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WESTVIEW

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Stylesheet

1. **Electronic submissions are preferred.** To help facilitate the journal's blind review process, authors should exclude identification information from manuscripts. Submissions by post should be typed on 8.5" x 11" white paper; prose should be double spaced. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope.
2. **Electronic submissions are also preferred for artwork.** Artwork submitted by post should be suitable for black and white reproduction. Work should be no larger than 8.5" x 14". However, photographs or slides of larger works may be submitted.
3. Include a brief biographical sketch for our contributors' notes.
4. Submissions and correspondence may be sent to Amanda Smith at westview@swosu.edu. Hard copy submissions will be accepted until 2016 and should be sent to:
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Foreword

—Austin Watford, Kenneth Beck, and Amanda Smith

Once again, another issue of *Westview* has navigated its way into your mailbox, and you have just ripped open its packaging in anticipation of the fine pieces that the hardworking editorial staff members have prepared for your enjoyment. We appreciate your pausing for our humble words in this foreword, especially with such great work just a page-turn away.

The Spring/Summer 2015 issue of *Westview* brings together slices of life from humorous reflections on the simple pleasures to meditations on youth, family, mortality, and the transcendent potential for renewal—all themes invoked by the spring-summer season. We present a wonderful selection of poetry and prose that explores every corner of the human soul and provides wonderfully simple yet evocative images of humanity.

This issue is unique in that it represents the combined efforts of Professor Amanda Smith's Editing students from Southwestern Oklahoma State University's Department of Language and Literature. These students have worked diligently all semester to hone their proofreading and editing skills, and this issue is a tribute to their collective success. In addition to substantial proofreading, each student assumed an administrative role within an editorial team as poetry, short fiction, creative nonfiction, art, or front matter/back matter editors. Their attention to detail, editorial knowledge, and creativity is reflected in these pages. We offer our sincere thanks to Kenneth Beck, Erin Benton, Ashley Comstock, Hannah Danforth, Shannon Eidenshink, William Giger, Katrina Goforth, Molly Hawkins, Tara Hintchel, Tara Holt, Anna Hundley, Sandra Pratt, Kierra Prewitt, and Austin Watford. We also acknowledge the contributions of student worker, Erin Benton, who is succeeding Heather Bailey as *Westview's* editorial assistant this year.

Thank you again for reading and supporting *Westview*. We hope you enjoy this issue and consider renewing your subscription and/or requesting a gift subscription for a family member or friend.

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My Grandmother's Lilacs

by Mike Emery

Life so full of questions, young and old:
Questions knocked with heavy fists
Against the inside and the outside of my skull,
Hammering insistently for as long as I remember
Questions searching out the gates
Through which to integrate the tried and true
In concert with the challenging and new.

Mind, wander vaguely back in years,
Persistent stumbling over celebrations,
Outrage, loves, and fears and grieves,
Back to that paradise of ignorant absurdity
Before I was well enough acquainted
With my mind to know what it was for,
Back before the questions began to
Colonize my brain like rumors of plague.

Back to the time of my grandmother's lilacs;
She had five bushes, all purple, never pruned.
We called it the jungle, so immense
To our four- and five-year-old imaginations.
We were not to dare beyond the blossoms
To explore the rocks and sagebrush out beyond
For fear of drowning in the little trickling creek
Where there were water skimmers
Dancing in the pools between the rocks
And darning needle dragonflies
That would sew your mouth shut
If you let them get too close.

But when older guardian eyes
Looked otherwise, we squirmed
Between the suckers and out of supervision's sight
To venture in the widening world
And inhale the sweet deep purple blossom
Scent of liberation tinged with sage.
Our fathers all were gone to war.
What had we to question?



From the Ides of March to Mayday 2012

by Mike Emery

On wheel and on foot,
The family tree expands its borders
In the four directions of delight,
Finding refuge from winter
In sun-dappled shadow,
Finding respite from summer
On twilight verandas,
Where viewers tweet secrets and
Contestants sing praises
To the pastas of spring
Gnoshing with fishes,
Faceless and nameless,
On the Lower East Side.

Living small is the best revenge,
Analyzing the couch
In a just-so apartment
With friends in a
World of one's own
Might be tiny but thrilling,
Healing an act of defiance,
And owning the past
A declaration of freedom.

Lessons in the history
Of the hard sell
Abound rebound
And reverberate
With songs of lament
In the mind of a con-man
For the vicious end
Of a battered fortune,
Where the American
Dream explodes
Into clutches of cactus flowers
Along a lonely desert track,
Dreaming of the next rain.



The Fabulous Banal

by Tonya Dale

I'm sitting in my kitchen, thinking about how I'm supposed to be writing something—an assignment given by an unknown teacher to “write something... write something fabulous. Now. Always.”

What should I write about? I wonder. I live in the suburb of a town of eighteen thousand in semi-rural Indiana. My reality offers a limited choice of flavors: beer, beef jerky, and breaded tenderloins. I prefer a dry red, dark chocolate, and a great salad.

I'm sitting in my kitchen with a sink full of dirty dishes behind me. The sink finds itself quite jealous of the dishwasher, in which sparkling-clean, spot-free, fresh-smelling dishes are gathered—neighbors with gathering conflicts. I wonder which will start the feud. My money's on the sink.

There are clothes washing upstairs in cold water with baking soda and environmentally friendly soap. It makes me feel better than using the toxic, fish-killing variety. Whether others feel superior for using the toxic, fish-killing variety to show those liberal, tree-hugging, lazy Atheist Socialists like me is a mystery.

I wasn't aware I was an Atheist Socialist; I am merely trying to keep my grass a natural color, the tumors benign, and the effects of environmental pollution at a minimum for my great-grandchildren and, ironically, my godson.

Isn't that what a good, liberal, tree-hugging, lazy, Atheist Socialist like me would do?

I don't know either.

The dog and the cat have both sat on the barstool next to me, to stare at me long enough to prompt my fight-or-flight response. I get up and give them something to chew on so they'll leave me alone, so I can write something.

I notice muck on the countertop of the island in my kitchen. Ignoring it produces the same OCD response I have when the glass in the living room is lit up by the morning sun, and I see that it's covered in dust and hair.

Paper towels made of recycled paper and generic cleaner with vinegar are the very best friends of my many compulsions. I stop writing to fetch cleaner from under the sink and scrub the offending muck too close to the laptop to ignore. Five minutes later, the remainder of the island countertop is now free of germs, bacteria, and all offending muck, and I sit back down in front of the laptop.

Now, I can write something.

The Husband is upstairs running the vacuum cleaner because I washed my favorite new blanket, and it has shed all over the other laundry. The carpet looks like a sixties-era shag due to the multicolor wads of fuzz the blanket has cast off in a

violent response to cleanliness.

I will wash it, again and again, and try to ignore his complaints of said fuzz polluting the formerly perfect carpet.

I'm fond of my blankets; I take one with me when we travel, and the shedding one keeps my side of the bed warm at night. It's already an attachment.

He will run the vacuum until the entire second story is blissfully free of all dirt, lint, and hair. I know, secretly, that his OCD compulsions involve anything that sucks things up from any surface; I suppose they could be far worse. I'll try to remember that.

Yesterday was Valentine's Day. In the middle of the island countertop sits a floral arrangement in a metal tin with a distressed, verdigris tint. Carnations, roses, hyacinths, something purple, and various greenery fight for balance and life outside of the floral shop cooler. Thin, twisted sticks are included to provide interest and contrast; near the top of one stick, a bright-pink, polyester butterfly is attached. I wonder if it would fly away if the clip was removed.

Also, I wonder how I could have possibly written something so ridiculous while attempting to write something so fabulous.

The vacuum is no longer running upstairs, and the Husband descends to explore quick solutions to an empty stomach and remove the dog from the barstool. He's chosen the remaining pepperoni pizza and garlic cheese bread and tossed it into the ancient microwave with the scary burned spot on one side. Thirty seconds later, he's enjoying a late breakfast of lukewarm fat, salt, cheese, and heavily processed flour.



Gone in sixty seconds.

Next, he fishes the sugar-free blueberry yogurt from behind the butter and leftover ranch dip. Once the plastic container is empty, he tosses it in the trash.

I, of course, retrieve it to feed the recycling bin; it has a very big appetite, and I feed it several times a day. Were I to regularly attend sessions with a psychologist, I would need to explain my desire to mentally convert inanimate objects into living creatures that need my care. I would fail every time.

The dog has retreated to her bed, still wearing the coat I encase her in when she goes outside for winter pee sessions. It's only four degrees today, and the three inches of snow that fell yesterday cover every inch of her giant, outdoor urinal. The coat was handmade by my mother, whose own dog has a collection of outerwear in various prints and fabrics. He never steps over a threshold in winter without sporting some very fashionable couture. I realize that my mother and I, as old ladies, are still dressing dolls.

Movement in the corner of the kitchen distracts me, and I look to see the dog draped over the back of the cat, whose girth exceeds the dog's by several inches. In spite of being spayed, the female dog has urges that can only be met by humping the giant, neutered male cat when he spreads himself out on the floor. Friends find this very funny and can relate many stories of eating dinner in my kitchen with dog-on-cat porn in the background. Because I am an insecure, repressed, introverted, and complicated personality, I screech until the humping stops. Thirty minutes later, I will have screeched at least three times. Apparently, I just need to get over something.

My attempt to drink my coffee before it gets cold is doomed—a victim of yet another morning spent as hostess to this ridiculously normal madness. I stare at the cup, at once wistful and agitated. I wonder what's going on in the neighbor's kitchen right now. Is their dog humping their giant cat? Is the countertop disinfected and muck free? Why can't any of us find our way out of these two-story, tastefully decorated, attractively priced prison cells with manicured lawns?

Have any of my neighbors, like me, wanted to suddenly stand up and run down the street screaming from the damn banality of this life? Have they?

My hands are shaking badly, typos ensue, and I must find a tissue quickly.

The Husband is looking at me with that same *I've been married to you for nearly thirty years and I still don't understand you at all* look I could still see even if I were locked in a dark closet. He had better be careful; I am fifty years old, haven't slept through the night since Clinton, and my body thinks it's a coal furnace with a faulty thermostat. The skinny bitches on the *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* have been prancing about on the small TV in my kitchen for hours, and I really want to make someone pay for their incredible ability to make me feel fat, poor, badly dressed, melanin challenged, and shamefully lacking in Botox and silicone.

