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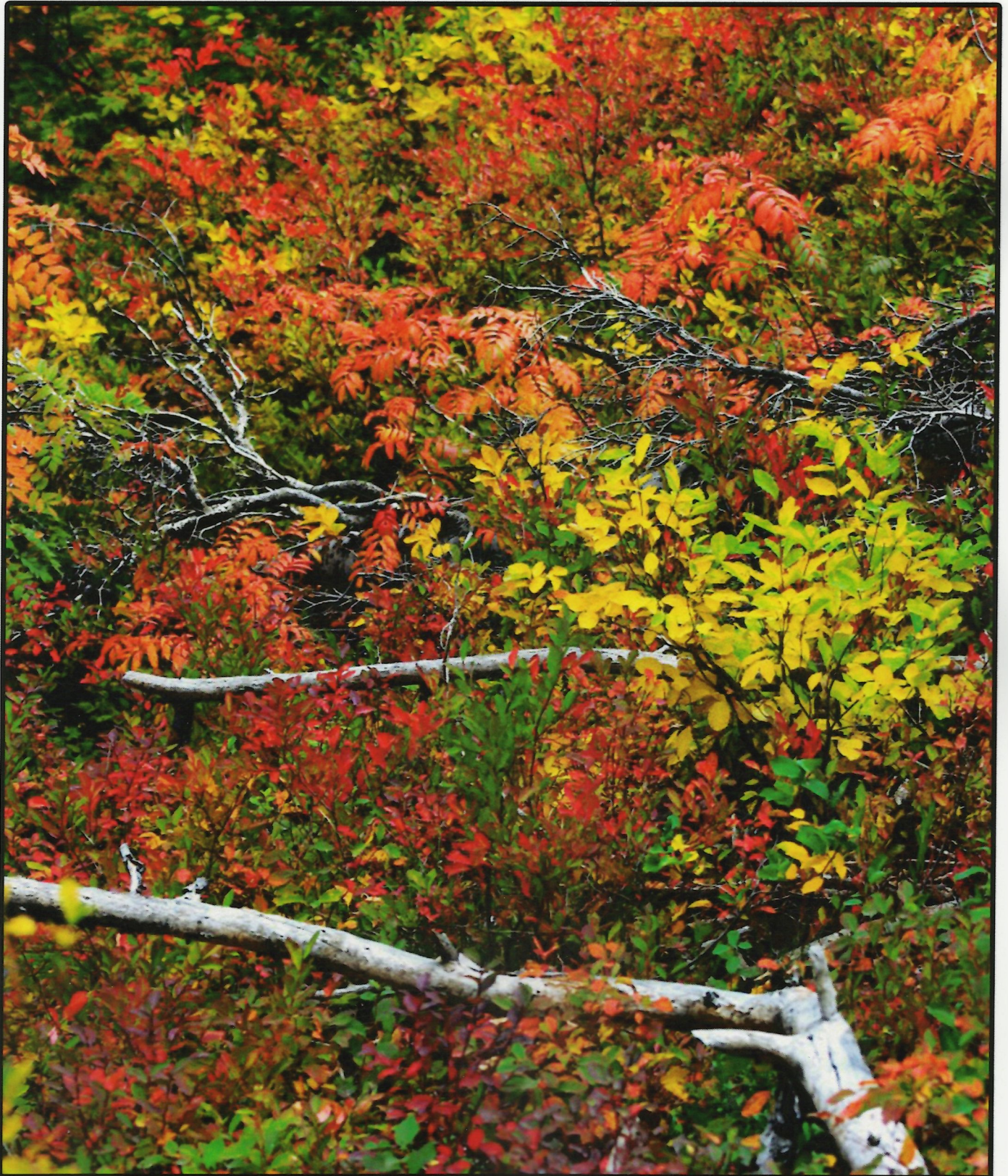
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# Westview

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# WESTVIEW

Volume 31

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- 1. Electronic submissions are preferred.** To help facilitate the journal's blind review process, authors should exclude identification information from manuscripts. Submissions by post should be typed on 8.5" x 11" white paper; prose should be double spaced. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope.
- 2. Electronic submissions are also preferred for artwork.** Artwork submitted by post should be suitable for black and white reproduction. Work should be no larger than 8.5" x 14". However, photographs or slides of larger works may be submitted.
3. Include a brief biographical sketch for our contributors' notes.
4. Submissions and correspondence may be sent to Amanda Smith at [westview@swosu.edu](mailto:westview@swosu.edu).  
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# The Two Emotions of Dogs

by Marc Berman

The dog drinks water  
with pursed lips through a straw.  
We laugh. It's so goofy.  
Who taught her this trick?

The dog, humiliated,  
slinks into the pantry,  
stares at kibbles  
in her crusty old bowl,

and because hope is  
the other emotion of dogs,

she hopes for gravy  
soft meat scraps,  
some egg yolks set aside  
on the stovetop,

hopes that the laughter  
that pings in her curly brown ears  
is surely directed  
at others.



# Meditation on Household Appliances

by Will Walker

On my block this very afternoon is a handful of solitary souls bonding with their refrigerators, thanking them for keeping cool in the face of challenging circumstances, adding an extra hearty, *Thanks, old buddy for not talking back or getting heat rash or suffering from a loose crown.*

Somebody's spouse somewhere nearby may be suffering, but the fridge is just fine, a paragon of energy reduction, efficient and even-tempered, unlike some people, not to mention any names. And some days

that's what we all love about our household appliances, that they don't talk back, and make their own informed decisions as long as they are able. Then they fail, cheerfully, without guile, souring the milk but never blaming you for not drinking it, never making matters worse by complaining about lapsed service agreements or dust bunnies or the way you failed to steady them when you had the chance.



# Mary Spillwater

Robert McGowan

**Everyone who's ever known** Dr. Spillwater esteems her the very manifestation of unwavering practicality, an impeccably sensible woman.

Her department chairman, when vexed by difficulty, as department chairs perpetually are, comes to her before all others for wisdom.

Friends and colleagues in critical need seek her advice on delicate private matters, so unerring has her judgment in all previous such instances proven to be.

And Dr. Spillwater has recently, for an unprecedented third time, won the university's Distinguished Teaching Award in recognition of her meticulous devotion—her students regularly excel far beyond the norm—to the chemical engineering classes that have been her charge over the past three decades.

The sapient, the erudite, the dutiful Mary Spillwater.

Dr. Spillwater has now entered into her mid-sixties, aghast on arriving there, dispirited, the loathsome inevitability of hollow retirement chilling her like, as she once melodramatically asserted, a clammy foul mist—the phrase memorable among her colleagues because the saying of it was so uncharacteristic of a woman who is by her nature much averse to flights of gooey lyric metaphor. Dr. Spillwater is not an artist, does not surrender to expressive impulse, and never has been one to poeticize.

More than forty years earlier, the young Mary switched her major to chemical engineering so as to immerse herself in the tangible. She'd begun college as a philosophy major, her ungirlish ambition having been to enter into history as one of the great logicians—Aristotle, Friedrich Frege, Alfred North Whitehead, Mary Spillwater. But after two years of inconclusive speculation concerning the nature of existence and on discovering along the way the futility of pinning down the laws of reason, what with the shocking fallibility of syllogistic thinking and so forth, her yearning for the corporeal had grown urgent. Thus the chemical sciences, in which range of empirical disciplines Mary's intrinsic rationalist bent—at last no longer in thrall to metalogical noetics and other such tomfoolery, as she now thought of it—would prove genuinely useful, in, thank God, practical ways.

Not that Mary is in the least religious. The phrase—thank God—only serves to express emphatically Mary's immense relief at having turned away from the purely notional and toward the real, or toward at least a more steadying version of the real. Mary had never adopted the primitive practice of offering up utterances of pious gratitude to some fantastical first-cause deity. As is clearly understood by even the most novice philosophy student, identifying the cause of the first causer is the familiar and anciently sufficient impediment to affirming the existence of Him who requires said thanks be uttered meekly unto Him, or, of course, Her. Mary early

on grew weary of the whole nettlesome folderol: that interminable, exasperating, and patently futile disputation concerning the god issue. The pertinent fact here is that young Mary disdained religion, scornfully, as a matter of good sense, as was, of course, consistent with her fundamentally sensible nature.

But that was then. Long ago. Before, she'd endured decades in an unremittingly cold relationship with damned chemical engineering—not that Mary is much given to cussing; she isn't. The point here being that she'd become finally pretty much fed up with chemical engineering—and before, she'd entered morose and terrified into her my-time-on-earth-is-nearly-over seventh decade, with now before her the prospect of being soon evicted from the cozy embrace of academe, jettisoned into drear oblivion, which likelihood had kindled in her a certain uncharacteristic desperation.

This was, for Mary, an entirely unfamiliar sensation. It discombobulated her, so that she therefore found herself in a state of discombobulation, a bumpy-jumpy-amusing word that probably has never once been made use of by the dignified, the scholarly, the earnest Dr. Mary Spillwater.

The malady itself—discombobulation, the word repeated here for the plain fun of it, a condition as unlikely, one might have thought, to be suffered by Dr. Spillwater as to have its name spoken by her—was one that poor distressed Mary was pridefully eager to conceal she'd succumbed to. Her horror on imagining anyone might notice she'd done so only intensified—how welcome is this opportunity to set down the word yet again—her discombobulation.

She'd never in her sixty-something years experienced such a failure of inner composure.

Mary was rattled.

She needed solace.

Which she found in religion.

Religion.

Though not in ordinary religion, religion of the sort she'd ages ago so cold-bloodedly cold-shouldered, but in a decidedly unordinary one of her own devising. Or not of a devising, per se, in that the process of devising involves a degree of conscious, purposeful intent. Mary did not, strictly speaking, devise her new religion. She descended uncritically into it.

As into delusion.

And delusion it was.

On waking one morning in her spartan, bare-walled bedroom, Dr. Spillwater was startled to be addressed, in a tone fatherly and commanding, by . . .

. . . she dared not attempt identification.

But she knew.

That she'd been contacted. She felt it. Ecstatically.

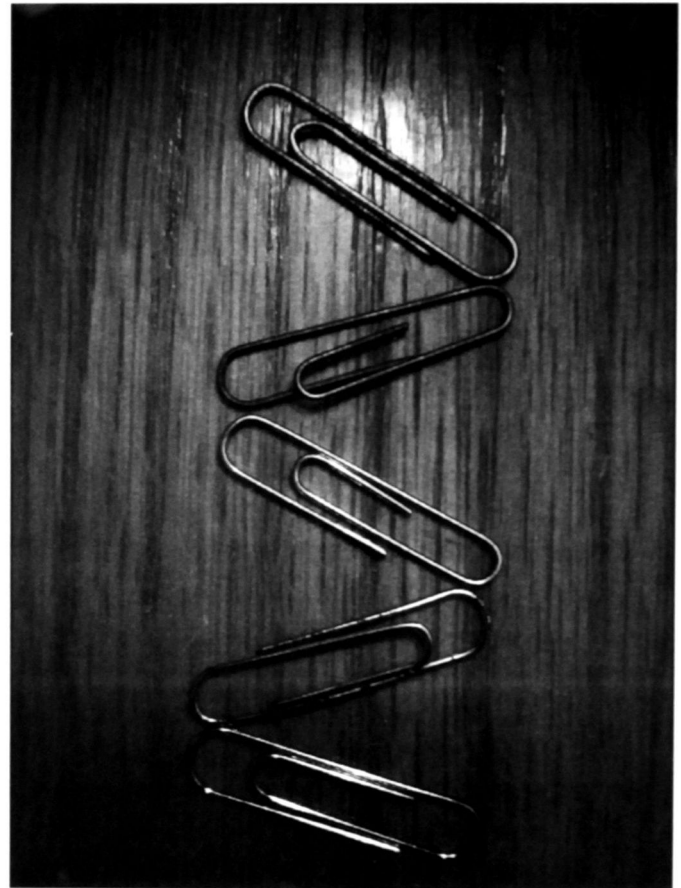
Which was, for staid Mary, an altogether new sensation: ecstasy.

And it wasn't a one-time experience. From that first encounter, the enraptured Dr. Mary Spillwater knew she was in touch with . . . She was in touch, is what she knew, and she was disinclined to probe further. It didn't matter. Mary was now in the company of her own superhuman caring entity. She knew not the entity's appearance or the entity's name or history, only that she would be forevermore safe in the entity's infinite regard and protection.

But naturally, certain prescribed rituals are now expected of her. Some of these Dr. Spillwater conducts at home in wary seclusion, at night in curtained darkness, others of a morning. Various sorts of objects must be arranged in potent formations: paperclips set out daily on her desk, cleared of all else, each time in a different complex pattern conveyed to her as she sits there awaiting instructions; fourteen, and precisely fourteen, aspirin tablets are twice per week, each Tuesday and Saturday evening, to be dropped, one every third second exactly, into the toilet, which then may not be flushed until morning; every day between six and seven o'clock a.m., forty-three toothpicks are to be lined up on her kitchen counter, side-by-side at an unvarying one-and-three-quarter-inch distance from each other, measured from the center-point in the width of each toothpick, so to create an overall length, strictly ruled, of six feet, three-and-three-quarter inches, to remain in place undisturbed during the workday and then returned to their plastic container each evening in readiness for arrangement again next morning.

In addition, Mary is regularly to perform certain detailed exercises. These involve primarily clapping, doing so in highly complicated rhythms, in several sessions each morning before rising from her bed. And she'd been provided certain combinations of words, or merely sounds really, without conventional meaning, that she is obligated to repeat aloud in an established uniform sequence while at table before each evening's meal, as in prayer. If, however, she is out to dinner among others, Dr. Spillwater is on such occasions, because her guardian entity is a reasonable and compassionate one, disencumbered of this requirement.

A very great deal depends on Mary's unwavering fidelity to her rituals, a very great deal concerning not only her own well-being, but the well-being of the





world. She therefore, ever the solemnly dutiful Mary Spillwater, carries this body of obligations compliantly upon her aged shoulders as the grave responsibility she knows them to be. And she is honored to bear them.

