd never seen her like that. I got scared and started backing up into the kitchen. My father whipped Molly again, and again he thrust his arm in front of her face. She grabbed

it and hung on. She looked like she wanted to rip his arm off.

I kept backing up. I backed right into the kitchen table. I jumped, turned around, and took off down the hall. At the end of the hall, my mother stuck her head out of her bedroom door. She had the same look on her face as those nights she came out of the bathroom after groaning and groaning for hours on end and after my father banged on the door and told her to stop it, get out of there, he had to take a piss. When she came out I always met her in the hall and asked if she was sick. She always said, no, she wasn't sick. She was fine. But she never looked it.

This time she asked me, "Is it over?" I shook my head. She went back inside her room. She closed her door and I closed mine.

Monday morning my father glanced down at my feet as I trudged into the kitchen with my head hung low, my book bag in my hand. He sipped his coffee. I sat down across from him and ate my Frosted Flakes. My mother washed dishes at the sink. Molly lay on the floor at my father's feet. No one said anything. We rarely did.

I finished, drank the left over milk in my bowl, got up and gave my bowl and spoon to my mother. She kissed me on the cheek and told me to have a good day. I turned with my book bag towards the breezeway.

"Come here," my father said.

I looked at him. What did I do wrong now, I thought to myself.

"Let me see in your bag," he said.

I opened it up. He looked in. "Your sneakers in your bedroom?" he said.

I nodded.

"They better be," he said.

Halfway to the bus stop I could see Johnny, Curtis and Patricia already up there. They were staring at my feet as I walked to them. Since they were younger than me and wanted me to like them they didn't say anything about my shoes. In fact, they didn't speak at all. They could see I wasn't in the mood to talk. We all just stood there waiting for the bus to come, looking up the road, up at the sky. I just knew they knew what I was going through. They knew how I felt.

It wasn't that way with Brian Macy though. He was the oldest of us. He was in the fifth grade. He lived at the other end of the street with his mother, who always seemed to be out, leaving Brian alone in his house. At some point we'd all been to Brian's but never went back. The time I went over he soaked a tennis ball with gasoline in his garage, lit it with a match, then kicked it at me. I ran out of there with my shoelace on fire.

Brian was always the last one to the bus stop, which usually didn't give him time to say much to us. When he did talk, he bragged about his beer can collection or how good he was at jumping ramps on his bike. We gave him space, let him go on and never challenged him. He scared us.

The day I first wore my shoes, though, Brian came at me before I knew what was happening. He walked right up to me, stepped on my feet and said, "Look at this idiot." Then he stomped on them. "You look stupid," he said.

I winced and moved away from him. His sudden and furious assault on me made me want to cry. I did my best to hold it in. I didn't want to cry in front of my friends.

But Brian didn't stop. "Those are the stupidest things I've ever seen," he said. He stomped on my feet even harder. He turned to Johnny and Curtis. "Did you guys see these things?" They tried to smile as they looked away. No one was going to stick up for

me. I was on my own.

I couldn't hold it in any longer. My tears burst out. The shoes, Brian, my friends looking away—it was all too much. The tears poured, my chest heaved. “Poor little baby,” Brian said. “Is poor baby crying? What a shame.”

I turned and ran. I ran as fast as my shoes would let me, which wasn't fast enough to outrun Brian's laughing. I ran right into the house, through the breezeway, past my mother and father in the kitchen, down the hall, to my room, where I dove onto my bed and cried into my pillow.

Soon my mother came in, rubbing my back and asking me what was wrong. I wasn't easy to understand but I got it out.

“What's his problem?” my father said, coming into my room.

“Brian Macy picked on him because of the shoes,” my mother said.

“Macy,” my father said to himself. “That kid's a punk.”

To my mother, my father said, “You drive him to school. I got to get going. Make sure he keeps his shoes on.”

To me, he said, “Stop that crying.”

I did stop crying but that didn't mean I lost my sad face. I wore it to school, where my friends gathered around and asked what was wrong. I told them about my father making me wear these disgusting church shoes. They looked down at them and nodded. Getting my unhappiness out of the way seemed to blunt any criticism from the kids in my class. They didn't mention anything about the shoes, and, as the day wore on, I almost forgot I was wearing them. Almost.

On the walk home from the bus stop I waited for more from Brian. Nothing happened. He didn't seem to care anymore. He was going on and on to Johnny and Curtis about how he'd trained his pet rat to turn on the TV.

When I got home, however, it was a relief to finally take those shoes off, throw them under the bed, and put my sneakers on.

*

The next morning I crawled on the floor, sticking my arm under my bed to get my shoes. I looked at them and sighed before putting them on. I knew that nothing could ever happen that could make me not hate those shoes.

In the kitchen my father wasn't at the table sipping his coffee as usual. Molly wasn't there either. I looked around. I didn't see or hear them anywhere. As always my mother was at the sink as I sat down to eat my Frosted Flakes. When I finished I gave her my bowl and spoon. She kissed me on the cheek, told me to have a good day, and, with my book bag in hand, I headed to the breezeway. There stood my father looking out the window. Molly was on the leash, sitting beside him. I stopped and stared at my father's back. Without turning around to look at me, he said, “Get going.”

I slowly opened the door, stepped out and walked to the bus stop. At the bus stop Patricia shook her head as Johnny and Curtis made fart noises with their armpits. I joined in, ripping off some really good ones. As usual Brian was last to the stop. We could see him coming up the road. He was passing my house when all of a sudden my father and Molly came out the front door. We stopped with the fart noises and watched my father and Molly walk ten feet or so behind Brian. Molly pulled as she always did when my father took her for a walk. Usually my father put the choker collar on her so that its pointed steel tips dug into her neck to discourage her from pulling. It never worked. Molly would still pull, making loud choking noises. At some point my father would yank

hard on the leash and say, “Dumb dog, you deserve to choke to death.”

On this morning, my father let Molly pull him along. Behind Brian, she made her loud choking noises. She gasped for breath, sounding as if she wanted to get at Brian bad. He peeked behind him and then started to walk faster. When Brian got to the bus stop he stood several feet behind us, using the four of us as a buffer.

My father and Molly reached the bus stop and stood in front of us. Molly started barking and lunging in Brian’s direction. We scurried out of the way—Johnny, Curtis and Patricia to the right, and me to the left—opening an unobstructed path to Brian. My father held Molly back as she continued to jump towards Brian. Brian quickly ducked behind the telephone pole and hid there. He seemed to know why my father was there.

And if he didn’t, my father was about to tell him. “Brian,” he said, “what’s this I hear you’re picking on my kid? You think you’re tough, huh? You think cause you’re the biggest you can pick on anyone you want, huh? Well, come on, tough boy. You’re not the biggest one today. Let’s see how tough you really are. Come on. Come out from behind that pole. What’s wrong? Are you afraid of a little dog?”

I looked over at Johnny, Curtis and Patricia. They were backing away from my father, their eyes fixed on him. They looked scared. A queasy feeling began to form in my stomach.

My father inched closer to the telephone pole, Molly pulling him forward as she strained to get at Brian, her heavy breathing sounding more threatening. “Come on, Brian, admit it,” my father said. “You’re nothing but a little, rotten punk. You know it and I know it. Your old man left you because he couldn’t stand you. And your mother never comes home because she can’t look at you. You’re just a no good piece of shit.”

Molly yanked my father forward, almost causing him to lose his balance. Only a foot away from the pole, Molly started with her deep, low growl. On the other side of the pole Brian loudly sobbed, which seemed to antagonize Molly. She jumped up on her hind legs in an all-out attempt to get at Brian.

Just then Brian spun around the other side of the pole, taking off down the street. Molly barked as Brian burned sneaker rubber.

I watched Brian all the way to his house. I wanted to be inside with him, hiding from my father. I would have gladly let Brian take it out on me. “Punch me anywhere you need to,” I would have said. “I know how you feel.”

What happened next would never be mentioned by us children who were there that day. My father let out a laugh so loud and so full of pride that it instantly caused the four of us—Johnny, Curtis, Patricia and me—to spontaneously bawl at the top of our lungs. We really let it out. Every person within a half mile must have heard us.

My father either didn’t care about our crying or he misunderstood it. He said, “He’ll never bother any of you again. You’re all safe now from the big, bad bully.” With that he turned away and started walking down the street.

I struggled through my tears to watch my father stride onto our driveway, up our front step and into our house. How alone I felt at that moment even with my friends close by. Were they still my friends? *Could* they still be my friends?

Behind me I heard the bus approaching. But at that moment I wasn’t able to turn around to look at it. A giant glob of snot formed on the tip of my nose and proved too heavy to hold there. Its heft pulled it down past my throat, my chest, my legs, onto the tip of my left shoe,

Didn't Say No – Excerpt from a novel

The brass player in a band he played with had a trumpet-playing friend out in the Imperial Valley, the fucking pointless desert, in El Centro, with a five-piece jazz combo. A jazz combo out there with all those *mariachis*. The guy's sax player was quitting and moving. Probably moving and therefore quitting. It was a difficult place to decide to continue living. Cal started filling in at the jazz combo's gigs, driving two hours each way for a \$75 gig. But the trumpet player in El Centro also owned a music store. Offered Cal a job there, so he could stay, stop the driving. Plus the store's instrument technician was a retiring band teacher, would stay another year and teach Cal basic wind instrument repair. It could be a life.

In 1983 he'd been full time in the Imperial Valley for almost two years. And not alone. The woman he'd brought with him had two kids. One, mercifully, a boy in high school, a year remaining, then the army. The girl turning 11. Sixth grade. Growing breasts. Make-up and her own phone were scheduled for next year, according to the woman, her plans for the \$200 in monthly child support.

The woman with the kids was someone who'd just started hanging around at his gigs in San Diego, the last six months before he made the move. She was a friend of a friend of the band's brother-sister singers. Started hanging around *him*. Made it easy. Or better put, he just didn't say no.

The landlord would not buy new carpet, claimed he'd had it cleaned when the last renter moved out. Now two-years-plus into living there, with Trinity's and Angel's friends in and out every day (and night), there was no way to prove it wasn't likely the truth. Cal checked the cost to replace the carpet himself. Too much, his business too new, his intake from the two jobs barely now covering rent, bills and food. He checked commercial carpet cleaning costs and told Virginia they could start saving to do that. Virginia responded that she was looking into getting a job at the Christian store on Main Street, in the storefront right beside the music store.

"Christian store?" he said, smiling, "What, do people go there when their pet lions get hungry?"

Virginia, squinted a little, looking back at him. "What?"

"Never mind." He took a bite of oatmeal. It was 5:30 a.m., the kids both still in bed before school. He usually got to his repair shop by six to work 4 hours before the music store opened. Virginia made oatmeal in a double-boiler, topped it with a pat of butter and brown sugar. It was really good, but he doesn't remember if oatmeal every day was his idea or hers. "What makes you think they'll hire you, what qualifications do you have for a *Christian* store?"

"I've been talking to her, I go down there a lot."

"Why? What are you buying there?"

"Nothing, mister skintight."

Cal swallowed, drank some juice, then said, "I think that designation is for those clothes you've been buying Trinity."

"Big words don't make you smarter." She scraped the ring of remaining oatmeal from

the pot into the trash. The kids never ate oatmeal, thus the six or seven boxes of sweet cereal in the pantry. “Okay, Babes, I just miss you and want to see you, you’re at the shop and music store so long every day.”

“How are you seeing me from the Christian store?”

“I usually see you in there when I walk past.” She was filling the sink with soapy water to wash the one pot. “But sometimes I don’t see you. Where do you go?”

“I don’t know, back into the shop, to the restroom, the guitar wall, checking sheet music.” He got up to fill his thermos with coffee. The coffee pot was beside the sink, and his wallet and keys sat with the junk tray on the ledge of the pass-through window where a person washing dishes could watch the TV in the living room. The TV was on now, the sound down to almost nothing, people sitting around a coffee table with matching coffee mugs.

She said, “Who do you talk to on the phone so much?”

“Customers. Stores have phones so customers can call and ask if you have something.”

“I know *that*. I’ve worked in *stores*.” The pot clanked into the dish drainer, and the drain started sucking the hot water out of the sink. “If I work in the Christian store, we could have lunch every day.”

When he finished fastening the two lids on his thermos, put his wallet into his pocket, hooked his wad of keys to his belt loop, picked up the sack lunch she’d made for him, and then looked at her, he realized he hadn’t really seen her this morning. She wasn’t dressed yet, but had leg warmers over sweat pants. It was probably already 80 degrees. “Are you cold?” he asked.

“I have to stay in shape.”

His mouth opened, then shut. Best not to ask.

As Cal expected, the Christian store job never happened, but Virginia joined the church the Christian store owner went to.

Fridays the older kid, Angel, started appearing in the kitchen even before Cal came in for his oatmeal. Then he went back to bed for an hour. Friday afternoon was when he would take the bus to Las Vegas to visit his dad. But it took until Cal’s wallet was left flopped open after Angel went back to his bedroom (likely Cal coming down the hall a little earlier than usual) for Cal to realize he never had much cash left if he had to buy something, Friday afternoon or Saturday.

He mentioned this to Virginia. She said, “No, my Angel doesn’t steal, he’s not an animal.”

Cal said he was going to start keeping his wallet locked in the file cabinet but it was going to be a pain in the ass to go lock it up every time he got home and then unlock it every morning before he left. Virginia said, “Angel needed his allowance. I told him to get it.”

“Doesn’t Merle pay his allowance when he’s there — his child support?”

“Maybe it’s not enough. Maybe Merle came up short this week.”

“Why are you covering for him, he needs to be taught—”

“I’m his mother, you don’t know anything about raising kids.” Her wooden spoon broke in half when she slammed it on the counter.

No more than one or two weeks later, one morning just after the clock radio-alarm came onto the oldies station at 5 a.m., Virginia fell out of bed instead of getting up. Then, still curled on the floor, she vomited. She couldn’t stand up straight to get from the floor to the car. Cal pulled on his t-shirt and jeans, stepped into his tennis shoes, threw the blanket

over her and half carried her out the door, then had to leave her sitting on the brick planter to go back into the house to unlock his wallet and get his keys. Down the hall in the bedroom, the clock radio was playing “Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain.”