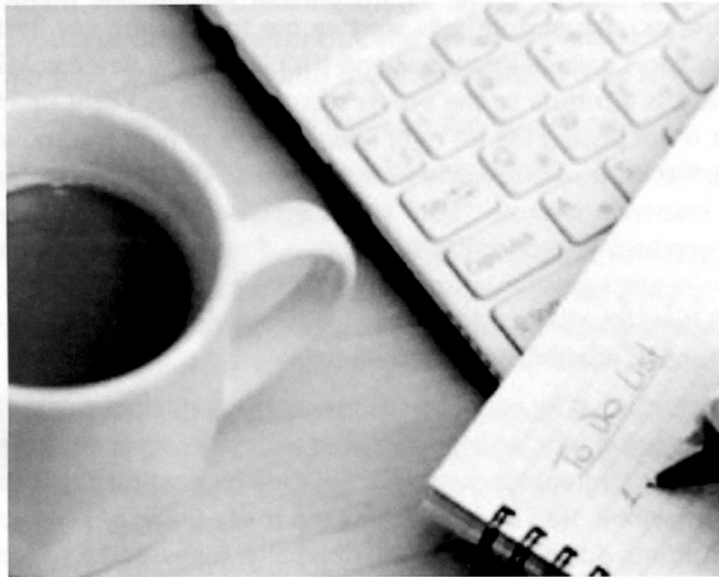
I stare back at him; the look on my face is Acid Queen on Heroin, and suddenly, he decides the carpet on the first floor needs to be not only vacuumed but also steam cleaned. Now.

Détente...and deep breaths.

The morning will continue to pulse and blend, with me as the main ingredient. I will continue to wonder what I'm doing here and why I'm writing about this instead of something fabulous.

Just as I will also wonder why it is that whenever something makes me cry, I immediately tell myself to stop crying, and why I must have a tissue in the pocket of every pair of yoga pants I own. I don't want anyone to see me cry because they'll ask me what's wrong, and I might just tell them.

My adult son is here this weekend, and I feel a strong need to bake something for him, to feed his home-cooking-starved soul and make him long for something that is far more important to me than it is to him. I will search recipes, open the refrigerator door several times, count the eggs, and see if there is enough milk. I will measure things, get flour all over me, curse at the eggshells, and closely watch the oven timer. When something is golden brown and the knife is clean, I'll retrieve it from the oven, put the pot holders away, and wonder if it is enough. It never will be.



I want so badly to change some of the settings on my life profile...if only I could remember the password. I was sure I wrote it down the last time I had this virtual nervous breakdown while trying so hard to write something.

My mother told me last year that she had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, but it's not the bad kind (because, well, there's a good kind?). My reaction to this revelation was to shake the mental ice water from my face, realize my mother has an awful illness,

then stare at my own shaking hands, in steadily worsening motion since grade school, and think...yippee. Me, too?

She went on to tell me that Grandma and Great-Grandma had it, too, because of bad nutrition in their time. They had thought it was just nerves, and did I want a cookie?

"No," I had said, "I don't want a cookie. I want us to have different hands."

She had found that amusing.

At the moment, I notice that the shaking is considerably worse than it has been in recent memory, and given that my fiftieth birthday was a few months ago, I realize that I'm afraid of becoming a Dopamine-challenged old person.

I don't even know what that means because I've never actually been an old person. I've just been me, but me is getting old. There is a road map developing above my upper lip, I no longer have a disdain for naps, and miniskirts really piss me off.

On the other hand, I am warm on a freezing winter morning, I've completed six 5k races since October, and the property taxes are paid in full. Somehow, I will find a way to make shaky hands look glamorous.

The dog is sitting next to my barstool, staring up at me while her tail works on cleaning a kitchen floor that has already been the benefactor of the Roomba at exactly three this morning. The Husband loves his gadgets, and his infomercial sales pitch to convince me of the Roomba's glory was epic. I truly thought that optometry was his second-best profession. He could be the messiah of the Home Shopping Network.

The cat has recaptured the stool next to me, and his stare is now one of pure triumph and omniscience; surely, I think, he fancies himself my greatest possession, the holder of all human knowledge. He knows the shiz...we just need to ask his fabulous ass. What the hell is wrong with us stupid humans anyway? As I write, he extends a giant paw and rests it on my thigh, and the purring becomes so loud and deep that I vibrate from mere contact. I'm not entirely upset about this.

My cell phone also buzzes and vibrates, virtual doorbells alerting me to a visitor. My best friend is asking how my day's going, can I believe this snow, and isn't it just too damn cold? The smiley face at the end of her text is a tribute to the power of suggestion as I light up in response. Yes, it is too cold, the cat is not pissing me off right now, and I'm so over the snow. I wish we lived on a beach with perfect white sand, warm blue water, and the Chippendales tanning themselves with oil. She responds with an "LOL" and suggests plans for antique shopping at our favorite store and maybe Chinese for lunch. We really love old furniture and tchotchke shopping; my response involves capital letters and several exclamation points. Happiness, for me, comes from the hunt for old stuff and dusty vinyl records, hours of deep-blue-girly-stuff conversations, and food of possibly questionable origin.

The Husband descends again to announce that he now plans to shovel the (expletive deleted) snow off the deck and the sidewalk. I stare at him, pondering the appropriate response, given that he all but put his hands on his hips, jutted out his chest, and boomed his possible sacrifice of life and limb in this raging war with winter. He's been watching too many *Game of Thrones* episodes, and I expect one day he'll stomp down the stairs wearing pelts, ropes, and a sword and bellow, "Wench, bring me food!"

I think I'm safe, though, from the whole dragon thing.

I tell him, "Okay, dress warm." The grunt I receive in response sounds a lot like one of the behemoths from *Vikings*. At least he has a hobby.

My son is awake and slowly navigates the stairs as he adjusts to daylight and gnawing hunger. "Hey, Mom," he croaks, suffering from both a cold and a defunct home humidifying system. "Is there anything to eat?" The still-warm breakfast casserole to my left involves all of his favorite moving parts, and he takes a quick breath as his olfactory sense finally kicks into gear.

"Cool, my favorite. Thanks, Mom." He gives me not only a sweet smile but also a quick kiss on my cheek before sitting down next to me and the vibrating cat.

Suddenly, I realize I've had something fabulous to write about all along.



The Scent of Maple

by Angela Shupe

The phone rang, waking her from a dead sleep. With her heart racing, Annie Filigren stumbled out of bed, feeling her way through the dark to the kitchen. Anything to make that blasted ringing stop, she thought, racing down the hall. Her left foot twisted on something in the center of the hallway floor. She was angry as she muttered things she'd never say in the light of day. *Who could be calling? And at this hour?*

Adam was always leaving things laying around when he got in from a midnight shift. *Should've been more careful*, she scolded herself, kicking at the towel now wrapped around her foot. She hopped into the kitchen just in time to grab the phone before it blared again.

"Annie?" said a flustered voice on the other end.

"Yeah, it's me." Annie stifled a yawn. "Callie, what are you doing calling so early? It's not even six."

"I'm so sorry, Annie. I really hate to do this, but John just left to go downtown. He got a call late last night for an early interview, and he'll be gone all day. My shift starts in half an hour, and I don't have anyone to watch Ben. Is there any way you could help?" Annie's stomach twisted, tightening into knots.

"You know my mom would always help..." Callie's voice quivered, and the phone went silent. Annie sat rubbing her aching foot, hating this decision, this interruption in her life. She knew it would happen sometime, just not yet. *It's the last thing I want to do. I just can't*, she decided.

"Please, Annie. I know we've not talked a lot lately..."

Lately? There's an understatement. More like two years, Annie mulled. Years ago, there'd have been no hesitation, but not now. When she first met Callie, they were both six-months pregnant and learning breathing techniques at the local birthing center. Annie had laughed when the instructor in the neon yellow dress began barking orders like a drill sergeant. Callie was the only other one to laugh, and their friendship began instantly. Both were first-time moms. Even though Annie was twenty-eight and two years older, Callie seemed more at ease with becoming a mom. Her confidence encouraged and empowered Annie.

Once the babies were born, Callie and Annie met off and on to get coffee and swap stories. When Callie moved to the next town, distance made getting together difficult. They'd tried and were successful a handful of times, until the babies became toddlers.

Then, it happened, and Annie pulled away from the friendship. Seeing Callie was only a painful reminder, so she stopped answering phone calls and didn't return messages. Soon, Callie stopped trying. Deep down though, she wouldn't admit it. Annie had hoped Callie would keep trying, maybe just give her more time. But now, it all seemed so long ago.

"Annie, I really don't have anyone else who can help."

Annie's heart tugged. She knew what it was like to lose someone. It was still too raw. The

knots twisted tighter. It was like her stomach was rebelling, and her body was at war with itself. Her heart almost wanted to go one way, but the rest of her was battling it out to stop her mouth from forming the words already escaping her lips. "Yeah, it's okay. What time?" Annie sighed.

"We'll be right over. And thanks, Annie. You're a godsend." There was a click, then nothing but dial tone.

How could she ask me this? Of all things, she had to know this would be the most painful. Well, there's my good deed for the day. Annie hobbled off to get dressed. Passing the mirror in the hall, she glimpsed the face of a woman—hollow and tired. Not giving it a thought, she closed the bathroom door behind her.

In the foyer, Callie hugged the mop-topped boy good-bye before turning to leave for the day. *What am I going to do for an entire day with this child?* Annie wondered. Staring up at her was a young boy with a curly brown mess on top of his head. He had to be about five. At that thought, her stomach started up again. *Will you give me any peace today?* She scolded it silently.

"I suppose we should get you something to eat." Dark eyes stared back at her, made even bigger from the long dark lashes standing guard over them like the Queen's Guard at Windsor Palace—unrelenting and alert. She'd seen them on her honeymoon years ago. She and Adam had laughed. They were amazed by the guards, who never once flinched. She looked at Ben. Still no response, so she motioned for him to follow her into the kitchen. "I could make some eggs," she offered. "What about cereal or toast?" No reply. "I have oatmeal." *What five-year-old wants oatmeal for breakfast,* she thought, opening the pantry to search for more suitable options.

"Mama always puts syrup in my oatmeal. And nuts, too," said a whisper of a voice behind her.