The obligations that have come to Mary by way of her special new relationship are sometimes distracting at work, though she has been generously granted methods by which both to perform these obligations and yet also to conceal them from others. When on occasion she is, for example, commanded to perform her clapping exercises, she has by humble entreaty been permitted to carry them out in another form, by striking up a silent cadence with her toes: big, middle, little, big, middle, little, the silent rite wholly invisible within her shoes. Not uncommonly, the entity will choose to speak with Dr. Spillwater while she's in conversation with colleagues, in meetings, or even when lecturing before a classroom crowd of students. Needless to say, Mary is hardly allowed to refuse such conversations and so engages in them without outward sign of doing so, cleverly squelching gesture and facial expression, or, should any such movements spontaneously occur, allowing it to be assumed they're but the involuntary twitches of an old-lady professor. And she disguises any insuppressible vocal emissions as coughs or throat clearings, as though in preparation for some sagacious pronouncement.

In her department at the university, Dr. Mary Spillwater is esteemed the consummate academic professional, an eminently shrewd intellect, the very avatar of unwavering practicality.

She's lately won, for an unprecedented third time, the university's Distinguished Teaching Award in recognition of her ardent devotion to the chemical engineering classes that have been her charge for a full three decades.

Her department chair, plagued continually by a vexing gamut of administrative worries, seeks her sage advice above all others'.

And friends in critical need come to her concerning delicate private matters, so unerring has her judgment in all previous such instances proven to be.



# Twins' Birthday, 9/15/13

by Paul Watsky

A struggle to  
retain the here  
and now against their adult else-

whereness. In exquisite a.m.  
weather, the faux Adiron-

dack deck chairs pre-  
view my estate sale. I hope they sell

as a lot, the four of them plus a brace  
of clunky, trestle-legged side

tables and our backed bench especially  
beloved by my wife. Mis-

calculation. I'll go  
first, and the real clear-

ance will follow after  
her. Now that's settled anyway, and

a jumble of wind-  
fall pears I'm monitoring

for ripeness comes back  
into focus, waxy

green, their upper  
surfaces gleaming modestly,

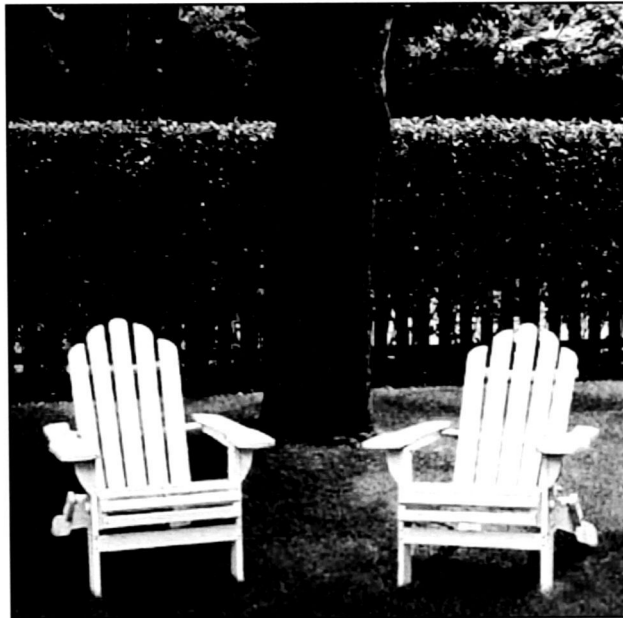
throwing shadows on their  
naturally faded red-

wood plinth, on two fist-  
sized paper

weights, river rocks Clare  
scavenged from the South

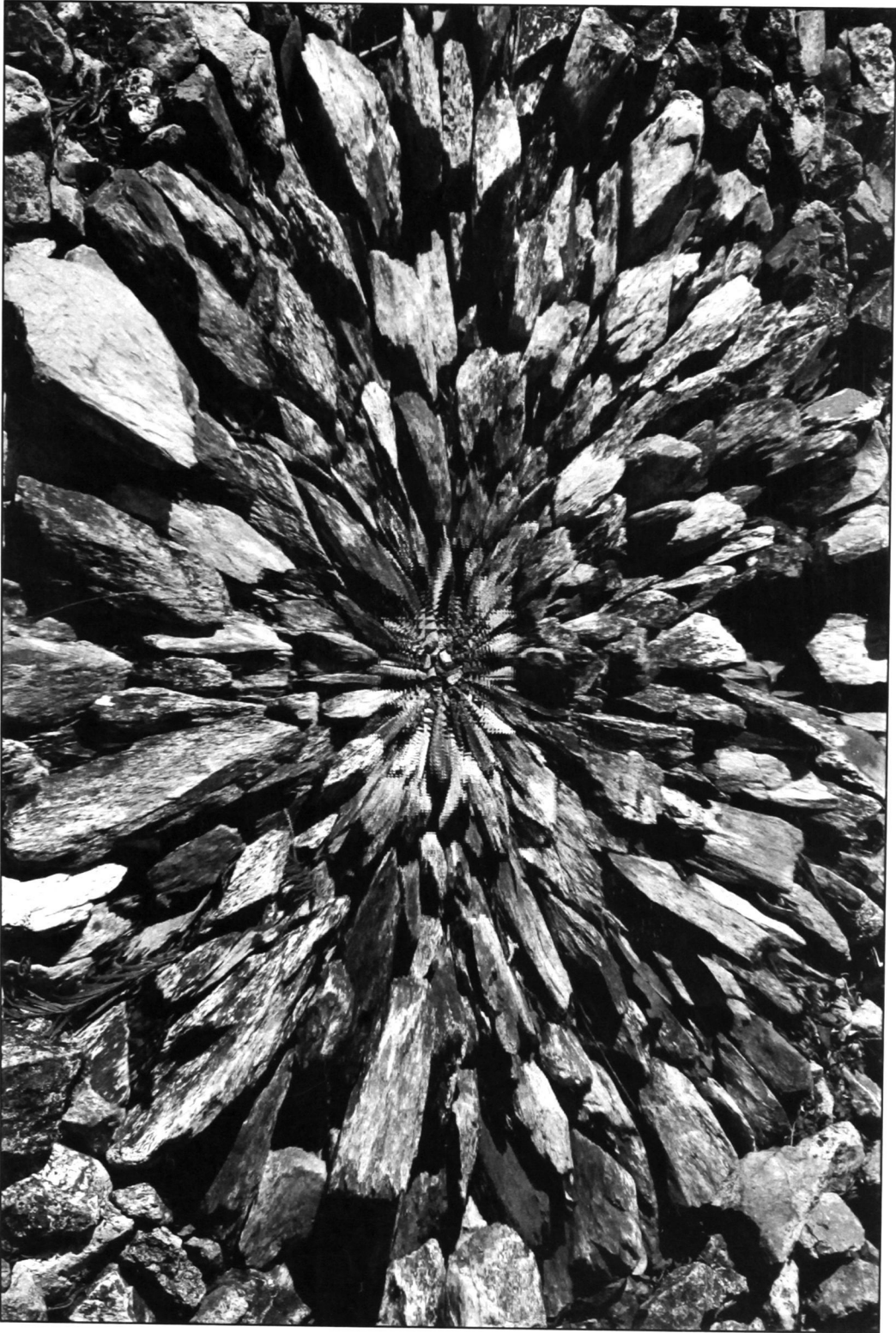
Fork of the Trinity, granitic  
quartz, off

kilter like the fruit and throwing their  
own, smaller, shadows.









# Inside Work

Tom Larsen

**The TV flashes** but makes no sound. Sedalia rocks the baby in her arms and reads the closed captions too slowly, maybe three words before the next lines come up. I watch her lips move, and I want to say something hurtful. Stupid Sedalia, refusing even to try until it's too late. Until all the problems that can arise have arisen and even the man in Family Services has lost his puzzling interest. I want to lie here and pile it on, talking in that snide rasp, the words sagging in monotone, as is my way. Felix Uncle, your humble narrator.

"It's not like they say, little *mamere* with first born," I tell her. "It is not always the mistake they make it out to be. You will still be young when Sam is grown with his juvee record and his ADD. You will get a second chance."

"*Disentise paola, mana Felix,*" she warns the kid about me.

Outside the sirens start up again. The nursing home has an emergency response language of its own. The short, warbling exchange is an inside joke, I'm convinced. Sedalia glances to the window and makes the sign of the cross.

I want to say, "And in the end you will have someone to pay the cable bill, providing he doesn't steal the television. Look at him, *mamere*. His first hot car hasn't even been built yet."

But I don't. The world will see to Sedalia soon enough and without my help, already dealing with her by proximity of decay. The hole in the floor beneath the crib is stuffed with old newspaper. A ball of it crumbled to dust in my hand. Another showed a strip of baseball standings, the National League reduced to the original eight. Brooklyn, Milwaukee, waiting all those years for Sedalia and Sam. The Polo Grounds pre-Willy Mays, painful enough, even to the ignorant.

Edgar calls up to me, but I ignore him, also my way. Edgar can tell from my silence whether I am home. When I am home my silence speaks clearly. It says *shut up, Edgar. Your fast track finaglings don't interest me*. He wants to come up and look at Sedalia's breasts, but I will do my best to foil him.

"And to think, Sedalia. Now at least you have a chance, slim as it may be, to profit from this mistake that is no mistake. You are in the running. Sammy the poet laureate, the Speaker of the House, the number one draft choice. It could happen, they tell me."

She reads, "... order now ...guaran ...tee"

"Felix, it's me, Edgar!" as if I would mistake him. "I have work for you, Felix."

Edgar has been here for three years, long enough to take a rung up the ladder. After a year, there are jobs the woolies will no longer do. Of course, I

am the exception. When you are fifty-six with one gift and many habits to feed, there is no ladder. I go to the window.

“You would have me rake rocks?” I snarl down to him.

“No rocks, Felix,” Edgar waves his hands like an umpire. “Inside work.”

I try to think what sort of inside work would be worse than raking rocks. There are more difficult things, surely, involving established procedures and tools that are beyond me. But raking rocks is interminable. Each stroke produces more rocks. Progress is measured in piles, not in the absence of rocks. Many piles are better than fewer piles, but the rocks are forever with you. The trick is to dislodge those that are visible and smooth over the rest. It’s a trick my people learned well raking the rocks of our own country’s rich, but, for me, it goes against the grain. I have no knack for it. There is always a rock that cries out to be raked.

“Let me come up, Felix.” Edgar wheedles.

“Sedalia?” I consult her.

“Order now ... money back ...” her lips wrinkled in distaste.

I cross back to the sofa for my cigarettes, and baby Sam watches me. Impossibly young, thoroughly unemployable, absence of memory, the blissful state. My grandmother was the lumiere of her village. As deathbed intermediary and advocate for the doomed, she put but one question to her charges. If they could live the same life again, would they? It is a question that cannot be answered in advance, as it is the nature of man to be hopeful and the nature of events to surprise us. In the end, all but one elected to decline. “Life is a disappointing business,” my grandmother would say. Better to be a cat. Sleep life away without a pang of guilt.

“Sedalia doesn’t feel up to it.”

“Up to what?”

“She’s not the best judge of character, but she doesn’t care for you, Edgar.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Anyway, that’s not love, my friend.”

“I wouldn’t screw Sedalia with your dick.”

“Have it your own way.”

We walk the pretty streets across town, skirting the low rent district to avoid relatives. Edgar’s got his business hat on and a small notepad in his shirt pocket. While it is true he can negotiate a better price than we can, Edgar’s percentage knocks it back down to subsistence level. We would like to kill him for this, but then we’d have no one to blame. He blows off a couple of cousins scratching lotto tickets in Jolene’s doorway and leads me across the parking lot to a sad row of houses. The one in the middle has a car parked in front with an older white

man at the wheel. The window slides down as we approach.

“That’s it?” the man looks me up and down.

“I can get all the help you need, but you must make a better offer,” Edgar tells him.

“You know the bid is not negotiable. I got a dry wall crew coming in on Monday, and this place has to be ready.”

“Well then, we should let him get to work, eh?”

The man and Edgar move out of earshot, and their sly laughter tells me I’m being screwed. The man is in love with his wife but suspects that she’s being unfaithful. Edgar is not in love with anyone, though at times he pretends to be. The thing is, I can follow love to the source. It is my gift. I see it in the eyes and hear it in the voice. It began as a knack for reading faces but soon went deeper. My reception is as clear as the WAMU radio signal, and, in matters of the heart, I am as infallible as the Pope.

When the man drives off, Edgar turns me to the door.

“Don’t try to get to know her, Felix,” he knocks more sharply than I would have, startling the old woman already standing there.

“Mrs. Jessica,” Edgar calls through the storm door. “This man is here to remove your plaster.”

“I cannot do it.” I smile right at her.

“It’s OK, Felix,” Edgar squeezes my arm. “You’re just doing half.”

The door swings open a crack, and the woman fits her mouth to the gap. “Just one minute, boys. I’m on the telephone.”

“I have no tools, Edgar.”

“There’s a hammer up there and some trash cans. The dumpster will be here any minute.”

“I’m to carry the stuff downstairs in trash cans?”

“I told you, just half of it. They couldn’t get a chute.”

“It’s 95 degrees!”

The woman taps on the glass and pushes the phone through the opening. “It’s my son. He wants to talk to you.”

Edgar takes the phone and turns away from us. The voice on the line is loud and cranky. The woman pats at her hair and looks everywhere but at me. She loves a young man from her childhood, and her dreams are rich in detail. She also loves her son, but in a way that is barely detectable. No one knows I can follow the love, but then I am a man of many secrets.

“OK, Mrs. Jessica. He can start with the third floor.” Edgar fits the phone back through the crack, and we wait for the locks and latches.

I study the seam where the wall meets the ceiling. There is a clean swipe where my fingers cleared a cobweb and the husk of an insect dangles from a thread. I can hear the woman downstairs move from the hallway to the kitchen. Everything is ready, waiting.

I drive the claw end of the hammer into the highest point on the wall. The sum total of blows reduced by one, then two. Plaster rains down on me, crumbling onto my arm and into my eyes. Dust melts in my sweat, and grit settles in my scalp. I pull the hammer away, and the holes stare blankly. Two holes in a room no one uses, still time to walk away. The choice is mine, and, for a moment, I wonder what I will do.

Five solid whacks and the room fills with dust. I watch it swirl past the window, churning backwards as it catches a draft. I see it settle over the mantel and drift toward the open door. It will only get worse. Dust will fill the whole house, and the woman will blame me. Who else would she blame? I rifle through the drawers in an old bureau and find a box of plastic garbage bags and a roll of duct tape. Marveling at my luck, I tape the bags together and hang them over the doorway. Next, I grab a fan from the second floor bathroom and position it in the window blowing out. I move quickly, listening to the woman track me two floors below.