Hours later, in the waiting room, a doctor came to sit beside Cal and let him know that Virginia had an ectopic pregnancy and they would have to remove one of her ovaries, as well as the embryo. He knew how hard this was, the doctor said, but ectopic pregnancies were life-threatening and suddenly turn what should be a happy, hopeful time of discovering there was a new baby coming into a sad time of loss that Virginia would need help and support to recover from. And Cal too, the doctor said, would feel it.

Prior to going to the shop on Saturdays, Cal mowed and trimmed the yard before 7 a.m. He would do it even earlier, but running a mower and edger earlier than 6 seemed rude. (No one having thumping parties with their stereo speakers outdoors seemed to worry about being rude on Friday and Saturday nights.) By the time he swept the sidewalk, driveway and front porch, it was over 80, maybe even nearing 90. He'd been finding cigarette butts on the front porch the last few weeks. Virginia opened the front door and asked through the security screen if he would like a fried egg sandwich and coffee. The kids were still in bed, the air conditioner already on. A fan blowing from the pass-through ledge across the kitchen made the egg sandwich cold by the time it was in front of him at the table, but it was still good, the egg crackly brown at the edges, cheese melted over the top, the toast light brown, not too hard.

“Trin and me'll be coming downtown to get some shoes for her. Maybe we can meet you at the store and get lunch?”

“She needs shoes already?”

“There's a new style of high-top tennies. I might get me a pair too and start jogging again.” She wiped the congealed bacon grease from the pan with a wad of paper towels.

“Did her check come?”

“Money money money, it's all you think about.” Virginia whirled back to the sink. The fry pan clanked against the already-chipped enamel.

“Someone has to.”

“How about think about me, *my* needs for a change?”

“Okay, what do you need, we'll go later ... together.”

“Some needs are ... okay, how about when are you going to make me be an honest woman?”

The mouthful he chewed, as good as it tasted, was cold fried egg. “It's up to me to help you be honest? What happened to your new church—”

“It's not about them, but yes, since you asked, they do agree.”

“Okay.” He tore off two more bites before chewing. Through a full mouth, “What is their agreement?”

“We're living together like a man and a woman.”

“You mean one of us is pretending?” He wished he hadn't said that. He stuffed the last big piece of egg sandwich into his mouth before he'd swallowed the last two bites, stood with his coffee.

“Are you really this dense?” She slapped the counter with a towel. He looked, but she'd evidently been killing a fly.

“Well, apparently I don't know what we're talking about. Maybe you can catch me up to speed later.”

"Later, always *later*. You need to make me out to be an honest woman."

"Why don't you tell me what you want?"

"We should be *married*."

He didn't say anything, watching another fly creep toward a grease spot on the stove, then pause to rub its hands together.

"It takes two to say I do. Think about it, Cal, you have a job, I keep the home and raise the kids, it's like serendipity."

"It is?" He retrieved his ballcap from the table beside his plate, put it back on. But his keys were across the kitchen on the pass-through ledge, and his wallet locked in the file cabinet. "So if you had a job, it would be a different story?"

"You're purposely twisting everything upside the head." With a butter knife she tapped on the counter, like a rim shot emphasizing every downbeat: "I'm sleeping in your bed. You should take me there to be your wife."

He put his hand on her shoulder as he went behind her to get his keys. "We're doing okay, let's just keep it this way."

Six months later, just when the short months of mild winter temperatures were climbing back into the spring 90's, the wedding ceremony took place in the backyard, under a chicken wire canopy covered with tissue-paper carnations. Trinity wore a miniskirt and midriff off-the-shoulder top. Angel wore stonewashed jeans and a t-shirt with a suit coat. Cal asked him if he'd found the coat in the hall closet where some of his old clothes had been moved, but Angel said, "Dude, no, I don't do handed-downs." Angel brought the stereo speakers outside and spent a week making mix tapes for continuous music. He asked Cal what he wanted to contribute to the playlist, but, besides the fact that Dexter, Pharoah or Coltrane should never just be mood music, Cal couldn't imagine them in the vibe for *this*.

Virginia wore white. At least not down to the floor, full, swooshy or trailing. But definitely lacey. Cal had asked, when she showed it to him, "White? What's that all about? You've been married before."

"I *feel* like it's my first time."

"Then that flower girl and best man you've got lined up were immaculate conception."

"At least they're supporting me."

"Okay, maybe they can take over with the rent and electricity."

"Don't be a dufus, it's my *wedding*."

He'd let her set the date when she'd told him she was pregnant again, in January. He wasn't sure how it would have happened, with how seldom he relented and how careful he was when he did. He knew enough to know it *could*. But in February, after the invitations had gone out and the caterer paid half (more than wiping out the carpet-cleaning savings), she said it had been a false alarm. The next one, over the summer, wasn't, but was another ectopic, and, now being married, the hospital bill put him into a deeper hole than the wedding had already hollowed out.

Lesson Plan

Acknowledgements to Barthelme's "The School"

Eliza tapped on the aquarium glass with her pen. She scowled at the still-alive salamander. Conjured bad thoughts about him. Considered withholding crickets. He didn't look any worse, or even sick at all—whatever *that* would look like. Nor did the bullfrog, or the gerbils or the turtle. Not even that stupid goldfish. This was unheard of, these small animals and their ridiculous longevity, and frankly, the timing was not good. Some tiny thing needed to keel over and soon, or else Eliza would have to give a Big Talk, and she just wasn't up to it. Not this week.

In a perfect world, the dead thing would be furry and cute, four-legged and named after someone's grandmother. The chicken wouldn't do, not with those creepy claws, nor would the silkworm pupas. They weren't really even pets. She never should have let the class name them. But that salamander, Mr. Magoo. Now, *he* was a contender. The kids seemed to like him a lot, while Eliza did not. Not one bit. He had the sticking-out eyes of a criminal: dark and never blinking. She suspected that lizards could live as long as humans. Wasn't that one of the factoids that little boys threw at her, year after year? Maybe that was for turtles. This had to be some kind of a record.

Maybe she could find an already-dead pet, a white mouse or some such, like on Craig's List or from a lab. Several of the animals were actually looking healthier, as if her classroom was Canyon Ranch. Their vigor was like a curse.

"You are going to have to talk to the a.m. kindergarteners about death," Ruth, the principal, told Eliza. "And soon." And with that Ruth squished away in her weird round-bottomed sneakers, slurping on the green swampy drink in the Ball jar that she marched around with every morning. Ruth was some sort of a professional drudge.

Eliza decided to show the kids *The Lion King* as a warm-up. She wondered if it might be too abstract for five-year-olds, but once they started bawling she knew she'd done the right thing. "Look guys, it's for your own good," she had said when she plopped the kids down on their hypoallergenic nap cushions. "Believe me, it's better this way."

Of course some parents complained, but they always did. They were so sure their little nippers were simultaneously naïve and possessing genius of an order never before known. Three parents had actually used the word *zeitgeist* when extrapolating on their spawn's exceptional understanding of the workings of the world in the "other things we should know about your child" section of the application packet. Actually, all the school wanted to know was whether they were truly potty-trained and if their little heads would puff up like blowfish if there were a peanut in the building.

Despite all the ancillary nonsense, the being-with-the-kids part of the job was excellent. Kindergarten is small window where children are mature enough to speak in full and comprehensible sentences, and yet still were enthusiastic about almost everything.

"Miss Eliza! Miss Eliza!" They ran towards her from all points in the schoolyard and huddled around her legs. Without her even asking, they lined up, eager to go into the classroom.

"We need to have a talk," she said, as she counted their little heads. "Has anyone lost,

umm, maybe their grandpa?”

“Lost?” said the overly-verbal Clarissa. “How could I lose my grandpa? I’m not in charge of him.” Ruth appeared at the window and made a slicing motion across her throat. Eliza wasn’t sure if this meant that she was fired or was supposed to kill something—that couldn’t be it—or maybe Ruth was choking (if only). Eliza made a point of having a student or two by her side at all times for the rest of the day. If Ruth came barreling towards her, Eliza would whisper, “little ears,” which would deflect Ruth. But she couldn’t forever use five-year-olds as her shield.

“What about we make voodoo dolls of the critters and then do bad deeds upon them?” Eliza’s boyfriend Revelry had said. “We can make them out of dryer lint, and put googley eyes on and then have them meet sorry endings. I’ll document it.”

This was the week Eliza had scheduled to break up with Revelry. She was fed up with his everything-must-be-a-performance approach to what she felt were legitimate problems. She promised herself that if he didn’t *on his own and without prompting* finally admit that Revelry was not his given name and just cut it out already, that he was out of here. “That’s not a name!” she screamed, but silently, in the mirror. She was getting too old for his I’m an artist, so I just can’t help myself antics.

When Revelry was awarded a genius grant on Tuesday of break-up week, Eliza lost her momentum. This grant, in the amount of \$10,000, would allow Revelry time to spend his days archiving a soundwork consisting of the purrs, scratches and other bodily sounds that their cat Sylvia made. Well, technically, Eliza’s cat. So, far be it from her to interrupt his artistic vision. She would have to let Revelry stay in order to give him continued access to his subject or medium or whatever poor Sylvia now was. She and the cat were art-hostages in their own home.

“I’ll give you a credit on the recording as a co-artist,” Revelry said. “Then you can write off Sylvia’s food and cat toys. Eliza wondered when he began to know or care anything about money, since it was *her* teenie apartment, *her* food, *her* cat, and she was pretty sure that Revelry wouldn’t know a tax return if it walked up and introduced itself. And while sometimes the only apparent difference between him and her students was height, she gave him credit for sticking it out in a career that seemed like a massive gamble. She herself had changed her major from art to early childhood education after one overwhelming term.

The Glorious Day School seemed, and in many respects was, an ideal teaching situation. But with each new round of applications, the parents became increasingly militant in their laid-backedness as well as their neurosis. They alternately wanted their child to slide down their own super-duper-colorful inner rainbow and in addition, be fully prepared for Princeton by the time they were eight. *Our Equinox will be attending school dressed as he prefers, in either surgical scrubs or with pants on his head. He will only eat foods presented in clusters whose units are prime numbers. And he has written a sonata about Pangaea.* Or some such nonsense. In truth, the kids were precisely unremarkable, each and every year. And that’s what made them perfect.

And usually, she could count on one or most of the classroom pets to come to an untimely and utterly random demise. Then everyone gets to learn their lesson about death and they can move onto hot lava. But these animals were proving to be problematic in their extreme health.

“We’ve never gone four months—maybe not even two—without some animal or

another turning into a rock overnight,” Brett, the other, far more cuddly Kinder teacher said. “I usually check all of the aquariums before the kids get in.” He wore those shoes that have toes, but Eliza liked him anyhow. “You know,” he said, waving the recess flag over his head, “this might be a record. Six months and no corpses.”

“Yeah, well now I’ve got Ruth all over my case,” Eliza said. “Death is on the lesson plan. Now, according to the little note she left me, I need to hurry it up.”

“Miss Eliza! Miss Eliza!” Several little boys came screeching towards her, one holding a bloody baby tooth in his palm.

“Trevor! Your first tooth!” She said this with a fervor that implied that no one had ever performed so worthy a deed as losing a tooth. “Congratulations!” She looked over the boy’s head to Brett, “Apparently this all has to go down soon, so if something turns up D-E-A-D in your room, will you please throw it into mine?”

“You got it, Sweetie,” said Brett.

When Eliza walked into her apartment that night, she was surprised (but not) to see a cluster of Revelry’s art-school buddies, all eight years out but still skinny and ironic in their muttchops and lack of socks. The living room (AKA: the only room) was a salad of wires and discarded shrink-wrap.

“Eliza. Honey! Not just microphones. We got ceiling-mounted cameras!” Revelry said, pointing upward, which pulled his Cookie Monster t-shirt way up past his bellybutton. “Awesome or what?” Eliza had always liked that little stripe of hair on his stomach. At the same time, she wished he’d stop dressing like a toddler. “We can stream everything. All Sylvia, all the time. We’ll be famous.”

“Know what? You just do whatever it is you’re doing,” Eliza said. “I’m going to go sit in the bathtub and weep.”

Once the drilling and hammering was over and the art-boys left, Revelry knocked on the bathroom door. “You okay?”

“I just don’t get what the crisis is. Dead animal emergency, says Ruth. Crazy crone. Can I just quit?”

“What about a decoy?” Revelry said. “I was at the pet store, you know, getting a little sumpin’-sumpin’ for Sylvia. Some of those toys look very authentic. So I got these.” He pulled from the paper bag five greyish-brown catnip mice, which did look like real mice, sort of. If you squinted.

“I guess if I wave one at the kids from a distance,” Eliza said. “Let Sylvia maul them up a bit.”

He threw two of the catnip mice out the open door to the living room and Sylvia performed a flying pounce-tackle-roll combo. “How excellent. I hope the camera got that,” Revelry said. “Hey want some company?” Rhetorical, as his pants had already hit the floor. Revelry had a particular fondness for bathtub sex, which was fine with Eliza, except oftentimes she wondered if she had fractured a kneecap on the enamel tub. After, they could still hear Sylvia thumping around in the living room with the mice.

The next day Eliza had a paper bag with two roughed-up cat toys ready to go. But it was Fire Drill Day and then it was time to go home. The next day was Music Day, stressful enough without the mice, with everyone wanting a turn on the drums. Then it was Friday, which meant a half-day and she didn’t want to enact her plan and then have the weekend wash it out of their jellylike minds.

“Nothing dead in my room,” Brett said, on the way out, “or I absolutely would have tossed it onto your desk.”

“Thanks for looking out for me,” Eliza said. “You know, I can’t but wonder if something else is going on. Why the urgency?” Ruth had stopped talking to Eliza.

“I’m thinking just wait. Something will drop soon.”

So things went on: the bags of mauled but unoffered toys, staring down the Kindergarten pets, the drunken bathtub sex. And the hostile post-its from Ruth, always unsigned. Such a freak show, that Ruth was. Maybe Eliza should just lower Sylvia into the gerbil tank: instant Pamplona!

Meanwhile, Revelry was getting a bit of traction on the videos, which one of his friends was streaming for him. The upgrade from simply audio seemed to be paying off. The guy would come by the apartment every now and then to adjust the sound or move a camera. Revelry’s actual work input seemed minimal. Sylvia took to her stardom as if she were born for it.

When a critic came to interview Revelry, he seemed more interested in Eliza than in The Sylvia Project. He didn’t even want to meet the cat. “I don’t much like animals,” the reviewer said in a faux-British accent.