"All right, I think I can do that," Annie replied, relieved the silence had finally been broken. *This little guy isn't such a tough one, after all.*

"Be careful, it's hot." She handed Ben the bowl of steaming oatmeal. The bowl was the blue ceramic one, with a tiny chip on the top of the daisy on the side. *Could never bring myself to get rid of it,* she thought. *Something about it reminds me of him. Doesn't make any sense; it's not like he gave me the bowl. Goodness, he was only three.* She decided it was there when he was, and for that reason alone, she'd never get rid of it.

"Can I have more syrup?" Ben's voice interrupted her thoughts. Hunched over the warm bowl, he was finishing the last of his oatmeal. "Please," he added, remembering his mom's words to mind his manners. He looked like a scared puppy with those big, unassuming eyes. Grabbing the bottle, she drizzled syrup over the remaining clump in the bowl. For the first time since walking through her front door, he smiled. "Don't you like the smell of maple syrup, Miss Annie?" He inhaled the bit of steam still rising from the bowl.

"Hmmm," she mumbled, trying to remember the last time she enjoyed the smell of syrup or if she ever had. "Guess I just don't really think about it." She screwed the top back on

the bottle.

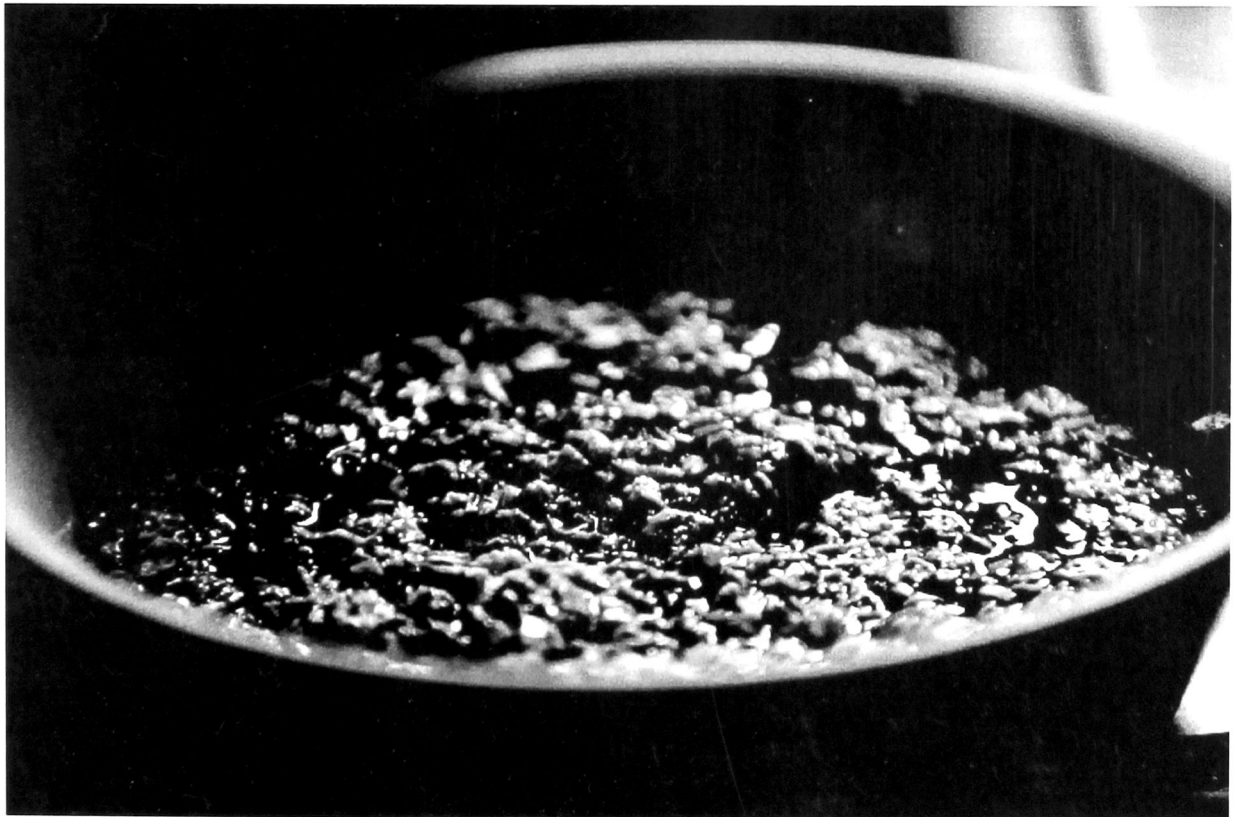
"Really?" Ben looked shocked. "It smells so good. Here, smell." Before Annie could say anything, he pushed the bowl up so close that syrup on the edge rubbed onto the tip of her nose. "Don't you smell it?" he asked. His eyes opened wider than the cup's matching saucer, he looked almost desperate for her to share his love of maple.

Annie snapped back, "Yes! Yes, I do." She hoped her answer satisfied him. *Who gets this excited over syrup?* She was annoyed. Feeling ridiculous, she jumped up to get something to wipe the syrup off her nose.

Really, Annie, getting mad at a five-year-old? She scolded herself, wishing her stomach would stop with the knots. Turning to face him, she softened her voice. "What would you like to do today, Ben? We could go to the park."

"You got syrup on your nose." He giggled, hiccuping through sips of milk. *I will not be undone by a five-year-old*, Annie determined. Looking straight at him, she repeated her question. He was still smiling, amused by the hiccups. He looked a bit sheepish, but pleased. His smile was warm and disarming, which made her heart sink. She could feel the old ache, pulsing grief.

Why does this have to be so difficult? It's been two years. Two years since it happened—since the day Noah was gone forever. It happened so quickly. He was there one moment, and then he was gone. He'd be about Ben's age now. The image of his dimpled cheeks, crowned with golden ringlets, wallpapered every memory she had over the last two years.



It was always there, a backdrop descending on the present, a constant fog blocking clarity. "Can we ride the merry-go-round?" Ben interrupted her thoughts. "And see the sailboats?" "We'll see," Annie replied, not willing to commit to a plan just yet.

"Lots to do there, Miss Annie," Ben assured her. Annie placed the dishes in the sink, thinking about what they needed for a day at the park.

They arrived just as a man with mustard yellow trousers was opening the gates to the merry-go-round. "Miss Annie, look!" Ben pointed at the lights now blinking. There was an odd halo illuminating the vintage ride. Circus horses, elephants, and lions came to life, cast in golden light, as if the circus master had just yelled for the circus to begin. Ben appeared to be entranced. Music began playing in perfect time with the jerking movements of the animals. Startled by the music, Annie jumped. "Can we ride it, Miss Annie?" He looked at her and back at the animals, not willing to take his eyes off them, as if they'd gallop away along with any hopes of riding.

Annie paid the man two dollars, one for each of them. The man stopped the ride for them to climb on. She propped herself up on a pink elephant. With mammoth head raised, the elephant seemed to be showing off the gleaming gemstones rimming her crown, which sat between two enormous rosy ears flapping in the wind. Ben jumped up next to Annie on a lion, then changed his mind, opting for the pearly white horse opposite her. Up on its hind legs, the horse looked ready for battle, as if it were about to charge the unsuspecting hippo directly in front of it. Ben grabbed imaginary reins, yelling "Yah! Yah!" just as the ride lurched and started to move in circles.



"Hold on," Annie said. "Ben, hold on," she repeated as Ben grabbed the handles protruding from both sides of the horse's head. Around and around they went.

Annie felt like a top being spun, hobbling a bit to either side. The animals slowed, and the park stopped spinning. "Okay, time to get off." Annie stepped down off of the uncomfortable elephant.

Ben looked at her with saucer eyes, "Again? Please?" he asked. Annie sighed.

"All right. One more time, but this time I'm going to watch. You hold on. Got it?" She looked at him sternly. Ben nodded his head, eager to get moving. He hopped off the horse, his

eyes darting between the lion and a dark brown bear with a red and white cap on its head. Choosing the lion, he climbed on. Arms wrapped around the rusty mane, he laughed as the lion jumped forward, and the ride began its circular dance.

The ride slowed, and Ben jumped off. "I'm hungry," he said. He passed through the open gate toward Annie with his eyes focused on the food stand behind her. It was almost eleven. They'd eaten breakfast so early, even Annie's stomach was growling. She led the way to the stand.

"Hot dog?" She looked down at Ben for an answer, and he nodded his head. "Two hot dogs and two Cokes, please," she told the man behind the counter. After paying, they sat down at a picnic table under an old oak tree, colors already starting to turn. Ben was staring up at the leaves. Yellow and red splashes resembled a watercolor painting with vibrant colors splattered on a canvas of green. Annie didn't look up. She never noticed things like that anymore.

"My favorite color's red," Ben said, still looking at the leaves. "What's yours?" he asked. "What?" Annie was focused on peeling off a fleck of napkin stuck to the bun before chewing her last bite of hot dog.

"What's your favorite color? Mine's red," Ben repeated, head arched, staring at the puzzle of leaves, branches and sky above them.

"Blue." She'd always loved the color. As a girl, everything had to be blue. Teal, royal, indigo... didn't matter the shade, as long as it was blue. When she was eight, her dad decided to repaint her bedroom. She wanted it blue, and her dad obliged. Her mom laughed when she insisted on a blue comforter, curtains, and a rug.

"Does it all have to be blue?" her mom had asked, wishing she'd pick the white comforter with tiny blue flowers and green leaves.

"Not enough blue," Annie replied. They settled on a sky blue comforter with tiny white polka dots.

"The sky's a pretty blue," Ben said. He pointed at the sky beyond the tree.

"Yeah, guess it is." Annie looked up for the first time since they sat down. It reminded her of her old room. *Wonder whatever happened to that comforter*, she mused. Looking over at Ben, she followed his gaze to the leaves above. "Wow. The leaves are already changing," she said, surprised by the vibrant colors. "I like the red," she added.

"Me too," Ben agreed. He stood, taking his eyes off the leaves for the first time since sitting. Annie was about to suggest taking a walk through the park when Ben turned abruptly to the left. "Do you smell that, Miss Annie?" She hadn't noticed anything but turned in the direction Ben was facing. Over to the left, opposite the food stand, was a cotton candy vendor. She must've just started the machine. Annie still didn't smell anything, but Ben's nose was directing his feet toward the blue and cherry red fluff. "Can we, Miss Annie?" he asked.

