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WESTVIEW

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W E S T V I E W

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Winter 2005

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Stylesheet

1. Submissions should be typed on 8.5" x 11" white paper; prose should be double spaced. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope.
2. Submitted artwork 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:
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Cover artwork by Stuart Harrison, "Windmill"



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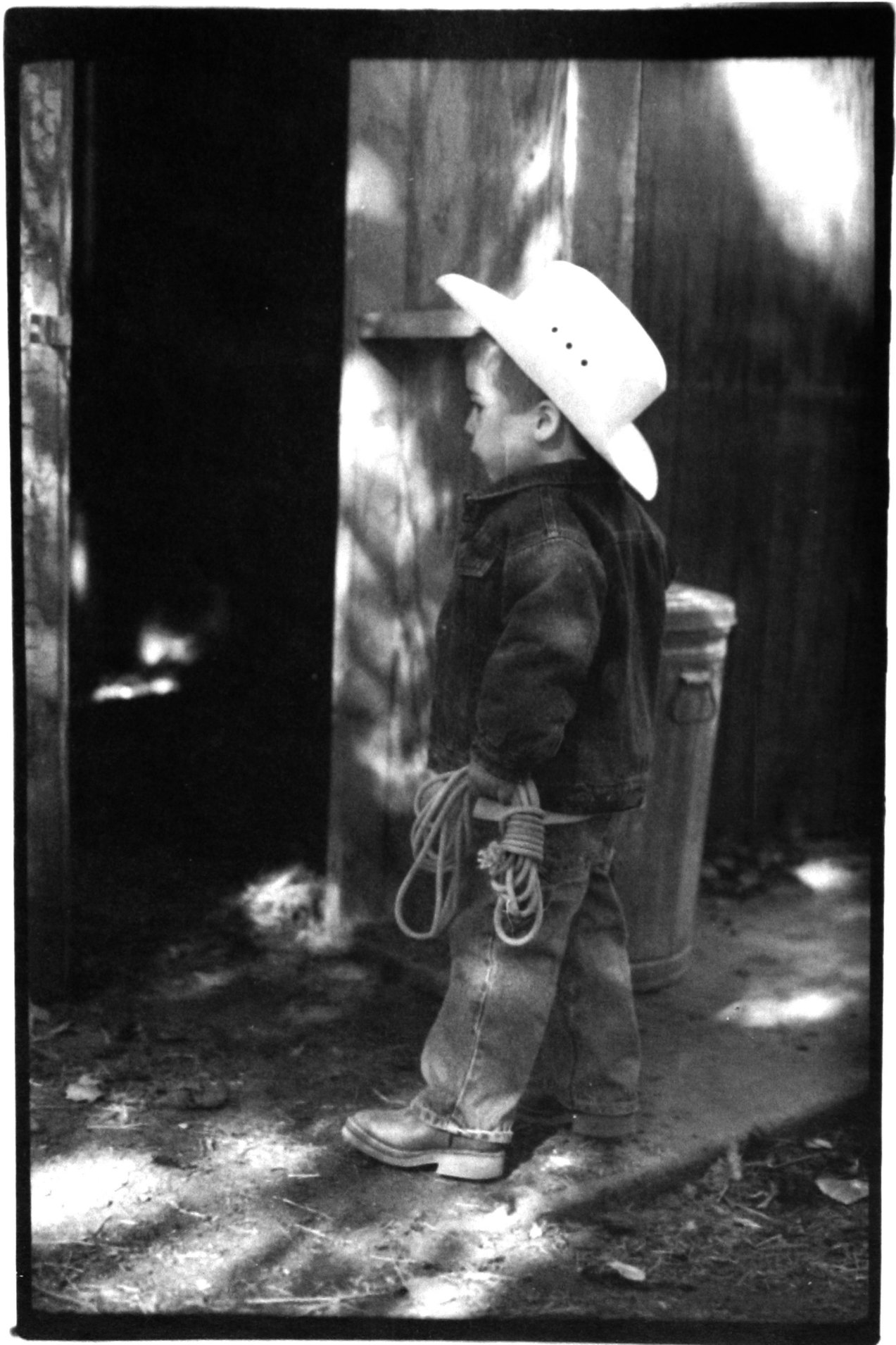


Photo by Erin Nagel



Sage and Cowdogs

by Walt McDonald

Go home, Billy Joe, and tell the brave
you're staying. B movies and spurs
don't feed steers anymore. Now, your rivals
are nephews of riders you taught how.

Unstrap your movie gun and chaps,
go back and straddle your own corral.
Old movie cowboys on stallions
dodged sentimentality like blanks,

but those were the thirties, when westerns
brought the world escape, the vinegar-sweet
aroma of dusty sagebrush and saddles.
Dialogue was a line of black-and-white clichés

lean as the men, gunshots repeated often.
Stars from the Bronx or Omaha seemed natural
as trained dogs almost as fast as horses.
Wild Bill and Hopalong spoke lines as stiff

as cold leather, but words didn't matter
behind scowls: on Saturdays, I was there.
Old stunt man with broken bones, gimpy
before you turned thirty, you were never

the heavy, only an extra in eighty films
with assorted hats and names like Buck
or Bill, one of the boys in the posse
trotting after the star and eating dust.



High in the San Juan

by Walt McDonald

Old chorus line of mountains,
high-stepping meadows of aspens
kicking elk and big-horned sheep

from the tree line, as if peaks had secrets
they mustn't expose, nudging them
with sprigs of grass down out of canyons

to tourists propped by their cars,
begging skittish deer and squirrels
to stay—Hold that pose, come to bread

and cookies flipped by city hands.
Last night at dusk, we saw a deer and fawn
leap past the cabin, and thought

how splendid to be alive and dancing.
They hopped away beyond boulders
and stopped, the doe looking back,

then both sprang away—and soon,
in a lope, a coyote as long as the fawn
followed nimbly uphill and disappeared.

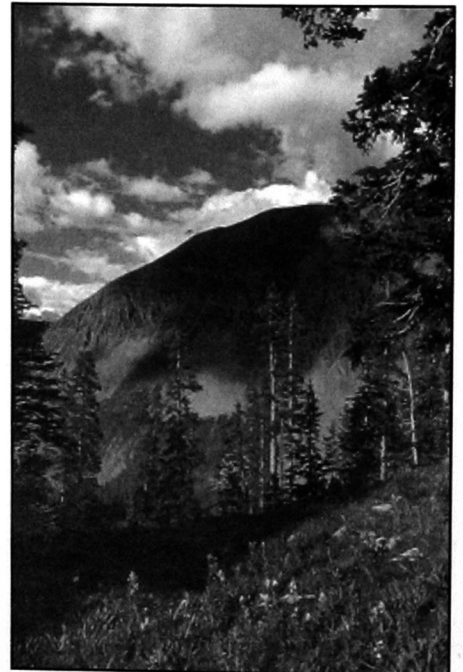


Photo by Tom Harris



My Boy at Shiloh

by J. Chester Johnson

*(our visit to Hardin County four
generations after the battle of 1862)*

A light flickers, and down into the boy
A photo darkens and casts a shade
On a May field in Tennessee.

For into sunken fables a diluvial echo
Takes the boy, hardly posed on print
Against a stone fence at Shiloh.

It wasn't for uniforms or famous killings
That conceit rang so loudly, but rather
One memory he couldn't own.

"I just wish to plot a crime I didn't see,"
As he stood on legends plowing deep,
The dead keeping secret the story.

"My family broken by it, a town pinched."
But he'll do better, for a survivor puts
Distance between bouts of pain.

Still, I fear, 'til he sees dead flesh mulch
Or his dank grip upon a dread shiv,
The shade gladly stays his own.



Pentimento

by Julia Wendell

Weeks later, the dog comes back
from a prowl with a head
in the platter of its mouth,
wiggling and wagging
with its newfound trophy.
There's not much left—
a matted patch of tabby, the small, white
triangular ears—just enough to know

it's her, so we can stop
filling in the blanks
of a better outcome.
Not knowing
is an open door
through which
anything can pass.

Which is why, years ago,
when I phoned my mother
with more bad news—
abortion or divorce—
she hung up on me.
Not knowing
was her blank canvas,
her masterpiece of safety.

I'd wanted
to tell my kids:
Farms are hard on cats,
and this looks like
a fox's work; the head snapped
off, the body gone, the eyes
left pretty much intact.
But the mother in me
that came from another
like and unlike me thought, even so,
some things are better left unsaid.



The Conditions Upon Norbert's Planetesimal

by Stefanie Freele

Dr. Z brought forth the suggestion of walking: inexpensive, easily accessible, non-excusable, and possible. "When you get that itch, that craving, you just head out the door and walk." He paused, hands in his hair, with that look of "See what I mean?" while waiting for Norbert's response.

"What if it's daylight?"

"So, it's daylight."

The thought of taking a walk during the day, with the sun, oppressive and obvious, beating on Norbert's head, seemed preposterous. "For one thing, there would be sun."

"Yes. There could be possibly plenty of sun." Dr. Z nodded vigorously as he leaned back, apparently waiting for more.

Just saying "There would be sun" seemed enough of an explanation for Norbert. How did people tolerate the domineering light of day instead of preferring dusk or early morning? Because of Dr. Z's apparent lack of understanding, Norbert felt compelled to explain what seemed so simple. "Underneath the sun would not be the place to walk."

"Tell me more."

"For one thing, it might be hot."

Dr. Z's eyebrows rose and his lips pursed. He didn't appear to be buying Norbert's diagnosis of daylight.

"There would be minimal shadows."

"Minimal shadows?"

"Yes. Daylight brings a harsh starkness to things."

"A harsh starkness to things?"

"I hate it when you repeat what I say."

"Norbert, I'm trying to get at what you mean. Explain your concept of daylight to me. What would it be like if you stepped out your front door at high noon and stood in the driveway?"

Norbert pictured himself squinting from the glare, cringing from the heat. Cars would drive by, filled with people squashed against their win-

dows, fighting to get a look at him. Norbert would try to look like he belonged in the driveway, but sweat would roll off his forehead. He would have forgotten deodorant. He'd reach for the sunglasses on top of his head, but they wouldn't be there. He'd damn himself for not wearing a hat. A car would pull up into the driveway and a group of political activists would run out, thrusting clipboards, wanting him to sign on the dotted line and give money. They'd surround him with their opinions, clapping him on his back, and he'd be thirsty from the heat, so thirsty. He'd bolt from the group of people, run to his front door, but it would be locked and he'd jiggle the door handle vigorously—

"What are you thinking?"

"Doctor Z." Norbert breathed heavily and wiped his brow. "Daylight is not an option. Won't do. Too bright." He knew that if he attempted daylight, he'd just run right back into the house and smoke a big bowl, enough to keep him indoors for a week.

"Have we tried visualization yet?" As Dr. Z thumbed through the chart, Norbert noticed that Z's tie tilted to the right. The angle disturbed Norbert because as he studied the bookshelves, the painting of a giant orange, and the papers on the desk for flawed arrangement, the tie was the only tilted item. If he leaned over to adjust it, that would be out of line for a patient. If he mentioned the single item's disarray, Dr. Z would undoubtedly want to talk about Norbert's *feelings* about the tie, and then make notes about it in the chart. If only the doctor might drop something and then lean over to pick it up, gravity would pull the tie down an inch or two, which would correct its appearance. On the other hand, Norbert thought, he himself could drop something on purpose, since the chances of the doctor dropping something were rather slim—

"Let's try a bit of visualization. Okay? Get comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Close



your eyes.”

“I’m not sure I want to do this.” What would Dr. Zolnay do while Norbert’s eyes were closed, while he was so vulnerable?

“With your eyes closed you will envision calm and comforting circumstances. Your vision is created by you—your own planet. I’ll guide you and you can then try it yourself.”

Norbert closed his eyes and then opened them again. Dr. Z patted his hand in the air as if the motion would close Norbert’s lids. By squeezing his face muscles, Norbert held his eyes closed. The darkness welcomed him. No tie in sight.

“Relax and breathe. Imagine. It is dusk. A cool summer evening. You just ate a healthy dinner. Fish. Salad. Corn on the cob.”

Norbert visualized a steaming mound of white corn on the cob, but the vision changed to a plate of donuts: sugar-dusted donuts filled with raspberry jelly. Throughout his life, he occasionally daydreamed about working at a bakery, even for only one afternoon, just to have the job of squeezing the jelly into the donuts.

“Because you haven’t smoked marijuana in a long time, you are feeling very clear-headed. You put on a light jacket and step outside the front door. The breeze welcomes you. Inhale. You smell steaks barbecuing.”

“I smell diesel. I don’t want to smell barbecues; they have people there.”

“All right then. How about freshly-mowed lawns?”

Norbert pictured a neighbor turning off his lawn mower and heading his way. This neighbor had been itching to talk to Norbert for weeks, to buddy up to him, to invite him over to play cards with the guys and to show him his basement pool table. He wore a cheesy “You are my new pal and I’m not letting you out of my sight” grin. Norbert searched for an excuse to go back in, but the neighbor moved closer. Norbert knew he shouldn’t run, but what else could he do?