“Why did he keep calling me Sylvia?” Eliza said after he’d left.

“I don’t know. It was like I wasn’t even here, the way he kept staring at you,” Revelry said.

“Well I for one thought he was a creeper.”

Revelry opened the fridge and pulled out a bottle of wine. “Tub?”

“Sure, why not,” Eliza said, rubbing the sides of her kneecaps. Revelry tossed a catnip toy into the middle of the room and Sylvia launched herself from the couch.

So this is my weird little life, thought Eliza. At least now they could afford classier wine.

In the morning, as usual, Revelry slept while Eliza raced around trying to piece together a teacherly outfit from the piles of clothes she’d left mouldering on the floor. Her phone rang every couple of minutes, but she ignored it for as long as she could stand it. When Brett called for the seventh time, she answered. “I sure hope you’re calling about something dead.”

“You may want to check out The Weekly’s art section,” Brett said. “Or not.”

“Is Revelry reviewed?”

“Sort of. And remember, I’m only the messenger,” Brett said.

“Stop it,” Eliza said. “Give.”

“Apparently the cat movie is getting a lot of internet play. One could say a bit much, if one was a private sort of a person. Who has a job where they are in charge of, say, impressionable youths,” he said. “And frankly, I would not have pegged you for a howler.”

“Howler?” Eliza knew nothing good could come of whatever he was going on about.

“Call me if you need a drink,” Brett said, “I’ve got a carton of Chardonnay here with your name on it.”

Eliza tiptoed into her classroom, checked for casualties. She felt pretty sure that Ruth didn’t have the wherewithal to go online and watch the Revelry’s film with the horrid, HORRID soundtrack of Revelry and herself in the background. She really was a screamer. Who’d have guessed? Not even Eliza herself. Of course she’d agreed to have her name put on the project along with Revelry’s. And of course that evil interviewer had linked his story to the site and of course, she’d mentioned her job, specifically naming The Glorious Day School in the interview.

When the first parent came to drop off their spawn and wouldn’t leave, Eliza knew it

was all over: her job, maybe her teaching license, definitely her sense of decorum.irate mothers and fathers stood with their feet hips-width apart, their arms gripping their children's shoulders. Eliza wondered which of them had first found the video. And then for how long did they keep it to themselves as a private nugget of entertainment? She had done nothing that each and every one of them hadn't done, except for having a clueless boyfriend with numbskulls for friends.

She could hear Ruth squishing towards her. The doom about her was palpable and sadly, not about the critters.

When Eliza wrote out her letter of resignation, Ruth stood over her to make sure she did it right. Every thirty seconds or so, Eliza's phone vibrated and danced along her desktop. Another frantic text from Revelry. And the promises: No more art! No more technology! He'd replace their claw-footed tub with a tiny shower that very day! He meant well, her art-boy. Meanwhile, the pets ran around in their habitats, all cute, chewing and pooping, just like they'd always done.

Obsolete Weapons

How often has she wakened with just this sense of impending disaster, of needing to leave but not knowing how to go? This time leaving the bedroom, even for the garden, brings no relief. The pressure of ceiling on crown remains the same, leaving her just enough room to stand tall with head erect, but what about the next day?

On the staircase, in the hallway, rubbing the eyes. Something in them that will not go away--or missing.

Downstairs, on the way to the garden, where she goes when she wants to get away, she is not surprised not to find them. Have they left her behind?

Perhaps she's only wakened at the wrong time of day, an evening, spent a night, a day, in bed as years ago she did. But breakfast is over: it is time for a cleaning.

How do we know? By the absence of feeling, good or bad, in her stomach. And other parts? The sense of short time since rising. The knowledge of a sun out there, but lower than usual. Not yet, perhaps never to be, a ball on the horizon. Were she to look out a window, clouds would cover it.

Ceiling, twenty thousand, two thousand, two hundred, two. Visibility zero. But the ceiling makes no difference any more anyhow--not in modern flight or warfare. We do it with instruments, Father says.

With Father did you ever take in the factory?

Of course. There was a tour.

And did you know what they made there?

I was too young. And I just smelled, never tasted.

Well, it wasn't chocolate.

Wondering why she is so hungry she tries to recall what she ate just an hour ago. But what difference does minute or hour make? Her watch is upstairs, in her room on the chest where she left it.

Someone enters--Mother. Or was she already standing there, blending into the corner, her soft flesh fading, assuming any shape? Her apron still on, her hand grasps a large spoon that should be dirty. The hand is smudged with pancake batter.

What could one say about Mother--that she is a mother like any mother, with her apron, her spoon, her worried mouth, her question? We could not hear her speak to say, what could she want to say: Up at this hour, she said, why aren't you in bed?

What did Mother see outside through the kitchen cafe-curtained window over the sink that so upset her--a napkin, a dirty sheet, a flag?

How would Mother look with a pan turned over her head in that condition, still holding the spoon but having washed the sticky hand, would she be fit for a party?

But the evening's almost over. Whoever goes out goes out soon. We watch them go.

And wearing such clothes? Where's your bathrobe? In fact, where's your nightie? Perhaps underpants are confining, but surely some decency?

It would matter to Father--her state of mind and body had always mattered, he'd looked at her, he'd listened to her--but not in this present state of alarm. Father, standing in the center of the room, his head short inches away from the ceiling. We missed his obligatory entrance, or, with Mother or without her, he has been here all along.

He touches his hat, straightens his shoulders. The gestures should be--but are they ever?--familiar.

We're in it, he says. Up to our necks, he says.

He is wearing a tie, the wrong colored tie, but it was too dark in the closet to see what he was putting on. Under the circumstances he's in excellent shape. All the buttons shut tight on his uniform. Cardboard lunch tucked under his arm, comforting. From the In-flight Kitchen, not Mother--or is it the Open Mess?

She should be in bed asleep.

Don't worry, he reassures, the descent of the ceiling makes everything darker, but we anticipated as always, we prepared. Deployed ourselves with strategy.

Has he really grown these three inches and lost the belly of his age?

But our necks?

Mine's on the line, he says. Or on the dot. The smile of his knowledge. (At last, a prime target.) Or it will be when I go out the door. Yours will be protected, swathed, muffled below.

But isn't one ceiling enough?

Only for me, he says, and runs through the door before the roar of ceiling falling.

Her lids falling are unsupportably heavy, but she cannot lie down again, can only stumble through the house, bruising her toe on the stairs, her knee on the bannister, as she goes down. (No wonder she is unaware of her partial nakedness.)

Through the crack at the bottom of her eyes, she sees Mother holding the spoon about to stir.

Will Mother understand when she says--

This dream woke me in the night, she says.

Which dream?

I told you.

Even without being told, she'll find out soon enough where Father is. She falls into his waiting arms. The last tension of restraint abandoned, she sobs in his arms. Does he cry, too? Her head against his throat, she cannot see.

Can't she go with him? She cannot go with him.

Where I go, I go alone, he says. That's the way it's always been.

Washing her hands, Mother watches them. She has stopped asking a long time ago.

Father draws back, straightens his hat, shakes off the rough nails that catch on his sleeve. Despite his look of regret, his pallor, the nervous excitement of his eyes and hands, the feet in their waxed but unshined shoes, we cannot intuit his sentiments and sympathies. No predominant or unambiguous emotion claims his face.

Does his necktie feel too tight? He loosens it, but we can infer nothing from the gesture.

Where is he going precisely? Only he knows, if he knows.

There is always time for one last question, but this is the last time. What will I do? she asks.

What you want.

Within limitations.

Like all of us.

But some more than others.

Myself, for example.

But I can't go with you.

But you don't want to.

She would argue, but he wouldn't be convinced: May I go with you to a party, on a boat, on a bicycle, in the car, to a museum, to a park, on a vacation--or is that asking too much?

It's asking what everyone asks.

He extends his hand as if offering it to shake. Mother has disappeared.

What will you give me?

He laughs. The same old question, but notice she no longer says bring.

How about a gun?

To think he could be amused at a time like this. He isn't quite, but seldom have we seen him so nearly.

You'd want an obsolete weapon, he says. Be my guest. It won't do you any good, you know--against anyone else. But you can embrace it, cling to it, wrap yourself around it as if it were a tree or something else. If you do that, be careful, unload it first.

I'll be careful.

The closet is in the basement, but in these perilous times half its contents have been moved upstairs to a triangular cabinet in the corner that used to hold china. Father reaches for the handle, his hand mirrored two or three times in the diamond panes.

The cabinet just fits into the space between floor and ceiling. The door so long and narrow rattles as if all its forty panes are ready to fall out, louder than dice and harder than bones. So dark is the room one can scarcely see what's inside.

It's been in the family for years.

Longer than she has. Longer even than Mother?

No one really likes it.

Her tongue stretches out, moves around her mouth. She tastes the sweet syrup on her cheeks. Oh, what pancakes. She remembers now having had them for breakfast, however long ago, though now she feels empty with no prospect of relief. Did she ever really like them? Is there time left to find out?

Father is on his knees, the first time she's seen him in such a position, fumbling with some cases of scuffed black leather. He is just rearranging (even at this late hour), that is all, not really looking. The stars, the shells, the bars, the ribbons--not for her to see, and he is allowed them only once a decade.

She imagines he is weeping, but she knows one can never read Father's face from his back, or his feelings from his face.

He stands up, straighter than before, tie, hat, everything in place, ready to go. Reaching past muskets and carbines--she would want something longer--for an old thirty ought six.

It's all yours, he says. Their arms stretch toward each other, hands grasp the barrel but do not touch.

He bends again, comes up with a box of cartridges.

Don't spend them all in one place, he says.

The door rattles for the last time as he shuts it. He touches the key in the lock. It doesn't matter.

Do you know how to use it?

Did he teach her once upon a time.

He looks once more at the cabinet in the corner. Merely a game, one of the few remaining, but so much pleasure. She remembers rabbit blood on the carpet (what's black

and white and red all over--a blood-stained newspaper), the limp-feathered birds she turned her head from and later enjoyed. The hoarse horn, the dog panting. A gun for each, lots of guns to go around. How long ago was it--five years, ten, fifteen--that she knelt after Brother at the wooden bench and sighted down the barrel. Her shoulder shook after she pulled the trigger. No more, thanks. Later at rows of picnic tables they ate turkey and ribs.

Her last glimpse of him, cardboard lunch under his arm, tie lifting three inches off his chest, face looking away from the house, away from the door toward wherever he goes, helpless, unarmed. His hand lingers a moment on the doorknob, but his feet do not hesitate or his breath quicken.

Not knowing how to say it, he has not said it. Had he heard them listening for it? (Some of us know better.)

How does the house feel without him? Empty.

How do their eyes look as he walks away? Cheated.

Defenseless? They don't think about that anymore.

Now that he's left, she's aware of her nakedness under the bathrobe she now removes. She loads her rifle and points it at the window, gray-spotted, beside the door. Through a sheet of gray, outside and in, she sees him a block and a half away. She would run after him but for her lack of suitable clothing.

Two eyelids together, the others apart, she aims at the arrogant fatherly flesh. So much easier than she'd remembered. She touches but does not squeeze the trigger, and lowers her weapon.

Her imagination follows him but not very far. She stops it lest it press beyond its limits. (Her common error.)

There's still time to leave, but then there's always time to leave. As long as bones support meat covered with skin. But perhaps at the same time the time to leave has passed. When is, was, our time?

She holds it at her side. She does not lovingly caress it, she does not examine it with eyes and fingers to find what she's forgot: the lessons Father taught her.

I can see her framed in the doorway grasping the barrel. Her head appears to meet the frame, not enough white space, or gray.

She will not retreat into the bedroom, but is she audacious enough to leave the house, to walk down the stairs, out the door, beyond the garden entirely? The turning of her back does not satisfy me.

Once again she enters the living room. She finds Mother crouched in a corner of the couch, looking at a photograph on the wall.

You know him better than I, she accuses.

I knew him not at all.

But better.

Mother has nothing to say.

The gold-rimmed oval holds Mother in white or dull ivory. How she's changed. How long has it been since we've seen that over-eager smile, those long, pearly teeth. And Father looking much as he looked today. Hale and confident, a little nervous in his new uniform, about to embark on a new adventure for better or for worse.

She holds the weapon extended, sensing for the first time its uselessness, yet uncertain whether to take it or to leave it. She opens the door and looks out through descending blackness. She would go now, but it is growing late.

Dropping the weapon, she grasps a head that feels too full to support itself. She bears

the whole weight of a ceiling that presses inexorably to the floor.

Somewhere does Father still sit, stand, kneel?

This is how it is from now on, something tells her. From now on, but not for long?

Perhaps to protect them or to keep inside her head what must not leave, she holds her ears. On the hassock across from Mother she rocks back and forth, robe modestly covering her knees.

The gun, forgotten, stands in the corner. They would sit like this forever, it seems. But sooner or later one of them will start supper, when the time comes.

Out of the Frying Pan

A hot, dry Santa Ana wind condition, common during the fall and winter in Southern California, blew from the high deserts down to the ocean on the morning Kelly O'Connor was released from Riverside Central Hospital. Native tribes had called the weather condition Devil Winds because of the dust, the forest fires, and the allergies and edginess of people caught in its path.

Kelly sat in the backseat of her mother, June's, '65 white, convertible Mustang with the top down. Her stepfather, Hank, was driving her mother and Kelly home to Azusa. The wind carried to the backseat the acrid smell of alcohol emanating from the couple in the front. Kelly's loose hair whipped and stung her face, while sunlight cooked the top of her head. She felt as if she was trapped under a hair salon's egg-shaped dryer.

"Isn't it great to be out in the sun after being inside for so long?" Hank shouted over his shoulder. He steered the car with one hand while the other reached across the front seat to her mother's slender neck, where his index finger crept up and down like a caterpillar.

Kelly nodded and smiled as she had with therapists, doctors, and nurses for the last month. Lying was easier than the truth. So, yes, she wanted to live. Yes, she would move in with her mother rather than stay in Riverside with Daddy. Yes, to a diagnosis of mumbo-jumbo words like situational depression, not chronic or bipolar disorder. She'd smiled and agreed that a change in her home environment would make her fine and happy and able to forgive everyone, including herself.

Because no, she didn't want the hospital psychiatrist to ask her any more questions and then ask questions about her answers and then start over again. She no longer wanted to eat in a cafeteria without knives, or sleep in a bed with rails, or brush her teeth in a bathroom without mirrors. Or stand behind a woman in line in the cafeteria room who wore only a T-shirt and sandals. Shirt and shoes required. No one said anything about pants.