Annie weighed the decision. *He did have oatmeal for breakfast. That was healthy.* "All right," she agreed. "You can get one."

"Don't you want one, too?" Ben asked. Annie shook her head no. "But it smells so good,"

he said. He looked at her, amazed she'd pass up the opportunity.

She could smell it now, the faint scent of warm sugar rising from the deep metal bowl spinning behind the glass case. It did smell good—he was right. “A red one, please,” she told the girl waiting with a slim paper cone in her hand.

“No, a blue one, Miss Annie.” Ben tapped her on the arm, “I want a blue one.”

Puzzled, Annie looked down at him. “Are you sure?”

He looked up at her quietly. Then, with a slight nod of his head said, “Yep. A blue one.” He'd made up his mind, and there was no changing it.

“All right. A blue one, please.” Annie handed the money to the girl, who handed Ben an enormous blue fuzzy cotton ball perched on a long, slim cone.

They turned down the winding sidewalk under the maze of trees. “Miss Annie, you have some.” Ben held the cone up close to her face, careful to not touch her nose like earlier with the oatmeal.

“I don't need any, Ben. It's for you.”

“We can share it. It's blue,” he said. He looked so innocent and genuinely eager for her to enjoy the blue fuzz. A smile drew across his lips, off-center to the left, capped off by a tiny dimple. Looking at him, she remembered how Noah's cheeks would always dimple when he smiled. She could see her son's face clearly. Her heart hurt, and she turned away, shoulders hunched, heavy with pain.

Angry at the pain and angry with herself for still feeling it, she squinted back tears. She knew it wasn't Ben's fault. Turning back, she tore off a piece of the fuzz, feeling its stickiness on her fingers. Bringing it close to her lips, the scent of vanilla sugar filled her nostrils. “Smells good,” she said, forcing a smile.

A smile stretched wide across Ben's face. “Told you,” he said. He was so pleased with himself, or maybe he was just happy to see her happy.

They walked the length of the park. The sidewalk looped around, and now they were on the far end, near the pond. Wanting to rest before heading back, Annie sat down on the patchy grass, worn through like an old, misshapen sweater stretched over the dark earth. From where they were, she could see the fountain in the center of the pond. The pond was just over the hill in front of them. Ben started to sit, then he saw it. “The pond!” he shouted. He jumped up, racing toward the water.

“Wait, Ben!” Annie yelled, but he kept running full speed toward the pond. Then, he disappeared over the hill. Annie jumped up and ran as fast as she could to catch him. *I can't see him*, her mind began to race. *He should be in the clearing beyond the hill. Where is he?* “Ben!” she screamed, frantically racing toward where she last saw him. *My God, this can't be happening*, her mind swirled. “Please let him be okay. Please let him be okay,” she muttered, breathless from running.

Then she saw him, curled up on the grass, clutching his knee. He was sobbing. “Ben!” She finally reached him. Scooping him into her arms, she held him close.

“I want my mama. Mama! I want Mama.” His voice was garbled between sobs. Looking down, Annie could see blood on his knee. Fear gripped her heart, wrenching the knots in

her stomach tighter. *It's just a scraped knee*, she repeated to herself. *He's okay. This isn't Noah. He's okay.*

"It'll be okay, Ben. It's okay. It's just a scrape." She rocked back and forth, cradling him in her arms, tears forming in her eyes. "You'll be okay," she reassured him. His little body stopped shaking. He calmed down, able to breathe normally again, no longer sobbing. "I know you want your mama, Ben, but you'll see her soon." He was quiet. Annie could hear the water rippling in the pond. "Let's get you cleaned up. I'll bet I can find a pretty cool band-aid for your knee. What do you—"

"You're a good mama," Ben said quietly. He was looking straight at her with the kind of tenderness only a small child can have. "You're a good mama, Miss Annie." He nodded, as if, in agreement with himself.

Sitting still on the ground, Annie felt her mind go numb. Looking around, she could see birds nibbling seeds in the grass, now chirping in silence. The rippling water fell silent. Everything around her hushed, as if creation were paying its respects to a grieving mother. She couldn't feel anything but the rush of tears exploding from somewhere deep inside. The ache in her heart burst like an overfilled balloon. Terrified of the pain she knew was coming, she bowed her head low, waiting. She waited for the pain, but the pain didn't come. There was something else, something different. Something she'd not felt in a long time—release.

Realizing Ben was still watching her, she clutched him closer to hide her face. Not wanting to scare him, she took a deep breath to steady herself. "It's just a scrape, Miss Annie." Ben was puzzled. "I'm okay," he reassured her. She looked down at him and gazed into his dark eyes.

"You're right, Ben," she said,



choking back tears. "It's going to be just fine. You're okay."

Standing slowly, she helped him to his feet. She pulled a tissue out of her purse and gently wiped his knee clean. "Can we still see the boats?" Ben asked, wiping a tear off his cheek. Annie nodded. They walked in silence to the pond. Ben pointed out his favorite ship, the tall blue sailboat with red stripes on the sails.

"Thanks, Annie," Callie said for the third time, opening the door to leave. Ben had jumped up when she rang the doorbell only a few moments before. He'd fallen asleep soon after getting back to the house. Annie watched him breathing softly, curled up on the couch, warmed by the dusky sunlight glowing in the front room. The house was quiet because Adam was working another late shift. Still sleepy, Ben held Callie's hand, stepping outside onto the front porch, not looking back. Then, he stopped.

He turned and ran to Annie, giving her a quick hug that only reached to her thighs. He smiled, then walked back to Callie. Annie watched them wind down the sloping sidewalk to their car. She sighed and shut the door.

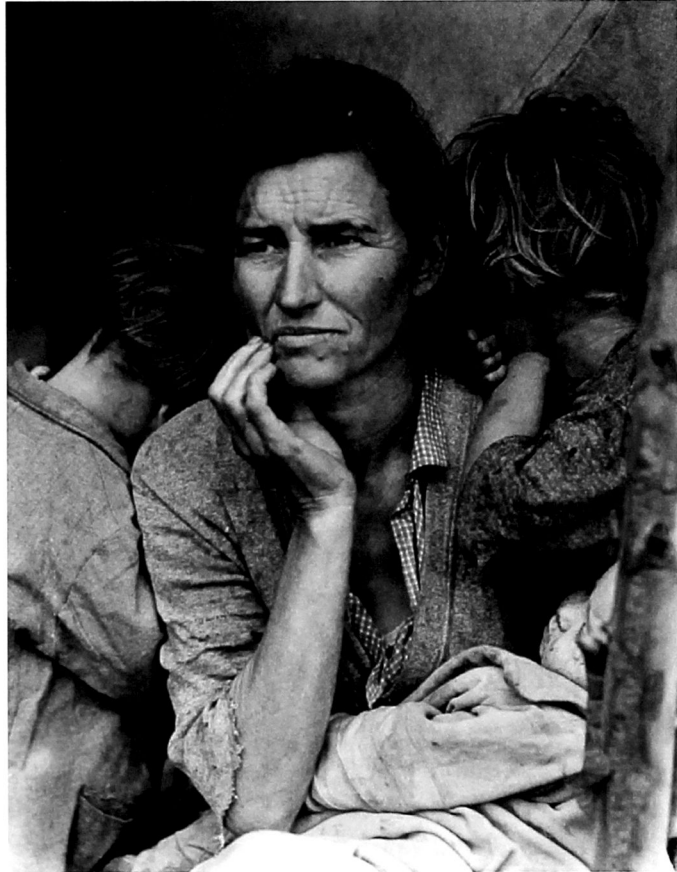
She walked to the bathroom, her face still grimy from her tears earlier in the day. She stared at the face in the mirror. It looked different somehow, gentler. Pouring a dot of soap into her hand, she lathered it into suds. Bringing soapy hands to face, she remembered the syrup on her nose from the morning. Taking a deep breath, she thought she smelled a hint of maple. She laughed, making a mental note to have oatmeal with syrup and nuts for breakfast.

The Depression Madonna

Florence Owens Thompson, 1903-1983

by K.S. Hardy

A photograph,
Famous, oft-reprinted
Of a woman, farm wife
With children gathered
Around her, hiding
Their own faces.
She looks off left,
No Mona Lisa smile,
Yet her face tells
An iconic story,
All the worry of
A mother with
Hungry children,
All the labor of
Years trying to get
Ahead but rolling back
And yet knowing
She will endure.
She must endure.



Alta Mesa

by Lance Nizami

I march between the tall, broad wrought-iron gates into the stone-fields
The stones do not move, do not speak, do not greet me
Some are polished smooth, and some are rough
Some are granite-dark, some marble-white, and some grainy limestone
Some say him-and-her, and some just him

Some are regimental: small identical white marble, names of military units there inscribed
Regardless, all are quiet
Sometimes, one will have a stone or pinecone on its curving top

Each, from time to time, will suffer scratches from a bird's thin claws
The flat sides face toward the road, toward the visitors, with names
The names mean nothing to me, none familiar

Some names are Anglo-Saxon, some are Pacific Islanders, some are Russian
Other names are German Jews; the rare Iranian's there, as well
The Japanese have their place, the Chinese theirs

The Chinese slabs are busiest of all, carved with ideograms
Accomplishments of persons listed, elaborately, one by one,
And all around is the sunshine

Wide plots of green grass, mown, have slabs set flat
The killdeer walk amongst those slabs; each killdeer to its own flat patch
They're always there; what do they seek?

You cannot speak to them; they're not approachable
But, they don't flee too far away, oh no
They find another place to walk amongst the slabs

I walk amongst the upright stones; I have the sun, the solitude
I walk amongst the stones so that I walk amongst the stones tomorrow
Threatened, once, that I might have a stone, I turned to walk

I pass the red-tile-roofed, pink-stuccoed, large, cool airy chapel
The sample carvings sit out front; they make me think:
Perhaps someday, but not today, and not tomorrow

The stones do not move, do not speak, do not greet me
I march out of the tall broad wrought-iron gates into reality.



Gravity

by Lance Nizami

What can I derive from a treeless mountain meadow?

How sunny the alpine meadow, the grasses dry and golden

A high-up alpine meadow feels my boots upon it, no complaints

It pushes back a feeling to my feet

My feet attract the meadow; the meadow pulls my feet, pulls at my boots

A tan-brown deer is watching me from far across the meadow

So safe and calm, she stares, unblinking, curious; a tan-brown deer

Her feet, too, pull the meadow, and the meadow pulls those hard and narrow hooves

Each time she lifts a hoof, the meadow pulls it back

Can we begin to find the peace of an empty mountain meadow?