“No one is around. The street is empty.”

Ah. He breathed. The empty street. The lawn-mowing cheeseball disappeared.

“The air feels terrific. You feel so good and the evening is so nice, you start walking.”

Norbert imagined walking to the end of the driveway. Dr. Z was right: no one around. The air did feel good, and he was glad he wore a long-sleeved shirt. The moon peeked up over the foothills. A bus roared around the corner. Tourists snapped pictures through the window.

“What are you visualizing?”

“Japanese tourists taking my picture.”

“No. It’s an empty street. You can cancel those visions and thoughts at any time. Let me know when they’ve gone.”

He watched the bus drive off into the summer evening. It returned to quiet. “All right, an empty street.”

“Good!”

“What should I be doing?”

“You’d be walking now.”

“Just walking?”

“That’s all you need to do. Take a walk and enjoy the air.”

“Why am I doing this?”

“To enjoy the evening. Don’t open your eyes.”

“What if other people are out walking too?”

“You wave and keep going.”

“What if they want to talk?”

“You say, ‘Hi, have a good evening’.”

“What if they want something?”

“They don’t. They’re enjoying the evening too.”

“I feel dumb just walking down the street.” Smoking a joint sounded much more relaxing.

“Instead of feeling dumb, spend your energy looking at the sky and the trees. Feel the air. Appreciate the flowers.”

“There aren’t flowers. There are fire trucks and sirens.”

“If you can’t cancel them, let them pass and continue walking.”



He heard sirens in the distance and four more police cars following afterward. They headed toward his house. Pulled into his driveway. Looked for him. They planned to search the house for his weed.

"The sirens are just passing, though. You are still enjoying your walk."

Norbert watched the police back out of his driveway and continue down the road. He made himself turn around and kept walking.

"What else am I supposed to do?"

"Walk."

"I'm walking. I'm almost at the corner."

"At the corner, you can turn around. Or not. Depends on you. The night feels very nice, doesn't it? Tempting to continue on."

"Tempting to go home."

"In due time. In the meantime, dusk is a special time. You are noticing the colors of sunset. Maybe the moon is starting to come up."

"I already saw the moon."

"Excellent!"

A police car came back slowly and started to cruise as slowly as Norbert walked. The window rolled down. "Hey, you! What are you doing out here?"

"A police car is pulling me over."

"He's telling you to have a good evening. He says, 'Beautiful night, isn't it?'"

The policeman pulled away, but Norbert found himself wondering why he didn't look into the back seat to see if a criminal were there. There might have been a handcuffed policeman in the back seat, or in the trunk, because the real criminal had ambushed the cop, then gagged him and switched places and clothes. If the criminal drove the patrol



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

car, he would feel the power of being a uniformed authority and would want to assert his—

"Now what do you see?"

"I'm watching the police car move away, but I am wondering what is in his trunk."

"I imagine tools and emergency kits. Let him drive off or move him out of the way. Feel that breeze again."

The car turned the corner but paused. Norbert counted the rhythms of the red right-turn blinker and wished the car would get out of his visualization. Annoyed, he imagined pushing the car out of the way with a giant bulldozer. And it moved!

"I moved the cop car; it wouldn't get going."

"Good! I told you. You can cancel things. You can move things out of your way. Replace the car with something else."

The moon hovered and the bulldozer pulled over to the side of the road, shuddering as it turned off. There was no driver, which gave Norbert the creeps, even though he knew it was he who had brought it there. What if he came around the corner on one of his walks and a headless bulldozer quietly followed him? It would be able to tear right through houses and yards and bulldoze its way through



buildings. It would be after him and he'd be running, but his legs would feel like cement. If only he could stay one step ahead, because eventually, the bulldozer would run out of fuel. He placed a box of jelly donuts next to the seat of the bulldozer. The addition of pastries made the machine seem far less intimidating.

"So, the street is empty and it's getting darker out, bluer, and more peaceful."

He scanned the empty road as crickets in the field started chirping their tunes. A cold marsh breeze swept past, rather like the ones he used to feel as a kid when riding his BMX dirt bike around the neighborhood. Those strange marsh breezes would come from nowhere, twenty degrees cooler than the rest of the evening. His dad used to say that they were caused by differences in pressure. Those odd cold spots used to make Norbert think of dead bodies hiding in the swamp, or worse, live bodies lying just underneath the surface of the murky water, ready to grab the ankle of an innocent passerby—

"You are feeling relaxed and taking deep breaths."

He took a deep breath and noticed the moon again. A witch flew past on a broom, and he involuntarily giggled.

"Something funny?"

"A witch flew across the moon."

"Well, that's a childlike thought. Very good. Let yourself be childlike."

A dish ran away with a spoon. Who made that up? And where was the fork or the knife? He couldn't remember how that all went. But it seemed so rebellious of that dish and spoon, so shocking. The witch veered off, out of his peripheral vision, but then zoomed right in front of him. It was the green-faced witch from *The Wizard of Oz*, the one who melted! As a kid, he never wanted to see that part with the witch unless his parents watched too. He threatened the witch with the bulldozer and she

sped off, cackling.

"Keep breathing deeply. Deep breathing is the best antidote for anxiety. If you leave my office with one thing, I want you to remember deep breathing."

He breathed deeply. Perhaps that bulldozer could be his secret weapon where only he could psychically maneuver the controls. Not even a trained operator, if he found the keys or knew how to hotwire, could make the bulldozer move. Norbert would be the sole person who could make that powerful piece of equipment work. It would be at his mind's beck and call, roaring out of nowhere to knock out any threat or crush an enemy. The power of bulldozers: amazing. He wondered how fast they might go if he needed one in a hurry and felt despair because, if he needed one over here and the bulldozer were over there, it couldn't go over five to ten miles per hour, and by the time it arrived, he might really be in trouble. However! It was his mind's bulldozer, and it could move at the speed of sound if necessary, and, actually, he could make that bulldozer do almost anything, including—

"How do you feel?"

"All right."

"Take a few more breaths and head back home. It will be a peaceful walk back, and you won't run into a soul. Let me know when you get there."

Time to turn around already? He nodded to the bulldozer that sat alone and sturdy in a dusty field and, with his mind, he let it know that he'd be in touch. With one last glance at the moon, he started back to the house, feeling the almost chilly breeze blow gently against his jacket, causing it to puff up. Most likely it made him look like a hunchback, but he didn't care what he looked like. No one would see. Even if just for a moment, he was the only one walking, and the cool evening air felt rather good.



Dancing with Siva

by Fredrick Zydek

In the center of a circle of stars
at the very core of what the universe
knows and does, Siva does his dance.
He is celebrating the ways in which
one thing becomes another. His hands

balance the last breath of what was
and the first hint of the mist of what is
becoming. Where he dances, alpha
and omega occupy the same space;
life and death walk hand in hand; past,

present and future all follow the same
thin line. This is a dance that springs
from intuition, it follows few set rules,
blooms one movement at a time much
the way a good jazz artist improvises

his way around an old tune. This dance
looks toward eternal truths, ignores
the fleeting aspects of the physical life,
yet finds a way to venerate all the things
that make us human and all the things

that tell us we are more than what we
appear to be. This dance reveals
the indissolubility and unity of all that is,
the interconnectedness and relationship
of stones and mothers, sweet grass

and the aurora borealis, long afternoons
at the mall and the cocoon stage of atoms
and electrons. This dance explains away
the mystery hovering between idle curiosity
and the sacred acts of being and nothingness.

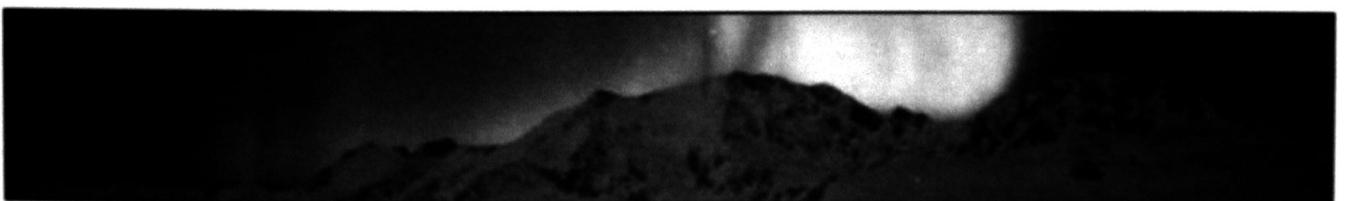


Photo by David Fritts



Original Sin

by Allison M. Smith

Glittering,
I adorn the ankles of all.
A jeweled snake
Dali's eyes painted
My festering extravagance
Infectious golden
 Poison emerald
 Life-blood ruby.
My responsibility constricts
The base, the feet, mankind
Who wear shoes to hide my malforming results,
But my true nature melts their façade.
I chain the legs of man:
None can be released,
Unwilling to relinquish
Such an attractive adornment as I.
Slaves



Caliban, His Letter to Prospero

by George Young

Caribal, cannibal, carib and Caliban, all the same
name for *monster*; me: half man, half fish,
with fins like arms, with long sharp fingernails
for digging, a receding forehead like a puppy
or a cat and the earthbound appearance of a tortoise.

I was the Lord of this island until you came
with your daughter, Miranda, and your books
to tether me with your spells, corrupt my gabble.
You taught me how to speak. Your art turned me
into a sort of poet. Now my curses melt in air.



Photo by David Miale

I now know “S” conjured us both up after he read
accounts of savages in the New World, of Patagonians,
their god Setebos, of shipwrecks on the “still-vexed Ber-
moothes,” the wild Bahamas. You were his
other self, I his demon, his Arawak, his wild Indian.

At first I showed you all the good things of the island:
where the clear springs flowed, where the berries
grew; and you taught me the names of things: moon,
sun, gave me the gift of language, until I tried to violate
Miranda in your cell, to people the island with Calibans.

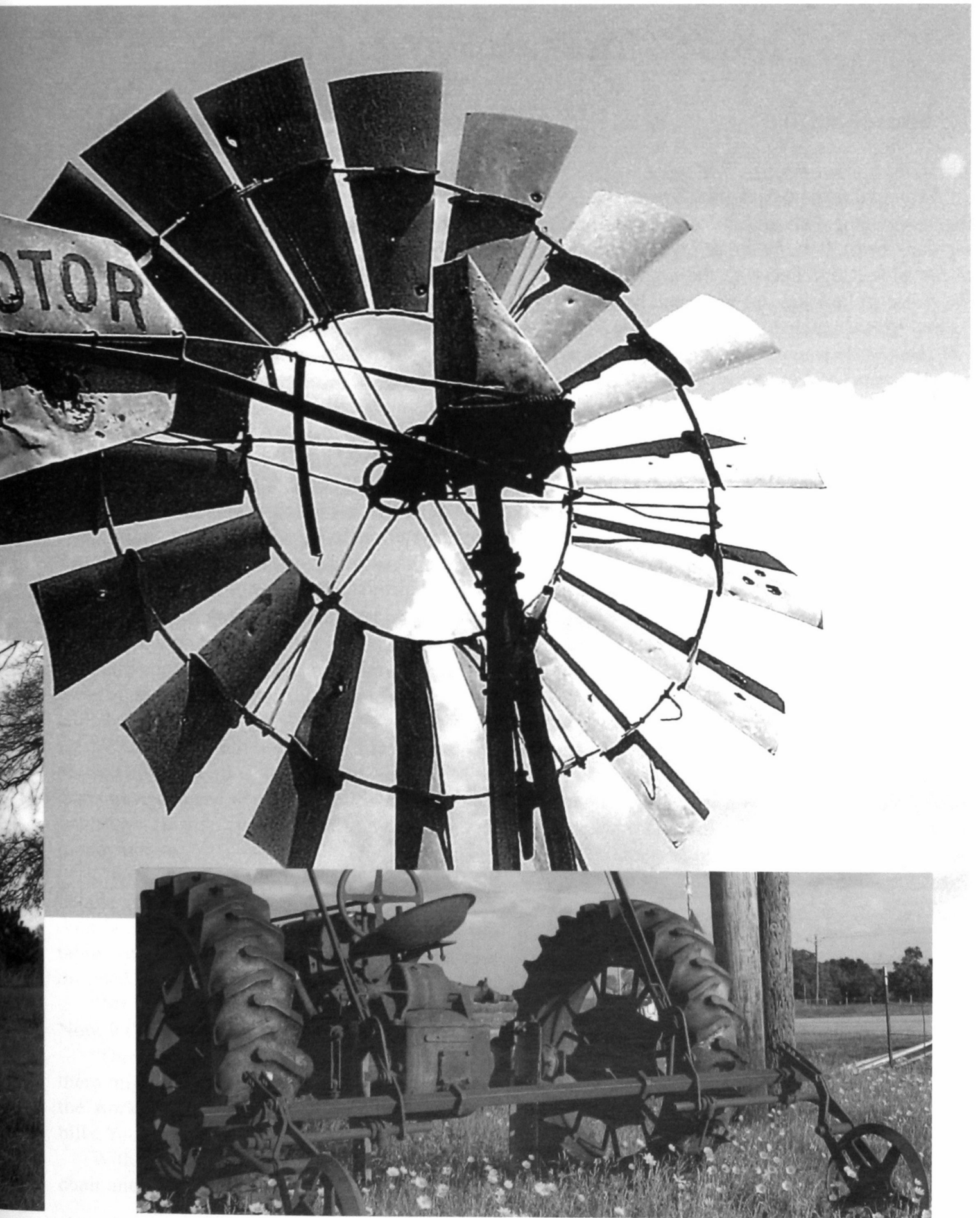
Then by your magic I knew the stripes, the blisters,
the cramps; became your despised slave, a mooncalf
fit only to fetch water, carry wood. But all that
happened long ago. My asinine plots to kill you failed.
You sailed away with Miranda and left me alone.