But now, sitting in the backseat watching Hank caressing her mother's neck, it would be so easy, very simple actually, to stand up and roll off the back of the car. No one would be able to catch her.

She glanced at June, who wore a pink, chiffon scarf knotted on top of her heavily moussed hair. Her mother looked so young that supermarket checkers still asked for identification when she bought liquor. She always wrinkled her nose and said, "Oh, don't be silly," but would repeat the story later to the family with a contented smile while stating, "They think we're sisters, Kelly. Imagine that with you sixteen and me..." She'd break off and wink at them.

Kelly turned sideways and stretched her long legs across the seat. That way she could look back at Interstate 10 and not see Hank stroking her mother's neck. She wanted to flick away that creeping hand with a snap of her thumb and index finger but instead drummed her fingers on the car's blue upholstery. Her cut wrists had healed enough so she could do this without pain.

Her sweat pooled and ran under the hip, '80s clothes her mother had brought for her to wear this morning—an outfit deemed more appropriate than the casual clothes Kelly

had worn at the hospital. Due to the heat from the Santa Ana weather, she'd already taken off a pink blazer with linebacker shoulder pads. She still wore white tights, a short, black, pleated skirt, and a white, pin-tucked, starchy blouse with long sleeves and tight, wide cuffs that covered her wrists. At least with the jacket off, she didn't feel so much like a six-foot, scarred flamingo.

"Not much traffic on the highway this morning," Hank said. "Wanna see me open her up?"

"No." Kelly tasted the word: a sweet, oozy plum dropping from her mouth. It made her lips pout like a fish. The word 'yes' made the sides of her mouth lift in an unwanted smile.

June said, "Well, I want to. Go ahead, honey." She snuggled close to Hank and kissed him on the cheek.

Hank floored it. They flew past other cars as he wove in and out of lanes. Still sitting sideways on the seat, Kelly held her hair back with one hand and clutched the top of the backseat with the other. Prone to motion sickness, she swallowed bile. She glimpsed a black-and-white patrol car parked on an overhead ramp as they whizzed past. Kelly smiled. Maybe the cop would stop them before she got too sick.

"See how she purrs! God, I love this car," Hank yelled into the wind. Kelly's mother placed a hand on the nape of his neck and leaned back against the front seat. Hank changed a few more lanes in quick succession.

"I'm going to vomit if you don't slow down," Kelly shouted over the wind.

"Not in the car!" Hank decelerated.

"Lean outside," June ordered.

Kelly twisted around to crouch on her knees and puke over the side. The wind caught her scrambled-egg breakfast and sprayed it across the window of the cop car sharking behind them in close pursuit with its siren wailing.

"Christ! Where did he come from?" Hank braked hard.

Kelly, still heaving, gripped the window edge to keep her balance and not fly out of the car.

Hank swerved the Mustang over to the fast lane's shoulder and squealed to a stop, though the cop had signaled him to go to the right to an off-ramp.

Kelly opened the door and jumped out so fast that she tripped and her knees skidded across asphalt. She rose to stagger a few steps to an oleander bush growing by the freeway's chain-link fence and wove her fingers into the holes for support.

The cop's siren turned off with a yelp. A heavysset officer, his uniform snug across beefy shoulders and belly, strode over to her. "You okay, miss?"

She could see her wild-haired self in his reflective sunglasses. She nodded and wiped her eyes and mouth. Her knees burned. She'd have scabs on them like a little kid.

She looked over at the Mustang. Hank had moved fast. The car trunk was open, and he wiped off barf from the car door while his mouth chewed what looked like a wad of gum. Her mother was spraying perfume onto her neck and, looking back in the rearview mirror to check the cop, quickly into her mouth.

"Don't worry about me, folks—I'm fine here!—REALLY!" Kelly's words started in a loud voice and rose to a shout. She clutched the fence. How like them to worry about the vomit and their alcohol smell rather than her safety. Through her anger a realization, something important, wiggled at the back of her brain, but she couldn't quite catch its meaning.

"Stay here, miss." The cop walked over to the Mustang.

Hank dropped the rag on the ground and stepped forward with his hand outstretched. "Hello, Officer. I'm Hank Pearson, bringing our daughter home from the hospital."

The officer didn't shake Hank's hand. "Tell me what's going on here."

"Like I said, my wife and I just picked up our daughter Kelly from a hospital in Riverside. We were speeding because Kelly is anxious to see her sister, Sarah, who stayed home to watch over our dogs." Hank smiled over at Kelly and called out, "Isn't that right, Kelly?"

"No." Kelly *loved* the sound of the word. Wanted to say it a few more times, just to feel her tongue tap against the top of her mouth. She would not take the blame this time.

June glared at her. "Kelly!"

"Most people rush to get *to* a hospital, not to leave it." The officer looked over at Kelly. His lower lip reached up to suck a brushy mustache. Turning his attention back to Hank, he said, "Kill the engine and show me your license and registration."

Kelly watched as her mother slid across the front seat and stepped out of the car in her capris, flashing a shapely, petite leg in the process. "Pardon me, Officer, but my daughter needs to get home and rest."

The cop scrutinized June. "So why aren't you over there helping her, ma'am?"

June replied, "She's just carsick—can't take the slightest movement."

The cop stared at her for a few beats and then said, "Let me see your license also."

June held her right palm to her heart. "Why? I wasn't driving." Kelly looked away, embarrassed, as her mother fluttered her eyelashes at him.

"Let me see your license, ma'am."

Kelly turned back to watch June rustling around in her purse.

"I don't see why this is necessary." June handed him a pink suede wallet.

The officer examined both licenses, checked if their faces matched their photos, glanced at Kelly and then back to them. "You two been drinking?"

"Of course not." June untied her scarf, shook her head, and fluffed her hair.

"Let's be honest with the gentleman, June." Hank smiled down at her and then over at the cop while assuming a man-to-man stance. "No reason to lie. We had a couple of Bloody Marys at the Riverside Inn before we picked up Kelly. I'm not drunk—don't even feel a buzz."

Kelly faced the fence again. Speeding cars roared past in the opposite direction; wind lifted her hair. Curious faces peered through the passing windows. Childishly, she wanted to stick her tongue out at the cars and people, the world even. But she didn't. A thought nagged at her again while the cop ordered June and Hank to walk a straight line. He had them remove their sunglasses and peered into their eyes. He turned to Kelly. "Come here, miss." Kelly walked over to the Mustang, but stayed four feet away from Hank and June. "Do you have some type of identification I can see?"

June snapped, "This is ridiculous. She doesn't have a license."

"Yes, I do. Daddy's wife taught me how to drive." She walked past her mother, making sure they didn't touch, and removed her purse. She handed the cop the wallet from inside it.

He asked, "Are these your parents? Your last name is different."

June spoke before Kelly could answer. "Excuse me, of course she's my daughter. Hank is her stepfather. I took his name."

"Stay here, please." After walking back to his car, the cop talked into a police radio.

"At least he could call me by my name and not say ma'am like I'm an old lady," June

said in what she thought was a whisper.

Hank put his arm around June's shoulder. "It's okay, honey."

The officer returned to them. He handed back their licenses and registration. "You checked out okay but I'm not sure if I should let you go with just a speeding ticket."

"We need to get home! We're sober enough, aren't we?" June jostled Hank with an elbow. "We'll be good." She wrinkled her nose and almost wiggled like a puppy at the officer.

Kelly watched his jaw flex as if he was biting back words. Her eyes hurt from the bright reflection off his sunglasses. She closed them.

"Pardon me, ma'am, but I'm trying to get your story straight. You two went to a restaurant, had a couple of drinks, and then drove to a hospital to pick up your daughter. Then you rushed down the freeway at over ninety miles per hour, weaving dangerously through traffic, even though you know your daughter gets carsick. Correct?" No one answered him. "Your husband only saw me when he turned around when she got sick. He doesn't seem to know how to use his rearview mirror."

While he spoke, Kelly played the freeway scene over in her mind. So gross to throw up like that—Hank and his swerving and braking. But she had held on. *She'd held on and not jumped. Kept alive.* Elation blossomed in her chest. She felt proud, like a preening, puffed-up pigeon at the park. She wanted to share this but deflated when she looked over at Hank and her mother.

They did not and would not care.

Hank cleared his throat. "Surely we can work something out. Some compensation for your time and Kelly messing up your car?" He reached for his wallet.

"I don't need anything else from your wallet, mister."

"This is so unpleasant," June said. "What can we do to help?"

"Nothing," Kelly said. "You're obviously not taking me home to a safe place. You're drunk and driving crazy." She turned to the policeman. "I was in the psych ward—tried to kill myself." She undid the button on her right sleeve cuff and shoved up the material to show him her red, puffy scar. "See? But I want to live now. I won't get back into that car. Ever." Her hand, still outreached to him, shook in anger and hurt.

June rushed forward, grabbed Kelly's arm, and pulled down the sleeve.

"That's enough!" The cop grabbed June's arm and held it still as she squirmed to free herself. "You and your husband get in the back of my car. We'll sort this out at the station."

"Let go of me," June ordered to no avail.

"What about the Mustang? I can't leave it out here," Hank argued.

The officer said, "Raise the roof and lock it up. We'll deal with it later. Wait—do you need anything from it, miss?" He looked at Kelly with such a kind smile she wanted to cry.

"Just my suitcase, please."

Hank opened the trunk, pulled out her Samsonite, and placed it on the ground. He raised the car's roof with angry, jerky motions. He joined June in the backseat, muttering under his breath.

The cop said to Kelly. "Ride in the front seat with me, miss."

"Why are you doing this? We were taking her home!" June shouted from the backseat. "Tell him the truth, Kelly."

"I just did, ma'am," Kelly replied.

Individuals of Concern 1



No one could dissuade Celeste Munchausen from believing that she was cupid. By the time she was captured in Central Park she had shot 32 people, killing 21 and wounding 11. Always bubbly and sweet she was welcomed by the inmates of Rikers Island Correctional Facility until she fashioned a bow out of bed springs.

Individuals of Concern 2



Michael Schaler would not be separated from his beloved “cut cut”. He said it was his only true friend. He often spoke to it and often giggled at what it seemed to whisper to him.

It was around the time that this photograph was taken that the situation seemed to darken. Michael was often found brooding unhappily in his bedroom.

Eventually a doctor was consulted but all Michael would reveal was that sometimes “cut cut” got hungry and was “mean”. No one at the time knew how serious this problem would eventually become.

The Misfits

Manuel cancelled our meetings the next few days with embarrassed apologies, as if because of a colleague's negligence and not his granddaughter's birth on the sofa in the presence of a hung-over consultant come down from America on the heels of a broken engagement. He gave me suggestions for where I could go to keep from feeling cooped up in The Hotel California, and over the next few days, I followed his advice. I took cabs into town and walked streets near the city center, watching street vendors sell pickled pigs' lips, ten year olds hawk neon-colored candy while playing reggaeton on a boom box at their feet, and elderly women walk stooped over with shawls over their heads. Was this the life Mercedes and her newborn daughter were destined for? Until recently, I hadn't been accustomed to churning over family issues. That very week, back in Denver, an advocate I'd hired had sent off legal documents to open my adoption file, and to think of it then made me wonder: this child's father supposedly roaming out in the Western distance, Mercedes on a sofa with Tita—this was something like how I might have gotten my start.

The third day after the birth, I had lunch by myself at a café next to a diminished fountain that gurgled water into a pool overrun with near-naked boys. Across a walkway from that scene, I sat beneath a covered patio with a fan overmatched by the heat, and the brightness of the sun kept me from looking too closely at passersby. When my meal came, I ate it slowly, happy to have the day to myself and nowhere to be. As I waited for the server to clear the table and bring me coffee, the sky around the square darkened, and in the faltering glare I could make out the faces of the boys in the fountain more clearly. They splashed water on each other's brown bodies, their tender feet oblivious to the hard brick edges of the pool. Colors sharpened. As the waiter set my coffee down in front of me, I saw a young woman humming, carrying an infant in a sheet fashioned into a sling. I could hear her beneath the shrieks of the boys, whose mothers called out for them to leave the fountain for the threat of lightning. A fork of lightning split the sky. Everyone flinched except the mother. She wore sandals that flopped softly with her tiny steps and a loose dress that hid her form. She kept the rhythm of her mumbled song as she walked. She was gorgeous and she looked so kind that I forgot for a moment why I'd come to Poza Rica in the first place. When thunder boomed a few seconds later, she turned her face toward me to look up at the sky, and only then did I see that it was Mercedes with Tita. My heart leapt. Something about her posture and the desolation of the square recalled scenes on the plain with Marilyn Monroe in *The Misfits*. I longed for them to join me, and then realized stupidly that I should ask them to. I called out to her, and she turned. It took her a moment to recognize me. I saw the relief in her face and it made me wish for an instant that I were Tita's father. I motioned for her to join me.

"Thank you," she said as she sat down. Tita slept on her chest in the sling.

"Do you want a break?" I asked.

She didn't understand.

"May I?" I said. I extended my arms toward Tita.

She said something curt, trying, it seemed, to be polite. I let my steaming coffee sit on the tabletop. For a few moments we watched the storm. The rain fell in sheets and the square emptied. The temperature dropped. I covered my arms and made a shivering noise.

Mercedes smiled at that, and I smiled back. The waiter came and asked her if she wanted anything. She shook her head no, but I interjected. "Please," I said. The server turned toward her, waiting. She relented, rattled off a quick order, and the boy bowed and walked away.

"Thank you," she said again.

Another thunderclap hit. Tita squirmed in her arms. Mercedes tried to shush her, and for the moment it worked. Still, she seemed awkward holding the baby as she did, the weight borne more by her arms than the sling. An older woman came to the table. She bowed in apology to me for the interruption, and then turned to gush at Tita. Mercedes took the compliment with a nod and forced a smile. I wished I could interrupt but I didn't know enough to say anything. The older woman asked a question and extended her arms toward Tita. Mercedes tightened her shoulders and considered whether to acquiesce. Hesitantly, she offered her child to the stranger. The old woman took a moment to coo over the baby and then sat down next to me. She positioned the baby in her lap with Tita's head facing up and began to explain. Mercedes listened with a chiseled smile. Tita squirmed and eventually burst into a full infant tantrum.