"We are all prisoners of history," I call down to her in my native tongue. "Myself, for example. Carried on the first wave of teeming refuse. The ladders of success to be built with our bones."

A board creaks as she is drawn to my words.

"Yourself, dear lady. A life trapped in an instant of regret. What was it you were thinking?"

Silence stretches. The dead bug twists. We take up our positions.

WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP!

"You can feel the things converging. Sense it in the pace of time, the beat of your heart, dear lady."

The wall puts up stiff resistance. I attack in short violent bursts, but the heat and dust send me scrambling to the window. I cough up great brown gobs and hack curses on my children's children. A shadow flickers down the stairway.

"My fate could not be averted, (hack, TOOHEY), but you ..." I pause for effect. "The way it all turned on a whim. The heart said yes, but the lips said ..."

Nothing.

I work from the waist up. Edgar has hired a shorter man for the rest, at a dollar less an hour. It is the sort of bamboozling that passes for American in the low rent district, along with the hats and notepads. In truth, Edgar just wants me out of the apartment to have a go at Sedalia.

"You must have considered the consequences," I slide into the dialect of my province. "A petty slight as your defining moment."

TV laughter clatters up the stairway.

"And THIS," I bury the hammer to the hilt, "...is not you. All this dreariness, where did it come from? But for one missed step, you would never have spent a night here."

The higher I go, the more direct the avalanche of debris. The shorter man will have to deal with lower back and knee strain, but blindness shouldn't be a problem for him. The steady sprinkling wedged inside the lids, scratching the surface, settling into corners, drying to black meaty pebbles.

"This house of unhappiness," WHUMP! THUNK! "Walls and floors steeped in longing and despair."

More coughing, godawful. I take the stairs to the second floor and snatch a pair of pantyhose from the shower curtain rod. The figure in the mirror is unrecognizable, teeth and eyes on a field of grime. I wrap the pantyhose around my face and tie it tightly behind my head. I finger her things, leaving smudges everywhere.

"He was yours for the taking, but you let him slip away." I scold her through the mesh. "If you had the choice to live it again, could you possibly bear it?"

I shovel the broken plaster into two rubber trash cans. They are half full, and I can barely move them. I can continue to work or wait for the dumpster and problems that will become readily apparent, assuming it ever comes. I stand gasping with my hands on my knees watching sweat puddle in the dust between my feet. A passing cloud plunges the room into shadows.

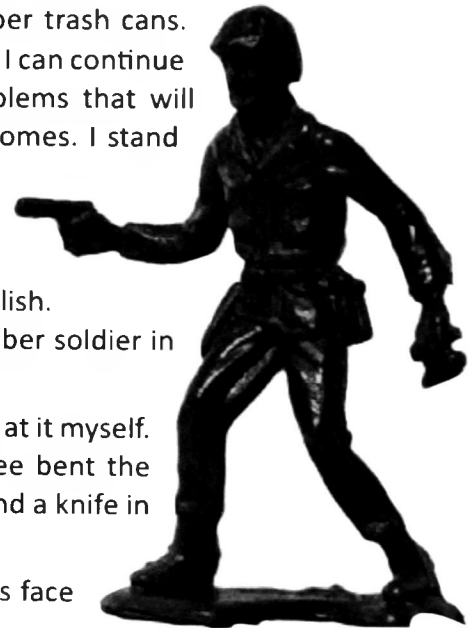
"Look... what I found," I speak to her in English. She looks from the television to the small rubber soldier in my hand.

"It is your son's. From another time." I look at it myself. The soldier is in a crawling position, one knee bent the other extended. He has a pistol in one hand and a knife in the other.

"David loved his army men," the woman's face softens.

"So lifelike, this one." I step closer, turning the tiny figure in my fingers. "Imagine, being frozen in this pose. Look." I hold it closer. "His face set in concentration. While our lives unfolded, he was up there, every minute of it. The rainy days, Christmas, always there."

She looks away. I have taken her where she mustn't go.





“Shall I leave him with you?”

She waves a hand dismissively.

The beams are old but sturdy. The wiring is from another time and should be replaced while the walls are open. A gum wrapper lies flat where the framer left it. The men who built this house, decades dead.

I follow the path of the sun through the windows. Light fills space long lost to darkness. I am conscious of this and of my role in it. Outside, the carillon plays “Greensleeves” while Edgar’s dumpster fails to show. I work until the rubble is knee deep then just leave it there. My shadow precedes me down the stairs. Sirens warble in the distance as I see myself out.

\*\*\*



# Confluence

by Gary Lark

Rivers of wind ran through the orchard  
as Tara and I sat in the water weeds,  
talking nothing and everything,  
not knowing that the marvelous glow  
we shared those few months would  
set us on a quest that would bend  
and shake and burn a path  
through the enterprise of fear.  
We would never meet again  
and never be separate.



# Lost

by Gary Lark

It was somewhere between  
dusk and dark  
on a road off another road  
when I saw a blur  
coming full tilt  
growing into a deer  
up along the river.  
I thought it was going to run right into us.  
As it briefly gathered its power  
to clear the car,  
I could see velvet-covered horns,  
its determined line of grace.  
We had stopped  
to figure out where we were,  
headlights still on,  
door cracked  
for the dome light  
on our map,  
a soft cottonwood smell  
filling the night.  
I looked up  
to see where the color changes  
from side hair to belly hair,  
the fine texture  
forming runs and swirls  
and legs passing over.

# Animal Ways

by Beth Paulson

The cries of coyotes in the night  
woke me up halfway between  
hope and dread, that shadowed place.  
Or was it the hungry mountain lion,  
screaming at a yearling kill?

Outside the bright and silent moon  
hooked a curtain of black sky,  
snow reflecting borrowed light  
on road and fence, and branches  
of the barren oaks gave way to wind.  
I walked uneasy through the house,  
feeling the weight of life and dark.  
Sleep did not come for me again.

By morning's calm, snow had filled  
the footprints of the animals,  
on one small drift a red smear  
almost concealing that wild cache,  
and into the river across the fields  
white-covered hills had fallen.



# The Weaver

by Mary Echlin

Her slender hands are smooth,  
yet the oval nails of the  
first fingers twist slightly  
inward like her grandmother's.

She pulls colored wool  
wound on paper bobbins  
through the warp of the loom  
and pushes the comb  
down, banging it hard  
against the rising pattern  
with a hollow thump

like the sound of a coconut  
dropped from high in a slanted  
palm tree by a boy who hugs  
the furry trunk under  
camouflage of shade.

"Do you give your hands instructions  
or are you in your native element?"

"My heart climbs; my hands follow."

# Chestnut

by James B. Nicola

Then there was a period of reflection,  
when both survivors thought about their ways  
and rued the blasted wars their nations waged,  
as well as domestic infractions, even those  
of childhood, in their neighborhoods and basements.  
For seven nights they thought. They thought and talked  
and listened deeply to each other's views  
as if for the first time on the tragic planet.  
They grew to understand, or started to,  
the follies they'd participated in,  
which had made them monsters. Pausing on a cliff  
that had been famous for its panorama,  
they looked out at the rubble and the fumes  
which stretched with every wind to the horizon,  
murky as an artist's feathering of two  
stark sections on a giant, full-round canvas.  
And so they lived in peace. For seven days.

On the eighth they came upon and loosed,  
each claiming to have spied it first, a perfect  
chestnut. Since they were human after all  
their hunger wrested their civility.  
Civility? What civilization?  
The murders, in the end, were mutual.  
The week of hope was over. But at least  
it was the end of violence for good.

It only remained for the gods to return  
and summon a poet, one of the dead-and-greats,  
whose work had been forgotten over the years,  
to note the history. Here is the account  
she penned in human blood, warm from the corpses.  
Had she tears, she'd have mixed the ink with tears,  
but as you know by now, the dead don't cry.  
She starts off in Strophe One by telling you  
how she remembers when she too once bled,  
a pulsing human issue of the earth,  
her childhood a golden phase when the world seemed kind,  
but then goes on from there to what befell  
so that should gods and nature try again  
some million, billion, trillion years from now,  
whatever species should emerge might find  
the tome, some scholar break the runic code,  
and all who read be forewarned of the pitfalls.



# The Woodpile

Marian Frances Wolbers

**In Granny's house,** the woodstove stood witness. It stayed unmoving on its cold, shiny, green legs over all those years of fighting and loving, mourning and celebrating. Granddad started the fire most mornings by shoving in pieces of wood and lighting a match to some rolled-up newspaper. During the day, Granny kept the stove going. She would walk out to the woodbin in the drafty hallway near the back door to choose two or three small logs; then, cradling them in her arms, she'd re-enter the kitchen, open a black, circular hatch on the stove's top, and sort of sidle each piece into the fire below, laying each piece just so.

When she got low on wood, she'd bark at her husband, "Paul Jr., go out and chop more wood." Then, she'd turn to the children, "Go to the barn straight away and fetch more kindlin' for the fire."

Leora was thinking about that stove, about how you had to keep the fire going through the day, no matter what. You had to keep the stove warm, never let it flicker out, die into cold ashes. The green stove was still there in the kitchen of her family's homestead way up north in Robert Frost country, where her family originated, long before they moved to Pennsylvania. Only brother Paul lived there now. Leora herself had lived north, south, and east. In the last thirty days, she'd found herself leaving Georgia in the early dawn, driving nearly nonstop, doggedly, without even knowing exactly why,



circling back to Pennsylvania.

And now, she was outside in a sturdy bank barn, piling up wood for Ren Willow's winter, for Ren's stove, the black Ben Franklin. More than just housesitting—for cash, of course (after all, one must keep gas in the car and eat a bit of food)—she had been a faithful caretaker in his medical absence. And now... Now that the house was ready for the old fellow's return from the nursing home, the deep windowsills dusted and the African violets revived, the blue star quilt cleaned and settled on a high spool bed, this—dealing with the woodpile—was the only other task she knew she must complete.

For tomorrow, she would be gone. She would leave this mountain where she'd harbored, taken flight, discarded the wifely mantle that threatened to shatter—no, choke completely—her fragile core. The thought of leaving Pennsylvania saddened her deeply. But then, she glimpsed in her mind's eye the visage of her older brother, Paul, up in New Hampshire, how sick he was, alone, wasting, waiting for her, waiting for both his sisters, to visit one last time. She would head there next. She shook herself mentally: *I have no grounds to complain. Soon Paul will be gone altogether—really gone! In mind, body, and brotherly self. No room to whine. No time to sink into sentimentality.*

About six feet outside the barn lay a huge pile, part of the preceding winter's supply of wood, dumped there by a local boy's truck. In the past week, Leora had stacked about a cord and a half, whittling away at the pile in early morning and late afternoon. She'd begun placing the rows more deeply inside the open portion of the big barn, deeper in than usual, since, as the Amish neighbors had told her, last year's snows had been heavy, frequent, and deep.

There was still a cord left to stack, and a storm was brewing.

*Have to get the wood in before it rains,* she said to herself. *Leave the small pieces, just go for the big ones.* "No, get the little ones, too—they're good kindlin'," Granny's voice said firmly inside her head.

*Yeah, yeah. Granny's probably met up with Jim by now, up there or out there or wherever it is that souls end up.* For the hundredth time that day, Leora's thoughts turned again to her sister.

It was sad that Jim had died, yes. Everyone was sad, for Salome especially and for G.J. and little Nellie. "Oh, to lose your father at such an early age!" they all said, shaking their heads. At the funeral, everyone cried. Afterward, everyone sent food. Everyone gave money. Everyone called up to help. Everyone was crushed.

*Everyone except me,* Leora thought.

*What on earth is the matter with me? Why the hell can't I just feel sorry for Sal? Why do I make excuses not to call or see her? Leora stacked wood furiously. Now, when she needs me most, why do I run? Why can neither of us look each other in the eye?*

Sal, who lived up in coal country not forty minutes away, did not even know

her youngest sister was no longer in Atlanta, within a half hour of her very door.

*Would she call me if she knew?*

*No, stay quiet. Keep your head down. Sal...*

*Water the flower pots in the parlor room, along the front of the house. Water them one last time.*

*Sal...*

Frustrated over the distance with her newly-widowed sister, a sibling who had always been close—so close each knew when the other had arisen, what the other was thinking, though miles apart—and disgusted by her own paralysis, Leora bent and lifted, hauled and dropped piece after piece of the heavy logs. Until finally, in the deepening dusk, with a new autumnal chill in the air and dark clouds appearing on the far end of the cornfields, all the uncomfortable thoughts that had hung around the edges of Leora's mind blew in at last—opening up, roaring through her, unstoppable.

*She's free. Salome is free. God handed her a divorce on a silver platter. Oh, to have Death do the dirty work for you! How horrible! How wonderful! Sal can always say she was "working things out." That she and Jim had passed through the hardest part of marriage and had come to a place of peace.*

*No one has to know she was days away from moving out on him.*

*No one has to see the pain her soul suffered under his tyranny: they will call it grief whenever she cries.*

*He's dead; it must be grief. Boom, it's over, and the children are yours. No contests.*

*No custody battles.*

*They don't have to know you wished he was dead.*

*And what about me? I'm stuck fighting a crazed, bitter boy-man. Egomaniac! Self-centered, son-of-a-bitching, cheating, blind lunatic!*

*He will not keep my children away from me.*

*God, strike him dead! ...and if you won't, then I will!*

A work glove flew off Leora's right hand, snagging on a jagged splinter from a hickory log. Leora looked out toward the remaining woodpile as she dislodged the glove and pulled it back on.

*Have to get the wood in before it rains, she thought. Can't quit now.*

Methodically, never breaking pace, she moved back and forth between the barn and the pile, picking up two pieces at a time, then crashing the heavy wood down on straight rows, so hard each log cracked and shuddered and thudded down, one by one by one.

*I'm cracking skulls, thought Leora fiercely. His skull cracks a thousand times! Again! Again!*

*Damn him for what he has done to me! Damn the vows! Damn the ring!  
Damn his denial! Damn his face, which I trusted.*

*A single tear formed and fell.*

*Damn his callous, self-centered heart, which never truly held me in it.*

*Damn his skull, and leave it here to rot.*

*Damn his hairy arms.*

*Damn his morning cough.*

*Damn. Damn. Damn.*

*In this manner, the time passed like never before.*

Leora did not leave the woodpile, though her shoulders ached and her back cramped up on her. In the darkness, with the rain nearly upon her, the woman in camouflage-green Army cap and men's heavy mountain boots stalked back and forth between the woodpile and the barn until, finally, three tall rows of firewood lined the east, north, and west walls of the barn. As the last pieces landed on the uppermost rows, the rain fell straight down in sheets, rattling the metal strips on the roof.