Now each morning I climb on all fours up to the highest
point on the island where I sit, a lumpish form
on a rock, and scan the seamless ocean for your sail.
I am that child of darkness you acknowledged *yours*
before you left, longing forever for your whistling whip.



Photographs by Gerald Wheeler





Archaeology

by Mary Akers

I would like to go back (with spade, pick, soft bristles), and sift through time and layers, brush away the intervening years and find: the tooth, knocked out by my then best friend, when we were seven, careening downhill in my father's wheelbarrow on Boscobel Farm; the earring, lost on the moonlit grass of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the night of my first kiss and kiss and kiss; the fork, from the picnic, on the Colonial Parkway, on my lunch hour, in eighteenth-century bodice, shift, and skirt, with the man I should have married, where days later, by phone, we discovered we both had chiggers; the wedding ring, lost in the sand of Hanauma Bay, where I snorkeled and the cold water took from my finger that which discord and infidelity would remove a year later; the bones and collar of my childhood friend, buried behind the shed, after being hit, just so, by a car against the head, so thoroughly unmarked that I couldn't let them bury her till morning, for the certainty that she was just sleeping; my father's dusty, creased, worn-down shoes, the only object of his lost life I saved, saved until the military husband who thought he knew me threw them out to spare me the trouble; the koala bear, Mr. Kowalski, of stuffed rabbit fur and leather fingers, whom I loved so dearly at age seven that my parents began to worry so that one morning, the day we were to leave for vacation, mysteriously, he was not beside my pillow, and never would be found; the plastic case of birth-control pills carefully researched, anticipated, and paid for by my first love, given as a present on my eighteenth birthday; the fetus of my stillborn child, carried within my body, lifeless for the last two months, born, but never seen, never buried, never properly mourned.



The Sad Tale of Angel Sonora

by Thor Jourgensen

None of this would have happened if I had never seen Angel Sonora and never told his story. That's what I tell myself when I think about the scarecrow in the doorway, the standoff and the shotgun, and what happened in the end. None of it would have happened, I tell myself. But it did.

We didn't meet the first time I saw him. He stood with his back to the packed meeting room, stumpy fingers clutching the brim of his soiled gray Stetson as he leaned into the microphone.

"I came to Moran County as a beet picker working Mr. Kurt Osterheiser's place."

The folding chairs behind him were filled with long-limbed ranchers in pearl-button shirts, flabby-armed wives sitting beside them.

"I've rented from him going on six years, and I'd like to take a shot on my own."

A sharp staccato burst of laughter erupted from the back row, and a tall rancher with shadows under his sharp cheekbones stood and pointed across the room at the three men and the woman sitting at the table before Sonora.

"Wait a damn minute. My daddy worked and plowed his place off County 41 before these Mexicans were allowed to even shop in town, save for Saturdays. He didn't pay bills with any government money neither."

Clapping broke out in parts of the room. The people crowded with me along the wall near the door began talking. One of the men sitting at the table banged a gavel once, twice, and the talk dropped to scattered whispers.

"Mr. Teitel, you'll get your chance to speak. Now, let's give this gentleman his due."

"Due?" the rancher shouted back. "He and all them migrants got their due and then some while the working farmer's been struggling to pay his bills. Your handouts a-goin' to ruin this county."

With that, he grabbed his hat off the folding chair and nudged his way through the crowd.

"My apologies. You may continue, Mr.—?"

"Angel Sonora, and if you see your way to giving me a loan to lease sixteen acres from Mr. Osterheiser, I can strike out on my own."

The *Times*' editor, a fat guy named Perry, sent me out to interview Sonora a week later. I steered my grandfather's Fairlane one-handed, directions to his place in the other hand, wondering how badly I would blow the first interview of my two-week-old newspaper career.

Magpies darted above the beet fields. A county prison crew in lime jumpsuits scooped mud out of an irrigation ditch and heaved it over their shoulders without looking where it landed.

The six white block letters were painted on a rusting mailbox. The Fairlane banged and bucked along the twin ruts leading through a beet field to his place. A red grain silo sat on one side of the dirt yard across from a stand of oaks that cast shade across the roof of a small yellow house. Dust from the Fairlane's tires settled on my shirt and glasses as I climbed out of the car.

A woman stood with a hip-high boy behind the screen door that opened onto the front porch. They retreated into the cool of the house as I crossed the yard. The door banged open, and Angel Sonora stepped onto the small concrete porch and yelled, "What can I do for you?"

"I'm Jay Taer; I mean, Trey Jaer, Mr. Sonora. I write for the *Times*. I came over, if you wouldn't mind, to talk to you."

Sonora squinted silently down at me. Sweat from my fingers soaked the small spiral notebook, blurring the light blue ruled lines.

"You write that story about the meeting?"

He took my gulp for a yes.

"C'mere."

I followed him around the house, his boot heels digging little divots in the dirt. He stopped in front





Photo courtesy USDA

of a two-by-four and plywood-sheet addition half built onto the rear of the house. I could tell it was going to include a second floor.

“Building it myself; cousin’s helping too. Hope to have it done by the fall. You’re Witt Jaer’s grandson? Too young to be his son, but you take after him.”

He smiled at my surprise.

“Everybody around here knows everybody else, even folks they don’t like. That’s why Broom Teitel and them don’t want migrantos owning land.”

I poised my pen above the damp notebook. A laugh that sounded like two corn husks rubbing together rose from his mahogany throat.

“There’s only so much land. God’s not going to make more, but there will always be more people: more Mexicans, Chicanos; all the people the Broom Teitels of this county don’t like are going to try their hand at tilling this dirt.”

I scribbled fiercely.

“C’mere.”

He led me over to a grass mound about half the size of a basketball court. It sat next to a weathered fence line bordering the beet field. The grassy sides

sloped inward to about the height of an average man’s thighs.

“Know what it is?”

“Old silage pit?” I guessed, remembering the slash in the earth at one end of my grandfather’s farm filled with smelly compost and covered with a slimy plastic tarp and old tires.

His eyes were obsidian blades glittering behind slitted lids.

“No, Witt Jaer’s grandson. People lived down there, under a tarp roof with cinder block walls and a dirt floor. People like my uncle, people who were good enough to pick fields but best kept out of sight the rest of the time.”

A week later, as dawn’s rosy red and orange glow offered a promise of the hot day ahead, Stuey Klemons walked down the south side of Main Street. Forty years old and what townspeople called “slow,” he had worked all his adult life washing dishes at Becknell’s Lunch. He was half a block from his employer’s doorstep when he stopped abruptly at the Bureau of Land Management storefront and stared at the figure slumped in



the recessed doorway.

Tom Krause was finishing up his night rounds when he saw Stuey standing stock-still and pulled his cruiser over to the curb. Both men, linked together in the small town's conscience as the personification of innocence and its guardian, stared at the clumps of hay sticking out of the frayed denim pant legs and bulging between the buttons of the faded flannel shirt.

Tom toed the stuffed figure with its beachball head and sombrero onto its back and listened as Stuey mouthed the words written on the cardboard sign stapled to the shirt back:

Wetbacks Get Out!

By noon, it was so hot on Main it smelled like the asphalt had just been rolled out. "That's funny," Perry said as he watched a man followed by two women trot by the newsroom's big plateglass window. "Only people I've ever seen run down Main are under ten."

I looked up in time to see the woman who ran the eyewear store next to the paper fast-walk past the window, purse clutched to her chest. Main at Moran was two blocks from the paper, but I could see the crowd clogging the intersection before I was halfway there.

I didn't notice the truck with the pile of black dirt rising from its bed until I reached the edge of the crowd. It was hotter than blazes, and people had shut off their cars and climbed out of them to see what the problem was. The truck gave out a mechanical groan, and little dirt clods rolled down the mound as the truck bed began to move.

With the bed tilted past 45 degrees, the dirt poised at the edge of the bed and then cascaded onto Main. People batted dust out of their hair and pointed and shouted. Angel Sonora, a long-sleeved work shirt buttoned to his throat despite the heat, stepped around the truck, drawing rude shouts as he shoved a makeshift sign into the dirt pile. Between breaks in the crowd, I could see blue and red lights flashing on Moran Street.

An hour later, Sonora stood before Judge Brockholder, a huge man who seemed even bigger in his black robe. Brockholder adjusted the reading glasses on his fleshy nose and began reading from a piece of paper.

"'Making an affray and blocking a common way.' Let me ask you a question, Mr. Sonora: Exactly what message was your sign, never mind your deed, meant to convey? *'We work it, we own it.'* I don't understand."

Sonora shifted very slightly on his right boot heel but didn't say a word. The big room with its high ceilings and corners cloaked in cool shade suddenly seemed very quiet. Brockholder stared at him a second longer and then rapped his gavel.

"Guilty. Twenty-dollar fine and court costs. Pay the clerk downstairs."

After that day, Perry vowed to make the push for land rights by Sonora and Moran County's other migrant sharecroppers the *Times'* top priority. We were an eight-page paper covering a town of 8,000 people, but beginning immediately, we rolled off the presses with banner headlines about "sharecrop loans" and "migrant rights." Letters to the editor began calling the paper biased. The town's biggest bank pulled its half-page, twice-weekly ads. Circulation began to dip. Perry hung tough.

He yelled out to me from behind his rolltop desk one morning as I butted my way through the door carrying a cardboard box loaded with coffee and donuts from Becknell's.

"Someone's been ringing your damn line every fifteen minutes since seven-thirty. We've answered, but the guy says he'll only talk to you."

It was ringing as I reached my desk. I set my coffee down and picked up the receiver.

"Sonora's place. Nine. Payback time."

I dropped the phone as if I'd found something with a hundred legs slithering along it and grabbed a notebook. The wall clock read 8:37.

The Fairlane bounced and swayed as I crossed the four sets of railroad tracks on the road out of



town. I missed the turn onto 42 and cursed the car through a dust-raising three-point turn. The red silo came into view a minute later, and I turned onto the rutted lane.

Angel Sonora stepped out of the porch shadow and took the two concrete steps down to his yard. His sleeves were rolled up, and I could see a green tattoo on his left forearm as he approached.

"Mr. Sonora, I gotta tell you something. We got a call at the paper."

His eyes were focused behind me and off to the left. I followed his gaze out to the road in time to see a black stake truck, sun winking off its chrome grill, turn into the lane. The truck bed jolted and bounced along the ruts, the driver a vague outline behind the sun-glared windshield.

Sonora moved fast. He reversed course across the yard and climbed the porch before I could turn around. I heard the storm door bang as the truck braked to a stop a foot from the Fairlane's bumper. Dust rose from the big tires and a nose-pinching smell wafted off the wet, green mound piled high in the bed.

"Better take off while the taking's good," Broom Teitel said as he unfolded his long frame from the driver's seat.

The screen door banged again, and Sonora stepped onto the porch, bow legs set wide apart, the butt of a double-barrel shotgun balanced on his left hip.

I wanted to dash behind the house or down the lane, but my feet felt like they were stuck in deep mud. I was about to piss my pants.

"Don't make me tell you twice, Teitel: Get off my land. Now."

Without taking his eyes off Sonora, Teitel reached into the cab, and the truck began making a grinding noise. The stake bed tilted, and Sonora swung the shotgun so that the twin black holes aimed at a point over my head.

Heat shimmers danced above the green mound as the load shifted and slid toward the edge of the bed.

"Boy, you better step back from that car," Sonora said to me.

I couldn't feel my feet, and I was sure if I looked down, I would see they had disappeared. The manure hit the dirt with a fat plop. Sonora lifted his head slightly, and I looked out to the lane to see a town cruiser bouncing along the ruts. It stopped halfway into the yard, and the driver's door swung open. I could see sweat stains under Tom Krause's brown uniform shirt as he pulled himself out of the car and adjusted his leather service belt.

He walked slowly along the lane toward the yard, head down, the shadow of his Stetson masking his face. If he smelled the mounting pile or noticed the sun bouncing off the shotgun barrels, he didn't let on.

He stopped at the edge of the yard, and Teitel started shouting something over the grind of the truck. Krause ignored him.

"Angel? I wonder if you'd mind obliging Broom here with the use of your front loader? Shouldn't take much more than fifteen minutes."

Sonora's jaw dropped, but the gun stayed steady and level in his hands. Teitel was shouting again as the truck bed reached its apex, and the hydraulic grind abruptly stopped. In the silence, I could hear a jet passing high overhead and the drumming of my heart.

Krause took a step into Sonora's yard.