"Ooooooh," the woman sighed. She made a pouty face and pinched Tita's cheek. Tita cried louder, and the woman put her hands to her heart in apology. Mercedes tried half-heartedly to reassure her. The exchange stretched on painfully before the woman returned Tita to Mercedes and backed away, acknowledging the scene she'd caused. Unconvincingly, Mercedes assured the woman that it was all right. When the woman left, Mercedes turned to me and rolled her eyes.

Enough is enough, I thought. I got up to sit where the old woman had. "Here," I said. I reached my hands out to her lap. Mercedes didn't stop me. In my arms, Tita's cries intensified. I held her up to my shoulder and whispered into her ear. "Little girl, what's wrong?" I said. Mercedes hawked me, just as she had the old woman. I rocked Tita on my shoulder but it didn't help. I started to sing the lyrics to "Hush Little Baby," but a few lines in, I realized I didn't know the next one. When I stopped, she cried louder than ever. Mercedes looked me in the eye and shook her head in exasperation. Nervously, I laughed in return. Maybe it had to do with how my body vibrated through the laugh, or maybe she'd already begun to cry herself out, but Tita's cries began to soften. As they did, Mercedes gaped. I kept chuckling to encourage the quiet. I struggled to sustain the sincerity of the laugh, and at some point, a note of falseness entered into it. Tita's whine revved up again. Mercedes laughed, and so did I. The pattern continued until Tita had cried herself out and fallen back asleep, and the waiter had returned with a plate of beans and rice for Mercedes. The scene attracted the stares of other diners. They smiled the universal smile of approval at the sight of a father forging a rapport with his infant child. Tita's eyes stayed closed, and I bent my head down to her tiny face so I could avoid the sight of so many witnesses. The moment passed. I felt eyes lifting off me. When I looked back up, Mercedes and I sat unwatched with the child. Mercedes chowed down on her beans and rice, apologizing in gestures for her hunger. I waved it away and urged her to continue. She leaned back, put her hands over her belly, and sighed. I noticed her swollen fingers, her dirty dress, her tiny body folded in the embrace of the wicker. "Thank you," she said, for the third time. From her purse she pulled out a wallet-sized card and put it on the table, a punch card for a coffee shop in New Orleans. She gestured for me to take it. I realized then that she'd expected to pay for her meal. I waved her offer away but she insisted, and so I nodded and picked up the card. Satisfied, she reached out for Tita.

We stood up to exchange her. I crouched my shoulder down to her level, and as I did, I smelled the earthiness of her hair, felt her breath on my neck. I could feel myself getting an erection. Tita felt weightless as I transferred her off my shoulder and onto Mercedes. The baby secure, she sat back down in her chair. I followed suit quickly to hide myself. I scratched the whiskers on my face and looked out to the desolate square, where she'd appeared just before the rain.

"Do you know Marilyn Monroe?" I asked.

"Marilyn Monroe?" she echoed. To show she understood, she made a coy face, pinky to lip and eyes raised, then laughed at her own performance.

"I liked her in *The Misfits*. Do you know that one?"

"Misfits? Yes yes yes!" she exclaimed. She began to sing the lyrics to "Die, Die My Darling" in an accented English that melted me. Really, it should've been just a funny misunderstanding, but in a whisper she sang: *Come crying to me now, baby. Your future's in an oblong box.* To the child, her meager voice became a lullaby. To me, a summons. My heart was a murmuring father telling a story, a story of what I'd be when I grew up. On the table, my coffee sat untouched in my cup, tepid from the passage of time.

The Pushkin Chronicles

Puzinkin

“Pushkin, Puzinkin, go to sleep
Pushkin, Puzinkin, don’t you weep...”

✱✱

A Life of My Grandmother in Seven Authors

Leo Tolstoy

“Much earlier than most, I understood that Levin was the hero of *Anna Karenina*, not Anna. It was the only thing on which my mother and I agreed.”

Heinrich Heine

“At first I was almost about to despair, I thought I never could bear it — but I did bear it. The question remains: how?”

Alexander Pushkin

“Would you like to hear my theory? After each great poem was born, he tried to kill himself with a duel. If he survived, he would write again. If not, it was time...”

Rainer Maira Rilke

“In his *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke said that a true writer would get up in the middle of a night to write down his thoughts. But here I am, in the middle of the night, writing down someone else’s thoughts.”

Agatha Christie

“I would never speak in this way, really, but I do wonder: What would it be like to kill someone in the English countryside? Oh, it’s horrible! And they are so polite out there!”

Franz Kafka

“I’ve spent my whole life not reading Kafka.”

God

“In my heart of hearts I know that God is the loneliest of creatures. Why else would He have brought this world into being?”

✱✱

Ping-Pong

My grandmother ran a foster home for 17 years. In the basement she had a ping-pong table where she took the quietest and stubbornest children. When I was 12 I asked her why.

“What they wanted to say was always hiding underneath what they didn’t say. I was severely educated, in the German model. My parents never said anything without a footnote hanging in the air, which I was expected to see and understand. And so I imagined each kid’s ping as a test of whether I could see the footnote explaining who they were, and why they were here. I always beat them though, and somehow – afterwards – they knew that I understood them. Someone else, someone with academic training, might interpret our game differently. Our regional manager, for instance. He couldn’t stand the back and forth, the pregnant air of conversation unspoken, and when he visited always told me to stop. That particular game went on for years. Sad to say, I never got to the bottom of *him*.”

★★

You and I

I have to tell you something. When I was your age there was “me,” and also “the other me.” These were quite distinct characters. I even had two journals, which I called “you” and “I.” The first one, that is, “you,” I might allow to be read one day. It was written in Russian, and is mostly reflections on literature. The other one, in German, was about all the other stuff. You can’t imagine what “I” said about me. *This* journal was hidden inside my mattress, and even the first me wasn’t allowed to see it. I told someone about this once, a young woman I met at the art museum in Antwerp, but she laughed. This was in the winter of 1923.

★★

Love in a Minor Language

Lonely, studying abroad, I once asked my grandmother for romantic advice. I had met a girl from Spain, and she didn’t understand me.

“Our courtship took place in French,” she wrote back, “all by letter, and focused almost exclusively on the recent death of my father. That’s how I fell in love with him. Your grandfather, I mean. When things got bad, I just translated everything we discussed back into that peculiar language spoken only by us, and only for a little while.”

★★

Balagan

1.

I want to become a writer, and my grandmother tells me this story. “But first you have to understand that my cousin, who was also my aunt, moved to Israel with her grandparents. From the *other* side of the family. Which explains everything.”

2.

“It works like this. You walk into the house and put down your glasses who knows where. Ten minutes later you need to read the mail, but you can’t find them. ‘Where’s my glasses?’ you shout. Your aunt answers, ‘On the *balagan*!’ *Balagan* is Hebrew for ‘chaos,’ and Polish for ‘wooden house,’ and Russian for ‘whorehouse.’ What your aunt means to say is that *balagan* is the place where everything changes, where something is always happening, where you need your glasses most desperately, but where you will miss the most important thing anyway, because it’s happening upstairs, in a private room, where you have no business. No one understands this better than your aunt. But this is irrelevant, you’ve got me off track...you still need to read the mail, and right now you are merely shuffling the bills from back to front.”

3.

When you finally visit your aunt, after many years, she barely recalls her own name. It’s summer, and she is fanning herself outside her broiling cottage, hardly more than a wood shack. Then you remember the story from your grandmother, so you ask, kind of slyly, “Aunt Zsa Zsa, where’s the *balagan*?” She laughs, like you’ve finally come to your senses, and she answers with a girl’s voice: “When we lost something in our house, we turn a glass upside down. Immediately afterwards, the object is found. And the place the object is found is the *balagan*.”

4.

I tried this at home. I don’t have to tell you how the story ends. I walked into the house, the bills stuffed into my jacket pocket, my glasses left God knows where. I begin to straighten up. When it was time to find my story I took a glass from the cupboard and turned it upside down, which was followed by a crash and a pop, as if my grandmother were still alive and making fun of my aunt’s accent – “which was, it has to be said, *all over the place*.” It’s possible, it’s likely, that I misheard my aunt’s instructions, for when I finished my investigation both the glass and my glasses were broken to pieces.

★★

Pushkin’s Secret Journal

“I finally found my journals,” she told me. “I’m pleasantly surprised with what I wrote about Pushkin when I was a girl. Everything else, unfortunately, has to go.”

“Will you translate something for me?”

She looked at the yellowed paper with a terrifying blankness.

Finally she spoke: "That's the thing with Pushkin. You can't translate him. How to explain this in English?"

★★

Von Clausewitz Plays Scrabble

For years I thought "Von Clausewitz" was just a funny name Grandma called me when we dueled over the chessboard.

Towards the end we switched to Scrabble; each turn was 20 minutes, but when she pulled the trigger on her tiles the most surprising words came out. Once, late in the evening, I thought I had the jump on her. I told her that "you can't have *Clausewitz* without..." and here I spelled out C-L-A-U-S-E. "*You* know, like a phrase."

She stared at me over her glasses: "I know what a clause is." We burst out laughing. Only then did she lay it all out: Q-U-A-G. "You know, short for quagmire."

Much later, I found this in Von Clausewitz' "On War": "War is an area of uncertainty; three quarters of the things on which all action in War is based are lying in a fog of uncertainty to a greater or less extent. The first thing needed here is a fine, piercing mind, to feel out the truth with the measure of its judgment."

Her chessboard is put away, but the Scrabble tiles still spill out every Sunday afternoon. I stir the pieces around with my finger, like a spoon in tea, until the old card table has a new white skin.

And then, one by one, we turn the letters over.

Mute

Chase pauses, listens. The house is silent, no boil of rancor to zigzag around. It is Saturday. No school uniform or natty casual, he becomes this untidy boy in shorts, a t-shirt, his mop of dark hair uncombed. He goes outside, follows the sloped path that edges the eleventh green, and skids into the cool hush of the arroyo. Always taking a paper lunch sack with him, he collects lost golf balls. Mulligans, he has heard them called. Take a mulligan. It means cheating, it means someone has hooked, sliced, flubbed. He always finds at least a dozen mulligans and he sells them to golfers waiting at a tee box or parked in a fairway. There are complaints sometimes. That Adams boy! That dumb mute! Selling our balls back to us. The nerve! Chase snickers. Balls is a funny word. Some admin dweeb at the club phones his parents. Chase, damn it, we got another call about you. Nuisance this and pest that. His mother, her razor-sharp voice. There are chides, threats, his allowance halved. But Chase continues. I'm a savvy businessman, he thinks; and what can my stupid parents do anyway? Nothing truly harsh. Not against Chase with his crazy, with his muteness. Balls.

In his usual spy mode today, he lurks through the arroyo, hides within the thickets of manzanita shrubs and oleanders. Sneaky low, he crawls the rust-red banks to peer into patios and houses, to glimpse intimacies: a swift trade of slaps between that mother and daughter so witty, so chic at club functions; that young lawyer couple having a mid-morning screw on their pine butcher block. All interesting to Chase, these private moments. Others' lives.

Chase cruises the arroyo, picks mulligans out of the dirt. Here is loose focus and no honed wariness; the flail in him ebbs, the crookedness aligns and he is true. What the hell is wrong with you, Chase? Damn it. Your tongue, your larynx, it all checks out fine. So speak! But why speak. Why not smash things instead.

Hearing the metallic clatter of putters being stashed into golf bags, he climbs to a green. Here's a foursome piling into their carts, one of them boasting about his birdie. Another notices Chase and says, There's the rascal. Found that Titleist I shanked at the eighth? As they chuckle all around, Chase identifies one man, the fat gut with the blubbery lips: Chase has spied him in lady-panties, mouthing along with a diva's aria on his record player.

They're jokers, this group; they already reek of beer and this blunts their scorn. Chase trusts them not to be finks, not to fink on him. His father uses this word in whispery brouhahas with his mother as they prowls around the billiard table at night. That bastard's a fink, his father says as he chalks the tip of his stick, as he slams into a cue ball. That bastard will fink on me and it will ruin us. Chase has figured out that a fink is a snitch, that to fink on means to squeal, to tattle, to betray. He collects words, fits them neatly into the folds of his brain. It all becomes only words: the chin-chuck of the school librarian, the pity in the eyes of his therapist, the slippery click of his mother's pearls as she cinches the clasp. Only sentences, black ink in cursive or block or italics on the white paper of his mind.

Chase thrusts the sack of mulligans at the foursome and splays one hand. Five bucks? says one of the men. Highway robbery. He thumbs cash out of his wallet and with a wink,

he gives Chase a ten. Chase nods his thanks and scampers back into the arroyo. In the scant shade of a palo verde tree, he stretches out on a tilted slab of sandstone and twists his knuckles into his eyelids. He mulls, Am I a happy boy? It its meaning who I am? No, he supposes. Take your pills! Pills will make you happy! So he takes his pills, a purple and orange capsule, a baby-blue tablet. The colors of blankness. He sits up suddenly, catching a voice calling out, Nurse! Nurse! A beckoning to the girl who drives around the golf course in a cart loaded with drinks and snacks. Chase scrambles to the fairway, but hangs back as the girl sells cans of icy cold Tecate and pockets her tip, hangs back until the golfers speed away. Hello, Melissa.

My lovely boy, she says to Chase as he walks up to her. Still only to me?

Still only to you.

His muteness lifts when he's with Melissa. He approached her not long ago to buy a Pepsi. Anything else? she said. Chase scanned the bins of chips and cookies and trail mix and shook his head. A shy boy, she said. Cat got your tongue? Or no, it's something else. She put the tip of her index finger on his mouth. Mute? Chase nodded. But there's poetry trapped in here. Sonnets. Beautiful lyrics. He stepped back to take her in fully. Platinum ponytail, dark roots. Sunned skin, glossy with lotion. Slender, muscular limbs. White shorts, white tank top. A tattoo of a galloping horse on one shoulder. She was twenty-eight, thirty, he guessed. He breathed in her scent, a blend of sweat and cheap gardenia. But you can talk to me, she said. What's your name?

Chase. I'm Chase. He paid for his Pepsi and scurried away. Within that scent again today, Chase plucks a can out of the trough of ice and says, My rhinestone cowgirl..

I'm all ears, Chase. Talk to me. Talk a blue streak. Tell me who I am.