The she-deer stares at me from far-off woods' edge

She seems to say, *Make up your mind, for I myself was here before you came*

Red moons ago my family came exploring—curiosity, she says, the deer

Or, at least, that's what she thinks—interpreting her wriggling lips is hard

Perhaps she chews her food, ignoring me: *the humans! All the same*

What should I say to this fine doe in this high valley?

Walk too close to her, and she will retreat, too smart for contact

Her distance, far from me, is her protection

The privilege, now, is mine to watch her eat—

Derive a calming moment, a few short minutes, in this mountain meadow.



Einsteinturm (Einstein Tower)

by Lance Nizami

An old college campus, tree-shaded in Potsdam
A campus of tall red-brick buildings and small ones
To one side, a land-point stands over a woodland,
A fine deer-filled woodland

A green land-point, table-flat, grass cut quite closely,
A tower there, Art Nouveau, five stories tall;
Smooth concrete, time-whitened, natural, seamless—
No edges; quite seamless

A dome on the topside for sky observation
The stories of concrete, a tube for the light-rays
In the basement: equipment to photograph starlight,
The glorious starlight

A five-story tower to test complex theory
Waiting for rarest eclipse of the sun
Built here to test the wild thoughts of a genius,
A questioning genius

What to say, now, of that Art Nouveau tower
The genius long dead, the tower now quiet
Glowing so gently soft white in the sunshine,
The fusion-made sunshine

Waiting for genius to open its doors once again

With Dad

by Ivan Hobson

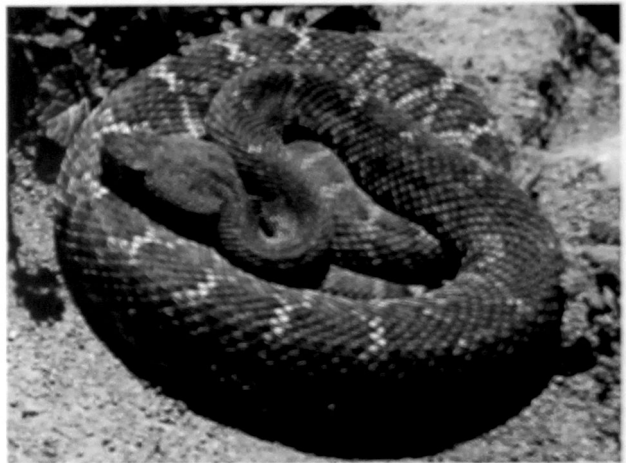
In the high-country on horseback,
we saw that rattlesnake
get taken into the sky.

What was wrong with the hawk
that it did not finish the job?

The snake striking until it was freed,
falling until it crashed
on the rocks below,

and the hawk, drunk with venom,
fluttered to the ground
where you told me it wouldn't survive
the afternoon.

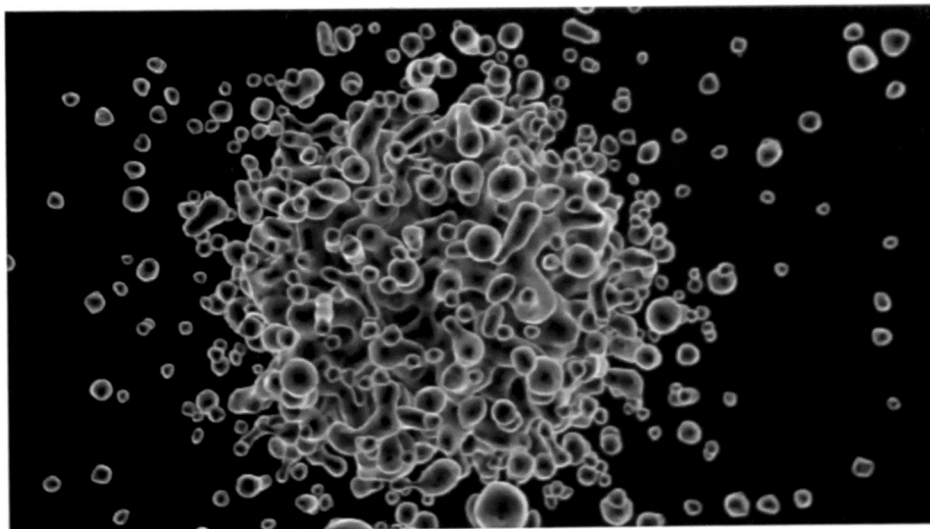
There I was, an unsure boy,
when I cleared my throat and asked you
if you still loved mom.



Inflammatory Thoughts

by Frank De Canio

Rife fantasies are toxins in the blood,
which mobilize the white cells in my brain
to thus articulate a surging flood
of mental images. They form a strain
of poetry intended to contain
the progress of the virulent disease.
In fact, such mental processes inflame
the very system they're presumed to ease
from torment with a regimen of verse.
But these engender more diseased conceits
and fantasies that make the sickness worse
until contagion rides iambic beats.
Thus, lest the virus runs its fatal course,
it must be extirpated at its source.



Disclaimer

by Frank De Canio

I want to leave this world before my time;
before the mocking maladies of age
and self-inflicted ravages of rage
become the rumored consequences of crime,
in which I'd squandered precious years of prime.
I want to die upon life's bustling stage
as though too soon upended in a musty cage
that duly functions as some scoundrel's wage.
I want to die before the smoky slime
that plagued men slither through, implies that I'm
to blame. Distress won't pluck my bearded sage
or wrack my brain, confounding who I am.
I'll stop the dealings of this crooked game
that makes me butt of random wrath and shame;
before, too agonized to give a damn,
I add hate's sore contagion to my lot
and make it seem God's justice that I rot.

The Whittaker Way

by Scott Woods

I was only twelve and still just a girl. I crouched in the shadows behind the second-floor banister and held my breath. There had to be some way to understand this that didn't ruin everything.

There was that man again, the one with the steel-gray eyes. The one who only visited late at night when Father was away and who stayed over in my parents' bedroom instead of the guest room and left before I was supposed to be awake. Mother was standing in the foyer with him, still in her dressing gown.

This morning the man kissed Mother. It wasn't a peck on the cheek, either. He kissed her the way my best friend Katie showed me, where you put your tongue in the other person's mouth even though it was gross. The kind of kiss Katie said you only did when you were in love.

I shrank away from the railing, a thumping in my chest like the rabbit's heart in my third-grade classroom when someone picked her up. Maybe Mother would divorce Father.

My second-best friend Louisa's parents were divorced, and they didn't live together anymore. For a while, she lived with her mother, and for a while, she lived with her father. Her parents had a big fight in court in front of a judge, and her father moved to California. Louisa didn't get to see him very often. Just one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer.

I tiptoed back to my bedroom and slipped into bed. In the dark, you couldn't tell the canopy was even pink. That's when I realized that sometimes the true reality of things could hide from you, and that divorce wasn't the worst part of this. Then it was like riding on a carousel that had sped up out of control with the horses coming alive and threatening to buck you off any second.

Katie's older sister said when a man and woman loved each other the man's seed could turn the woman's egg into a baby, which was why a child was partly like each of her parents.

People always said I was the spitting image of Mother. Except for my eyes—Mother's were brown. I don't have Father's eyes either; his were brown too.

Mother was Martha Cabot Whittaker, Father was Spaulding Holdfast Whittaker, and I was their only child, Roxanne Cabot Whittaker. It had always been that way for as long as I could remember. The worst part about this visit was that Mother might have been in love with this man for a long time, and maybe that explained why I didn't look like Father—maybe I wasn't related to Father by blood at all.

What would I even call him...Spaulding? And my last name...might not really be Whittaker. It was all too important, altogether too many things I didn't know.

My window curtain progressed from hiding in the night to bubblegum pink and then to saffron yellow. It wouldn't be long before I should pretend to be asleep so Mother could wake me to get ready for school, but I wasn't going to pretend. I had to find out if Mother really loved this man and if she had loved him even before I was born.

But, I'd have to come up with some other way than asking her straight out if this man was my real father. I was allowed to ask direct questions, but the topic must never be exactly what I wanted to know. If I did that, she would stiffen and clam up. It wasn't the Whittaker way.

I sat up in bed when Mother came in. Everyone always said she was very pretty, with her lustrous black hair and trim figure. They also said I would be pretty, too, when I grew up. Mother saw I was awake, asked me to get dressed and come down to breakfast, and turned to go back downstairs. It had to be now.

"Who was that man you were saying good-bye to this morning?"

She froze in the doorway, then turned slowly around. Her eyes were narrowed, and they stared at me as if trying to read my mind. It seemed like she wasn't breathing. Then she broke it off, maybe when she could tell I was noticing, and lowered her eyes. "A friend of your father's and mine. I thought you were asleep."

She turned to go again, but I needed to know.

"He only comes here when Father's on a trip."

Mother sighed, came back into the room, and sat on my bed near my feet. She laid her hand on my knee through the covers, and it was a long time before she spoke. A sad smile fixed on her face. "What did you see, Dear?"

"I saw how you kissed him."

She sighed again, and her shoulders slumped a little, the first and only time that ever happened. "I've known Jerry Aberdeen for a long time, since before your father and I were married, so he's probably a better friend of mine than he is of your father's."

She'd known him before I was born, so he could be my real father. The carousel started up again, spinning even faster. But I had to be sure.

"I've never seen you kiss Father like that. Do you let this Jerry Aberdeen put his...thing...in your...you-know?"

"How did you learn about that?"

"From Katie's big sister. So, do you?"

"Yes, Dear."

The earthquake shock wave sent the carousel tumbling, until Mother added, with a great gentleness I would come to recognize only much later, "A woman can't help feeling what she feels."

Even then I understood she was speaking about me as well as about herself, and it soothed me somehow so I could risk another question. "Why didn't you marry him instead of Father?"

Mother drew herself up and seemed to choose her words carefully. "His appeal lies in a certain volatility in his character, in a hypnotic physicality that may be hard for you to understand until you're a bit older. But—and it's crucial that you understand this, Roxanne—Jerry Aberdeen issues from no family. His people starved the whole century they've lasted in this country; they starved in Ireland before they immigrated here and in Scotland before that. No, my agreeing to wed Jerry Aberdeen was never even the consideration of a moment. I was a Cabot. Marrying into the Whittakers provided for my future, and the future of my family. I knew that I must do what must be done."