Before heading back to the farmhouse, Leora straightened all the way up at last, stretched her back, and regarded her work. The boxy, whitened ends of logs banked solidly to her right, left, and straight ahead. She congratulated herself for having the foresight to toss all the kindling, all the chips and smaller branches and odd pieces, in one pile close to the exit. In a corner near the door was a piece so oddly shaped, so interesting, like a buck's antler, she had saved it. Maybe it would be good for hanging up or whittling or whatever.

It was a job well done. As Leora drew one last deep breath to fill her nostrils with the smell of wood, she realized sharply that if she was to return here, to be Ren's caretaker, each and every time she returned here to fetch wood, the memory of crushing her husband's skull in the barn would come back.

*To haunt me...or Ren, or his children...*

*Oh, God!*

Leora's sorriness threatened to drown her again. But, once again, Granny's words saved her as she heard her say for the thousandth time, there in that kitchen with the green stove, where all the dinners were cooked, "Leora, once the butter's on the table, no one remembers that you milked the cow."

*Haunting is not for me. No, "haunt" is too strong a word, Leora decided. I will simply remember this anger. I will honor it, not hate it. I will see to it that my children live here in Pennsylvania with me, safe in my domain—wherever that is to be. And, that way, I shall not be haunted.*

*But, I will look at forests and at trees everywhere I go until that day arrives, and each tree will be an ally; each tree I see will make me fight for them. Though he may have pushed me away, Terry will not divide me from my daisy-sweet*

*Margie and my careful, quiet little Heather.*

*I have made up my mind.*

Leora stooped down near the kindling and sobbed into her work gloves. As clear as anything, she could see her girls getting themselves ready for bed; she saw them tucking each other in; she could feel their hearts longing for her nurturing presence. She felt the full grief of her loss and their loss and vowed, finally, that the grief would end.

She shut the doors of Ren Willow's barn and latched them tightly. She turned her back on the starry hex signs adorning the red-painted structure, then ran from barn to house.

It rained all night long. With chestnut-colored tresses fanned out across a feather pillow, Leora slept deeply and well.



# Before Dawn in Nebraska

by John Nizalowski

originally published in *The Last Matinée*, 2011

Like the ghosts  
of all the tornadoes  
that never were,  
the siren sings  
to the darkness.

A train engine  
illuminates the prairie—  
folded hills of brown  
and black. No moon.  
An old coyote sings,  
clouds circle silently  
above, lightning  
pulses on the horizon,  
the sparks of the dying  
campfire respond.

“Holy is the night,”  
the aged drifter says,  
drinking whiskey straight  
in the migrant camp.  
Tomorrow he gets  
paid off-time to head  
to Abilene, before  
the autumn wind  
cuts him dry.

# The Single Step

by John Nizalowski

originally published in *The Last Matinée*, 2011

“It is so sensitive to touch that at a bird’s footfall a whale asleep at the surface will start wildly.” – Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*

That great gray mass,  
rising into sun’s blaze,  
asleep in cold water,  
wrinkled like valleys afloat,  
turning in dreams of  
suns and moons,  
when tracks of claws  
whisper across its inner sky,  
its whole being shivers  
from gentle slide  
of nails on skin;  
becomes an island  
off Japan’s southern coast,  
warm coral sea,  
smoking cone mountain,  
Banyan tree, sweet potatoes,  
fresh fish sliced with  
bone knife,  
or a meadow  
high in the Urals,  
spine of Europe’s edge,  
framed by tall birch  
blessing the reindeer



with shade,  
yet again becomes  
Jupiter, tiny orange note  
singing through space  
around the monster sun,  
itself a point of time  
circling the galactic  
center, the realm  
of globular clusters.  
thirty thousand stars,  
a beehive of energy,  
and all of it,  
all of it,  
from whale to sky,  
vibrating from the single  
step of an arctic tern.



# Time's Needle

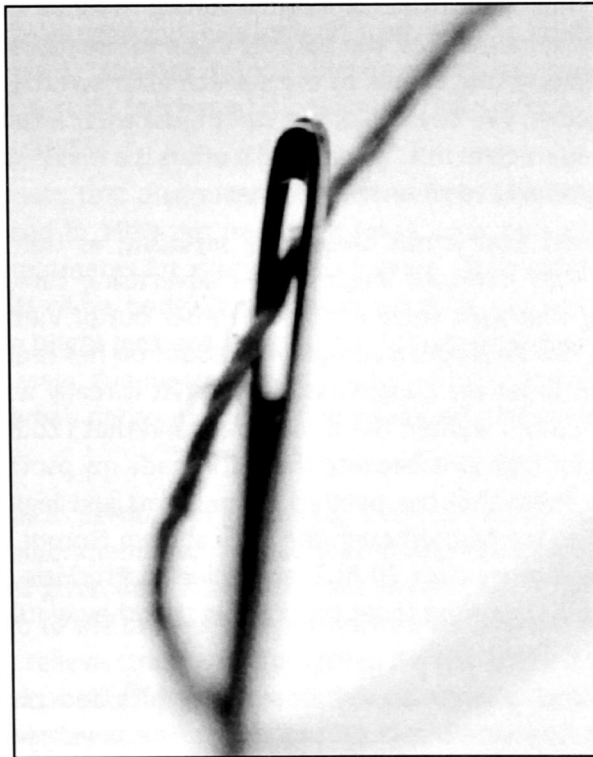
by John Nizalowski

originally published in *The Last Matinée*, 2011

The wagon rolls behind me,  
autumn leaves rattling  
like old Egyptian bones.  
The dry sound of time—  
fallen maples gone,  
stars, meteors, Tibetan flags  
transformed to threads  
and finally to dust.

My daughter in the wagon—  
her coming decades gleam  
like shining towers.  
This very day,  
she threads  
her first needle—  
quick prick to her finger,  
a bead of blood,  
the lost brother  
blanket wrapped and buried  
in the New Mexico earth.

Now she reaches down,  
clutches the leaves  
passing by,  
catches the years,  
the rattle of time,  
the thread of ages,  
the sun in her blonde hair,  
the stars,  
invisible beyond blue sky,  
shine in her eyes.  
Nothing is hidden,  
for she has sewn the thread,  
time's mistress  
riding the chariot  
of a million years.



# Nature's Tattoos

Denise Landrum-Geyer

I.

**I never know** what I'll see when I look in the mirror. Usually, all I see are the bright pink patches inching up from my neck and down from my scalp, ready to swallow my face. Sometimes, the patches change color from pink to white; I'm not sure if that's better or worse. I refuse to leave the house without putting foundation on, as I want to avoid questions about my skin. I have psoriasis, a skin disorder that takes the form of multiple patches of itchy scales—pink, white, and silver—covering random areas of my body. My husband used to call me Leopard Girl because of my spots; I say that I have nature's tattoos.

II.

When I was in seventh grade, I decided I wanted to become a dermatologist to find a cure for psoriasis, so I used the upcoming science fair as an opportunity to find out what I could about my disorder. My science fair project, entitled "Psoriasis: No, You Can't Catch It," was, my twelve-year-old self hoped, an enlightening look into psoriasis as a disorder. I researched all eight types of psoriasis, typical treatments, and common misconceptions about the disorder, including the idea that psoriasis is merely a cosmetic inconvenience. Yes, the patches itch and the medications stain my clothes, as does the blood that comes to the surface after scratching the scaly patches. Yes, it's unattractive, I've been told, but can't I just wear a turtleneck and be done with it? While I appreciate this "advice," all it offers is a mask—another way to fade into the background and hope nobody notices.

Psoriasis is the disorder that is not taken very seriously, as the phrase "the heartbreak of psoriasis" has ironically suggested in advertising campaigns since the 1950s: it is the thing that kept Kevin Arnold's brother out of Vietnam on *The Wonder Years*, the thing Kim Kardashian complained about on her reality show. At the science fair, I wanted to let my classmates know what it really was that they were making fun of every day. I wanted them to understand that I could not shave my legs like the other junior high girls because the razor made my psoriasis patches bleed. I wanted to show them that the patches on my arms and legs were more than dandruff but less than leprosy, although the biblical term *tsaraat* was used to name psoriasis as well as leprosy circa 70 BCE, according to *Psoriasis Connections* magazine. Most importantly, I wanted to let them know that they wouldn't catch it from me if they sat next to me in class.

My mom and I created a large display board that included photos of my psoriasis patches. The photos were blown up and glued to neon yellow and orange construction paper to attract people to my table, and I displayed samples of the various ointments I was using at the time to relieve the itching and scaling. I won

third place in the science fair, though that didn't matter to my classmate Kim, who shook her blond hair vigorously from side to side while pursing her lips and throwing her tan arms into the air as she exclaimed, "Eww. That is so gross. I don't want to see that stuff," when I walked up to claim my red ribbon at the PTA meeting.

### III.

"The heartbreak of psoriasis" is a real phenomenon. My grandpa had it. My dad has it. I have it. Though my brother does not have it, my niece Courtney might have it: already, there are scaly patches that pop up on her limbs and then quickly disappear. The first time I saw a perfectly-formed circle of pink and silver scales on her forearm, I cried. When my dad saw my reaction, he cried, too. Whenever these patches pop up on her arms, Courtney will show me her arm while pointing at my stomach. "It's like you, She-She," she tells me. Despite Courtney's self-diagnosis, Dr. Hinkebein, the pediatrician who also first diagnosed me with psoriasis, is not ready to diagnose her patches just yet: "Let's wait and see what happens," he told my brother the first time the patches appeared, much like he told my mom when we first visited him about my patches.

I was in the fourth grade when I discovered a scratch behind my left ear that scabbed over for no reason. My mom and Dr. Hinkebein knew better, though the official psoriasis diagnosis was not made for a few months. Dr. Hinkebein put off the diagnosis due to my age; most psoriasis patients are first diagnosed as adults in their twenties or thirties, and I was nine years old. He held out hope that I was having an allergic reaction until three months passed with no improvement, at which point he told my mom, "She has it, too." Because I was so young when the psoriasis first appeared, the scaly patches and potential treatments quickly became part of my everyday routine.

My dad was first diagnosed with psoriasis in his early twenties; by the time I was diagnosed in 1989, he had been living with psoriasis and the cornucopia of suggested treatments for almost twenty years. Depending on the day, scaly patches cover 50-75% of his body. People often ask if he was burned in a fire, as the scaly patches turn bright pink and are raised off the normal-looking surrounding skin, like permanent scars. I've never seen my father without those roaming pink patches of scales, and when my own patches first appeared, I became his research partner.

### IV.

My status as permanent guinea pig is written on my body in fuchsia. Dad shares the joys of experimentation. He has been wrapped in cellophane; I have been dipped in tar. He has given up eating pork; I ate yogurt once a day for years. He goes in for colonics; I go to the tanning bed. He drinks a tablespoon of cod liver oil every day; I meditate to relieve stress and strengthen my immune system. Despite all this, Dad and I are not usually described as "ill" because of our psoriasis. At one point in the 1980s, psoriasis was explained as being skin that was simply too healthy: my skin works so well that it regenerates nine times faster than normal skin.

Typically, skin cells regenerate and degenerate in a 28-day cycle. The new skin cells develop and mature as the old skin cells begin to weaken and slough off the

skin. In psoriatic people, the skin cell cycle accelerates. My skin cells regenerate on a 3- or 4-day cycle; the cells are immature and malformed, and when the surrounding normal skin cells become stubborn and refuse to move, the psoriatic cells begin to pile on top of one another, forming scaly patches. These patches then shed themselves, leaving little pieces behind, especially on dark-colored furniture or clothing. I have always been one of those “accelerated” students, on the fast track in school. I am also stubborn. So is my dad. So are our skins.

Right now, my own psoriasis is on the mild side, covering less than 10% of my body. Despite this mildness, I know that Dad still regrets the close connection we have because of the disorder. When I come home to Louisville, I feel his eyes follow me around the kitchen as we catch up on the latest college basketball and football gossip. At the beginning of every visit, he sits on the stool closest to the television as I wander around the white island in the middle of the room under his gaze. I wait for him to give me the result of his evaluation: “You look good,” means that I’ve been managing—or covering—the patches well. “Are you okay?” is his way of suggesting I make an appointment to see our dermatologist Dr. Young. For the past few years, I’ve received the “good” bill of skin health from Dad whenever I go home, though that does not stop our discussions of potential treatments for our skin.

I was Daddy’s girl growing up, though it was not the stereotypical adoring, do-no-wrong father-daughter relationship. Although I would accompany my dad to University of Kentucky basketball games while I was in grade school and my mom still tells me that Dad is wrapped around my finger, more often our relationship appears clinical: we are researchers studying ourselves and each other. I accompany him to dermatologist appointments. We share medicine and yogurt. We talk about diet and exercise. We take turns in the tanning bed. We share bits of information, much like we share similar bits of skin. I watch Dad deal with his psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, which is a specific form of arthritis connected somehow to psoriasis. Psoriatic arthritis has made Dad’s feet and hands deformed, his joints swelling up so much that he has shoes specially made to fit his feet. Whenever I feel a jab of pain in my knees, I think of my dad’s slow, painful gait, and the arthritis that led to a knee replacement nine years ago.

About 20% of psoriasis patients develop psoriatic arthritis, but there is no definite way to tell whether or not a patient will develop this ailment; genetics seem to play a part, which means my chances of developing psoriatic arthritis are better than those psoriatic patients who have no family history of arthritis. I’ve had “weak” knees and ankles since my days as a high school athlete and dancer, which has led to many evening knee ice-downs, though none of the doctors I’ve been to are yet willing to tell me that psoriatic arthritis is in my future. Once again, it is a matter of wait-and-see. When I think of this possible future, I focus more closely on the present, reading articles and trying alternative treatments, which I then share with him.