You're a swirly girl. You boot-scoot across a stage and sing honky-tonk songs about unfaithful love. Under the hot neon in your glitter-glam and your pink cowgirl hat. The guy in the band who plays the guitar hankers after you and wants to steal you away on the back of his chopper. But you've been burned and spurned and you won't let turmoil into your heart again. And then you come here and become this nurse.

Sad, Chase. It's sad, isn't it.

Now you tell me who I am.

A rich boy. A smart boy. A lonely boy. Crazy mad, but adorable. You'll woo and charm and smash a lot of girls' hearts.

Turn me into a song, Melissa. Write a ballad about me.

Nurse! Nurse! Another foursome hails her.

A music mogul out of Nashville is coming to the bar tonight. My big chance. Maybe I'm on my way.

Nurse! We're dying!

I have to go. Melissa hops in her cart and wheels away.

My rhinestone cowgirl. Chase continues to wander, to peer into the fancy houses along the humps and shallows of the golf course. Through that window screened with metal fretwork, a man lopes on a treadmill. On that patio enclosed in thick mesh, within baskets of ferns gently misted, an elderly woman in a lilac pantsuit is weeping. Curious. Other people. He traipses homeward, climbs out of the arroyo, crosses the eleventh green, and skulks into his mother's high-walled garden.

Beds of black, moist soil with pansies and dahlias, glazed ceramic pots with frail violets, and the hot reek of it all. This garden is odd evidence of aspects of his mother not often glimpsed. Of her tenderness. Of her hurt. Chase often catches her sitting here on

a stone bench, her eyes shut, her hands folded primly on her lap. Serene, not someone he identifies and he shudders.

He goes into the house, into its darkness slashed with blades of sunlight coming through slit-thin skylights. His mother is out. I'm going out, she announces. I have to get out of here. He listens to his father say, Where is out? What is the exact location of out? But she never says. His father is in. It is the opposite of out. He's in the den, slumped in the giant leather couch, arms crossed, one eyebrow cocked at Fox News. Paperwork is scattered across the coffee table and a half-empty bottle of bourbon is on the floor. He is absolute stillness, this smart, good-looking man. Think of what I could have been, he has said. A major league shortstop. The Padres scouted me. Now I finagle. His eyes slide towards Chase and he says, Doomsday, son. Doomsday.

Chase spends the afternoon in his cluttered, boy-messy room with his books about vampires and pirates, with a video game, the numb slaughter of zombies. A golf ball smacks the wrought-iron screen of his window. Mulligan, he thinks; easy pickings. He has an essay to write, a simple task, another A-plus. So vivid! his sourpuss teacher scribbled in the margins of his last essay. So well written! About some dumb old war. War words. Doughboys. Mustard gas. Bayonet.

As a drab orange dusk seeps in, Chase hears his mother's arrival home. How noisily she enters! The drop-crunch of twine-handled shopping bags, the jangle of her keys tossed across the marble-topped kitchen island, groans of exhaustion, curses about sales clerks and the basic lack of competence, and then there's the traffic!, fuck!, this awful Phoenix traffic. But there isn't always this racket and bluster. Sometimes she slips into the house, a mussed and smug blur, and vanishes into her private study. Spooky stealth.

Coming out of his room (cautious, cautious, interpret the mood), Chase smells hoisin sauce. Take-out for dinner (again), moo shu pork and brown rice. Who's starving? his mother says. Me. That's who. She is lean, all jutting bones, her gestures swift and sharp. I'm a scythe, she says. A human scythe. Look out. She is pallid, her clothes only white or pale gray, but she is dark too, dark hair in an acute bob, dark eyes thickly lined, a blood-red mouth. She yanks open a kitchen cabinet and sighs a growl. Plates. The plate incident. In the midst of parental deadlock, a speechless, animal crouch, Chase smashed plates, littered the floor with shards until his father grappled him into calm. But there are no new plates yet. On purpose, Chase thinks; so we're not matched. His mother hauls out what wasn't smashed (blue glass, fine china with gold squiggles, earthenware) and with napkins and utensils, she shoves these at Chase. Take these. He spins into the adjoining dining room and sets the ends, the extreme ends, of the long, long tiger maple table, and he puts himself on one side, dead center. He fetches a glass of milk and now sits, sits small. His father comes in with a bottle of wine and uncorks it, squeal and suck, and splashes two goblets full and his mother scoops out the pails of take-out and tosses around the folded, papery pancakes and the little containers of hoisin sauce. And now they're all sitting. Sitting small.

A wordless thing swells, oozes, snags in the tiger stripes. They're plotting the night's seethe. How it is. Now his mother cracks her fortune cookie and reads the slip of paper out loud. You will soon find bliss. In bed. Ha! She always adds, In bed. Ha! Dinner cleared and the evening cleared, Chase tucks himself into his room, flips into his laptop. Italy is a country in southern Europe with an august and ancient history. The capital, Rome, has for centuries been at the crux of Western civilization, in art, religion, and politics. Crux is a smart word and so is august. He claps shut his laptop as he hears the

clack! of billiard balls. All tip-toe, nerves alert, he sneaks out of his room and inserts his slim self into his spy nook, a nifty alcove made as if their architect anticipated his need for such a place. He peeks into the billiard room, observes his parents circling the table, its slick ebony edges, its emerald-green felt. The only light is a low-hanging lamp with a rectangular shade above the table that illuminates the surface, his parents' hands, arms, their bodies as they bend to align and take a shot. But tonight there is no low rumble about finks, about being finked on. No tallying between them, no nasty swipes, only the click and careen of billiard balls.

In the morning, there are no snide asides about victory or points lost, only blithe chat about the day's plans. But what's unspoken settles in the pulse, makes it simmer. They should take a mulligan, Chase thinks; cheat, not take a penalty, not add that flub to their score cards. Flub. Maybe I'm the flub.

Sunday brunch. Chase has to wear a necktie, an oxford shirt, khaki pants, the same as his father. In a summery sundress patterned with abstract pansies, his mother comes into the kitchen. Chase watches as she eyes his father and he eyes her. A pause. Who are we today? Never mind that. We're late. They drive the mile and a half to the club, leave the BMW with the valet, and sweep in. It's a matter of how to negotiate the tedium, of how to maneuver through the crowd already boozy with mimosas, soon followed with brown, double, neat. Any of Chase's classmates dragged here have already fled, their parents shooing them out after making them do hellos. Chase endures it too, though he's become adept at ducking under the pat-a-pat-pats on his head. Poor mute boy. As he nods a hello. What a shame. He won't be able to talk to girls. Another nod hello. Oh, but to have a husband who never says a word! Eventually, a wink from his father lets him escape and he hustles out.

A flagstone path through a grove of topiary (javelina, teapot, snowman) leads Chase to a metal gate; he unlatches it and lets himself into the pool area. Teen girls, unfairly allowed to skip brunch, lie on chaises longues in skimpy bikinis; they banter shrilly, trade snickery gossip. Others swim laps in the olympic pool, a lithe shuttling through the bright, silvery water. Chase sits on the end of a chaise, within the girls' pretty sneers. But they tolerate him. There's that weird kid who can't talk. Girls jump into the pool, somersault underwater. He's a sweetie, don't razz him. Girls climb the aluminum ladder out of the pool and sashay back to their beach towels. And all the time, their ceaseless chatter. She is so dead to me! In the tool shed? That slut. But now she won't flunk chemistry. Ha! Chase listens, scoops it all up. This marvelous world, slim bodies under the sun, the oddly sensual tang of chlorine in the girls' hair, and all of the words.

Chase scoots back to the clubhouse and finds his parents in the members only. He perches on a swivel stool at the bar and the cocktail lady brings him a gingerale with grenadine. He scans the cool dim. Clusters of people in tiny confabs, minor hubbub slashed with guffaws. Oil paintings of cowboys lassoing cattle, of a squaw tending a flock of sheep. And there's his mother, all flit and flirt, a clumsy whirl. And his father, in a broody mood, sunk in a wingback chair, a tumbler of brown held on one knee. Who are we today? Never mind that. Chase's gaze drifts to the golf course, the eighteenth green, and he thinks of Melissa. My rhinestone cowgirl. Still only to me? Still only to you. He hears his mother's voice. Okay already. His father steers her out and Chase tags their wake. As they wait for the valet to get the car, Chase collects more words. Prick. Lush. Shameless. Spoiled. Insolvent.

Another week rolls along into Saturday, its release. I'm going out, says Chase's mother

as she dashes away. His sullen father is bowed, hip against the kitchen island. With a paper lunch sack, Chase hurries into the arroyo. As he collects mulligans, he tilts an ear towards the golf course, anticipating pleas of Nurse!, Nurse! Soon, the sack is filled with lost balls and he sells it to a cranky foursome. Five dollars. Fine. Now scram. He meanders the hours aimlessly until he spots the drink and snack cart as it rounds a hillock. His heart skips, then spasms. It's not Melissa, it's another girl, someone entirely other. Chase turns away, trips on the fringe of the fairway, belly-slides into the arroyo. A music mogul out of Nashville is coming to the bar tonight. It's doomsday, son. Doomsday. His mind clamps tightly. He touches his mouth. There's poetry trapped in here. Chase plods home, crushed under the dread sureness that Melissa has boot-scooted away. And echoing faintly in his mind, My lovely boy.

A wordless scene at home. Suitcases in the foyer, his father adding to them. His mother is sitting on her garden bench, eyes shut, hands clenched on her lap. The logical catastrophe. Chase lingers in the margins of it, as if a comment. So vivid! So well written!

All of the words leak out of Chase now and flood the floor, breaking into liquid shards. Letters and syllables eddy, catch on things. The k of fink wedges on a corner of a suitcase. Finagle swirls around Chase's ankles, breaks apart. Lush and scram flow into the garden, splash against his mother's shins. Nurse! and crux and bliss gush across the golf course, snag on flagsticks, spool into homes; x and s and b float between that mother and daughter in a spat, c curls around the elderly woman weeping. Words coming apart drench the clubhouse and pour into the olympic pool, letters grazing, hooking the girls' bodies. But the words do not stream to his rhinestone cowgirl, gone now, gone. Write a ballad about me, Chase thinks. Put me back together. Put me into words.

NONFICTION

The word "NONFICTION" is rendered in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a dense pattern of small white speckles, giving them a textured, starry appearance. A thick, teal-colored diagonal line cuts across the word from the bottom-left to the top-right. The line has a slightly irregular, hand-drawn quality and also features the same white speckle pattern as the letters.

*You do not know what your life is--nor what
you are doing, nor who you are.
Euripides, The Bacchae*

Apollo & My Fool's Errand

In my early twenties I learned that Apollo's great temple at Delphi bore a famous inscription: "Know thyself." And I thought, "How banal can you get?"

Yet legations from all over the Mediterranean world visited Delphi to consult oracular powers there. Well, if the maxim was a fair sample of available sagacity, they should have spared themselves a trip. During my young-and-stupid phase, "Know thyself" seemed more a joke than advice worthy of Apollo. One's own self? What could be easier? "Hey, I already do! None better."

Slowly as years, I began finding that maxim to be a unisex maze, a sort of labyrinth precisely the size of each life. And shape-shifty. At times, a snare cunningly hidden in plain sight, though lately I see it as a door opening to us only if we're already inside. Which takes a while. Wise is the man who knows his own mind. Are there any?

Those roundabout travels and wrong turns befalling everyone on the way to self-knowledge acquire an especially paradoxical twist because our human nature is written right and left of us, on each side of the road, and also within us as part of time's story. Clues lie thick-sown wherever in our lives we happen to glance, including our genetic heritage of cells that have journeyed, Proteus-like, through eons of animal forms to be the life of your eyes, just now doing the looking.

We know. Our role makes part of the tale, one written in the skies and right under our noses, but, like the Sphinx's riddle, we suppose it's decipherable only by some deep thinking savant. Tracing evolution backward may be the least of it, which, in the technical and laboratory sense, must nowadays be left to biochemists. Certainly, even for a specialist, all-inclusive self-decryption must forever reside light years beyond any lifetime. This is so because *what* we are depends on *where*. A Zuñi boy guarding his father's cornfield from rabbits and crows in, say, 1539 is one thing. Three years later, that same Zuñi youngster seeing horses for the first time -- with the land's first Spaniards astride them -- becomes quite another by virtue of his new context. Even to place him within a European year-number transmutes the boy he actually was to historical artifact. Thus, any holistic deciphering of "me" needs to consider our actual situation in time and space, whose dimensions aren't solely themselves but, in some rather spooky ways, each other. Oh, no doubt of it, context alters content.

After all, how can the part be fully known without knowing the whole? And doesn't fully knowing the part *change* our sense of the whole? For example, in embryo we each had a tail like a tadpole, which survives vestigially as the coccyx, a funny come-uppance when you think about it; all of us walking round while wagging, under the skin of our pretensions, little bony stumps of tails.

Then, too, knowledge of the whole changes what the part truly is. For example, awareness that evolution hasn't stopped, is in fact ongoing, subtly alters our sense of our own bodies; that's true just as surely as my tongue runs on sun sugar devised by the mind

of a forest, and surely as our lives depend on a star. Among mental circularities I value the ongoing widening of that part/whole spiral more than any other line I might follow.

Yet it's a line none of us can trace very far. Astronomers must speak of "the observable universe" only. Given the possibility of multiverses, that's not saying much. Oddly, as a less-than-minuscule side effect of all that, I rather like being surrounded by the unknown and unknowable.

Happily, however, you can't lose 'em all. In groping round my backyard inch or two of planet Earth I do sometimes sense my ignorance becoming the size of a cosmos, and like that feeling as well. Or at least believe I believe I do. (When it comes to the self, can we ever be sure?) It's a sort of fool's errand, working to enlarge your unknowing, yet I enjoy the attempt. Odder still, my expanding awareness of being nearly infinitely ignorant strikes me as an achievement of sorts. In a world where one riddle is tucked into the next, it's not easy to grasp even a rough sketch of what went into expressing you.

If your ignorance has an activist bent, however, certain wider dimensions of "Know thyself" do begin to grow familiar. As a matter of radical fact, for example, we living creatures are expressions of Earth, just as *we* in return express *it* -- though in thought and word only. Not coincidentally, therefore, the word "matter" is traceable back to Latin *mater*, or "mother." Hence, we and our maternal planet are a kind of Möbius strip, each alive inside the other. As I walk and look around, it enriches me to feel how that is so.