She patted me on the knee again, and a long shudder drove right through me. The shudder pulled along behind it a flash of memories—my first Easter dress with its bonnet and long ribbons—clinging to Mother's thigh on the first morning of kindergarten—my seventh birthday party when I realized my friend Eleanor was jealous of my family's position—Father's speeding ticket and its astonishing lesson that he was capable of a mistake—Mother's lecture last month about menstrual periods and how I must always carry a purse with a napkin in it until I was fifty.

The shudder passed and I asked her my last question. I knew the answer, but I needed to ask anyway so she wouldn't worry. "I shouldn't tell Father, should I?"

I went to Trent Day School that morning as usual, but I couldn't think about much besides Mother and Father and how Jerry Aberdeen had ruined everything. It felt like Father was already living in California.

"No, child," Mother had replied. "You mustn't tell your father. He would be very hurt. He might even feel honor-bound to divorce me, and then we wouldn't all be able to live together."

She pursed her lips. "A woman has to learn to manage men carefully, Dear. That short Y chromosome the poor darlings are so proud of is nothing more than a mutant X chromosome, and it's missing essential human genetic material. Men have a tendency to place abstractions, like honor, above things that are real. People get hurt as a result, sometimes even die, all in the name of some dubious principle. Never forget that all the world's wars were fought by men."

That day at school, Rory Bradford asked me again if he could carry my books out to where the drivers picked us up. I would never let Stanton Lowell do it, even though the girls all called him a dreamboat, but today I'd said "Yes" to Rory despite his ears being too big and his glasses slipping down his nose.

My driver wasn't taking me home. Father was returning from his trip, and we were all to meet at The Roses, then occupied by Uncle Pinch. Uncle Pinch—

my father's older brother Pynchon Winslow Whittaker—lived there all alone, except for the servants, of course, now that his wife had filed for divorce. Mother said he was drinking more than ever. She also said Aunt Jerilyn was trying to get half of everything, but that she wouldn't get The Roses, no matter what. It had been in the family three hundred years.

What Mother said about the Y chromosome made it seem like Father's divorcing Mother was inevitable. While I was at school, a fear had grown inside me like a balloon blown up nearly past bursting that Father didn't love me anymore. Why should he, if I wasn't his daughter?

I needed to talk to Father, just the two of us, today.

Of course I wouldn't tell him what I saw. I'd promised Mother, and I knew better anyway. I didn't know what I would say, but Father was a psychiatrist. A good one, too—Mother said he'd soon be chairman of Psychiatry at Trent University School of Medicine. He'd know if I was feeling bad.

Neither Mother nor Father had arrived yet, so I tracked down Uncle Pinch on the little terrace he liked off the billiard room. Sometimes he was a more reliable

source of information than either of my parents, although, with Uncle Pinch, the meaning immediately apparent wasn't always the only intended one.

The terrace was only big enough for two chairs with a small round table between and offered the same view as the patio. The house was built on the highest ground of a peninsula, about two hundred yards to the water in three directions, so you beheld a wide arc of ocean but not the



point or its little bay that were blocked by the horizon formed by the bluff.

"Hello, Roxanne. How's my favorite niece today?"

This was our standard joke—I was Uncle Pinch's only niece. I pointed to a pitcher sitting half-full on the table. "Is that iced tea?"

"Long Island Iced Tea. Want a taste?"

I nodded, and he passed me his glass. "Just a sip, now." It tasted like regular iced tea.

"Good, no? Not a drop of tea in it. Packs quite the punch. Just invented down at the Oak Beach Inn by my favorite bartender, the unfortunately-christened

Robert Butt. Oak Beach on Long Island, not in our own Oak Grove, more's the pity. If Long Island Iced Tea doesn't provide the most splendid way of appearing to try to hide your drinking, I don't know what does. How was school?"

"Okay, I guess. We learned about the triangle trade."

"The triangle trade? Where New Englanders sailed rum to Africa, bartered it for slaves, sold the slaves in the Caribbean to work on sugar plantations, bought molasses made from the sugar, and distilled the molasses into rum back home?"

"Yes," I said, sitting on my hands so Uncle Pinch wouldn't notice me twisting my fingers.

"And you're asking if we Whittakers were involved with that?"

I nodded. "Kids whisper about it, loud enough for me to hear."

"The answer to your question, Roxanne dear, a question by the way most un-Whittaker-like in its directness, is 'Yes, of course.' It seems barbarous now, and it doesn't do to speak of it, but two hundred years ago trading in slaves was both very profitable and in line with prevailing mores. Why else would the Constitution be essentially silent upon the matter?" He added, "I think it was Obadiah Marplethwaite Whittaker who first got us into the business."

I wasn't always sure whether Uncle Pinch was putting me on with some of the family names he came up with, and I didn't know what to say next.

He peered at me keenly. "But that particular piece of dirty family laundry isn't your primary concern."

I couldn't risk telling him about Mother's visitor, so I asked if he and Aunt Jerilyn were really getting divorced.

Uncle Pinch poured himself another glass from the pitcher. "Your Aunt Jerilyn," as he made a little toasting gesture, "is nothing more and nothing less than a gold-digger. We're all well shut of her." He swirled the glass in his hand, drummed his fingers on the table for what seemed like a full minute, and then winced.

"My brother believes I drink because of your grandfather. I let him believe that." He tossed it back. "Your grandfather was a homosexual."

Uncle Pinch looked to see if I understood, his face tilting down a little and both eyebrows raised, as if he were staring out over the top rims of eyeglasses, except Uncle Pinch didn't wear them. His eyes were blue as ocean sky on a clear day, startlingly true but also with the color bled out a little. Mine were steel-gray.

I nodded and pretended that I did understand.

"My brother has this unshakeable conviction that I've never recovered from learning this scandalous news." He sighed. "Another of my brother's many unshakeable convictions is that it isn't right for him to be the family patriarch, as I'm the firstborn. I have no head for business, never have—if it's left to me we'll have to sell off some land soon. Not that it would be the first time: Whittakers used to own the entirety of Oak Grove. Even so, it's clearly best for

the family, so he really needs to man up."

Uncle Pinch drained the pitcher into his glass and looked out at the horizon. "What my brother doesn't understand is that there's more than one way to be a Whittaker." Then he gave me another penetrating over-the-spectacles glance. "We're so unlike, he and I, for brothers."

He didn't seem wholly pleased with what he saw in my expression. "But, as I always say, if you can't lie to your family, then who can you lie to?"

After the conversation with Uncle Pinch I was no less worried than I'd been before and twice as confused. If anything I needed to talk with Father even more. He'd arrived while I was with Uncle Pinch and was out on the patio reading *Forbes*. Mother was going over dinner plans with Cook.

I said, "Welcome back. How was your trip?"

He put the magazine down, reached out arms-crossed to clasp my hands, and gave me a pirouette. "It was okay, but I missed my girl. How is she?"

There were so many things I wanted to say, but the only one that came out was about school. "Okay, I guess. There was a boy today who asked to carry my books."

I had Father's full attention. "Not Stanton Lowell?"

"No. Rory Bradford."

He probably noticed that I was having trouble swallowing, but he didn't let on. "And what might not be okay about that? The Bradford family is eminently respectable."

I said I didn't know. He didn't prompt me, and after five heartbeats I continued, "I let him, but I don't know if I should have. Father, how do you tell if love is real?"

I lost track of the heartbeats this time as he stared right into me, his eyes suddenly moist and his lower lip pushing his mouth from a half-smile to an inverted horseshoe. He took a deep breath. "Let's go for a walk, Roxanne."

He led me to where the curving knife-edge I knew as Smuggler's Point jutted out from the bluff and formed Smuggler's Cove in its lee. Neither of us said anything until we sat on the bench bolted into the rock there, and my father was silent even then.

I said, "Louisa's parents are divorced like Uncle Pinch and Aunt Jerilyn are going to be. Louisa doesn't get to see her father hardly ever."

He let out a long sigh and inclined his head toward mine. "Despite your uncle's circumstances, it's important for you to understand that divorce is not the Whittaker way. Whittakers aspire to do what's right for the family, and what's right for the family means what is profitable and consistent with social position. Divorce meets neither of those criteria."

He leaned forward, and I followed his gaze. He pointed to a seal out past the breakers who seemed to be looking straight at us. "The first Whittaker to land on these shores, Jeremiah Whittaker, did what was right for his family. His prospects in England weren't the brightest, and he pulled up roots and bought this property and all of what is now the town of Oak Grove from the Indians for ten woolen blankets and a handful of beads. It has turned out to be an excellent investment, and he improved the family's social position immeasurably."

He sighed again. "Whittakers sometimes can fall short of expectations for proper comportment, as your uncle has done, but that doesn't change the expectations." We watched the ferry heading out for Provincetown.

When it became a featureless dot, Father broke the quiet. "It's time you learned about your grandfather, Winslow Colefax Whittaker, and how he died. Your mother hasn't told you, has she?"

"She said he died in a fall."

He considered that. "Yes, a fall is what your mother would say. The full story is that he fell right here, right from this spot, and it wasn't an accident—it was suicide. We rarely speak of it, because, as you might imagine, it was not behavior proper for a Whittaker.

"The reason he committed suicide," Father continued, "was that he was being blackmailed, and he was being blackmailed because he was a homosexual. Do you know what that means?"

"A boy at school gets picked on for being one, but the other boys use a different word for it," I said. "I don't know if he really is one."

He nodded gravely. "Your grandfather's suicide upset me for a long time, but I finally came, if not to accept it, to understand. It wasn't paying out the money, I shouldn't think, or even the gossip and slander that was sure to follow any revelation. No, I think it was your grandfather truly loved the man. He couldn't live with the betrayal."

Father turned away from the sea to look directly at me for just a moment and then turned back. "The answer to your question, Roxanne, is that love is real if you are willing to do what must be done to sustain it."

It had turned out the question that just seemed to pop out of my head hadn't been about Stanton Lowell and Rory Bradford at all. This friend of Grandfather's, though, didn't sound worth the sacrifice. "After your father died," I asked, "why didn't the man try to get more money from you?"