#### V.

Psoriasis is a disorder of particularity. What works for one person will not work

for another. Because of this fact, Dad and I take turns experimenting on our bodies and fill each other in on the results: his experiments are usually under a doctor's supervision; I tend to combine typical treatments with alternative, homeopathic experiments. I once stained my body black with walnut juice because my husband's aunt, who also has psoriasis, went to a Cherokee healer who told her to coat her scaly skin with the oil from black walnut hulls gathered during the month of October. The treatment sent his aunt's psoriasis into remission—not so much for me. Instead, the silver and white patches on my stomach, chest, and face turned black, which made the lesions even more obvious. After a few weeks, I stopped the walnut juice treatment in favor of the coal tar ointment that I've often returned to over the years. Dad and I try to find things that kind of work, which we then share with one another. Despite our efforts, patches persist.

## VI.

Since my initial diagnosis of psoriasis at the age of nine, I've only spoken with my father about the emotional fallout from psoriasis once. I was twenty-two at the time, and my psoriasis was particularly bad: bright pink patches covered the left side of my face, running from my hairline down the side of my jaw like a scaly sideburn. Pink, malformed splotches the size of silver dollars also covered my stomach, chest, back, and upper thighs. While it was easier to cover the spots on the rest of my body, I had trouble hiding the patches on my face: concealer and foundation muted the bright pink color of the patches, but the scales flaked off continuously, taking the foundation with them over the course of a normal day. I kept my hair long at the time, as it provided a curtain that hid the patches fairly well.

I was in my last semester of college and applying to graduate schools when I went home over fall break. I pulled my hair back in a ponytail for the hour-long ride from Lexington to Louisville, and, as I walked into the kitchen to see my parents, I pulled some strands of hair out of the ponytail in an attempt to cover the left side of my face. My dad was not fooled and asked me before saying hello, "How are your spots doing?"

"Okay." I didn't want to tell him how bad I let it get, that I was frustrated with the MG217 tar ointment because it stained my clothes yellow and made me smell like a freshly paved driveway. The thick, yellow coal tar medication was all I could use at the time because my prescription ointments ran out before I could make an appointment with Dr. Young, and, though the tar worked when I applied it to my patches two or three times a day, I did not have time to coat my body in the ointment and wait 30 minutes for the medication to seep into my skin. Instead, I applied the medicine once every morning and immediately dressed for class, which not only stained my tops and bras a mustard-yellow color but also wiped the medication off my body. My dad knew the trouble with this medication, as he used the same solution in addition to the treatments Dr. Young prescribed. He also knew the impatience I've had with topical treatments ever since I was first diagnosed.

"You using your medicine?" He arched his thick, white eyebrows skeptically as I shook my head. "You have to use your medicine. It won't just go away by itself."



"I know, Dad." The tears welled up in my eyes before I realized what was happening. "I just don't have time for slathering on that stupid ointment."

"I know. I'm sorry." At first, I misunderstood the apology, and when I looked across the counter, I was surprised to see him dabbing the corner of his right eye with a napkin. "I'm sorry." When he repeated those two words, I dropped my head and left the room without responding. I couldn't tell him it was okay: it wasn't okay, but I did not know how to tell him this without also suggesting that I regretted the mysterious genes we shared. I didn't want him to think that



my psoriasis was something he should apologize for, even though every doctor we visited pointed out that psoriasis was a genetic disorder that I had because of him. I avoided being in the same room alone with him for the rest of the weekend because I wasn't sure how to respond to his apology. As I was leaving to return to school on Sunday, Dad handed me a bag full of medication samples he had gotten from Dr. Young. "These should do the trick," he said as he walked me to my car. "They're corticosteroid creams. No staining." When I whispered "thank you" as I hugged him, he said simply, "I don't need all that medicine. And you're so much smaller than I am, one little tube could last you a week." As I now prepare for the birth of my first child, I sometimes wonder—and worry—if I will be having a similar conversation in a few decades. I cannot help but see psoriasis as a mysterious bad gene that I will probably pass on, though there is no way of knowing this until it happens.

## VII.

Psoriasis is a perpetual in-between: the disorder usually does not prevent people from completing everyday tasks, so it is dismissed as unimportant. Yet when healthy people see psoriasis, they want to move as far away from it as possible because it looks like something that is contagious, as Brett, the blind date I took to the Christmas Dance my senior year of high school, reminded me.

Brett and I were set up by my friend Lonni after I broke up with my boyfriend two weeks before the dance. When I met Brett at Lonni's house, all he could do was stare at my chest, which was covered with a large patch of silver scales.

"It's psoriasis. You can't catch it." I smiled self-consciously and flipped my hair over both shoulders in an effort to cover some of the afflicted area. I was wearing a scoop-necked black dress with spaghetti straps that I had bought six weeks before. In the interim, my skin flared, partly due to the stress of breaking up with my boyfriend while I was also filling out college applications. The night of the dance, I was desperately looking for a replacement dress with a higher neck, but my mom

convinced me that I should wear the dress I had bought. "It's so pretty," she told me. "And really, your skin doesn't look that bad."

"Yeah. Okay," I thought to myself as I folded my arms over my chest while I was talking to Brett. He would not stop staring at my chest, and I wished I had stayed home instead. The evening progressively degenerated from there, as my "date" spent the entire night on the other side of the gym making out with another girl. When I drove him home, he looked me up and down one more time and told me, "If you covered yourself, it wouldn't be so bad. But, I don't want to touch that stuff. What if it happens to me?" My cheeks flushed, and a hot, mascara-laden tear slid down my face as I pulled into his driveway. Before he could close the door, I threw my car into reverse and began hitting my palm on the steering wheel as I cried loudly. Although I had dealt with negative reactions to my psoriasis before, this was the first time I was deemed undesirable by a member of the opposite sex because of it. I had gone out on dates in high school and had a steady boyfriend for a few months prior to meeting Brett, but my psoriasis had been rather mild for most of my high school career, only showing up on my stomach, upper arms, and back. I usually managed to avoid questions by covering the patches with clothes, but I was so keenly aware of my skin that I avoided any intimate contact beyond kissing. I worked hard to avoid the rejection that Brett delivered after that dance.

Most of my significant others have been understanding about my disorder, and, after giving them the obligatory abbreviated version of my seventh grade science fair presentation, I have become increasingly comfortable with allowing people close to me to see my spots. After presenting my psoriasis spiel to Dave and showing him the patches on my stomach, he shook his head and exclaimed, "If that's all that's wrong with you, I think I got the better end of this deal." I appreciated his sentiment at the time, but I still worry about his reaction if I have an especially bad flare-up. Dave is not worried: "They're kind of cute, really," he tells me all the time. "And I have spots, too, you know."

"Those are freckles. Not the same thing," I always shake my head violently at this argument.

The spots will always be there. There is no real explanation for where psoriasis comes from; researchers know it is passed down genetically, though they are still trying to isolate the chromosomes responsible. They are close, Dr. Young tells me every time I visit her office, which is usually twice a year. The most important part of this knowledge lies in one fact accepted within the dermatological community: psoriasis is not contagious. You cannot catch it. It is an autoimmune disorder that has something to do with the way people need to release toxins through the skin.

There is no cure for psoriasis, only treatment to soothe the condition and lessen the visibility of the patches. Often, the treatments are more dangerous than the psoriasis itself. The most successful treatments for the largest number of psoriatic patients have included intense UV treatments in tanning beds, steroid creams, and coal tar applications. The potential side effects of all of these treatments include cancer and infertility. More recently, dermatologists discovered that Enbrel, an

arthritis medication that is injected into the bloodstream twice a day, also clears up psoriasis in some people. Dad and I have both considered Enbrel, despite the fact that this medication only appears to work 60% of the time and its side effects include skin cancer, nervous system damage, and death. While other people go to dermatologists to preserve their skin, patients with psoriasis are searching for something to destroy their skin, to make it stop, or at least slow down, before they can look forward to normal skin renewal.

#### VIII.

Dad and I took part in a research study at the University of Tennessee-Memphis for almost two years when I was in junior high. Every month, my entire family, including my mom and younger brother Trey, would pile into our blue Dodge Caravan and go down to Memphis for two or three days, where smiling men and women in white coats would give us a new list of treatments and suggestions. It was on my second visit there that a doctor suggested I begin to take 500mg of penicillin a day. Researchers there had recently discovered a connection between strep throat and psoriasis. Initial psoriasis outbreaks often occur in patients who have recently had a severe case of strep throat, and the doctors in Memphis suspected that some psoriatic patients might be carriers of the streptococcal bacteria that causes strep throat. After testing my saliva, the doctors triumphantly returned to tell me that I was, in fact, a strep carrier, and handed Mom a brown medicine bottle full of penicillin pills the size of bullets. I took the penicillin pills for four months, until the doctors in Memphis decided that it would be more effective to take my tonsils out rather than build up my immunity to penicillin through the large doses I was taking every day.

While the doctors were treating me from the inside out, Dad was given a selection of ointments to apply at different times of day to different areas of his body. Many of the treatments also required my mom's help: at one point in the study, I remember Mom wrapping Dad's legs and arms in Saran Wrap in order to force the ointment to soak into his skin while he wore special gloves and socks to seal in some kind of moisturizer. Although I hated swallowing the huge horse pills every day, I was quietly thankful that the doctors had not suggested turning me into a plastic mummy as a form of treatment.

We stopped going to Memphis during my eighth grade year. I'm not exactly sure why. Maybe it's because we had seen enough of Graceland and the surrounding museums of Elvis memorabilia. Maybe it was the lack of time and money for monthly trips. Maybe the study ended. Maybe it's because the treatments never worked.

#### IX.

When I was twelve, my family went to Florida for vacation. Sunlight and salt water seem to "dry" up psoriasis spots for many people, so my family made an effort to travel to Panama City Beach in the Florida panhandle on the Gulf of Mexico

every summer. We always stayed at the same condominium: a small, family-friendly complex that is about a mile away from the main strip of hotels and rental homes. I always appreciated the quiet atmosphere and small crowds because I could wear a two-piece bathing suit without feeling too self-conscious, which was especially important since Dad and I planned to spend as much time as possible outside, either at the beach or at nearby pools. One morning, we both decided to go to the smaller outdoor pool on the outskirts of the complex. My dad ambled slowly down the pool steps in the deeper end of the pool while I waited behind him, absentmindedly observing the women in the shallow end of the pool. I suddenly felt a set of eyes bore into my stomach, the source of which I located in a young mother, who gathered up two small boys and hurriedly pulled them out of the water. I looked around, ready to leap back from the offensive object that aroused this mother's fear and anger. Then, I heard her words: "I can't believe those people...spoiling the pool for the rest of us." It was me. It was my father. We "spoiled" the pool. We set foot in the same water as her children. Our skin—the rough, itchy patches that often resemble some form of mutated poison ivy—threatened to float over and infiltrate her children's bodies. My face flushed with embarrassment, which then turned to anger.

Dad didn't seem to hear her words. At least, he didn't acknowledge them. Instead, as the other pool-goers took their cue from the vigilant young mother, my dad smiled and said to me, "Looks like we have the pool to ourselves now."

I wasn't sure then if I wanted the pool to myself. I'm still not sure if I do.



# *So Five Seconds Ago, Being A Meditation in Real Time About High Speed Technology, Language, And “Getting to Heaven in Season”*

by John Graves Morris

OMG, have you ever noticed  
that *Fast Facts* seldom  
shake themselves loose any faster  
than their homelier cousins

shunned by all the Web pages,  
that *Quick Questions* are no  
quicker than any others  
though the answers might be?

How will these *random* improvements  
*impact* a future impeded by  
captcha codes? Journalists have  
*shined* what light they can, *pleaded*

for people to become more *proactive*,  
to come up with a *game-changer*.  
Bandwidths spread their potbellies  
to deliver ever speedier access

as our pre-arthritis thumbs ache  
to tap out more and more tweets.  
This can't help but suck big time.  
And why can't minds absorb data

faster than the language *reboots*  
because of trade, TV, tech, and text?  
WTF? Can't we get the July sun to  
outrance the calendar and to crank

its thermostat more conveniently?  
Its shadows arrive west only on  
schedule and appear to be loitering  
by the pool while the ground broils,

but we're inching toward winter.  
How, *going forward*, can we  
*incentivize* more of us to *go viral*?  
The end of all the light comes on

as it always has, but no faster.  
Why can't we, with all our pace,  
be more fulfilled, and wiser?  
Where's the *app* for that, #I♥FB?

# Stepfather

by John Graves Morris

the fabled male equivalent  
to the ogress in fairy tales,  
a five-and-dime, bargain basement  
parent, a left-handed compliment,

a third wheel, an extra seat  
at the dinner table, practically,  
at times, a virtual intruder  
into the family circle, particularly

in times of crisis. The mother's  
voice with her children is key,  
and even if his is not excluded  
he should maintain silence similar

to the ambulance-chaser attorney  
who contributes a brick to the walk  
of donors at his old law school,  
appreciated not for his presence.

2.

the limbo for which the bar  
moves only lower, not higher,  
the square peg that enlarges  
as the round hole shrinks.

His busy face ruddy with beer,  
my stepfather on one occasion  
admitted that he roared his way  
into the dead center of our hearth

intent on righting smallest wrongs,  
crashing over the biggest speed  
bumps to true our alignment. Draining  
his glass, he sighed that he couldn't

slow down, that his topographical  
map of familial health, drawn by  
faith and wishes, dazzled his eyes,  
an oasis that only he could see.

3.  
the pale negative of a photo  
lost in the attic to time,  
the punch line of the bad joke  
that, the more one tries, jibes

less with the details rescued  
from memory's ashes. I can see  
my stepfather puttering around  
the garden, joshing the neighbor boy

hired to mow the lawn after I moved.  
My wife's children remain similarly polite,  
respectful, deferential, distant,  
teaching me that merely trying to blend

with their efforts, being the opposite  
of my stepfather's hand over hand  
pulling in his family's tug of war,  
will not in mine keep me unmuddied.



# A Simple Disquisition About Nothing

by John Graves Morris

Allow me to talk awhile about nothing,  
what a man feels burning the letters  
a woman whose name he will never  
again permit to be spoken in his presence

once sent him declaiming her love,  
the flames smooching her calligraphy,  
smudging it back to the ashes from which  
and to which he would happily consign her, too.

This is the same nothing a woman feels  
before collecting all the letters  
her father ever scrawled to her,  
page-protecting them in a folder

in the order of their composition  
to begin her exegesis of his messages  
that have placed her in the binder  
of his ambivalences about women.