"Angel? Broom'd be glad to pay, say, twenty dollars for the use of that front loader."

"Hell you say!" Teitel shouted.

"Get off my land before I—"

"Angel, that twelve's pointed at me right now. I can arrest you for that and Broom for trespassing, or we can put your front loader and his twenty bucks to good use and settle the rest of this like men back in town."

The shotgun barrels sagged to the porch, and my legs began to tremble as Teitel tugged his truckdriver's wallet out of the back pocket of his jeans.



Much later, after summer's heat had surrendered to fall's long shadows and finally to the vacuum of winter, Brock Teitel came home. News of the Silver Star and Purple Heart he'd earned made its way back to Fort Moran, a town, like a thousand other small towns, that counted veterans among its heroes.

People mentioned it in passing to his father, but Broom Teitel, still holding a resentment as cold as the prairie winter over his son's decision to enlist, just nodded or grunted at the comments. To Faye, or to people who would listen to him at the Co-op, he said: "Shoulda stayed home and helped me in the fields. Who the hell ever heard of Vietnam anyways?"

Bud Stiles had heard of Vietnam and of Brock's medals, and as Moran's local DAV commander, he invited him to speak at the Post during his leave. Brock accepted because he knew Bud Stiles, not as a veteran but as the coach of the Wiggins Wolverines, a tough varsity team that had beaten the Moran Beeters, Brock Teitel playing left guard, in a Thanksgiving Day Armageddon.

He arrived on the four o'clock Zephyr and walked the four blocks, not to his father's home where he was told he was not welcome, but to his aunt's house, his Army greens and mirror-polished boots turning heads and drawing waves. He returned the flurry of hugs and greetings from everyone waiting at the house and let his nephews lug a duffle bag the size of one of them up the stairs.

His aunt enthroned him on the den couch where his eyes wandered to that day's *Times*, the headline blaring the news that the first migrant land loans were ready to be announced. His eyes shifted to the story about the accident and how a migrant, his wife, and son were killed when a semi crossed the double yellow east of Limon.

The name of the dead man and his family snagged something in his brain, and he thumbed to the obituary page where there was a black-and-



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

white picture of the man. Halfway through the obituary, his eyes stopped and reread the name as his lips formed the letters: "Tito E. Sonora, stepson, of Houston."

Brock knew a Tico Sonora, also known to some of his platoon members as Taco. In his mind he heard the thumping roar of helicopter rotors and saw a green carpet rush by the open door in a blur. Tico was counting rosary beads, balancing the string on top of his helmet. He pinched a bead between a thumb and finger and held it up for Brock to see.

"Hey, I saved this one for you." His laugh boomed over the sound of the blades.

Brock called Stiles after dinner.

"We'd be honored to hear you, son. In this town, you're a hero."

"I have something to take care of tomorrow morning, but I'll be there in time, and you'll hear a hero, mark my words."

I was sitting in one of the back pews when he walked into the packed church. He wore his dress uniform, rows of ribbons on his chest, the medals reflecting the light from the candles massed around the altar and the twin coffins. He stood at the back during the service, ramrod straight, as incense and candle smoke ribboned and met in the ceiling shadows.

As the mourners filed out behind the two cof-



fins, one bearing Angel Sonora, the other his wife and son, he stood off to the side, letting people pass. A man with a limp and a mismatched suitcoat and pants was the last to descend the cracked concrete steps. He tugged a pack of Winstons from his coat and cupped the lighter against the cold wind off the river.

The bristle-blond man in olive drab approached the smoker and stopped, waiting until the other man lifted his head. They stared at one another for a second, then embraced in a clumsy, muscled collision. As I followed the procession down to the graveyard by the river, I looked back and saw them, arms over each other's shoulders, moving slowly along the path.

Brock honored his obligation to Coach Stiles. He stood at the front of the hall, staring over the mostly gray and white heads as Stiles introduced him by rank and name. He shuffled his feet as Stiles recounted the fight that earned him the Silver Star; then he cleared his throat and said: "I played a very small role in that action, but I owe my life to this

man."

Whispers and grunts coursed through the men ringing the tables as he motioned for Tito Sonora to come to the front of the hall. He had changed into red and black Tony Lamas, faded jeans, and a fatigue jacket with his last name stenciled in black letters over the breast pocket.

Brock stepped back as Sonora turned, shook his shoulders like a man getting ready to lift a heavy weight and cleared his throat.

He started haltingly in a soft voice. When he finished speaking, half the men in the hall were crying silently; the others stared stonefaced into space, coffee cups and beer mugs forgotten on the tables.

Perry stopped by my desk that afternoon and dropped a piece of paper on it. It bore a Bureau of Land Management letterhead and listed the migrants selected to receive sharecroppers' loans. Angel Sonora's name was the last one on the page.



Grandfather and His Kelvedon Sweetheart

by John Grey

And here I was thinking he was referring to
an old girlfriend he escorted
to the bijou in his first jalopy
to see Nelson Eddy and Jeannette McDonald,
America's singing sweethearts.
But it was corn, the Kelvedon Sweetheart,
days when his fingers were young and supple enough
to tear the husks and cornsilk from the ears.
It's cooking on some hotplate in his head.
As yellow as the morning sun
is that shucked beauty rolling in boiling water.
He grins, says he can taste it now.
But just not with the lips that kissed it then.



Hungry Cancer

by Jason Sullivan

She says radiation doesn't make her sick;
I know better. She eats a little less
at mealtimes, not finishing her carrots,
letting the soup go cold. I can understand
how food is not comforting: why eat
when something is eating her from the inside?

In six weeks the treatments will end.
My mother, whom I think of as wedding-
dress white, is being eaten by the big black.
Her cancer has come back, hiding
under her arms and in her glands,
knocking on the door, hungry like a beggar.

Her hair has always been brown, and short.
The first time around, a lady came and spoke
with her, saying nothing is wrong with losing
her hair. She gave my mother a wig, a lighter shade
of brown. They sipped coffee, stale and sad
as the conversation, brown like the wig.

Under my mother's eyes, the skin is tired,
flesh-colored and drooping. She stays awake
at night, staring at the white walls, the blue
comforter wrapped around her. She is hungry,
she wants the cancer gone. By dawn,
she has slept but is still tired.
She drinks coffee, with a pink packet of sugar.
It is Monday, the day of her treatment.

She didn't have to wear the wig the first time,
and probably won't this time either. She is
durable as denim. Fabric tears eventually,
and my mother is weary, but her threads
are strong, even when gnawed upon
by the teeth of cancer. Radiation doesn't
make her sick. It just chews on her like the cancer;
blood cells confused about this bitter meal.



Chronology

by Celia Stuart-Powles

All night we have slept together, my face
next to yours, and tonight, no doubt,
we will do the same. In such an intimate
relationship, perhaps it is my place
to say “I find you tedious,” my sweet
taskmaster. Your expression is constant
regardless of the response you elicit—
each time I wake you stare with a square
glare that rebukes me for every waste
and procrastination in minute detail.
Oh child of Cronus, little tattoo blue,
you are more luminous than a hummingbird,
and chime more reliably than a dove
as faithfully you nest ever-watchful
on my bed, my own tick-tock,
my horologe, my folding travel-alarm.



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall



The Revised Standard Version

by Rachel Chalmers

1. People are all 'What the—?'

Lucy Carter, sixteen years old, Christian and in love, drives her father's car from Sydney to the Anglican Youth Camps in the Royal National Park.

"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars," she says to herself. "See that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet." Her heart rattles its cage. She had never driven to the camps before. Her hands are slick on the wheel.

The road winds up out of Audley Weir, a strange Victorian pleasure-ground in the eucalyptus forest, to the heath and scrub on the ridge. It's fiercely hot. The bush reeks of aromatic oils, and the sound of cicadas presses on her ears. White painted letters on a chocolate board direct her to Deer Park and Chaldercot. She indicates dutifully and makes the turn off the sealed road onto the red dirt track.

These landmarks are familiar as prayers. The car park for Winifred Falls. The fork in the road that leads to Telford and Rathane. Banksia trees on Trig Hill. "Please God," she says to herself. She changes down a gear and eases her father's Corolla through the last switchback. The orange roof of Chaldercot dawns through the trees. In the courtyard, Number Thirteen, the tame deer begs for scraps. The swimming pool shines artificially blue.

His red station wagon is parked at the top of the stairs that lead down to the water. She leaves her father's car next to his. Her breaths are shallow. The grass is thinly shaved, with deer droppings strewn all through it. She hears water slapping at the pontoon and tastes the brackish spray before she sees him. He's messing about with the little yellow dinghy, a Laser with deep-blue sails.

"Bill," she says, and he turns, his crow's feet crinkling. His skin is tan against the whiteness of his hair and the swimming-pool color of his eyes. He doesn't look his age. "How's my girl?" he asks, and holds out his arms. Lucy runs, the boards springing under her feet. Their bodies collide. His

belly presses into the hollow beneath her breasts.

The window above the big kitchen sink over-looks the pontoon. Bill's wife Mary is up to her elbows in hot water and detergent foam. She's washing up after making lasagne for eighty people. The cheese has baked hard onto the broad steel trays. Orange oil floats on the surface of the washing-up water. She watches Bill scoop Lucy off the ground and hold her tight. "A capable wife who can find," she says. She is trying to learn the last chapter of Proverbs by heart.

"Mary?" says a voice.

"Chris," she says warmly, turning. He's eighteen now, almost a man. There's a red-haired girl with him.

"We're here early. We thought you might need help," says Chris. He picks up an apple from a bowl and takes a bite. He picks up another apple and tries to juggle the two. Both fall. The girl picks them up off the floor, replaces the unbitten one in the bowl and hands the other back to Chris.

"Thank you," he says. "This is Shantih, my next-door neighbor. Shantih, Bill's wife, Mary."

"Chris has told me a lot about you," says Mary. She pulls off her yellow rubber gloves and takes one of Shantih's hands in her own. "We're so glad you could come along."

The girl is no more than thirteen. Her hand is cool in Mary's warm, wrinkled ones. Her red-gold hair hangs straight to her cheekbones. She has clear skin and grey eyes. There are freckles sprinkled across the bridge of her nose. Her parents have gone to Europe for a second honeymoon. Shantih has been despatched to camp in Chris's care.

"Mary does all the cooking," says Chris. "Eight days, eighty people. She never stops working. She never sleeps."

"That's not true. I have two assistant cooks, and everybody takes a turn as an orderly," says Mary. "But I do have a job for you if you'd like."





Photo courtesy of deerparkview.com.au

She shows them four bags of oranges on a stainless steel worktop. “They need to be cut in half and juiced. But keep the halves. We’ll fill them with orange jelly.”

“Oh, excellent,” says Chris. “What she does then is cut the halves in half, so you’re left with orange jelly quarters. And if they’ve never seen how it’s done, people are all ‘What the—?’”

Shantih picks up the knife and touches the blade.

“Here,” says Mary. “I’ll set you up with the juicer.”

“Jesus, of course, would have fed us all on loaves and fishes,” says Chris as the knife sinks into the first orange. “But this year he sent Mary in his place, and I’m glad. I don’t like fish.”

The kitchen is fragrant with juice. Mary pulls her rubber gloves back on and plunges her hands into the cooling washing-up water. Bill and Lucy have disappeared. The pontoon, empty, bobs on the tide.

Far out across Port Hacking, Mary can see the ferry laboring toward her with its cargo of souls to be saved.

2. Practicing the fingering

There are fifteen cabins scattered among the trees. There are four bunk beds—beds for eight people—in each cabin. The cabins are built of the same chocolate-treated wood as the sign on the main road. Their roofs are of corrugated iron. Their concrete floors are painted green. It’s so hot that few people can sleep in their sleeping bags.

Most are lying on top in pajamas. Only a few were foresightful enough to bring sheets.

Bill and Mary have a room of their own, with a double bed. He is asleep, snoring. She drifts between restless dozing and anxious prayer. Let no one be hurt. Please, let this weather break. Don’t let Bill....

Chris is cabin leader for seven boys, aged thirteen to fifteen. It’s an hour past lights out. He is leading them in a farting competition. There is much muffled giggling, and the cabin air has a sulfurous smell.

Lucy is cabin leader for six girls, including Shantih. Five are asleep. One snores, another drools on her pillow. Shantih is awake, silently practicing the fingering of Bach’s Cello Suite No. 1.

There is a mosquito coil burning at the door. Its sweetness almost overcomes the sweaty smell of the girls’ dirty laundry, their wet towels and swimming suits.

Lucy is pretending to be asleep. She is remembering, in rich and indulgent detail, the first time. She would wait for him in the empty church, tingling with anticipation.

St. Mark’s was low Anglican, and intolerant of beauty. The pews were teak, the carpet mustard, and the stained glass—yellow and olive squares and rectangles—was hidden over the door where no one would be offended by it. The Bibles were the Revised Standard Version, as the King James was considered scripturally unsound. Even the flowers, arranged by retired women with ill-concealed crushes on Bill, were lurid and smelled of funerals.

He would be out on the porch, seeing everyone off, genial as always. When the congregation had drifted away in twos and threes, he would come into the unlit church on his way to the vestry. Her heart would lift the moment she saw him.