What's more, the origin of "express" gives the word new life. Its etymology gets reenacted every time one of those high priests of caffeine forces steam through finely ground coffee for your cup of *espresso*. An everyday phrase like "expressing yourself" can feel witty, as if the self gave off tinted vapor, variously colored according to mood.. Less remotely, of course, your heart's red "expressions" are actual squeezes and spurts of your life's blood. After instilling that heart, your mother, in labor, then physically "expressed" you as her newborn, whereupon your personality further became (metaphorically) her "expression," augmented by family, schoolmates, and others, however remote in time and space. Plato, for instance; or the Biblical story of Job.

Inevitably, therefore, just as Earth "expressed" us, we in turn "expressed" the gods. No less a deity than Apollo, although a god of self-knowledge, echoes the blurred impulses of his creators by becoming -- in Greek thought and ritual -- now an ethical guide; now a devious womanizer; now an archer fatally accurate; now the god of harmonious music; now a benign healer or fell avenger. Quite a repertoire. Yet it's common for a god or goddess to be simultaneously, or by turns, herself and her opposite. Aren't we all? Apollo simply wore whatever face his human creator/worshippers needed to see at the time, thus echoing on a grand scale our own labile and various selves.

So experience, which is sometimes called (a bit uncomfortably for me) "the school of fools," has by now shown me that Delphi's "Know thyself," may be the trickiest counsel ever imparted. Among its implicit aspects is knowledge of the universe whose creatures we are. In pursuit of our relation to it--meaning our relation to everything that is--I often end up at the wisdom of the ages. That, too, has many sources, though perhaps none more historically important for this scientific age than a highly intelligent Greek named Thales, who has been called "the first scientist."

If we imagine people of the ancient world as old, we're forgetting that, on average, most were younger than we are, so I picture Thales as a fit fortysomething, and very, very smart. Alive today, he'd be a Nobel laureate in theoretical physics. Even back in the sixth

century B.C. his versatility as astronomer, cosmologist, and geometer led to his reputation as a deep thinker, one often consulted by fellow Greeks. Yet when this proto-physicist was asked, "What is most difficult?" Thales didn't answer as you'd suppose, by naming some abstruse problem in star-science or trigonometry. Instead, he replied, "The thing most difficult is to know yourself." Small wonder that he was reputed the wisest man in Greece.

Given his wide interests, it's at least plausible to suppose that his idea of self-knowledge meant going beyond a mere inventory of our strictly personal illusions, our hang-ups, our talents, and our vanities. Conceivably, such a versatile man must have felt that true self-knowledge includes our relation to our natal soil, to this planet, to its nearest star, and beyond. That's why I've come to see Delphi's "Know thyself" as the most inexhaustible imperative ever imparted. Its necessary context is our entire natural world.

But don't take my word for it. Pretend this voice isn't mine, doesn't come from a few atoms dreaming they're someone less than a six-billionth of his kind now alive. Imagine instead it's Apollo calling: "If you truly knew yourself *that* way . . . would you still be who you are?"

Where Do You Come From? (Eight Times Asked)

1. *Where do you come from?*

I was born October 14, 1951, in Richland, Washington, a place nicknamed Atomic Town, a place where you could (from 1948 to 1960) celebrate Atomic Frontier Days, where you can still go bowling at Atomic Bowl, where you can have your house painted by Atomic Painting or wired by Atomic Electric, have your car's dents fixed at Atomic Auto Body, have your own body modified at Atomic City Tattoo and Piercing, or relax with a cool one from Atomic Ale Brewpub while reading the Atomic Town Entertainment Guide. It's a place where Hanford's nuclear scientists took pride in atomic accomplishments, of "breeding" the first operating plutonium reactor, of fueling the Fat Man bomb dropped on Nagasaki, of generating nuclear power.

In the 1970s, the nuclear tide turned—think Three Mile Island and *The China Syndrome*; think the birth of Earth Day, the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act; think leaks from underground storage tanks at Hanford. In the 1970s, fewer businesses were called atomic. But the name has not gone away and may be coming back in that midcentury modern, retro, ironic sense.

Fact: I would not be from Kennewick if not for *atomic* energy. My father came from Kansas in 1949 to work as a chemical engineer at Hanford. He returned to Kansas in 1950 to marry my mother and bring her west to set up house in a government-built, 545-square-foot "prefab" in Richland. A year and three months later, I was born into this brave new atomic world. Three years later we moved to nearby Kennewick.

2. *Where do you come from?*

I come from east of the mountains. The mountains are the Cascades—known as the Cascade curtain—which divide Washington State into two distinct worlds. I live in Seattle, epicenter of the hip, green, liberal, Boeing-Amazon-Microsoft-Starbucks-infused, traffic-clogged, high-priced western side; but I am from Kennewick on the dry, conservative, nuclear, hydroelectric, irrigated, agricultural eastern side.

3. *Where do you come from?*

I hate this question. Here is how it often goes:

"I come from Kennewick,"

"Is that near Kennebunkport?"

"No, it's in eastern Washington."

"Near Spokane?"

"No, it's one of the Tri-Cities."

"Oh. Is that near the nuclear place—Hanford?"

"Yes, near Hanford."

Then the conversation can a) peter out, b) devolve into a joking comment about glow-

in-the-dark rabbits or double-tailed rattlesnakes, or c) lead to a question like, “Have you been exposed to radiation?”

Of course we are all exposed to radiation every time we fly in an airplane, go through security screening, have our ankle x-rayed, wear a glow-in-the-dark watch, use a microwave oven, or talk on a cell phone. There is naturally-occurring radioactive material in space and in the earth itself. In the early days, Hanford secretly released “relatively small” amounts of radiation into the air and into the Columbia River. For 18 years, I drank the river water that ran from our taps; I swam in the river; I ate salmon that swam in the river; I breathed the air downwind of Hanford; I ate beef from cattle that grazed downwind of Hanford. “Yes, I was exposed.” I get my thyroid tests done, so far so good. But my father died of brain cancer after working at Hanford from 1949 to 1984. And thyroid problems run in my family. You can see how all this does not make for good party conversation.

4. Where do you come from?

I come from shrub-steppe of the vast Columbia Plateau, the basin formed by lava flow after lava flow back in the late Miocene/early Pliocene Epochs—say 17 to 7 million years ago. Red-hot lava pushed up through cracks in the earth’s surface. This thin, molten, fast-flowing lava flooded the plateau and followed the ancestral Snake River and Columbia River all the way out into the Pacific Ocean. More than a hundred lava floods covered the land over the course of 10 million years. At the lowest point—near Hanford—the basalt was two miles thick. The earth’s lava crust sank into the shape of a saucer now known as the Columbia Basin. When lava flows ceased, powerful winds blew sediment over the land.

Then came the Pleistocene Epoch or ice age—roughly a mere 15,000 to 13,000 years ago. Glacial Lake Missoula formed when a finger of the Cordilleran Ice Sheet dammed the Clark Fork River near current Lake Pend Oreille in western Idaho. The ice dam was 2,000 feet high and held back Lake Missoula’s water (half the volume of Lake Michigan). When the ice dam ruptured, torrents of water, ice, and debris surged across eastern Washington.

These thunderous floods repeatedly scoured the land, moving rocks and soil, seeking channels and blasting new ones that ran toward the low point near Kennewick. There, the Horse Heaven Hills contained the flow—even with the one-mile wide opening at Wallula Gap—and water backed up more than a hundred miles and created a lake more than 600 feet deep. These floods moved 50 cubic miles of soil and basalt and carved out the Columbia Basin Desert.

5. Where do you come from?

The desert. You walk out onto the land and you see miles of sagebrush, bunch grass, needle grass, and cheat grass. Your footsteps make a dry, scrubby sound. You see the Horse Heaven Hills to the south and Rattlesnake Mountain to the west, the Blue Mountains off to the east and the wide Columbia River and open land beyond to the north. This land offers little refuge. Its wind pushes you, whips against you. Its dust scours you. Its vistas sweep out to the horizon and leave you dizzy and without shelter. This land makes you feel bare and revealed and vulnerable, like a small child alone on an alien planet.

6. *Where do you come from?*

I come from a place that seemed as homogenized as its dairy milk. Although tribal people had hunted, fished, and wintered in Kennewick for hundreds of years, although tribal people still fished for salmon in the Yakima and Columbia Rivers when I was young, and although we drove to where Indians fished and my father bought salmon from these fisherman, I did not know any Indians, at least not Indians that I knew were Indians. In the 1950s, a “sundown law” meant that no African-Americans lived in Kennewick, so I did not know any African-Americans either.

I knew some Hispanics and one especially well. After Fidel Castro took power in Cuba, many Cuban parents wanted to send their children out of the country. The Catholic Welfare Bureau ran the Peter Pan Operation that quietly brought 14,000 refugee children to the United States. When I was in 6th grade, our school principal announced over the intercom that a Cuban child was coming to our school. Dolores Li—a Chinese Cuban—arrived in 1961 at Hawthorn Elementary School in Kennewick—2,589 miles from her parents in Havana. We became friends and are still friends 50 years later.

I was intrigued by people from elsewhere, because it allowed me to imagine elsewhere. Years later I traveled to Europe, North Africa, and Brazil, lived in Mexico for a year; became an English instructor and taught students from Viet Nam, Japan, China, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Korea, Venezuela, Argentina, Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, Chile, Brazil, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, and Iran. More years later, I understood that most everyone in Kennewick was actually from elsewhere, trying to homogenize.

7. *Where do you come from?*

I come from Kennewick where I hiked, biked, and drove through Columbia Park—right past Kennewick Man—hundreds of times before his skeleton surfaced on the banks of the Columbia River. On July 28, 1996, Will Thomas and Dave Deacy—fans of the annual hydroplanes races—came upon these human bones. They called the police, but Kennewick Man proved not to be the victim of a recent crime. Turns out he lived 9,200 years ago and he has become one big controversy between tribal people from Yakama, Colville, Nez Perce, Wanapum, and Umatilla, and scientists (particularly Doug Owsley, a physical anthropologist from the Smithsonian), and the Army Corp of Engineers.

Tribal people call Kennewick Man the Ancient One and want his remains to be blessed and reburied. They lost their legal case to do this. For now Kennewick Man’s remains reside in the Burke Museum at the University of Washington in Seattle. Doug Owsley continues to research Kennewick Man, including recent DNA analysis at a lab in Copenhagen. Though Owsley has not yet published his research, he has stated that residue in Kennewick Man’s bones indicate that he ate a lot of food from the marine environment. Owsley went on to speculate that, “This is a man from the coast.” But 9,200 years ago sea mammals came up the Columbia as far as Celilo Falls and salmon and lamprey were plentiful in the Columbia. And people have always traveled by river.

So Kennewick Man may or may not be from Kennewick, may or may not have lived in Kennewick, may or may not be related to any modern tribes in the region. Here is what we know: he was buried in Kennewick and now he is not.

8. *Where do you come from?*

A place that lava flowed over and built up, a place of cataclysmic floods equal to ten times the combined force of every river in the world, a place shaped by wind and dust, a place of rivers, a place that held the bones of a prehistoric man, a place where tribal people hunted, fished, and wintered, a place Lewis and Clark journeyed through, a place just off the Oregon Trail, a place where steamboats plied the Columbia River and trains traveled the rails, a place settlers settled and farmers farmed, a place where rivers were harnessed, where irrigation made the land fertile, where atomic energy was born, an arid place with wide vistas, a place of undeniable power, a place yet forming, the place that formed me.



BIOGRAPHIES

Poetry

Lacie Clark-Semenavich

Lacie Clark-Semenavich's poems have appeared in *MOBIUS*, *Phantasmagoria*, *Coe Review*, *Barrelhouse*, *Zygote In My Coffee*, *Kansas City Voices*, and *Scissors & Spackle*. Her chapbook, *Legacies*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2012.

Caitlin Connelly

Caitlin Connelly is a student at Lewis University graduating in December with a Bachelor's degree in Creative and Professional Writing, and a minor in Marketing. She also has a poem published in Lewis University's literary magazine, *Windows*. When she isn't writing, Caitlin enjoys spending time with her family and friends and does other various activities with reading being at the top of the list.

Mike Cunningham

Marcene Gondolfo

Marcene Gondolfo's work has been published widely in many journals, including *Poet Lore*, *Bellingham Review*, *DMQ Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *Bayou*, *The Café Review*, and *Paterson Literary Review*. This year, Gondolfo released her first full-length collection of poems, *Angles of Departure* (Cherry Grove Collections, February 2014)). Last year, the book was a finalist for the Melissa Lanitis Gregory Poetry Prize and the Patricia Bibby First Book Award and a semi-finalist for the Washington Prize. She has taught at several northern California colleges, including UC Davis and Sacramento City College.

David Hernandez

David Hernandez's most recent collection of poems is *Hoodwinked* (Sarabande Books, 2011). His awards include a Pushcart Prize, an NEA Literature Fellowship in Poetry, and the Kathryn A. Morton Prize. His poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The Missouri Review*, *Field*, *The Southern Review*, and *The Best American Poetry 2013*. For more information, visit his website at www.davidahernandez.com.

Bryn Homuth

Bryn Homuth has recent poems published or forthcoming in *Jabberwock Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, and *Flint Hills Review*, among several others. His poem "Bandaging," which appeared in *Ducts.org*, was selected as a finalist for the 2013 Best of the Net Anthology. He currently lives with his wife in Minneapolis, MN, and teaches composition for Crown College.

Tim Jones-Yelvington

Tim Jones-Yelvington is a Chicago-based writer, multimedia artist and drag/nightlife personality. He is the author of “Evan’s House and the Other Boys who Live There” (in “They Could No Longer Contain Themselves,” Rose Metal Press) and “This is a Dance Movie!” (Tiny Hardcore Press).

Tim Kahl

Tim Kahl [<http://www.timkahl.com>] is the author of *Possessing Yourself* (CW Books 2009) and *The Century of Travel* (CW Books, 2012). His work has been published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Mad Hatters’ Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Metazen*, *Ninth Letter*, *Sein und Werden*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Really System*, *Konundrum Engine Literary Magazine*, *The Journal*, *The Volta*, *Parthenon West Review*, *Caliban*, and many other journals in the U.S. He appears as Victor Schnickelfritz at the poetry and poetics blog The Great American Pinup (<http://greatamericanpinup.wordpress.com/>) and the poetry video blog Linebreak Studios [<http://linebreakstudios.blogspot.com/>]. He is also editor of *Bald Trickster Press and Clade Song* [<http://www.cladesong.com>]. He is the vice president and events coordinator of The Sacramento Poetry Center.