What does nothing have to do with  
the way an airplane's contrails  
are backlit by the early morning sun  
as it attains cruising altitude,

mirroring a man's heart rate rising  
with the light of Saturday morning,  
his free breath streaming all the way  
out and up to a plateau of exultation?

What does it have to do with a man  
during his late afternoon walk in the park  
learning to see and learn anew  
with myopic eyes creating out of lights

suddenly bursting as dusk rises into  
a garden of anchored dandelion seeds,  
pointing him a different path, newer wisdom  
as if the stars had been strewn before him?

Logically, nothing is as nothing does,  
and nothing will naturally be in between,  
but how can it all result in Our Nada  
who art in Nada when the tangible world

keeps unstoppering its daily cork  
and spilling out nothing less  
than a liquor fragile, but intoxicating,  
if we can only learn how to drink.

# Mending

Patricia Heim

**When I began writing** memoir, I pictured the house I grew up in, particularly my bedroom overtop our garage, and thought of the children who've lived there after me who grew up and might have become writers. Overcome by something like sibling rivalry, I imagined the lot of us huddled on the sidewalk, gazing up at the second-floor window, arguing over whose bedroom it rightfully was.

The bedroom, of course, was mine, as Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother's was hers, despite the wolf unlawfully occupying it for a time. It was my room: just as the house was mine, as my parents belonged to me more than to my siblings, as all of these shall remain forever.

For the first half of my childhood, I didn't have a room of my own. From the moment I graduated from a bassinette to a crib, I shared a room with my sister Betty Ann. When I was three-and-a-half, my firstborn brother, Frank, a discharged Air Force pilot, returned home from Germany with a wife and baby boy, taking over both my twin bed and my mother's attention. Betty Ann, who was twelve, stayed in our room. The following seventeen months, I slept (or tried to sleep) between my parents in their double bed, at which point I began to lose my good disposition.

Yet, it might have been my sister who'd gotten the raw end of the deal, since my brother and his wife conceived a second child in my bed, next to hers, while their son, Frankie, slept in my old crib by the wall. I grew so spiteful of Frankie for enticing my mother away from me that once, when he was a toddler, I yanked his ebony curls so hard the family promptly moved out.

I was nine when my sister got married. That night, elated at the prospect of having my own room, I removed her clothes from our closet and drawers (and from the wooden chair on which she piled most of them), along with the makeup and toiletries cluttered on top of the dresser we shared. After I'd carted them to the attic and was putting the finishing touches on the new décor, my mother came by, wondering what I'd been up to all evening.

When I sheepishly acknowledged I'd packed up Betty Ann's belongings, my mother, who, I now understand, must have been sad, cast me her disapproving look and then disappeared. It was the look I'd seen that afternoon at the wedding reception when I sang "On the Good Ship Lollipop" and at the end, for dramatic effect, kicked off my right shoe, dyed daffodil-yellow to match my junior bridesmaid dress. It was the look she'd given me countless times before and would continue to administer all the way up to the week before she died of a brain tumor when I was thirteen, after I'd snuck into her bedroom, assuming she was asleep, to steal a bit of costume jewelry.

As I think of my mother now, nearly fifty years later, that's the face I automatically see, the Saturn of the many looks she gave me, glowing brightly like a lump of coal seared in my memory: a look so hot it consumed every trace of her accompanying words and actions as well as my own—a look that sank many a happy mood, becoming the organizing feature of so many stories.

The last child of parents who were often preoccupied, I sought attention in sometimes misguided ways or, out of a greed that arises from such neglect, pursued gratification in substitute form. For instance, the summer I was eight, I came home from the five-and-dime across the street from our shore house, a stash of candy bars stuffed up the sleeve of my windbreaker. Smelling a rat, my mother, concealed behind the linens she was hanging on the clothesline, surprised me from behind, saying, "Hey there, Patsy."

"Oh, hi, Mom," I said, trying to dodge eye contact as I hurried toward the back door.

"Hold on a minute," she said, undoubtedly noticing the bulge in my sleeve. Narrowing her eyes, she glanced at me sideways, reckoning I'd snatched change that morning from my father's pants pocket just as I'd frequently seen her do in the morning before school to give me milk and recess money, and as all six of my older siblings eventually admitted to me that they, too, had done.

"Where'd you find the money for that candy you're hiding?"

Without a leg to stand on—I didn't get an allowance and hadn't sold any lemonade that week—I confessed the truth.

Another time, a soldier in our neighborhood, who had a crush on my sister, paid her a visit one summer evening when only she, my mother, and I were home. Although I'd known and liked him for years, now that I was seven, he'd morphed into the man I suddenly wanted to marry. Baby-faced, tall, and shaped like a quarterback, and—unlike my five brothers, to whom I felt invisible—he treated me like a friend and equal, making me feel important, so I took him for a god. That night, dressed in his army uniform, he looked especially irresistible, perhaps because my brother, the pilot, had worn a similar one, which I'd seen in pictures, noting how it caught the gleam in my father's eye.

At some point during the conversation—I was probably feeling left out—I stole off to the kitchen, climbed up on a chair to reach the freezer, and fixed us each a bowl of ice cream. When I came in view of my mother, proudly carrying the tray of desserts, again I got the look, whereupon I made an immediate about-face, returned the ice cream to its carton, and deposited the bowls and spoons in the sink.

Minutes later, back in the living room, my jealousy got the better of me, and I found myself saying, "Charlie, I heard Betty Ann telling my mom she doesn't like you anymore," which happened to be true. Charlie's smooth, freshly shaven skin waxed crimson, as did Betty Ann's, and the look, in its most severe form, glared at me like headlights from both my mother's and sister's faces. Making some excuse about having to leave, Charlie leapt from the sofa and practically out the door; I

have no idea what occurred next or if we ever saw him again.

One Christmas, when I was four or five, Santa Claus brought me a Debbie Reynolds doll and pink metal high chair. Although I'd always been an early bird, on Christmas morning I descended the stairs and approached the tree well before sunrise. I was the only one in the family who still got toys (my big ones were never wrapped), and to see them, I only had to flick on the lights. Debbie had long, wavy, auburn hair, which, together with the high chair, gave me the bright idea of playing hairdresser. After plopping the movie-star doll into her seat, I fetched the scissors from the buffet drawer and proceeded to coif her hair into a bob.

At daybreak, no sooner did my mother come downstairs than she spotted my beautiful new doll's shorn head, her gleaming tresses strewn in a ring around the high chair. Surely she gasped before saying something to express her dismay, but all I recall is the look, shooting through me like a bolt of lightning. By then, I sensed I was beyond rehabilitation.

Sometime after I started first grade, while my sister and I still shared a bedroom, a pipe sprung a leak in the corner close to my bed. My father ripped out enough plaster from the ceiling to mend the pipe, failing to look after the cosmetic repairs. For years, my mother nagged him to patch the hole—roughly a foot in diameter—and repaint the new plaster, but, a stubborn Irishman and hopeless procrastinator, he never got around to it until shortly after she died, when his guilt caught up with him. Later, he wallpapered my room with the flowery pink paper my mother had bought years earlier and stored in a box in the back of my closet.

My mother, a proud woman who longed for beautiful things she might have obtained had she been more self-possessed and, thus, not so frightened of her healthy aggression—or if my father hadn't grown up poor, lived through the Great Depression, and become a penny pincher—was embarrassed by the hole and prohibited me from inviting my playmates into my room. Probably because they'd spent so much time there before the leak, my sister's friends were allowed back in, sometimes sitting on my bed, all the lamps on, laughing and smoking cigarettes late into the night while I tossed, turned, and occasionally whined. We were a large family crowded into a small house without a den or finished basement, so there was nowhere suitable for me to entertain. Other than when my mother offered my companions and me a snack in our kitchen, we either played outside or at their homes, which I began to visit on a regular basis.

Because it made me feel confused about myself and, therefore, ashamed, I grew resentful of my bedroom and began to suspect my family “was different,” meaning I, too, fell outside the norm. I feared the frown of disapproval being cast at me by friends, neighbors, and the world at large. I wasn't just a girl who had a hole in her bedroom ceiling. My family was damaged in a way that cried out for fixing, meaning I was flawed as well.

More specific comparisons cropped up from the gap in the ceiling, around which I'd begun to organize my sense of self. How much easier it had been to displace my feelings of inferiority onto something concrete and remediable, like an

unsightly hole, than think myself shy of something essential to being a person—that there was a niche for me in the world I was inadequate to fill.

I could no longer dismiss the reality that my parents were significantly older than those of my classmates. That, at home, my mother wore housedresses and went to the hairdresser each week to have her short hair washed, set, and teased into a “bubble,” whereas my friends’ mothers dressed in slacks and skirts, tying their hair into ponytails or wearing it down in a more natural look. They drove cars and ran our Brownie and Girl Scout meetings while my mother rode the trolley or depended upon my father to take us wherever we needed to go. She rarely got involved in my school activities, though I remember her accompanying me on a Girl Scout trip. I still have a photograph of us standing, smiling, on the steps of the Capitol, along with the note I’d written and propped up on her bureau the night before: “Dear Mom, Wake me up at six o’clock.”



As far as I knew, I was the only girl my age who was an aunt and had been since she was three. Several of my siblings were married; more than one had eloped, and my parents had as many grandchildren as kids of their own. My father didn’t work at what I thought of as a real job, such as being a manager for the railroad like my friend Peggy Miles’s dad. Having quit school after seventh grade to work in a mill, for the first twenty years of his married life he drove a truck for the Atlantic Refinery and, when I was growing up, owned a warehouse, a beverage business, and a couple of apartment

houses, from which he earned a decent living. He kept irregular hours and often stopped by a bar he owned, coincidentally called “The Knot Hole,” before arriving home for dinner, sometimes tipsy or even drunk, referring to men who punched time clocks or held office jobs as “lunch-box johnnies.” An impetuous man with strong opinions he tended to flaunt, his voice, at times, grew so loud I cringed if one of my friends was in earshot or at the thought someone I knew might be walking by, especially in summer, when all our doors and windows were open.

When my father decided to sell the half-ton International pickup he’d used for delivering beer and beverages, he parked it in our side yard, writing “For Sale” in white paint across the front windshield. The truck sat for months before it sold, despite my mother’s complaints that it was killing the grass it blocked from the sun. By the same token, she was mortified, as no one else in our neighborhood would do anything so tacky.

One Christmas Eve, when I was already in bed but not asleep, my father came home soused, minus the tree he’d promised to pick up. Every tree stand in town

was closed, so my second-oldest brother, Joe, sawed down the blue spruce in our front yard, fearing my mother would have a breakdown over our being the sole Christian family in America who hadn't managed to put up a Christmas tree. Aside from the giant maple in the middle of the lawn, it had been the centerpiece of our landscaping, shielding the living room from the harsh morning light while providing a bit of natural beauty visible from inside and out. Its loss meant another empty space we'd have to endure until my father planted a new blue spruce that, for as long as I lived in that house, never attained the size of the original.

The next morning, pulling out of our driveway to attend Christmas Mass, a fresh gouge in the landscape, a stump in the ground where once a lovely fir tree grew, my father was the one who got the look, accompanied by the silent treatment, which my mother refused to remit for at least a week.

Some afternoons, walking home from school without being especially aware I was feeling bad about myself, I fantasized that my father had tended to the hole in my bedroom. This thought bordered on the delusional in that I was able to persuade myself beyond a doubt that I'd enter my room and at last find the ceiling looking as good as new. Cheered by the thought, I threw back my shoulders and picked up my stride, racing up the driveway, through the front door, up the steps, and into my bedroom, only to discover the hole staring at me desolately from its post in the corner: the same wire lath protruding from its edges, a fresh coating of plaster dust accumulating on the floor.

Although I'd gotten used to not inviting my friends upstairs, after my mother died the summer after seventh grade, I had new reasons to avoid entertaining. Her loss, which felt as though part of my body had been torn from me, made me feel even more exposed and defective, and I began to cover the deluge of feelings I couldn't cope with by becoming a perfectionist.

At thirteen, my feelings for my mother had reached the height of their ambivalence, our conflicts—intensified by her illness and death—catapulting my love-and-hate beyond the norm. To gain a sense of control over the fickleness of fate and the chaos into which I'd been plunged, I blamed myself for her death. By devaluing myself and idealizing her, I culled the darkness from the light, disowning my bad feelings while preserving the good (my love for her, especially) untainted by my disappointment.

The narrative I invented went like this: while she'd been a good mother, I'd failed to be an equally good daughter, having done something terribly wrong or neglected to do something so precisely right that would have made her happy so she wouldn't have had to die. If I could somehow undo these acts of omission or commission, whatever they might be, I'd shore up the dam through which the flood of self-recriminations poured.

In an effort to be my own mother, I began, internally, to give myself the look, which served to remind me I'd erred, or was about to do so, from the straight and narrow road that would protect me from the untold hazards that lurked in the world, from criticism, rejection, and even abandonment, and lead me safely

into maturity. Under this regime the slightest exaggeration of truth became a lie and something as innocuous as looking up at the clock during a test, evidence of cheating.

From as far back as I can remember, I swaddled myself with soothing rhythms and sounds to restore my mind to a state of harmony, which I must have needed to do after getting the look, often followed by an abysmal silence. I sang songs and recited poems, most of which I knew by heart, swung on swings, and, as I got older, jumped rope, roller-skated with abandon, and wove in and out of driveways, no hands, on my bike, basking in my power to fly away from everything that felt unbearable. I tried to adjust my behavior, as if it were a picture I could hang with a level I carried inside my head, to escape disapproval from the outside world and, even more ruthlessly, from within.

Beginning in eighth grade, getting it just right and no stone unturned became my mantras. Aside from yellow-highlighting every sentence in my textbooks, I memorized facts I already knew (repeating them ten times), prayed rosaries, never skipped a prayer, and attempted to exhaust every idea that entered my mind for whatever I happened to be doing at the time, lest I omit something. I couldn't tolerate a space in which, alone, I'd concoct meaning from a muddle of disturbing thoughts and feelings. Nor could I enjoy the freedom and power I was tempted to feel now that my mother, who'd died of disappointment, lay cold and envious in her grave.

Just as the hole in the ceiling came to represent my perception of myself, my mother's disapproving look left a deeper impression than that made by our more positive interactions, despite how they outnumbered the negative ones. My fondest memory was the time when I was eight or nine and our paths crossed in the dining room: She bent down, smiling, cupped my cheeks in her hands, and said, "Hi, doll face," all the preoccupation drained from her eyes, now lit like Christmas trees, her skin shimmering like the early-morning, sun-flecked surf.