Lucy at thirteen had sallow skin and straight, rather greasy hair. Her colorless eyes were huge, and beneath them her face dwindled to a sharp point. She loved the things she loved—music, Jesus, Bill—with single-minded concentration. She



had no sense of humor at all. She didn't understand, for example, why people dismissed certain kinds of behavior as attention-seeking. To her, attention was the most important thing in the world.

Bill gave her his full attention. It was one of his talents, to be with a person, if only for a little while. He listened carefully to her halting account of her week, her walk with God, her quiet times, how Jesus gave her the strength to rise above persecution. He hugged her when she wept, and at the end of each night, he kissed her. On the cheek. On the mouth. On the breast.

Just kissing. Any more would be a sin.

It's been three years. She knows he will leave Mary for her. She just turned sixteen. She can marry. She can drive a car. She has written him a song. She smiles into her pillow, and moves her thighs together, just to feel the skin sliding over bare skin. Sleep moves over her like a warm front.

3. *This really wise thing*

The glass wall behind them shares Mary's opulent view of Port Hacking, but the kids sit with their backs to it. Chris, Lucy, and Bill are behind microphones. The men wear khaki shorts and chambray shirts. Lucy wears a Laura Ashley dress. She sits on a stool and nurses a twelve-string guitar.

Chris is saying: "You're welcome to use the trampoline, as long as you have a spotter to tell you when you're getting too close to the edge. We have a safety rule about the waterfront, too. You have to wear shoes. You'll see if you go down there that Port Hacking has lots of oyster beds. Well, let me tell you, those oysters are razor sharp. And if you fall and cut yourself, I don't want to be the one picking bits of oyster shell out of your cuts."

Bill, up next, listens happily. As long as everyone keeps these simple rules in mind, no one will get hurt. He toys with this as an idea for a sermon. Then he remembers that he may be in violation of the Seventh Commandment, at least if you count desire as adultery, which Jesus clearly

did. He sighs.

"Thank you, Chris," he says. "And now on to my favorite part of our daily worship. God loves it when we make music and sing. Music is an important part of our lives, and the words to songs are as important as the tunes. Don't you hate it when there's a song you love, but the words are just not right? I do. And that's why I'm especially grateful to Lucy, who has written new words for some of the songs we all love. I'm sure you'll recognize this next one...."

Lucy bares her teeth in a frightened way and launches into the theme song from M*A*S*H, originally titled "Suicide is Painless."

"Through early morning fog I see / visions of the things to be, / the joys that are in store for me / I realize and I can see / That Jesus is our savior, / He changes our behavior / and we can have such love and joy and peace!"

On the second sing-through, seventy-six ill-trained voices take up the refrain. The resulting noise causes Shantih, slumped at the back, actual pain.

After the song, Chris returns to his microphone.

"When Bill told me we were going to spend this week studying Paul's Letter to the Romans, I have to tell you, I was like, 'Hey, that's some heavy stuff, big guy.' I was like, 'Man, some of them are new at this, you know?' Anyway, so Bill said this really wise thing. He said, 'Look, if they get Romans, they get it all.' And that's really true, guys. It's all here.

"So this reading is from Romans, chapter three."

A flock of sulfur-crested cockatoos mobs a tree near the verandah. Shantih listens to the birds' raucous squabbling, wishing she could be outside, watching them bicker and play. By the time she tunes back in, Chris is finishing the reading.

"Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."



Watching Chris read, Bill reminds himself not to talk over the kids' heads. They are good kids. Most of them are regulars at church and Fellowship. Many come from faithful families. These kids need the meat of Scripture. But some are completely new to all this. He thinks of them as drowning swimmers. He must throw them the lifeline that is God's love. Bill's eye rests on Shantih, who looks rather glum. He is suddenly, horribly afraid that his sin will sabotage his efforts to save these kids.

Lord, he prays, speak through me to these innocents who don't know You. Forgive me my sins, and use me to do Your will. Lord, I know these children are suffering. Let me bring them into Your light. Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

4. *Everybody's worried*

"I'm not going," says Shantih.

"Everyone goes," says Chris patiently.

"I don't paddle canoes. I'll get callouses. I won't be able to play."

"You can go in the power boat," offers Bill.

"I can't swim."

"You liar! I've seen you swim!" says Chris.

Shantih looks him dead in the eye.

"I've got my period," she says.

Mary comes into the dining room with a hamper of food. "You three, are you busy?" she asks. "I need to carry this down to the power boat."

"Shantih isn't coming," says Bill. He knows she lied about her period, and he knows there's no way he can call her on it. He's furious. He won't look at any of them. His face is bright red.

"Oh, I don't mind helping carry," says Shantih amiably.

She carries the hamper down the stairs to the waterfront. Only twenty or so of the campers will depart from the pontoon. The rest are being loaded, two or three at a time, into canoes at the Chaldercot boatshed. Some have already paddled out as far as the sandbank in the middle of the harbor. An

impromptu game of football is in progress on the shoals.

"Ah-hah! It's true," thinks Shantih. "They really can walk on water!"

Mary and her assistant cooks are taking the aluminum powerboat. It wallows on the end of its rope-line, fat with plastic tubs of meat and salad and vats of lemon cordial. Bill's taking his beloved speedboat, the Sting Ray, a wicked-looking fiberglass wedge with a giant outboard motor. He has the first aid equipment. Chris and Lucy are sailing the dinghy. When the wind dies in the narrow inlet past Maianbar, Bill will throw them a line and tow them to the falls.

Mary casts off and putters out toward the football players on the sand. Bill in the Sting Ray roars around and past her. Chris and Lucy turn the little dinghy into the wind, waiting for its blue sails to fill with the breeze.

"Goodbye," says Chris. "Don't get into any trouble."

"I won't," says Shantih.

The dinghy catches a breath of air and lifts itself with grace, its yellow hull slicing the greenish chop. Shantih watches them go, her chin on her hands, smiling. The bell-birds are calling and the Sting Ray's wake slaps the pontoon. The empty afternoon stretches before her.

Later, she takes her cello up to a clearing in the bushes, sits on a fallen tree and practices the Bach suite. Her body leans into the music. Bach, she thinks, knew more about tenderness and urgency, sorrow and delight, than any of these people with their supposed hotline to God. She is glad that they are gone. She waves cheerfully to Chris. He waves back.

"I wish Bill wouldn't let himself get so angry," says Chris, at the tiller, to Lucy, who is fiddling with the jib.

"He's worried," says Lucy.

"So am I worried," says Chris. "Everyone's worried. No excuse."

"Judge not," says Lucy, "lest you be judged."





Photo courtesy of www.freeadelaide.netfirms.com

“Ooh,” says Chris. “Was that a rebuke?”

Lucy ignores him, and fastens the jib sheet into its blocks.

“You remember that guy at Teen Ranch, who jumped in the river after the kid who was drowning, and they both drowned?” asked Chris. “I totally identified. I’d have done the exact same thing. That’s what it means, to be *in loco parentis*. That’s what love is.”

“What?” asks Lucy absently.

“Sacrifice. See, what Jesus did was perfect love, right? And it was perfect sacrifice. So to be Christ-like, we have to give up our lives, everything we care about, for the glory of God. Right?”

“Right,” says Lucy.

“But there’s no point getting angry about it, like Bill does,” says Chris. “I mean, it’s just what you have to do. Give it to God. It’s the same as how you can’t be a Christian and a smoker, too. Which do you want more, the cigarette or God? Whatever it is you want most, you have to give it to God.”

“Is that a pelican?” asks Lucy.

“No, it’s just some kind of seagull,” says Chris.

5. *Southerly buster*

“Hey, check this out,” says Chris. It is night. They’re on their way home, bellies stuffed with Mary’s burgers. The dinghy is bringing up the rear of the long water-borne caravan. Bill has cast them off, but there’s hardly enough wind for the dinghy to make headway. Chris is trailing his hand in the water.

“What is that?” says Lucy. She dips her hand in. Like his, it’s quickly covered in bubbles that glow palest blue.

“Some kind of phosphorescence, I guess. I’ve never seen it before, heard of it even.”

“I bet there’s a poem about it.”

Chris snorts. “Yeah, and I bet it’s terrible.”

“Chris,” says Lucy.

“Mmm?”



“Is that a shark’s fin?”

It glides toward them on the current. They’ve been teasing one another about sharks, and it seems impossible that this could really happen. It feels like a dream. The moon lights the surface of the water, and the banks slope steeply on either hand, and here they are, in their little dinghy, with a fin moving their way. Could a grey nurse overturn the little boat? Would it?

Lucy can’t believe her life could end like this. She loves Bill. Love this strong, love that has overcome all these obstacles, well, it has to mean something. It has to go somewhere. It can’t just stop. Surely even God wouldn’t demand that.

Chris lets out a sharp breath. “It’s poly-STY-rene,” he says, and flicks a rope at it. The piece of packaging falls on its side, and the shark-fin illusion is gone.

Cold air breathes across them and changes the texture of the water from pond-like smoothness to ruffles. The indigo sails belly and fill, and the flat-bottomed boat lifts its bow a little. A veil of cloud obscures the moon.

“Here we go,” says Lucy.

The wind picks up and keeps picking up. The stiff ruffles spill over themselves, and the dinghy blunts its bow on the chop.

“Hope the kids have rounded Maianbar,” says Chris as he rakes in the sail.

Most have. Some have not. Bill is rounding up the stragglers when the wind comes on to blow.

“Throw me your ropes!” he roars, and gathers six canoes to the Sting Ray like lost sheep. Once they’re secured, he has to tow them slowly or risk swamping them. That means he watches helplessly as the southerly buster sweeps the canoes ahead of him right across Port Hacking. “My God, my God,” he prays. “Look after these children, if not for my sake, for the sake of Your dear Son.” The rain falls in bucketfuls, warm as blood. It’s hard to tell where the air ends and the water begins.

Mary, who led the caravan, is first back to camp. She ties off the aluminum boat and runs, taking

the stairs two at a time, through the rain to the kitchen, to call the Coast Guard. As the assistant cooks empty the boat, Mary and Shantih fill deep pans with many bottles of milk. Mary shovels cocoa powder in with a tablespoon, as if the richness of the chocolate will determine the outcome of the night for good or evil.

The first of the campers arrive, wet to the skin and overtired, their bright spray jackets clinging. Some are thrilled by the adventure, others are chilled to the bone by the wind and fear. Mary, washing up with unprecedented vigor, looks out the window to see the Sting Ray drawing up to the pontoon with its precious cargo of canoes.

“Down to the waterfront, all of you!” she calls. “Take towels!”

6. *Walk with us*

“They should be in bed,” says Mary. Her face is drawn and lined. She has taken the storm very much to heart. If one kid had been lost or hurt... Their poor mothers. Her own impotence in the face of disaster. She even forgot to pray.

Bill, however, is euphoric. “It won’t take long,” he says. “Not even one injury. Mare, God was looking out for us.”

Chris, as cocky and justified as Bill, herds the sleepy campers into the hall. Lucy is tuning her guitar. Shantih is nursing a cup of cocoa. The back of her hand conceals a yawn.

Bill takes the microphone.

“We have been very, very fortunate tonight,” he says. “And I’m not talking about what some might call our lucky escape from injury. Luck had nothing to do with it! Jesus was watching over us. He heard our prayers. He delivered us.

“I’d like to thank Him now. Let’s pray. Dear Jesus, we’re safe and warm tonight, and we know it’s thanks to You. We know that You have power over the wind and the waves, and we know You spared us from harm tonight. We know that You can care for us the same way in our ordinary lives, and see us safely through the storms of tempta-



tion and persecution. Lord, we ask that You walk with us as You sailed with us tonight, now and all the days of our lives. In the name of Christ, our saviour. Amen.

“Now let’s lift our voices in a song of praise!”

It’s Lucy’s cue, and she hits it.

“Love is but a song we sing and fear’s the way we die / You can make the mountains ring or make the angels cry / Though the bird is on the wing and you may not know why / Come on people now, smile on your brother / Everybody get together, try to love one another right now!”

“Off to bed now,” says Mary when the singing has died.

“What about that?” says Chris to Shantih, bouncing on his heels. “Wasn’t that something?”

“Are all Anglicans this crazy?” asks Shantih.

“Oh no, we’re special,” says Chris. “Sydney’s the most evangelical diocese on earth.”

“Hunh?” says Shantih. After a minute she asks: “If Jesus didn’t want us to get hurt, why’d He send the storm at all?”

“To show us that He was watching out for us.”

“He had to scare everybody to do that? Seems a bit mean.”

“Jesus can’t be mean,” says Chris patiently. “He loves you, Shantih, He really does.”

Shantih shrugs and smiles and looks away, embarrassed.

“Come on,” says Lucy, finding her. “Time for bed. I have an umbrella.”

They run up the hill together. The storm has turned the dirt road into stream beds. Lucy and Shantih stop outside the cabin, in the shelter of its overhanging roof, to catch their breath. The soil smells richly of eucalyptus and loam and earthworms. The lights in the hall below them go out. It’s raining too hard to see the waterfront.