Marilyn Krysl

Marilyn Krysl won Cleveland State Poetry Center Prize in 1996. *SWEAR THE BURNING VOW: SELECTED AND NEW POEMS*, 2009, is available from Ghost Road Press.

Stephen Massimilla

Stephen Massimilla is a poet, critic, professor, and painter. His latest book, *The Plague Doctor in His Hull-Shaped Hat*, was selected in the Stephen F. Austin State University Press Prize contest. He has received the Bordighera Poetry Prize for Forty Floors from Yesterday; the Grolier Prize for Later on Aiaia; a Van Rensselaer Award, selected by Kenneth Koch; an Academy of American Poets Prize; and multiple Pushcart Prize nominations. His volume *Almost a Second Thought* was runner-up for the Salmon Run National Poetry Book Award, selected by X.J. Kennedy. Massimilla has recent work in *AGNI*, *American Literary Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Bellingham Review*, *Chelsea*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Epoch*, *Fiction Fix*, *The Literary Review*, *Marlboro Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Provincetown Arts*, *The Southern Poetry Review*, *Tampa Review*, and many other journals and anthologies. He holds an M.F.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University and teaches literary modernism, among other subjects, at Columbia University and the New School.

Beth McDemott

Beth McDemott’s poetry and prose are forthcoming in journals such as *So to Speak*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *American Book Review*. She received an honorable mention for the 2013 AWP Intro Journals Award and first place in the Regional Mississippi Valley Poetry Contest. Recently, McDemott completed her PhD at the University of Illinois at Chicago; she currently teaches in the English department at the University of St. Francis and live in New Lenox, IL.

Kelly Nelson

Kelly Nelson is the author of *Rivers I Don't Live By*, winner of the 2013 Concrete Wolf Chapbook Award. Her found poetry has appeared in *Boktor*, *Really System*, *NonBinary Review* and *Found Poetry Review* and has been nominated for Best of the Net. Her non-found poetry has appeared recently in *Sequestrum*, *Watershed Review* and *I-70 Review* and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She teaches Interdisciplinary Studies at Arizona State University. Visit her website at www.kelly-nelson.com

Pablo Otavalo

Pablo Otavalo lives and writes in Chicago with his partner Rachel and their inscrutable cats Sebastian and Dorothy Parker. He is a recipient of the 2013 and 2014 Illinois Emerging Poet award and his work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *RHINO* and *Structo* magazine. He is a reluctant dancer.

Jon Riccio

Jon Riccio studied viola performance at Oberlin College and the Cleveland Institute of Music. An MFA candidate at the University of Arizona, current and forthcoming poems appear in *Four Chambers*, *Paper Nautilus*, *Waxwing*, *Switchback* and *Triggerfish Critical Review*. He coordinates the Tucson-based WIP Reading Series.

Karen Terrey

Karen Terrey's poems have appeared in *Rhino*, *Edge*, *Meadow*, *WordRiot*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Wicked Alice*, *Canary*, and *Grey Sparrow Journal*. Terrey's poetry chapbook *Bite and Blood* is available from Finishing Line Press. If you'd like to learn more, she blogs at www.karenaterrey.blogspot.com.

Allison Titus

Allison Titus is the author of the poetry books *Sum of Every Lost Ship* (CSU) and *The True Book of Animal Homes* (forthcoming from Saturnalia), and the novel *The Arsonist's Song Has Nothing To Do With Fire* (Etruscan). She teaches in the low-res MFA program at New England College.

Alexandra van de Kamp

Alexandra van de Kamp lives in Stony Brook, NY, with her husband and is a Lecturer in the Program of Writing & Rhetoric at Stony Brook University. She has been previously published in numerous journals nationwide, such as: *The Cincinnati Review*, *River Styx*, *Meridian*, *Lake Effect*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *The Connecticut Review*. She is forthcoming in *32 Poems*. Her full-length collection of poems, *The Park of Upside-Down Chairs*, was published by CW Books in 2010 (WordTech Press) and her chapbook, *Dear Jean Seberg* (2011), won the 2010 Burnside Review Chapbook Contest. A new chapbook, *A Liquid Bird inside the Night*, is forthcoming in 2014 from Red Glass Books, a Brooklyn-based poetry press. For six years she lived in Madrid, Spain, where she co-founded and edited the bilingual journal, *Terra Incognita*. You may see more of her poetry and prose at her website: <http://alexandravandekamp.blogspot.com>

C. Derick Varn

C Derick Varn. is a poet, teacher, and theorist. He currently edits for *Former People*. He has a Master of Fine Arts in Poetry at Georgia College and State University where he served as assistant editor for *Arts and Letters: A Journal of Contemporary Arts*. He has served as managing editor for the now defunct *Milkwood Review*. He won the Frankeye Davis Mayes/Academy of American Poets Prize in 2003 and His poetry has appeared at *Unlikely Stories 2.0*, *Full of Crows*, *Writing Disorder*, *JMWW*, *Clutching at Straws*, *Xenith*, *Piriene's Fountain*, and elsewhere. He currently lives in Mexico, and recently moved from South Korea. Originally from the deep South of the United States. He lives in Northern Mexico as a lecturer and teacher on Ethics, Composition, and Intercultural communication. He taught both University and high school in South Korea and the States as well. He lives with his partner, and a bunch of books, and writes at night.

Emily Vizzo

Emily Vizzo is a San Diego writer, editor and educator. She currently serves as an AME for *Drunken Boat*; Vizzo also volunteer with VIDA, Poetry International and Hunger Mountain. She was previously published or is forthcoming in *FIELD*, *The Journal*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *The Normal School* and *North American Review*. Last year one of her essays was noted in *Best American Essays 2013*. She earned her MFA at Vermont College of Fine Arts, and teaches yoga at the University of San Diego.

Alicja Zapalska

Alicja Zapalska is a high school senior and editor of a local literary magazine, *Octopus Eight*. She is published or forthcoming in *Winter Tangerine Review*, *Polyphony*, and *The Postscript Journal*.

Art

Larissa Barnat

Diane Christiansen

Diane Christiansen is a Chicago based visual artist working in painting, drawing animation and collaborative installation. She has exhibited extensively all across the United States. In the past several years Christiansen has also had exhibitions in Scotland and Slovenia.

Leslie Ansteth Colonna

Leslie Colonna is a sculptor currently living outside Chicago, Illinois. She received her MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art and is an Assistant Professor in the Department

of Art and Design at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois. Her current work centers around identity as expressed through the human figure. More of her work can be seen at <http://leslieanstethcolonna.tumblr.com/>

Joseph Gegan

A native Californian, Joseph Gegan feels a deep love for the Bay Area Figurative Movement. While a student at the University of California, Davis, Gegan had the extreme good fortune to study under Wayne Thiebaud. He received his MFA from Boston University, working closely with John Walker. His interest is in building paintings from intuition, allowing his hand to work one step faster than he think he can control – always searching, moving, finding as he feverishly edits and re-edits until he achieves completeness. Gegan finds painting to be a physical way of thinking, an internal discourse made concrete. Recently, he has been using the breaking down of old paintings, both his own and those of other artists, and repurposing them through collage. The action of this decay is psychologically penetrating and allows for interesting new associations, both personal and formal. Gegan's painting has become increasingly sculptural, possessing a physicality that ripples with texture and moves in muscular patterns that add layers of depth. The paintings are very much about his own reach and the movement of paint, his own physicality and touch as he endeavors to make paintings with a complex psychological presence that tries to capture the soul of a place.

Thomas Gillaspy

Thomas Gillaspy is a northern California photographer with an interest in urban minimalism. His work has been featured or is forthcoming in numerous magazines including *Streetlight Magazine*, *DMQ Review* and *Citron Review*.

Catherine Kelly

Catherine Kelly is a junior at Lewis University. She is double majoring in Studio Art and Psychology, with plans to achieve her masters in Art Therapy. Her pictures are a series of reflections and shadows. They were taken during the 2014 fall school semester. Kelly was inspired by nature and its raw beauty.

Kimberly Pellikan

Kimberly Pellikan is a recent graduate of Carthage College. There, she pursued graphic design and art. Her work emphasizes experimentation through different mediums. Kimberly's interests and inspirations include music, dreams, cult film/television, and anything older than 1999.

Shaun Reynolds

Shaun D. Reynolds was born and raised in Chicago. He currently resided in Frankfort IL and works as the regional assistant at Lewis University's Shorewood Campus. He has the dubious distinction of membership in the Computer Graphics Pioneers SIG of SIGGRAPH, due to having been a computer animator starting in 1977, and one of the

2 animators of the first fully digital film, “Dilemma,” directed by John Halas of Halas & Batchelor Films of London. He worked as a director for several film and video houses in the Chicago area from 1977-2001 and as a freelance designer and artist afterward. Reynolds also taught art courses at the South Bend Art Center and at DePaul University. He holds a BFA from University of Notre Dame ‘70 and a MFA from the University of Chicago ‘77.

Artist statement:

Reynolds’ work is about the power of the image and its implications. As you will see, the basic theme common to most of his work is that it uses one or more famous or familiar images which become or encapsulate one or more other familiar image. The reasons he does this are to reveal some unstated subtext of the images, to add a subtext of my own, to demystify or “deconstruct” the mythology attached to it, and, ideally, to add an element of humor or irony in the juxtapositions. “Infinite Jetst” is a tessellation homage to 2 of my favorite artists, M.C.Escher and David Foster Wallace (author of “Infinite Jest”), with an infinite stream of stealth bombers on a Moebius strip, but going which way? “Beauty’s in the Eye of the Beheld” warns about letting our cultural aesthetics be manipulated by those who stand to gain from the result.”Western-Ization” is about dueling geopolitical propagandas whose imagery is equally as misleading as its philosophy.

Allison Rios

Allie Rios is Director of Advancement Communications at Lewis University. She has written both as a hobby and professionally for many years, spanning many different forms and aspects of writing.

Deborah Stevenson

Deborah was born in Washington, DC. She grew up in Tokyo, went to high school in Baltimore, and got her BA from Sarah Lawrence College in New York. She lived for many years on the West Coast, and recently relocated back to the East Coast. She currently resides in Brooklyn, New York.

Fiction

Ashlie Allen

Ashlie Allen’s work has been published in *The East Coast Literary Review*, *The Squawk Back*, *The Burningword Literary Journal*, *The Crab Fat and Conclave: A Journal of Character*. She writes fiction and poetry. She also has plans to do photography.

Joan Connor

Joan Connor is professor at Ohio University and a former professor in Fairfield

University's and Stonecoast /University of Southern Maine's low residency MFA programs. She is a recipient of a Barbara Deming Award, the John Gilgun award, a Pushcart Prize, the Ohio Writer award in fiction and nonfiction, the AWP award for her short story collection, *History Lessons*, and the River Teeth Award for her collection of essays, *The World Before Mirrors*. Her most recent collection, *How to Stop Loving Someone* won the Leapfrog Press Award for Adult Fiction and was published in 2011. Her first two collections are: *We Who Live Apart* and *Here On Old Route 7*. Her work has appeared in: *Glimmer Train*, *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Chelsea*, *Manoa*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Journal of Arts & Letters*, and *Black Warrior*, among others. She lives in Athens, Ohio and Belmont, Vermont.

Kelly DeLong

Kelly DeLong's work has appeared in *The Sun*, *Macguffin*, *Evansville Review*, *Roanoke Review*, among others. His novel *The Poor Sucker* was published last year. His non-fiction book *The Freshman Year at an HBCU* will be published early next year. He teaches at Clark Atlanta University.

Cris Mazza

Linda Michel-Cassidy

Linda Michel-Cassidy lives in rural northern New Mexico, where along with the writing, she is a studio artist and aspiring ski bum. For four years, she was a resident artist in the Taos public schools. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Eleven Eleven*, the *Provo Canyon Review*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Writing Tomorrow*, the anthologies *Seeking Its Own Level* and *New Mexico Voices*, and others. She is a contributor to the *Review Review* and the *Tishman Review* and reads for *Post Road* and *Drafthorse*. She holds an MFA in visual arts from the California College of the Arts and is an MFA candidate in creative writing at Bennington.

Kathryn Paulsen

Kathryn Paulsen has been published or is upcoming in *New Letters*, *Cottonwood Review*, *Cedar Rock*, *New York Times*, *L.A. Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Newark Star-Ledger*, and various magazines. She has been awarded residence at Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony, Ledig House, and others artists' retreats. Though she currently lives in New York, she grew up all over the country as a part of an Air Force Family.

Carrie Repking

Carrie Repking received a B.A. in fine arts from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She has been a practicing fine artist for most of her life. Her love of reading led to her opening and running an independent bookstore for ten years in Fallbrook, CA. She has had short stories published in *The San Diego Writer's Monthly*, *the Penmen Review*, and now the *Jet Fuel Review*.

Ben Rubin

Ben Rubin is an art professor at Malcolm X College. He has an MA photography and an MFA in painting.

Manuel Sanz

In addition to attending Bread Loaf Writers' Conference this August on a work-study scholarship, Manuel Sanz had stories appear in *Puerto del Sol*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *Chariton Review*, *Xavier Review*, *RE:AL*, and other literary magazines. Sanz teaches writing at the University of Denver.

Daniel Schiffrin

Daniel Schiffrin writes fiction and journalism; he's been a curator for *SFMOMA*. He was a visiting scholar at Stanford and has done radio interviews for KALW and KQED.

Jenny Wales-Steele

Jenny Wales Steele's fiction has appeared in *Sou'wester*, *cleavermagazine.com*, *The Ampersand Review*, *juked.com*, *Salt Hill*, *verdadmagazine.org*, *Harpur Palate*, among many others, and she's been nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize. A native Arizonan, she lives in Tucson. Visit her at www.jennywalessteele.weebly.com

Nonfiction

Reg Saner

Janet Yoder

Janet Yoder lives with her husband on their Seattle houseboat, the floating nation of Tui Tui. Her writing has appeared in *Raven Chronicles*, *Bayou*, *Porcupine*, *Passager*, *The MacGuffin*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Evansville Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Pilgrimage*, *River Teeth*, and *Chautauqua*. She is currently at work on a collection of personal essays inspired by her friendship with Skagit tribal elder, the late Vi Hilbert.