"Oh, he did. I told him to go ahead and tell everyone if he wanted to. The Whittaker family has survived scandals before. I never heard from him again."

He sniffed once, as if he agreed with my unspoken assessment, and then went on, in a more measured tone. "I finally made peace with the suicide, and I had this bench put here when I did, but poor Pynchon never got over thinking of himself as the son of a homosexual. He has a psychiatrist for a brother, and still

he's drinking himself to death, and there's nothing you or I or anyone else can do about it."

This sounded a little different from Uncle Pinch's version.

"I'm having to take over as de facto head of the family. Your uncle will never leave any descendants to whom I could turn things over, so it's not merely a temporary stewardship. Eventually you and your mother and I will come to live here at The Roses."

Father shifted his attention from the ocean to the knife-edge and its little bay scoured deep by the action of the tides. "We let people believe the legend that Blackbeard used to hide out in the cove, but the truth is that people called it Smuggler's Cove before the pirate Edward Teach was born and that Whittakers owned this land then too."

He was telling me that Whittakers had been smugglers before the Revolution when that profession was both profitable and socially acceptable. Probably patriotic, too, back in the day.

"The original names were, of course, Whittaker Point and Whittaker Cove, but over time the locals consistently preferred the more...colorful...nomenclature."

A little breeze had picked up, bringing with it the salty smell of history as Father continued, "The Blackbeard legend was planted by Temperance Endicott Whittaker, Jeremiah's great-granddaughter. What Whittakers cannot change, Whittakers co-opt."

He looked right at me again for another long moment, and his face held a smile that twisted into wistfulness. "You're an intelligent girl, Roxanne, and observant." Then he broke off the direct gaze, and we both stared out at the sea again. The tide was mostly out, and the two rocks called the Buck and the Faun were plainly visible. That's when he spoke the words I've remembered every day since. "Whatever happens, I want you to know I couldn't be prouder of you."

After dinner that evening, I followed the path to the bench on the bluff and sat alone listening to the surf crash against the rocks in the dark.

Father knew.

Father knew about Mother and Jerry Aberdeen. He knew, and he didn't want people to know he knew.

I sat on the bench and turned all the way to the right to where the sun was just setting. Then I rotated back very slowly and catalogued everything in view: the Tudor manor house with its reflecting pool and twelve bedrooms, the thousand acres of grounds, the stables where I loved to ride, the rose gardens tended so scrupulously by generations of Whittaker women, the swimming pool and tennis court, the deep blue waters of Whittaker Cove where the family docked their boats, the finger of cliff curving out to Whittaker Point, and the ocean

beyond that stretched away to Europe. Farther to the left lay the beach that was perfect for sunbathing and clambakes, the game fields, the garages, and the groundskeeper's cottage. The glow of the sunset spread all the way around the horizon.

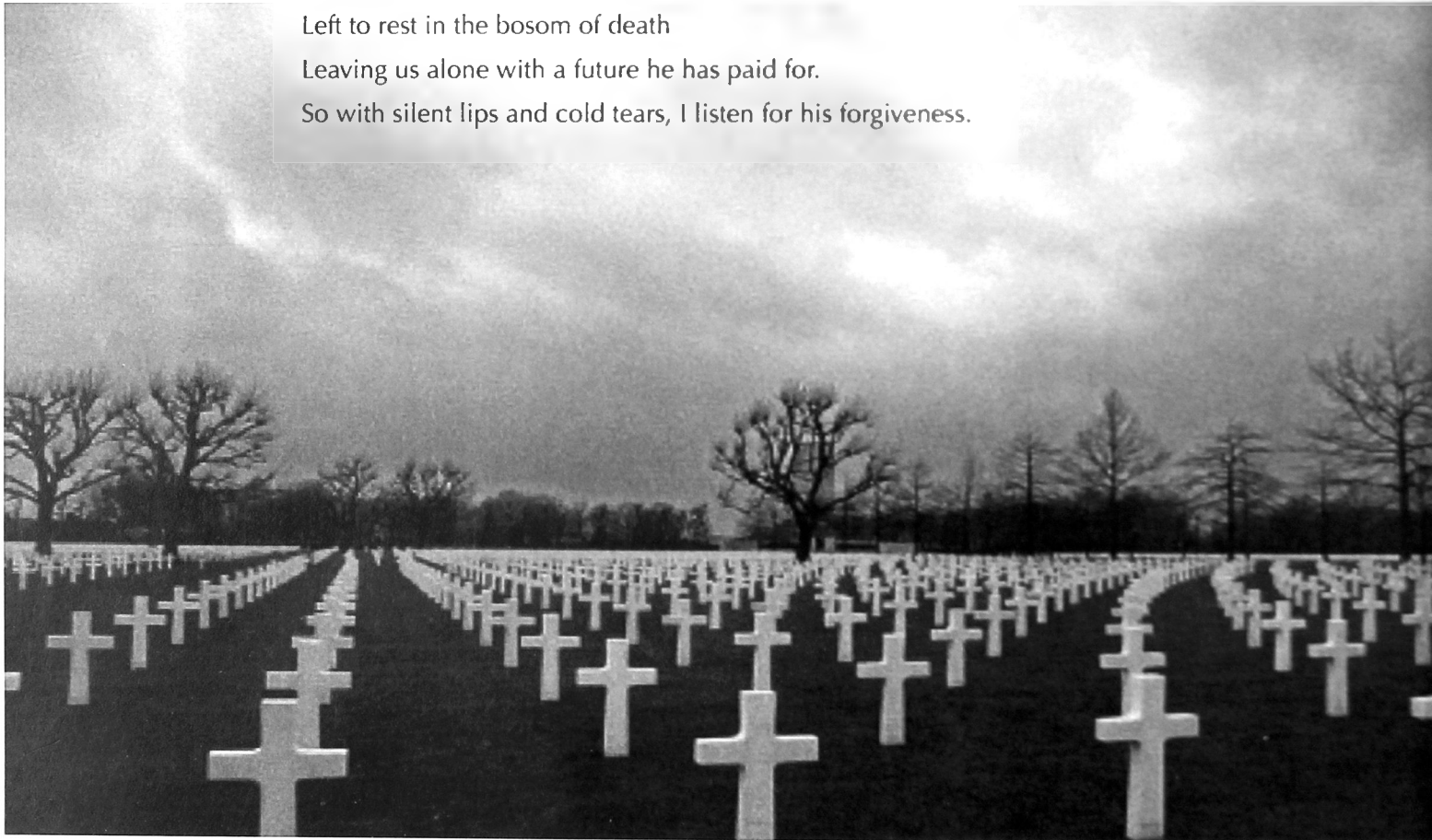


His Finest Hour

by Donovan Bradshaw

On the small straw bed I would lie,
Idle in body, but mind ablaze.
My father gone, a betrayer, in the trenches afar
Left to fight in another's war
Leaving us to stand under the world's crushing air.
So with bared teeth and hot tears, I scorn his name and mine.

I kneel down at the soft grey stone.
A soft goodbye, but a heart torn asunder.
My father, a hero, gone to the heavens above
Left to rest in the bosom of death
Leaving us alone with a future he has paid for.
So with silent lips and cold tears, I listen for his forgiveness.



Back to Daylight

by Maura Gage Cavell

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

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

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

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

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

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



Float Inside

by Maura Gage Cavell

Dark, tan skin
like gold, wheat-deep,

blue jewel-like eyes
filled with purpose and power;

he moves stealthily
like a lion,

comes toward her,
her blood pulling her

toward him as if he
commanded it;

if they'd had—together—
babies—they might

have had his power,
his beauty, her dreaminess,

and a touch of his magic.
They would have been as

beautiful as paintings—
this combination an amazing

melding of darkness and light,
moon and sun, stars and ocean—

but, instead of babies,
they make the brightest

love, sparks so electric
the world is disappearing

as they float inside this place
of magic, this green-bright joy,

a delight so warm, fulfilling,
magnetic, a full-blown hurricane

of excitement, that to live
without it is like being

bruised from the loss—
right down to the marrow.

So, they shift like shadows,
never certain if this brightest

wonder, this translucent dream,
will recur and shift

behind the midnight magnetic hope
and land them into the someday

finally arriving,
a salty ocean love,

alive and never having to
splinter all apart.



thirst

by Lee Clark Zumpe

A trinity of live oaks writhes
scratching the woolpack of dirty skies—
shameless beggars.

A vague whisper swells,
barking out thunder offering its promise—
teasing parched flora.

the storm in us

by Lee Clark Zumpe

we're a jumble of
thunderheads against
August afternoon—blue

rain-slick streets choked
with lethargic traffic,
headlights half-dimmed,

flooded gutters bursting,
swirling eddies leading
down dark storm drains,

umbrellas bobbing on
narrow sidewalks forming
Chinese dragons.



Soloist

by John Grey

He purses, he blows, he coddles,
he skitters his fingers down the keys
like mice across a floorboard.
When breath shrieks through that brass body,
the saxophone doesn't know what hit it.
Forget the drums, the guitar, the vibes,
the guy bent over his piano.
Until the soloist steps out front,
brandishing his sax,
the music has just been toying with us.
The tune, so far, is
just an elongated starter's orders.
But now, the race begins
in turn, strident, garish,
then tenor sweet,
tasteful as birdsong.
Throat bulges, eyes stretch to bursting point,
sweat bathes the forehead.
In his head, he's Bechet, he's Hodges,
he's Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young.
Sound makes mockery of sense.
Notes burn, are then extinguished
by the next.
The melody is shaken by the root.
From table to table,
mouths are too amazed
for conversation.
Drinks freeze inches from their thirst.
Feet can't follow enough to tap,
so the head, the heart, must work the beat.