“I feel I haven’t got to know you very well this week,” says Lucy to Shantih.

Shantih takes a breath and starts playing the Prelude in her head.

“I don’t even know,” says Lucy, “do you have a boyfriend?”

“Do you?” asks Shantih.

“Yes,” says Lucy, after a moment.

“Who?”

“We like to keep it private,” says Lucy.

“Well, me too,” says Shantih.

“You love music, don’t you? I saw you brought your viola.”

“Cello.”

“Are you having lessons?”

“Yes.”

“I love music. I write songs. For guitar.”

“I know,” says Shantih.

“Course you do,” says Lucy. “I’m sorry. Let’s go to bed.”

Shantih follows her into the cabin, feeling ashamed of herself. Lucy changes into her pajamas without speaking, and climbs into bed. Shantih does the same. She’s very tired, but the wind and the rain keep her awake. She lies on top of her sleeping bag and thinks about the Bach.

Sometimes she wants to play it harshly, with every note mathematically precise and contrasting cleanly with the next, all stacked against one another like brightly colored pieces of glass. Other times she wants to let the notes flow against one another like waves on the shore, like wind in the trees, all soft and graceful and organic in shades of green and blue. The music moves through Shantih’s body and pulses in her blood.

7. I promise you

Breakfast is finished, and the washing-up water comes out in its plastic tubs. Everyone is high this morning after the storm. The sun has come out, it’s clear and cold, and the raindrops glitter on leaves and spider webs. Lucy has walked out onto the veranda for a breath of air. Chris, who is carrying a tub, trips over his own feet. A great slop of water and detergent hits the linoleum floor.

Shantih has collected the glass milk bottles from her table and is trotting to the recycling bin.



“Watch out for the—” says Chris, but he’s too late. Shantih’s foot slips in the soapy mess, and she falls fast and hard. The milk bottle breaks underneath her left hand. When she lifts it, blood spurts from a great gash in pulses.

Chris catches her wrist and they stare at each other. His terror and grief is like a blow to the chest, and he thinks, stupidly, that he has never understood before exactly what it means to have another person in his care.

What Lucy, on the veranda, hears is Bill’s voice raised in terror, calling: “Mary! MARY!” She pushes herself away from the railing and heads inside, more floating than running, to see Mary striding from the kitchen, lifting a tea-towel from Shantih’s hand, replacing it at once and saying with perfect authority: “Straight to hospital.”

The emergency plan swings into action. Chris and Bill help Shantih down the stairs and into the Sting Ray. Chris’s family car is parked at the boat ramp in Yowie Bay, a short drive from Sutherland Hospital. Chris casts off and Bill revs the boat’s engine.

Mary and Lucy stand side by side on the veranda, watching them go. Lucy is numb. In his hour of greatest need, Bill didn’t call on God or on his

lover. He called upon his wife. He would never have left Mary. How could she have imagined that he would? Lucy sees very clearly now that she has been a stupid and naive little girl.

Mary thinks only of Shantih, of the tendons and bones that lay exposed in her hand.

Chris holds Shantih, who is trembling with the pain and shock. “You’ll be okay,” he says, tears running down his face. “I promise you, the doctors will make it better. It’ll be just as good as new.”

Bill pushes the Sting Ray as hard as she will go. The boat leaps beneath him, smacking off the tops of the waves. The wind streams through his thinning white hair. The shadow has been lifted from his heart. He knows for certain, now, that he will be forgiven, that Shantih will be healed. He knows that he loves Mary and that he will be able to let Lucy go. He knows Lucy’s heart will break, but it is the will of God. Best of all, he knows that he has enough strength and love to nurture and sustain them all.



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (at Harry Hines, Chicago)

by Judi A. Rypma

At the blind center
 withered dreams,
fractured lives, bruised
spirits compete with
cheery smiles, too many
new skills, generals
insisting on stoicism
in the face of despair.

Some soldiers respond well,
obligingly swallow medicines
and regimen dutifully
fit square pegs into square holes,
 wield canes like rifles
laugh at every sighted joke.

They get: frequent passes,
approving clucks, care
packages, invisible medals,
Dear John letters
 they can't read.

The rest lock themselves in
temporary quarters as if
craving solitary.

When their hitch is up
they're all released—
honorably or dishonorably
depending how often they saw
 Captain Shrink.

They've survived this battle
who knows how well or if
the uniforms of their old lives
will still fit
or if they can make it on the outside
with only one white weapon.



Rainy Spring

by William Jolliff

Silence shuffles its feet, then hunkers down
and breathes the stale scent of cold machinery,
a morning's peace of dust and old grease.

My father tinkers with a coulter, then drops
a share bolt in the crumpled, oily sack
from Parrott's Implement. He looks up

and to his right. He has forgotten whatever
it was he came here for, what he would do
next. Nothing. Already, already it's June,

and every rainy day costs him ten bushels
per acre, maybe, or a year of farm payments,
a year off his life. Today his heart rises, sinks.

Life is shorter in planting season. He knows
he will die some rainy spring, some grey day
when the machinery is ready, and his hands

are ready, when everything's ready but the rain,
and he cannot get into the field to do what needs
to be done. And he will just lie down. Lie down.



Photo by Joel Kendall



Omi the Amazing

by Deborah Gillespie

For seven years we lived with a parrot,
an Indonesian Red Lory
born in Dubuque.

Admiring his ruby plumage,
more brilliant than a cardinal,
we carried Omi from room to room,

porch to porch,
where he perched
on a swing my husband made.

We sat watching him, entertained for hours,
juggling on his back with his feet,
like a kitten or baby seal,

hanging upside down like a bat,
talking and whistling,
gurgling and cackling.

One night I dreamed the bird became
my husband, wearing his jeans and a beard,
or maybe my husband turned into the bird,

willing himself into this winged creature
to become center of attention,
a reincarnated

object of affection,
leading the easy life
until one night,

one dreadful night,
a cat came stalking
and bird became cat.



Watermelon

by Daniel Mintie

Green zeppelin of midnight,
sailing, shadowless, through the moonlight

Like an earth without a moon;
sweet dream of yourself,

Bass tuba of silence,
greengrocer of the unself-conscious,

Twenty kilogram cargo
of lycopene, sugar, gravitas,

Tarambuja in Sanskrit, *Wassermelone* in Deutsche,
named for that chief

Amongst our constituents—
what would you call us? Only slightly less

Water than you are, filled so
ever much more with ourselves.



Waiting for It

by Deborah Atherton

She would sign online, very late at night—after midnight. She had learned the exact moment when men kissed their wives goodnight and said, “I’m just going to go finish up a few things from work before I hit the sack, honey.” She knew that, instead of working, the men would go to their computers in a desperate search to assuage the loneliness they felt, climbing into that bed.

She had written a screen profile with a few delicate facts about herself, which displayed intelligence, demureness, and use of correct grammar. She knew that, before they finally gave up the day and went to bed, the men would hunt for women they thought might talk to them, even though they were married and bound to stay that way. The men who picked her were almost always educated, well-to-do, married for many years to the mother of their children. They ran companies. They made incomes in six figures. They had already planned prosperous retirements and provided for their children’s tuition funds. Most likely, they were turning fifty, or maybe even sixty. Such men look for women to contact; they do not want women to contact them. They are members of the last generation to grow up with mothers who stayed home and fathers who went to the office. They like to be in charge. They need to be in charge. But life is slipping away from them, the years are rushing on, and despite the wife waiting in the king-sized bed between designer sheets, the children sleeping downstairs in teenaged bedrooms with bright posters, or safely packed away to a good college, they feel terribly, horribly, unbelievably alone.

She used to feel alone, too, but somehow that feeling had passed. She did not live her life the way these men lived their lives. She had seen herself differently, as an artist, as someone pursuing a higher calling. For a while, she had painted. For a long time after that, she had been a potter and had run a little pottery store on 11th Avenue, offering classes

to children and beautiful, bright, splashily-glazed pots for sale. She had bought the building in the early ‘80s for almost nothing down, when the city was desperate to get people into the far West Side; she had always earned enough to live on, but never enough to save.

She had had romances with a variety of men, with stockbrokers and musicians and lawyers and contractors, but somehow none of these had stuck. The contractor had been working for the firm that bought out the building the pottery store was in to build a new apartment building with a grocery store downstairs. He had secured a nice buyout for her, which she had taken with gratitude. After fifteen years, she was tired of muddy fingers and crying children. The contractor had also arranged a nice deal for her on an apartment in the new building, so nice that it still left her part of her buyout to live on for quite a while. The contractor was married, her first married lover, and lived in Forest Hills, but he came to visit her on Tuesdays and Thursdays in her new apartment for two years, until he and his wife retired early and moved to North Carolina.

He gave her a little laptop computer as a going-away present. She had told him she might like to try writing children’s books, and he had offered this to her “to keep her from being lonely after he left.”

She had never tried to get him to leave his wife, and he was intensely grateful for what he perceived as her generosity, which accounted for his generosity in return. But it had simply never occurred to her to ask him to marry her. He had already helped her get an apartment and a buyout, and he still brought her a present every Thursday: flowers, a small piece of jewelry, a box of chocolates. He took her out for dinners in attractive, discreet restaurants. He had done enough.

She liked his Tuesday and Thursday visits, but she was very content the rest of her week, living her life. She went to Wednesday matinees on Broadway



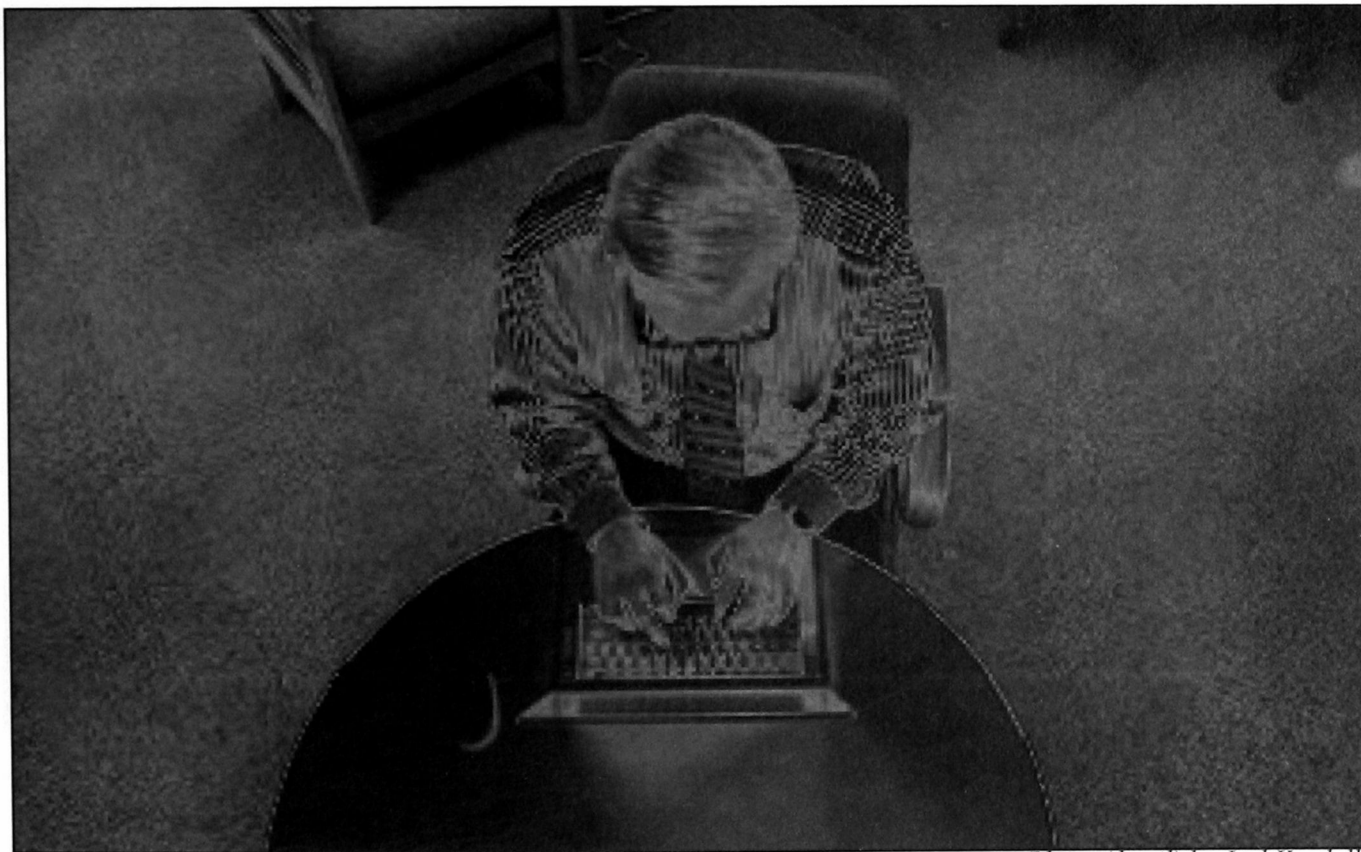


Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

and Friday morning concerts at the Philharmonic. She ran into her old college roommate at a reunion she had finally felt comfortable enough to go to, with her new access to nice clothes and good shoes. She had cut her artist's mop of hair, too, and it now lay sleek and close to her head, just like all the other women at the reunion. She and her old roommate had become friends again, and her roommate nominated her for the Cosmopolitan Club. She went there at least once a week to have lunch with her roommate or one of the women she had been introduced to there. Some of the women were businesswomen, though on a grander scale than she had ever been; some were wives or had careers as playwrights or painters or interior decorators supported by their husbands' large incomes. When people asked her what she did, she said she wrote children's books. They seldom pursued the topic further. No one ever asked her to name a title.