The shock of physical or mental pain is so visceral, especially when it carries the message we are less than and, therefore, unlovable, that, as part of our survival system, it serves as a warning, like a bee sting, to engrave it in memory and steer clear of it at any cost. In contrast, extremes of pleasure, which mark us in a way that prompts us to repeat them, aren't perplexing. More easily digested, they go down like pudding; it's unnecessary to chew on them or remember them accurately.

Possibly the satisfying and pleasurable aspects of my relationship with my mother were less convincing also due to some low-level depression on her part that either caused or exacerbated our lack of intimacy. Or our temperaments were either so alike or different we could only awkwardly dance that dance, leaving me, a highly sensitive and exuberant child, to retreat into my private world, spinning fantasies of a mother perfectly attuned to my needs, setting up my hopes to be continually dashed.

However, the most plausible explanation for the look itself is the intergenerational transmission of trauma, metaphorically described as a hole in



the psyche. My mother, unaware she had needs that, to the detriment of her well-being, went unmet, experienced herself as deprived rather than as a victim of her own neglect. Having disavowed an excruciating reality—shame over the lack she perceived inside her—she foisted it by way of the look, like a hot potato, onto me.

In an effort both to get what I wanted and meet my own needs, I may have kept inciting the look. Frustrated by my inability to win my mother’s attention in more favorable ways, my impulses got the better of me, and, although painful and ultimately damaging to my self-esteem, I found a way to be noticed while hoping to communicate I was hurt and angry to the point of bitterness and, therefore, in need of loving intervention. If I could make my mother feel defeated, perhaps she’d understand what it felt like to be me.

What was missing then and even now—the breach in the landscape that can never be filled—is my mother, fully alive, with everything I wish she’d been able to offer me. I suppose if I stopped giving myself the look, redirected it toward her, I’d unleash the sheer might of my indignation. If I could let that genie out of the bottle and prove to myself, as the adult I now am, that I can handle my own wrath, despite how it might temporarily disorganize my mind, I’d lay down my prodding stick and wander more freely from the straight and narrow.

Then, maybe I’d remember other times—like that moment in the dining room when my mother spontaneously provided what I needed—and give that North Star a chance to rise. Either way, I’d come to grief, feel the regret of all we weren’t able to have together and be to one another, and fall like plaster dust to the floor. Afterward, however, I’d pick myself up, feeling more willing and able to accept life’s inevitable voids and disappointments. Somewhere in the good disposition I never fully lost, I might find an opening into forgiving us both.



# Sky Pearls

by Maura Gage Cavell

Why should she apologize  
for needing the midnight blue

of moon, stars, and planets  
she wanted to learn?

Her high school's planetarium  
made her forget it was daylight.

Night's dreams and planetary guidance  
seemed to be possible.

The cold clear nights now call  
her to look up, identify

some long ago learned pattern,  
a bit foggy through

the thickness of time  
and so many branches.

# With Winter's Approach

by Maura Gage Cavell

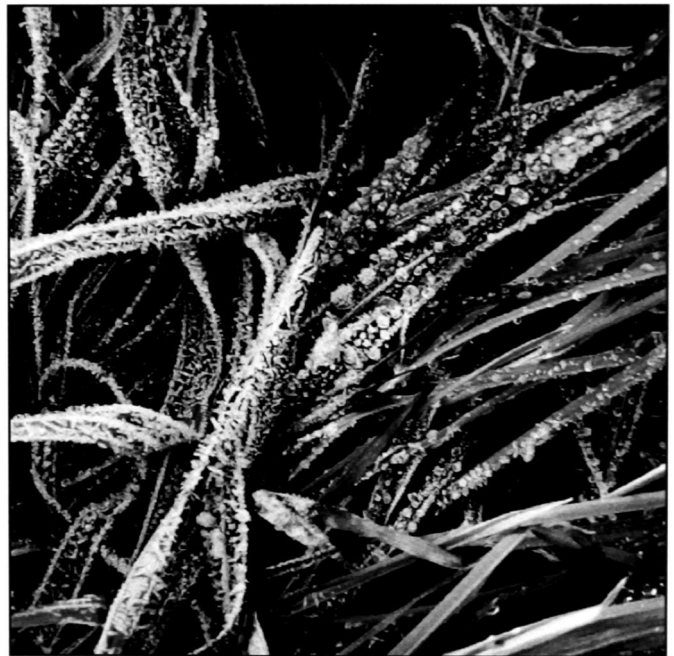
Wheat-colored hair  
blowing back, her face  
full of sunlight;

the branches of the woods  
behind her blow back  
slightly, too,

the yellow sun-glow  
shining over the earth,  
opal light of frosted-

over grass, ravens  
on a distant telephone  
pole, the cloud's lace

flowing past like wedding  
veils or gauze over  
a pale blue sky.



# Back to Daylight

by Maura Gage Cavell

Darkness falls early like an  
emptiness in winter.  
Rain runs icy as it hits  
freezing air.

Rose bushes have drooped and dropped  
at courtyard's edge.  
Dogs keep howling at all hours.

Night deepens; the moon's  
caught in a swirl of fog.  
The air's damp and slippery;  
cold silence enwraps us.

Shadows from car headlights  
shift across the walls.  
Somewhere out there  
she is making her own way.

These fields of hers  
are untrodden; she will make  
her own new horizons,

find light and brightness again.  
Somehow she will climb  
all the way back  
to daylight.

# All Night Diner

by Michael D. Riley

Gray formica with darker shadows,  
crooked names scratched in crooked hearts.

Silver Deco edges, triple fluting  
with silver rivets cling to 1933.

Red leatherette, split twice,  
is twice spliced by red tape.

Two seats curved like airplane wings  
fly toward each other forever

over continents of dried gum,  
chipped linoleum, crossed ankles in old shoes.

One thick rivet rusted to the floor  
yearns for its lost mate and shakes

cups and saucers, ice cubes  
and silverware in its derangement.

We sit alone together  
under a stainless-steel canopy

curved like a hangar before windows  
full of streetlights and rain.

Coffee drips endlessly into  
the brown sea we fly over.

From the grill, dawn mist rises.  
Cigarette signal flares flicker and die.

Our mirrored doppelganger  
leans low over his cup.

Salt. Pepper. Sugar. Glass mugs  
half full, held in reserve

before a white flag of napkins.



# Christmas Card

Roger Jones

**At 10:30 in the morning** on Christmas Eve, my neighbour slipped a Christmas card through my letter-slot. Never mind that it's a cold and grey winter day, everything that says, stay inside, sink into a book, sip hot chocolate. I'm left with no choice: guilt demands that I reciprocate. So here I am, out on the streets, early dusk at 4:30, setting out to shop. It's more than dark; patches of slick ice cling to the pavement, obscured too often by the fluff of light snow. In a mood of angry stupidity, I probe several stores. The first I try, Walmart, offers half an aisle of cards, all saccharine and specialized—for sons, aunts, great bosses, and the like—but none blank. Then, I drop into two corner stores in quick succession. In the first, an aging Korean proprietor, hair black-lacquered an inch from the roots, shakes his head with a grin. Three doors farther down, the owner of a Chinese souvenir shop dismisses me, his palm held up and out.

Indeed, I should know better, for the witching energies of the year have peaked, driving away even the most manic shoppers. But not me. My business is unfinished, and I despair. Then, I am saved! Five minutes before total shutdown, I enter a shop signed, "tobacco, gifts, tourist souvenirs." I swivel a rickety display column and find a message-free card for a dollar ninety-five depicting palm trees at the edge of sand and surf. In gratitude, I claim victory (they celebrate Christmas in the tropics, don't they?), and I can accept this pristine beach lapped by sapphire seas as heaven.

Still, my hunt has taken me too far from home. After trudging for twenty minutes, my craving for a coffee and a muffin cannot be quelled, so I cross the street to a still-lit hamburger outlet. Already immersed in absurdity, I settle for hot chocolate and an apple turnover.

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From my cracked red vinyl banquette, I see a female cashier and three young male staff but no other customers. Why should it be otherwise? And, I lament to myself: *what procrastination has reduced me to this?* The tallest of the staff— young, lanky, and energized—wipes a counter top as he chats with his two stockier, quieter colleagues. He applies roughly one wipe per eight sponge gesticulations to back up his remarks. With his other hand, he holds a lit cigarette, which he waves more than smokes; I take this to be his practice, given that his teeth gleam too brightly for him to be an addict. More professional than the men, the woman focuses on a cash register with a red and gold crown on top. A receipt ribbon curls to the floor as she checks each number. In character, her hair is coiled in a tight bun and her expression is set at severe. I guess her to be in her thirties. Though she remains silent, her sharp glances at her staff hit home. The lanky man's wiping accelerates, as does the random movement of plates and pie stands by his two colleagues. All four have brown skin and black hair. From high in the corner by

the kitchen entrance, “Silent Night” rasps out of a black speaker—maybe from the Christmas album of a minor rock star in heat, what with the numerous, urgent warbles. At the end of the restaurant, a full-wall mural, Socialist realism style, shows a brawny Caucasian worker in string vest and jeans beaming at a hamburger, lurid in reds and greens. Next to him, a cheerful short-order cook, equally muscle-bound, flips scarlet patties. I suspect I’m at the center of a hitherto undiscovered and definitely not-of-this-world universe.

A closer look at my purchased card reveals no humans on its silken beach, no debris or detritus, just virgin sand under canted coconut palms thrusting at the ocean, curving to a point with endless blue beyond. At a muffled shout, I realize the lanky man is staring at me. I slip the card back into its envelope, at which he laughs and dashes into the kitchen, whereupon “Silent Night” is silenced, and a sitar raga belts from the overloaded speaker. As he prances back, all three men watch me, so I shrug and smile, but the cashier frowns, bending her head a notch. In short order, the lanky man returns to the kitchen, the volume drops, and he saunters back to hop up on the grill, cleaner spray and sponge in hand. Still, he keeps glancing in my direction as he arranges pots and kettles around a shallow pan. From a hook on the wall, he takes a stuffed toy and lays it in the pan, as if it were a *crèche*. This triggers the cashier’s interest, and, for once, she smiles. She looks at me, points at him, and says, “Bethlehem.” At this sally, all four roar with laughter. And I, ever a good sport, nod in involuntary support.



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After enough of a break to make me long for my cozy home, I get up to leave, but a gust of cold air sweeps in. With it comes a scruffy middle-aged man, ragged-quilt-coated, running shoes with toes open and soles flapping. As if on a mission, he shuffles up to the cashier. “Want to use the washroom,” he mumbles.

“Go away,” she says, head down. “Washroom is for customers only.” And though it seems a mild enough rebuff, he turns away and wanders back to the door, unprotesting.

“Wait,” I say, going up to him. “Let me buy you a soft drink.”

With a puzzled squint at me, he says, “Don’t want a soft drink. Want to use the washroom. Weak kidneys. Tired of peeing my pants.”

But, I’m insistent. “Wait,” I say again, and then I appeal to the cashier, “I’ll buy

him a drink, maybe something to eat. Let him use the washroom.”

With an indifferent shrug, she indicates assent, and, as if she wants no misunderstanding, adds, “All right,” without inflection, and to her staff, who have stopped work and are watching, “Get on with something. We’re going home any minute.”

As he moves to the washroom, the man mutters, “Tea. Don’t need anything to eat. Don’t really need tea.”

Then, his emergency relieved, he sits opposite me, lingering over a slow, shallow draw on his tea. He refuses milk or sugar. He smells of stale sweat and newish urine.

“Where d’you go from here?” I ask.

Like a gantry, his back straightens, his head lifts and his face stares at mine, though I can find no emotion in it. “Back to the shelter,” he says. “They treat me good there. Shower. Christmas food. A bunk. Only thing is, the daytimes. Thrown out by nine in the morning. Can’t go back ‘til 6:00. You?” He looks at the envelope on the seat next to me. “Family?”

“No. I live alone. I go to my sister’s for Christmas dinner tomorrow.” He notices the envelope; I nod and say, “For my neighbor, Emily, a card for her.” I show it to him.

“What has that to do with Christmas or with anything?” he says. “It’s make-believe. Why would you give your neighbor that? I am real.” Again, the lanky man is watching. “You are real. That’s real,” pointing to the near-blackness outside the door and the draft cutting around the frame of the door.

With a brusque wave of his hand behind him, he leaves. Despite my efforts to pay the bill, the cashier refuses my money. “We get too many of those,” she said. “They’re not clean. They come when the hostel throws them out.” The lanky man joins us at the cash register and touches my envelope gingerly, so I pull out the card to show him. “That is our home,” he says, fingering it. “Guyana.” So, my fantasy turns out to be his reality, whereas this cold city must have been his vision of hope not so long ago. I don’t ask how he feels about what he has found; I don’t even check what my feelings might be trying to make a go of it in his homeland. Instead, I offer him the card; he and the beach are the closest compatibility I can figure out this night. He refuses it, but I insist, and he accepts it, puts it open on the counter and gives me a pen, making a gesture that I should scribble. I write “home,” hand it over, put on my coat, and head for the door.

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“Merry Christmas,” the lanky man calls from behind the counter, and I swing around in courtesy and say, “Merry Christmas,” back. All four repeat, “Merry Christmas,” in litanal response. Outside, the man from the hostel has vanished. The door closes on the twang of the raga, and I slip into a silent night and the swaddling of cold, dark agnostic air.



# Peggy

by Henry Rappaport

In short-sleeve October,  
both of us away from home,  
we used to walk the ave.  
and talk in the bright sunlight that spiked  
off stands whose news we never read.  
I kept trying to tell her  
how I always felt lonely with her.  
I don't think she knew.  
On those early, empty streets  
she would talk, and I would talk,  
and where we turned away from the sun  
it was cold.  
She used to drink a lot of Tab  
and rev up into jittery, sure-fire talk,  
and I would try to calm her down.  
Her skinny, wise-assed self needed  
more buzz as much as I  
needed more conversation.  
When I left without a word,  
I sent her a case of Tab  
with a note that said,  
When I have gone,  
the sweetness comes.  
The worst life imitates art.  
A few months later,  
Alone and freezing in Madrid,  
A friend sent me a note that said,  
Peggy cried.

# Peeling the Grief Until the Onion is None

by L.C. Atencio

Legend has it that two mythic creatures,  
which forged the earth themselves,  
pay one a visit when one peels an onion.

They are two: the three-winged eagle  
comes from the northeastern hemisphere  
and brings half of a spirit clutched in its claws;  
the other, the four-legged serpent, springs  
without slithering from the southwestern hemisphere,  
bringing over thus the other half of the spirit  
in its venomous fangs.

Myth has it that when one peels an onion,  
the serpent and the eagle, for only this occasion,  
come together and join the spirit into one.

They come from opposites to make the spirit disconcerted;  
and therefore soon surprised upon the visit they are paying.  
Once gathered together, the enemies of lore  
beguile, screech, and hiss at each other with maniac hunger  
as the spirit, once full, slips into the house  
through the opening of a window sash  
and comes to the relative or friend,  
and remains at his or her side.



The cycle repeats itself with that same one spirit  
as many times as an onion has layers,  
and the cutter cries time and time again  
for what he knows,  
and for what he doesn't.

At the last visit, the spirit kisses  
the hand of the cutter as gently as the tears tumble  
upon it in fragments like snowflakes, melted.  
The spirit waves goodbye from the window  
as it parts from the relative or friend,  
but also as it parts from itself into two.

Half of the grief ascends with the  
eagle. And half descends with the serpent.  
By now, one has healed  
and accepts the utter and absolute passing of someone.  
Healed, not by the onion or its physical effect,

Cured instead one is by that last kiss  
the soul laid upon one's hand,  
for such a hand cut the onion slowly and committedly.  
For one worked to weep and to eat and to live.

# Death

by Sandy Anderson

Although he favored the weak, the old,  
you couldn't claim he neglected anyone.  
A mad gambler, you never could read  
his cards. Sometimes he folded  
on a full house, sometimes he sneezed  
and someone startled out of a coma.  
Sometimes he closed his eyes,  
and the stillborn breathed.



# The Generous Aroma of Prayer

by William Joliff

“One of the most surprising, and perhaps confounding, facts of charity in America is that the people who can least afford to give are the ones who donate the greatest percentage of their income.” – *The Atlantic*, March 20, 2013

What is it about church basements, that smell?  
One whiff and I start in coloring Jesus.  
And if it's a place where the poor come to pray,  
you can sniff out a history of food:

the Sunday stench of coffee, weak and stale,  
the macaroni remains of casseroles,  
spaghetti from teen fund-raising dinners,  
sheet cake from weddings, hastily arranged.

Add to that the Goodwill cloud of old clothes,  
cheap detergent, slightly pious sweat.  
These are acquired tastes, but they may be  
the odor of the Gospel: the poorest fifth

of Americans give twice as much—that's  
twice, twice as much—of their money away  
as the richest. Go figure. Maybe mildew  
and crayons really are the aroma of prayer.



# Contributors

**Sandy Anderson** has been published in many magazines, including *Weber Studies*, *Sugarhouse Review*, *Lucid Moon*, and *Limberlost Review*. In 1978, Ghost Planet Press published her book *At the Edge in White Robes*. She has also published the chapbook *Jeanne Was Once a Player of Pianos*, with Limberlost Press. Her poetry was recently published in the anthology *New Poets of the American West*, edited by Lowell Jaeger. Her awards include the Salt Lake City Mayor's Award in Literature in 1997 and the Writers at Work Writing Advocate Award in 1995. She currently works as a piano teacher and has enjoyed volunteer positions as judging chair for the Piano Federation Festival and Utah Chairman for Music Achievement Program. She has been in the literary community since the 1960s and is the founder of City Art, the longest-running reading series in Utah. Anderson was also the editor of the award-winning literary magazine *Wasatch Front*, which won first place in the literary magazine category at the Rocky Mountain Collegiate Press Association. She has been artist in residence at several local high schools and has given workshops to many different groups including veterans and the disabled.

**L.C. Atencio** holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing from the University of Central Florida, with scholarly emphasis on illustrating literary works. Atencio's poems, "Believing in words, not in whoever," and "Staring through the cracks of reality," were published in 2012 in *Nota Bene*, an anthology by the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. He has edited and judged college journals such as *Phoenix Magazine*, *The Cypress Dome*, and *The Florida Review*. His poetry and short stories have been published internationally in *Perspectives*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *The Penwood Review*, *The Storyteller*, *Space and Time Magazine*, *Grey Sparrow Press*, and others. His illustrations have been featured in college magazines such as *Aries: A Journal of Art and Literature* and in fantasy journals such as *The Mythic Circle*. Atencio is proud to be an experimental novelist for the everyday person and a book illustrator. To get in touch, he may be contacted at [l\\_atencio@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:l_atencio@knights.ucf.edu). For a limited time only, he is providing free illustrations for editors, presses, and literary

agents so long as the message of the writing is morally positive.

**Marc Berman** is a business executive living in western Massachusetts. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Alembic*, *Poetry East*, *Forge*, *Confrontation*, and *Lullwater Review*, among others.

**Maura Gage Cavell** is Professor of English and Director of the Honors Program at Louisiana State University Eunice. She resides in Crowley, LA, with her family. She's recently published in journals and magazines including *Abbey*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Iconoclast*, *Ship of Fools*, *Clark Street Review*, *The Louisiana Review*, and *California Quarterly*.

**Mary Echlin** has a master's degree in English and has been teaching at the high school and college level for about three decades. For the last two of those decades, she has been a teacher at Kimberton Waldorf School, an independent school in Pennsylvania. Her work has been featured in *Breakwater Review*, *The Coachella Review*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *PMS*, and *Schuylkill Valley Journal of the Arts*.

A psychotherapist in private practice, **Patricia Heim** received her training at the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia. She writes with the Greater Philadelphia Wordshop Studio and Writers.com. She also likes to paint. Heim has published essays in *R.K.V.R.Y Quarterly Literary Journal* (nominated for the Pushcart Prize), *Apiary Magazine*, *Epiphany Magazine*, *The Dos Passos Review*, *The North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Evening Street Review*, and *The Portland Review*.

Originally from Magnetic Springs, Ohio, **William Joliff** currently serves as Professor of English at George Fox University, just south of Portland, Oregon. His poetry and criticism have appeared in *West Branch*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Appalachian Journal*, *Poet Lore*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Center*, and other journals. His most recent chapbook is *Searching for a White Crow* (2009).

Born in England, **Roger Jones'** home has been in Toronto for many years. He works sparingly as an arts strategist—an example: he, with his then-partner, set up CANCOPY, the first version of the Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency—and more determinedly on writing. A collection of short stories and a novel are seeking publication. He has published in Canada in *Green's Magazine*;

*Paperplates Magazine*; *Out of Service Magazine*, and *The Nashwaak Review*; in the United States in *Pangolin Papers*, *Windhover Journal*, *xconnect Magazine*, *Rockford Review*, *New Mirage Quarterly*, *New Mirage Anthology*, *Timber Creek Review*, *Thorny Locust Magazine*, *Puckerbrush Review*, *Xavier Review*; and internationally in *Takahe* (New Zealand), *Cambrensis* (Wales), and *Storie* (Italy).

**Denise Landrum-Geyer** is an assistant professor of English (specialty—Composition and Rhetoric) & Writing Center Coordinator at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. She is interested in the ways in which creative writing and composition pedagogy intersect, especially in creative nonfiction. Her research interests also include essay studies, genre theory, computers and composition, qualitative research, feminist and critical pedagogies, composition history, invention studies, writing across the curriculum, and writing center theory. In addition being a professor and essayist, she is a bit obsessive about dogs: dachshunds, shih tzus, German shepherds, and Newfoundlands are particular favorites. She has been in Oklahoma since July of 2009, and she is constantly learning what it means to live life on the Great Plains, especially as a wife, mother, and University of Kentucky alum and sports fan.

**Gary Lark's** most recent book, *Without a Map*, was published in 2013 at Wellstone Press. A previous book, *Getting By*, won the Holland Prize from Logan House Press, 2009. His chapbooks include: *Men at the Gates*, *Tasting the River in the Salmon's Flesh* and *Eels and Fishes*. Poems from *Getting By* were featured on *The Writer's Almanac* with Garrison Keillor. His work has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Poet Lore*, *The Sun*, and *North American Review*. Lark has been a librarian, carpenter, janitor, salesman and hospital aide.

**Tom Larsen** has been a fiction writer for twenty years and his work has appeared in *Newsday*, *The McGuffin*, *Best American Mystery Stories*, and *The LA Review*. His novel *FLAWED* is available through Amazon.

**Robert McGowan (1947-2012)**. Robert McGowan's fiction and nonfiction have appeared as story collections, as book and catalog contributions, as commentaries, as weekly columns, in over five dozen prominent literary, art, and nature print journals in America and abroad, including *American Forests*, *The Black Herald* (France), *Camera Obscura*, *Chautauqua*, *Connecticut Review*, Canada's venerable *The Dalhousie Review*, *Etchings*(Australia), *New Walk*

*Magazine* (UK), *River Teeth*, and *South Dakota Review*, and have been four times nominated for the Pushcart Prize and several times anthologized.

**John Graves Morris**, professor of English at Cameron University, is the author of *Noise and Stories* (Plain View Press, 2008). His poems have appears in journals such as *The Chariton Review*, *The Concho River Review*, *Jelly Bucket*, *The Great Plains Review*, *Sugar Mule* (and those poems were reprinted in Jeanetta Calhoun Mish's anthology of Oklahoma writing *Ain't Nobody Can Sing Like Me*), *Westview*, *Crosstimbers*, and others. A poem also appeared recently in Dorothy Alexander's anthology *Elegant Rage: a Poetic Tribute to Woody Guthrie*. He is finishing the manuscript for a second collection to be entitled *Unwritten Histories*. Twice the featured writer at the Westview Writers Festival, he lives in Lawton.

With his first collection of poetry, *Manhattan Plaza*, **James B. Nicola** joins the ranks of poets Frank O'Hara and Stanley Kunitz and humorist Robert Benchley as a New York author originally from Worcester, Massachusetts. James has been widely published in periodicals including *The Atlanta Review*, *Tar River*, *Texas Review*, *Lyric*, *Nimrod*, and *Blue Unicorn* stateside, and overseas in journals as exotic as *The Istanbul Review* and *Poetry Salzburg*. He also won the Dana Literary Award, a People's Choice award (from Storyteller) and a *Willow Review* award; was nominated twice for a Pushcart Prize and once for a Rhysling Award; and was featured poet at *New Formalist*. A Yale grad and stage director by profession, his nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a Choice award. Also a composer, lyricist, and playwright, his children's musical *Chimes: A Christmas Vaudeville* premiered in Fairbanks, Alaska, where Santa Claus was rumored to be in attendance on opening night.

**John Nizalowski** is the author of three books —*Hooking the Sun* (Farolito Press, 2003), *The Last Matinée* (Turkey Buzzard Press, 2011), and *Land of Cinnamon Sun* (Irie Press, 2013). Most recently his work has appeared in *Measure*, *Digital Americana*, *Under the Sun*, *Weber: the Contemporary West*, *Gobshite*, and *Slab*. He teaches creative writing, composition, and mythology at Colorado Mesa University.

**Beth Paulson's** poems have appeared recently in *Pinyon Review*, *Red Rock Review*, *The Kerf*, and *Passager*. She received Pushcart Prize



nominations for 2007 and 2009, as well as 2011, and a Best of the Net nomination for 2012. A new collection of her poems, *Canyon Notes*, was published in Fall 2012 by Mt. Sneffels Press.

**Henry Rappaport's** fifth book of poetry, *Loose to the World*, is circling in on a home. A perpetual student with some of our highly regarded contemporary poets, he figures he's beginning to get it. You can tell him what you think at [henry@hento.ca](mailto:henry@hento.ca).

**Michael D. Riley's** recent publications include two anthologies—*Irish-American Poetry From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* and *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust*, 2nd Edition—along with *America*, *The South Carolina Review*, *The Lyric*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Studio* (Australia), *The Worcester Review*, *Arts and Letters*, and *Poetry Ireland Review*. Recent books are *Circling the Stones*, a collection of poems based on Ireland, 2007 from Creighton University; *Ashore Here*, a collection of meditative poems set at the seashore, 2008 from March Street Press; *Players*, a collection of character-based poems, also 2008 from *Turning Point*. *Green Hills: Memoir Poems* has been accepted for publication this year by Finishing Line Press. He is recently retired as Emeritus Professor of English from Penn State Berks.

**Will Walker's** work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Bark and Passager*, *Crack the Spine*, and *Rougarou*. His chapbook, *Carrying Water*, was published by Pudding House Press, and his full-length collection, *Wednesday After Lunch*, is a Blue Light Press Book Award Winner (2008). He received his bachelor's degree in English history and literature from Harvard University. Over the last decade, he has attended numerous writing workshops with Marie Howe, Thea Sullivan, Gail Mazur, Robert Pinsky, Allen Shapiro, and Mark Doty. He was also an editor of the *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*. When not putting pen to paper, he enjoys placing bow on string and playing the cello. He and his wife spend their summers in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

**Paul Watsky** started in poetry fairly early—high school—kept it going for about a decade, through a Ph.D. in modern poetry at SUNY Buffalo and five years as an assistant professor at San Francisco State University. For half a dozen years he did a lot of very short forms—haiku, senryu, tanka—because his children, then little, required so much attention he couldn't sustain elaborate literary

structures. As his children grew, he recognized he could go longer, with both free verse and a kind of bastardized formalism. Lately he has leaned heavily on corrupted couplets: irregular units that superficially represent order but actually mock such aspirations. Watsky has practiced as a psychologist with an interest in creativity theory for 30 years. His work has appeared in journals, including *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Smartish Pace*, *Interim*, *Permafrost*, and *Atlanta Review*.

**Marian Frances Wolbers'** work appears in the Spring 2014 issue of *The Southampton Review*. Her novel, *Rider*, was published by St. Martin's Press under the Wyatt imprint in 1996 and received favorable reviews from *Publisher's Weekly*, *Booklist*, and *Library Journal*. Her book *Uncovering Fashion: Fashion Communications across the Media* was published by Fairchild Books, the textbook division of Condé Nast, in 2009. She also wrote for *Time-Life* and *Rodale, Inc.*, and published extensively on health, science, history, and many other topics.

## Photos and illustrations

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