When the contractor moved to North Carolina, though, for a while she did feel lonely. She would

open her little laptop and try to begin a children's story, but nothing much came to her. She thought she might like to write a story about a cat, but she didn't have a cat, and she didn't want a cat; they were demanding, in their way, cats. Still, people seemed to buy books about them, and she thought she might give it a try, if only she could get a good idea.

In order to get a good idea, she had subscribed to an online service, which she found fascinating and full of information and diversion. It made her feel better that she was using her gift, which was small and light and perfect, and which she kept on her kitchen table, drinking many cups of coffee through the night. She tried chat rooms and message boards; she looked at matchmaking services; she learned how to google and how to send instant messages. She learned quite a bit about cats, too, one way and another. She even started trying out a few sentences of a book. "Once there was a cat called Selwyn...." Selwyn was the name of the contractor who had moved to Asheville.



But it wasn't until one night when she couldn't sleep, when the lobster lunch at the Cosmo Club refused to settle in her stomach, and she had gotten up for a cup of camomile tea and idly turned on the computer, that she discovered her special gift. She could attract men from thousands of miles away, from all over the country, just by sitting there quietly, as still as she could be, drinking her hot drink. She had a little photo of herself to send them; she looked good, but not frighteningly good, in her nice haircut and nice clothes, with an especially attentive expression on her face.

Out of nowhere came her first message. "Sarah?" the words popped up on her screen. Her screen name was SimplySarah. Her real name was Melinda, but she had been warned not to use her real name online. She looked at it for a moment, not knowing who was being summoned, then remembered her moniker. "Yes?" she typed in, curiously.

"Hi, Frank here. From Philadelphia. You're up late."

She considered for a moment. "Tummy troubles," she finally typed in.

"Too bad. Hope you feel better soon. Until you do, would you like to chat?"

"About what?" she had asked.

"Anything. Nothing. Tell me about you."

"I write children's books," she typed in.

"Really? That's interesting. I'm in investment banking. Lately though I've been thinking, maybe it's not too late to try something else."

"What kind of thing do you think you might like to do?"

"Oh, who knows. Maybe open a bed and breakfast. Or a restaurant. I've been teaching myself to cook, and I really love it."

She was later to learn that this was the hallmark of the men who contacted her online late at night. They had ideas about changing their lives. Ideas that were completely out of sync with the way they were living now, ideas that would never, ever be realized, but filled the boring hours between din-



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

ner and bedtime. She felt completely accepting of these ideas herself; she knew they were not so different than her planned book about a cat named Selwyn.

Frank was the first one she met, and the first one to meet her in person. She took the train to Philadelphia, and a taxi to the Warwick Hotel. He was waiting for her, sitting in an old wing chair, a martini with three olives in front of him. He rose eagerly when she came in. He was wearing a very expensive suit; when she had spent all her days up to her elbows in clay, she had never noticed suits, but now that she had leisure, and a few good suits herself, she was very conscious of how men dressed. Suits and watches, those were the key. You could never tell anything by haircuts, even very wealthy men seemed a little clueless about haircuts, especially if the hairline was receding, as Frank's clearly was, slowly, and not unattractively, but discernibly.

"Sarah?" he asked. She had never gotten around to telling him her name was really Melinda. After all, it wasn't real, their relationship; it was a thing existing in the ether, for all the typed confidences



and even an occasional whispered conversation, conducted on cell phones, after Frank's household was asleep.

"Frank?" she asked in return. Although that was silly, of course it was him. Who else would come up and call her by that made-up name?

"What are you drinking?" he asked.

In acknowledgment of their belonging in some sense to a different era, an era before Cosmopolitans and Long Island Iced Teas, she ordered a whiskey sour. She could see ordering it made him happy. They were playing at something, in this hotel bar, something sophisticated, something of the 50s, when men in gray flannel suits met women who worked in advertising agencies in hotel lobbies for whispered conversations. She reflected that they might have been better off in black-and-white, although, in truth, it was dim enough to pass for a nicely washed-out sepia film.

After an hour of animated conversation, Frank asked her if she was hungry. She was, very. He took her to an elegant restaurant, and they ordered oyster stew and salmon and a bottle of wine. He seemed extraordinarily happy, on top of the world. He talked as if he hadn't talked for years to anyone, about his job, about his children, about turning forty, and then turning fifty, and wondering if anything ever would look like it was in Technicolor again. She said she knew exactly what he meant; wasn't that extraordinary, she felt just that way too. In truth, she didn't; she herself was feeling a kind of contentment in middle age that she had never expected. But she did understand how he felt; Selwyn had seemed to feel exactly the same way. She had given Selwyn respite, and he had appreciated it, greatly, though by the time he was close to sixty, he had seemed to reconcile himself to his life more and had gone off quite happily to Asheville in the end.

At the end of the dinner, Frank leaned over to her. "Please don't think I expected you'd say yes, but I took a chance, I booked a room at the hotel for you. It's so late, it's a long way back ... please

don't be offended."

"Why should I be offended?" she asked. "That's a very nice thing to do."

They went back to the hotel, and they went upstairs, and she let him make love to her, and laid back, dreamily content afterward, as he dressed and apologized.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "I've got to go back."

"Of course," she said. "Of course you do."

"Listen," he said, "don't be offended, but I'd feel terrible if this ended up costing you anything. Please let this be my treat. Let me pay for the taxi and the train—charge anything you want on room service—please, I insist."

"OK," she said.

She hardly noticed afterward that he had left her more than enough for the taxi and the train. She took her time going home the next day, did a little shopping, caught a late afternoon train home. She was back on her computer that evening, and so was Frank.

"Hi," she read in her Instant Message.

"Hi," she typed. "I had a wonderful time."

"Me, too."

"Would you consider—would you like—to do it again?"

"Why not?" He was nice, he reminded her of happy, easy times. There was only one hitch. "I just wish it weren't so far away," she typed.

"I'd come to you, but—"

"I know, it's okay."

"Listen, how about if I—how would you feel if I—helped you to get here?"

"You have a helicopter?" she joked.

"What you need is a car."

She considered. As a Manhattanite, she normally only drove rentals, on weekends or vacations, but her new apartment was in a building with a garage.

"I just—the apartment took most of my savings. I'd like to see you, but—"

"Let me help. Sarah—I'd really like to see you."



Finally, she accepted. It wasn't such a big thing. She was a little worried at first about how they would do this—and about having not told him her real name; the moment she was registering a car seemed really late to be doing that—but in the end, all he did was give her the name of a car dealer on 11th Avenue and a time to show up. When she got there and told the dealer her real name, he was unworried.

"Happens all the time," he said. "We all have our little secrets."

And so she began a weekly pilgrimage to Philadelphia. It was just like seeing Selwyn, except only once a week. They always met in a hotel bar, then had dinner, then went upstairs. The program did not vary, nor did the sex. Like Selwyn, he gave her little gifts, but his were a little grander. Mostly they talked. He seemed starved for conversation. She couldn't understand it. Did people go for years without talking? Perhaps they did.

She had been meeting him for almost a year when her cell phone rang, oddly, at nearly midnight. It was a camomile tea night; she had been up, looking up cat behavior on her computer and considering adding a sentence to her children's book. It was Frank's number; she answered.

"Sarah?" a woman's voice demanded loudly. It was a husky voice, drenched, at least at the moment, in alcohol.

Melinda thought for a moment. Clearly, there was only one possible identity for the woman on the other end of the line. She had to be careful.

"I'm sorry," she said, very softly and in her best Cosmo Club tones. "You must have the wrong number."

"How can I have the wrong number, it's written right here, in his wallet!"

Men always thought their wallets were somehow sacrosanct territory, when, if you thought about it, wallets were really the center of attraction.

"I just got this cell phone," said Melinda. "I suppose it could have been someone else's number. They wouldn't let me keep mine when I switched

over. Can I help you in some way? You sound upset."

"Upset! Of course I'm upset! He's seeing someone else! He's probably seeing you, you're probably lying!"

"My name's Melinda," said Melinda. "The only person I'm seeing is my fiancé, we're getting married in May." She was proud of herself for that; it sounded very convincing. "To tell you the truth, I thought I'd never get married, I'm forty-six, you know."

Her age seemed to more reassuring to Frank's wife than the fiancé lie had been. "Forty-six? You're getting married? I'm sorry, I'm being ridiculous, aren't I? Where did you meet your fiancé?"

"You'll never believe this," said Melinda. "On the Internet. On one of those matchmaking services."

"I've never known anyone who actually met anyone that way," said Frank's wife, now completely distracted. Melinda wondered how many gimlets she had had before making the phone call. "You know, you're my age exactly; I didn't know people our age did that. I thought it was for kids."

"Well, it wasn't easy," said Melinda. "But I had to try. I've never been married, I just didn't want to grow old alone."

"Frank and I have been married for twenty-five years. Right out of college."

"I envy you," said Melinda. "I wish I had had that. Do you have children?"

"Two," the woman said proudly, then added, sadly, "The second one is off to college in the fall."

"That will be a big change," said Melinda.

"I've been thinking of going back and doing my master's in English literature. I never got to."

"That sounds good," said Melinda. "Look, you know, you sound like you have a great family and a lot to look forward to. I wouldn't worry about some silly number in a wallet. It could be anything—does your husband have clients?"

"Yes," said the woman. "Yes, of course he does."



Of course. But, there was something about this number—no last name—”

“It’s late,” said Melinda. “You’re tired. You must be, I am. Go to bed, get some sleep, I’m sure it’s nothing. Sometimes late at night things look so much worse than they really are.”

“You’re right,” said the woman. “And—you know—good luck in May! I hope you can be as happy as we’ve been!”

“I hope so, too,” said Melinda. “Thanks.”

“Thank YOU,” said the woman.

As soon as she hung up, Melinda rang up Frank. She knew he’d be at his club, playing poker, he always was on Thursday nights.

“Your wife just called me,” she said.

“Christ,” said Frank.

“I convinced her I was someone else,” said Melinda. “But I’m going to cancel this cell phone tomorrow, I never want another call like that.”

“I understand,” said Frank.

“I’ll call you tomorrow to see how things are,” said Melinda. “But I think it would probably be best if we didn’t see each other for a while. She needs some attention.”

“Okay.” He seemed a little stunned and for once not in control.

The next day, she called him at the office from a phone at the Cosmo Club. She was leaving no more trails.

“How is she?” she asked.

“She’s fine,” said Frank. “She never even mentioned it. But she said she wants to go back to school. And I noticed—the card with your number on it isn’t in my wallet anymore.”

“She wants to see if you’ll notice. Don’t.”

“Okay,” said Frank.

“How are you?” asked Melinda.

“Relieved,” he said. “That was a close call.”

There was a moment of silence.

“Thank you,” he said. “I owe you.”

“You owe me nothing,” said Melinda.

“But I’d like to leave you a little something—a goodbye gift. I know we can’t see each other anymore. I’ll leave it for you at the Warwick, to call for.”

“Thanks,” said Melinda. “You don’t have to.”

“Neither did you.”

“Tell her you think graduate school is a great idea.”

She went down to Philadelphia the next week. When she went to the desk at the Warwick, the clerk remembered her, smiled, and handed her a small package, beautifully wrapped. She opened it in the bar—it was a white gold pin with a large diamond. She would never wear such a thing, but it had its own loveliness. She put it in her purse, next to her new cell phone, and after a nice Italian lunch at one of their old favorites, took the train back to New York. Before she went home, she put the pin in a safety deposit box with the gifts from Selwyn. Soon, she would take them all to a jeweler she knew and get an appraisal. Beautiful things shouldn’t sit in steel vaults; they should be out in the world, decorating women whose husbands gave them such tokens in lieu of their love.

That night, she was back at the kitchen table, sitting quietly in a chat room, waiting to be found. She knew the exact hour they would come looking, and she had gotten very good at waiting for it.



Edgar Goodrich, *After the Burial of Reverend Burden*

by Robert Cooperman

His widow's too Eastern-prissy
to make friends with the wives
of us respectable merchants
trying to turn this slag heap
of gold-barking murderers
into a city fit for Christians.

Not that she walks around
giving instructions to angels;
but she lets it be known
her father was a Boston minister
holier than Jesus.

You ask me, that half-breed
William Eagle Feather
knows more than he'll tell
about the Preacher's death.
That boy's too good a tracker
not to read prints in ground
he swore was hard as a railroad tie;
blank as Pinhead Jones's head.

Widow Burden was seen
talking to him.
When it comes to pagans,
The Good Book says they'll burn;
so why engage them
in pleasant conversation
if they're all going to Hell?

You ask me, it was more
than innocent palaver.



Photo by Dawn Walker



William Eagle Feather Fails to Divulge How Reverend Burden Died

by Robert Cooperman

I'd never tell that fat
white slug of a sheriff—
him tossing me a coin
for my tracking jobs
like I'm a gold-tramp begging
free drinks in his saloon—

But from the faint boot marks,
it was John Sprockett flung
Preacher down the shaft.
Only thing I can't figure:
why that rhyme-crazy killer did it;
maybe he thought Preacher
wanted him run out of town.
Or it had to do with Preacher's wife.

I can read ground like Scripture:
Preacher was taken unsuspecting,
like a cougar had pounced on his bed.

The time I met his sweet widow
rambling on the mountain,
my heart did a courtship dance
so wild I could hardly speak.
Now, just let me find
some pretty words to say to her.

Sprockett owes me,
but I'm too frightened of him
to ask for a poem or two.



Sheriff Dennehy Speculates on the Death of Reverend Burden

by Robert Cooperman

If he was filled with lead,
especially a perforated spine,
I'd say the culprit
was that escapee from Hell,
John Sprockett, scars slashing
his face like someone smashed him
with a bottle of rotgut.

It looks like an accident;
but why would a man of God loiter
at that abandoned mine shaft?

We didn't smell no whiskey on him—
Preacher famous for temperance in a town
oiled by liquor and its gold river.
But rumors flew raucous as crows
about him and Mary LaFrance.
Wouldn't surprise me:
she can bewitch Jesus himself.

So her and me'll have a nice chat
if she wants to keep the company
of gold fever boys in my town.

Sprockett could've killed Preacher,
though why I can't cipher at all.
Still, when John spouts the Bard
like a flash flood, he can murder
anyone discourteous enough
not to listen. Maybe Preacher
didn't pay proper attention.



Mary LaFrance, After Her Talk with Sheriff Dennehy

by Robert Cooperman

When Sheriff tried to accuse me
of murdering Tommy, I jammed
my fists into my hips
that flare like rose petals,
and demanded, "Why would I want
to kill the golden goose
that was going to marry me
once he divorced his wife,
and call the baby I'm carrying his?"

Right then,
I knew our interview wouldn't end
till I gave proof of my innocence.
When he finished, we had an agreement:
I lie still for him now and again,
and he don't run me out of town
if folks blab about me and Tommy:
Dennehy not wanting
the Preacher's widow to smell
another woman on his corpse,
to sadden her already sorry heart.

Plain as her face,
Sheriff's sweet on her.

If she'd been more obliging,
Tommy'd never come to me.
Besides, everyone just pretends
he was straight as St. Peter,
when the only thing about him
not crooked was his root,
ripe as a stalk of sweet corn.



The Diva Lucrezia Falcone Arrives in Gold Creek After the Death of Reverend Burden

by Robert Cooperman

When last I deigned
to perform for oafs and sluts
among the peaks my voice dwarfs,
Pastore Burden admonished
his congregation that to listen
to me was a sin greater than murder.
So I shed no tears for the vile man.

That time, a woman was hanged
for killing the man who beat her.
I commissioned a tragic opera
based on her life story,
even badmen sobbing at her fate.
Now, I return to perform
The Death of Angelica,
her real name prosaic as pyrite;
her looks enough to give pause
to even Hugo's bell-ringer:
myself an angel of passion,
William Cody once
my golden-haired seraph.



My manager maneuvers my return
to the opera houses of Europe,
to avenge myself on those singers
whose careers hoarsely soared
in the beds of impresarios,
my voice purer than a choirful
of Viennese castrati.

I'll commission a new opera:
Pastore Burden stabbed by his wife
for his many infidelities;
she'll turn the blade on herself—
existence unbearable without
her demon preacher.

How opera improves on life!



Photo by Dawn Walker

To be continued in future issues

These poems are part of a collection entitled *The Widow's Burden*.

Purchase information may be obtained from Western Reflections Publishing Co., P.O. Box 1647, Montrose, CO 81402-1647.



Keeping On

by Earl Coleman

The sun pokes jaundiced finger tentatively
into dawn's abiding fog. Persists—despite
the odds that it will be eclipsed.

My heart persists. Between my ear and pillow
hear it tentatively beat; in my midnight room,
the distant street lamp on the window-blind.

The sun will often shine for weeks on end before
the rain and fog can swallow it; the distant gull
bewails its hunger in the midst of so much fish.



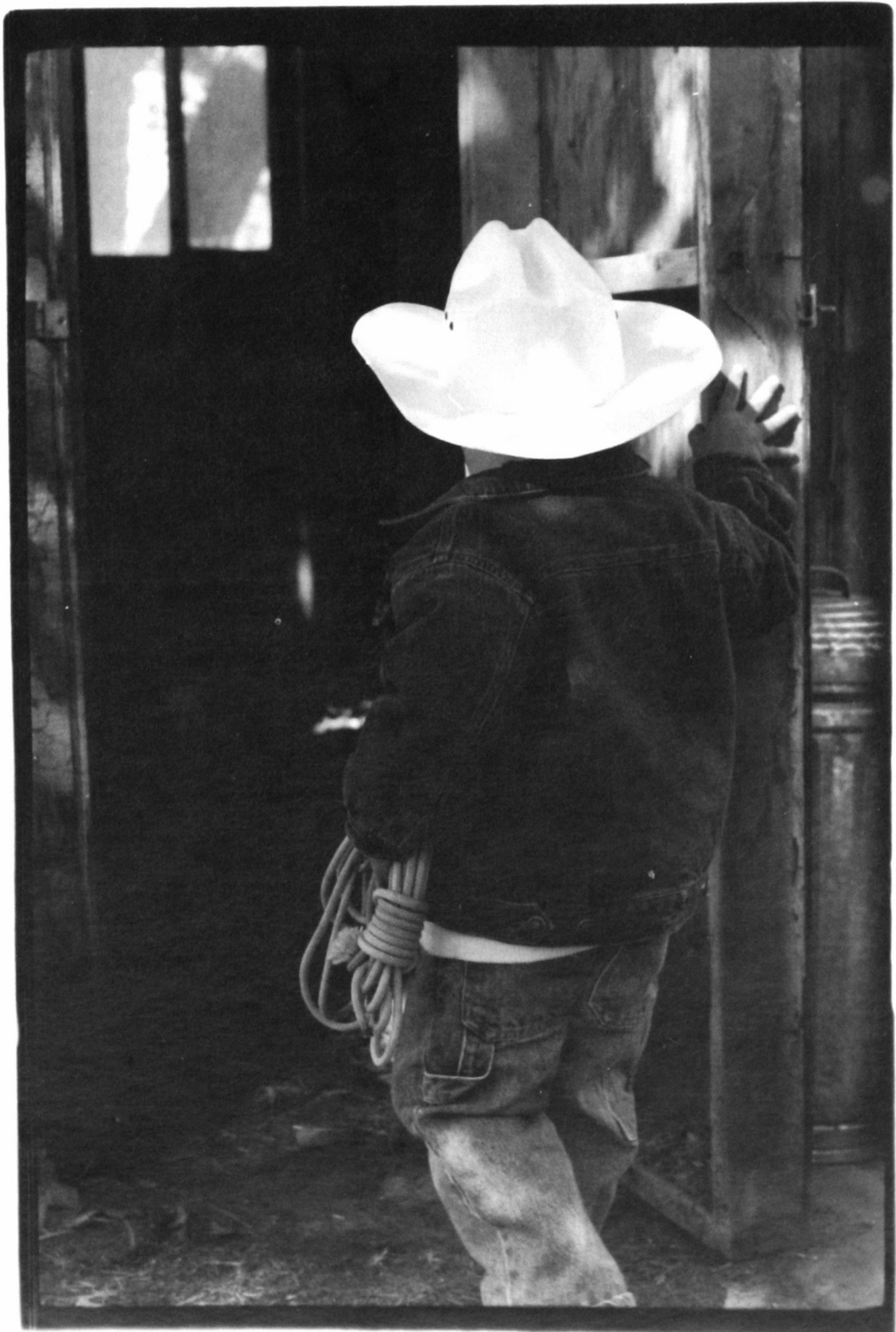


Photo by Erin Nagel



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Robert Cooperman's third collection, *The Widow's Burden*, is available from Western Reflections Publishing Co., P.O. Box 1647, Montrose, CO 81402-1647. His work has appeared in *The Centennial Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and *North Dakota Quarterly*. His first book, *In the Household of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, was published by the University Press of Florida.

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J. Chester Johnson has been published in *International Poetry Review*, *Cumberland Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Evansville Review* and *New York Times*, among others. His poem, *St. Paul's Chapel*, has been one of twelve exhibits on display at St. Paul's, the chapel that was damaged in the 9/11 attack on New York City.

William Jolliff grew up on a farm just north of Magnetic Springs, Ohio. He is currently chair of the Department of Writing and Literature at George Fox University. His poems have appeared in many journals, including *Southern Humanities Review*, *Northwest Review*, *West Branch*, *Passages North*, and *Appalachian Journal*. He recently edited *The Poetry of John Greenleaf Whittier: A Readers' Edition*.

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Walt McDonald served as an Air Force pilot, taught at the Air Force Academy and Texas Tech University, and served as Texas Poet Laureate for 2001. His books include *All Occasions* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), *Blessings the Body Gave* and *The Flying Dutchman* (Ohio State, 1987, 1998), *Counting Survivors* (Pittsburgh, 1995), *Night Landings* (Harper & Row, 1989), and *After the Noise of Saigon* (University of Massachusetts, 1988). Four of his books have received awards from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. His poems have appeared in many journals, including *American Poetry Review*, *The American Scholar*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *First Things*, *JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)*, *London Review of Books*, *New York Review of Books*, *Poetry*, *The Sewanee Review*, and *The Southern Review*. His latest books are *Climbing the Divide* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), and *Great Lonely Places of the Texas Plains* (Texas Tech UP, 2003). In the latter, his poems are paired with color photos by Texas State Photographer Wyman Meinzer. In 2002, Texas Tech University Press published *The Waltz He Was Born For: An Introduction to the Writing of Walt McDon-*



ald, a book of essays edited by poets Janice Whittington and Andrew Hudgins.

Daniel Mintie is a poet and journalist living in Portland, Oregon. His writing appears regularly in regional, national, and literary publications.

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Jason Sullivan graduated from Oklahoma State University's English/Creative Writing in the spring of 2004. He attended the Oklahoma Arts Institute as a poetry student in the summers of 1999 and 2000. He has been published in *Papyrus*, *The Boarding House Review*, and *SWOSU Chapbook*, among others.

Julia Wendell has two full-length collections of poems, *An Otherwise Perfect History* (Ithaca House, 1988) and *Wheeler Lane* (Igneus Press, 1998), as well as a chapbook, *Fires at Yellowstone* (Bacchae Press, 1994). Her poems have appeared in *The Missouri Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Chelsea*,

Birmingham Poetry Review, *Mid-America Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Carquinez Poetry Review*, *Nebraska Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Passages North*, *Whiskey Island Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Southern Indiana Review* and *Maryland Review*, among others. Wendell has taught at Arizona State University and the University of Iowa, and currently owns and operates a horse farm in northern Baltimore County.

Gerald R. Wheeler of Katy, Texas, has had award winning photography, fiction, and poetry appear in *North American Review*, *Onthebus*, *Lynx Eye*, *RiverSedge*, *Westview*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Cape Rock*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Slant*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Peregrine*, *The Distillery*, *Owen Wister Review*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Aethlon*, *Vincent Brothers Review*, *The International Poetry Review* and elsewhere. He is the author of three poetry collections: *Tracers*, *Tracks*, and *Travelin' Still*. Wheeler is a Pushcart nominee.

George Young is a physician living in Boulder, Colorado, and a collection of his poems, "Spinoza's Mouse," won him the Washington Prize and was published by Word Works in 1996. His poems have recently been published in *Comstock Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Wisconsin Review*.

Fredrick Zydek has had five collections of poetry published. Holmes House Publications has just released *Dreaming of the Other Side of Time*, and *T'Kopechuk: The Buckley Poems* is forthcoming from Winthrop Press. His work has also appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, *Nimrod*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Yankee*, and others. His published writings include personal essays, fiction, academic articles, plays, poems, and an occasional review.

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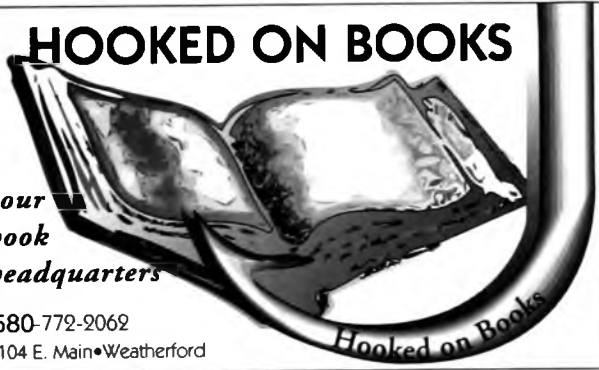
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