Cowboy Bob

by John Grey

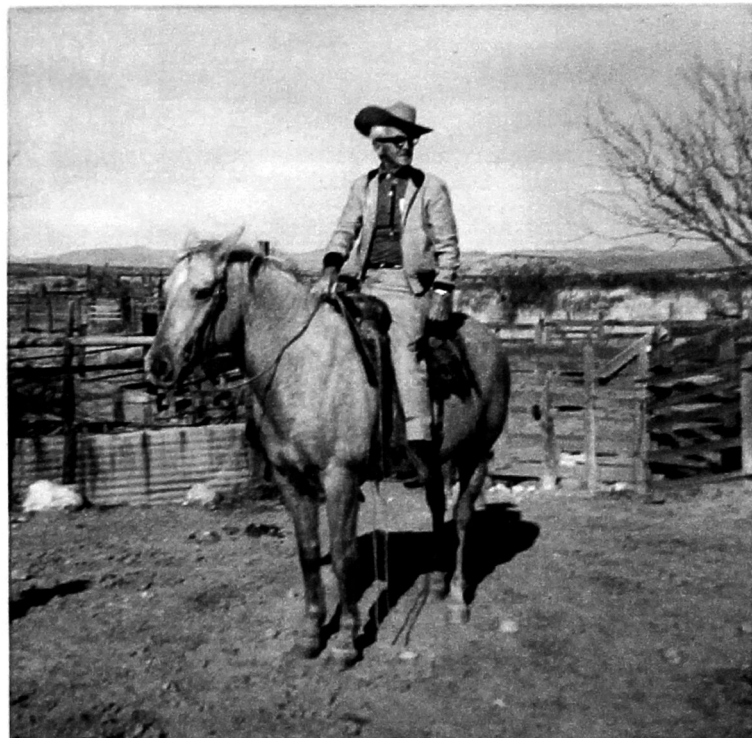
He grew up on cowboy movies.
He was raised on black and white
Saturday matinee B fare.
In his adolescence, he matured
to color and night programming
and heroes with a darker side.

He could tell you about Anthony Mann
and Randolph Scott and James Stewart
in *The Man From Laramie*.
He saw himself as the loner with the rifle
who rides into town and makes a difference.
Catch him when he thinks nobody's looking.
Those arthritic arms and hands
are still practicing their draw.

He complains that young kids today
are all into superheroes,
not the flesh and blood man
who put his life on the line
on a dusty main street
against a bunch of outlaws
each as mean as ten pit bulls.

He's been diagnosed with cancer.
It's not like the Dalton Gang or the Youngers.
He can't face it down.
His trigger finger's wasted.
It's more like one of those crazed comic villains—
a Doctor Octopus
as opposed to a Jesse James.
It wants to take over the world,
not a few acres of rangeland.

He gets radiation treatment
at the hospital.
If it were a movie,
no way he'd go see it.



Courtney and the Spark

by Robert Kerbeck

His paddle hit the water like a spear. *Fuuuwwsht*, she heard. Then the other side, *Fuuuwwsht*. Courtney stared at the distant figure, shirtless in the cold, as he paddled the large board across the smooth, early-morning face of Donner Lake. There was a black dog sitting at his feet like canine royalty. Court, as her father had nicknamed her, rose each morning for the last three weeks, cup of coffee with four sugars in hand, wishing the man to come closer than he ever came. It was only his paddle blade she heard. Only he struck the water with such force, the sound audible in the dawn before traffic on the water and the nearby road severed



their connection. Even then, she sometimes had to scooch her big rump forward onto the edge of her dock in order to hear him.

There were other less powerful board riders of all ages, sexes, and sizes, though none as large as her. They rode their stand-up paddleboards, SUPs they called them, in circles, triangles, and drunken polygons, depending on their skill level. The activity had

exploded in popularity. It seemed each day there were more and more, their blades slicing and carving their way to joy.

Donner Lake was calm in the morning. That was when Court was going to try, before the wind came up and the kids on wakeboards and Jet Skis chopped up its tranquility. She'd bought the equipment the prior evening—extra-large board and paddle, men's wetsuit size XL, as well as an emergency personal floatation device—from a skeptical teenage salesperson at the local snowboard shop, which also carried SUPs. She'd even set a date, only two days away, and put it on the Union Pacific train calendar in her father's rustic-gone-feral cabin, now hers.

In the parlance of the local Truckee real estate agents, the chalet was lake direct, which meant the decrepit one-story cabin was as close to the water as possible. There was no setback as required for new construction. The dock, too, was longer than currently allowed, with a small private sandy beach below. There were no cabins like it remaining. The others had been torn down and replaced with multilevel, Silicon Valley type mega-mansions that took up every inch of buildable lot and blotted out the view of the lake from the road. Her father's cabin was known around the town as the Mickey Mouse chalet because it was in such disrepair. The roof had been

patched so many times it looked like an AIDS quilt, with four separate TV antennas, all hand-installed by her father, in order to pick up the signals of as many baseball games as possible.

Agents swarmed her with brochures and emails that filled her mailboxes, real and virtual. She couldn't set foot in the small town without one of them, usually an older woman with too much makeup, coming up to her in the aisle of the Big Chief supermarket to find out what she was doing with her valuable eyesore. "What are your plans?" they would repeat again and again, but Court had no plan. Her father's calendar had only one thing written for the entire month of September. Under the twenty-ninth, circled in red, she'd written—Change your life.

She and Ricky were supposed to move down together from San Francisco to be closer to her father and to give living on the lake a go. She'd known Ricky wasn't a fix-it type of guy, but it still astonished her that changing a light bulb was the only home improvement he'd attempt.

"I'll just screw it up," he'd say.

"How do you know if you don't try?" She pleaded with him to fix something in their apartment. She thought if he could do it once, it would give him the confidence to springboard himself (and their relationship) forward. Apparently, Ricky didn't want to springboard. First off, he was too damn heavy, weighing close to three hundred and fifty pounds. No, his focus was on painting scenes of mayhem and destruction featuring barely clad female warriors with spear tips for nipples. His only other priority was getting high all day and smoking the top-quality weed his medical marijuana card enabled him to purchase. Selling his art and getting good weed were the two reasons he gave for letting her go, alone, to Donner Lake.

Court's father, known as Papa or Papa Joe, had taught her the basics of home improvement. She'd inherited his tool kit, as well as the cabin, when his Alzheimer's took over and left him living in his long johns, unable to remember to dress and eating little more than the Donner party did and they had starved to death only a few hundred feet from the cabin in the winter of 1846. She'd bought Papa a walking cart in the spring to get food from the closest market. It had worked fairly well through the summer, but the only market within walking distance closed on Labor Day, when the tourist kids willing to spend \$7.50 for a Royal Bomber Pop headed back to Silicon Valley. Papa couldn't drive anymore because he had his license taken the same week he got the cart. She'd called the state, anonymously, a few weeks earlier to report him as unsafe. Within a week, he received a letter to come in for a test, which he forgot about. Finally, when she was down visiting, Court took him to the local DMV.

"I'll take that, sir." The black woman behind the desk plucked the license from Papa's see-through fingers.

"But I'm going to need that to drive."

"No, Mr. McMillan, you won't be driving anymore."

"Dr. McMillan," Court said.

"Oh, a doctor? What kind?" the desk worker asked with the faintest of interest.

"Aeronautical engineering with a focus on statistical turbulence theory."

The worker stopped typing on her ancient desktop computer to glance at Papa dubiously. His response seemed to make her feel better about taking the license.

"He's telling the truth," Court said. "He has a Ph.D. He worked on the B-52 bomber, and he worked at NASA," she said, desperately trying to remember the highlights of her father's career in order to mark him, in this woman's mind, as something more than a demented old man at the end of the road. She almost told the woman that her father had top-secret security clearance that she'd recently found secret military documents in the cabin's garage, but Court worried the woman might turn her in, even though the papers were over forty years old. The worker wasn't listening. She was too busy stamping the Unsafe Driver License Revocation forms.

"I'm sorry, Dr. McMillan. You didn't pass the test. It's not safe for you—or for others. You don't want to hurt anyone, do you now?"

"No, of course not."

"You're going to be fine. Our public transportation is pretty good. You might just meet someone special on the bus," the worker said and moved to pat Papa's age-spot riddled hand, until she saw the look on Court's face and stopped.

Maybe Papa would be fine (though she doubted it), but Court wouldn't be. She spent that chilly spring evening sobbing in one of the cabin's tiny twin beds, unable to forgive herself for what she'd done, and for what she was going to do soon.

After that, whenever she visited and it was time to go out, Papa would stride to the garage to start up his Olds Delta 88. He wasn't physically infirm and had the leanness of a survivor of eighty-six years. He'd hunker down behind the wheel on the burnt orange velour interior.

"Hop in," he'd say.

"Papa, you can't drive anymore. They took your license."

She couldn't take the look he gave her, since each time the news came as a shock. Her father would stare as if she were crazy, but somehow—no matter how bad a day he was having—he knew at the same time that she was right.

She turned to Plan B, the bus, got the local schedule and rode the route with him over the summer to the Super Chief. When she sent him on his own, following surreptitiously in her Volvo, he got off at the wrong spot. In Truckee, where harsh winters came early and stayed forever, a mistake like that could be fatal.

"Papa," she said, after she secured him inside her car. "You're going to the Super Chief. It's on Donner Pass road. Why did you get off the bus early?"

"I'm going to Mike's."

"No, Mike's just closed. Remember, he closes every year right after Labor Day."

She watched him take this in.

"I know that."

"So why did you get off the bus?"

"Apples are cheaper at Mike's."

If he couldn't get food by himself up here in the Sierra Mountains, it was time for intervention.

"Well, I'm not wasting my money," he said and looked out the window as she held in her tears. Even though Court made the two-hour-plus drive every weekend, winter was coming. There'd be times the I-80 would get shut down, and no matter what, she wouldn't be able to get to him. Papa had outlived his friends and neighbors, and he did not know his new neighbors. Certainly they didn't see them over the walls of their compounds, though occasionally Court would see their Bentleys or Hummers, all with tinted windows, as they pulled in or out of garages larger than the Mickey Mouse chalet. She might have considered asking them to keep an eye on Papa—despite the fact that they'd been calling the city about the state of the cabin—but come winter these people would be long gone. Donner Lake was their summer home. Papa would be on his own.

"My name is Courtney McMillan. I have an appointment," she told the gangly man seated behind the glass window inside the Truckee Family Care Center. He was wearing a black turtleneck and blue jeans. He put down the mountain-climbing magazine he'd been reading.

"Welcome."

"I called about my father. He has Alzheimer's."

Court noted that the man was not just skinny but practically emaciated. She was probably twice his weight, though they were around the same age. What was it with these Donner Lake people? He was nearly as thin as Papa. Was starving themselves part of some strange homage to the lake's namesakes?

"Name?"

"I just told you, Courtney McMillan."

"I got that," he said quietly. His black eyes were huge or maybe it was just that his cheeks were so sunken in. He was tall, too, and barely seemed to fit in the small reception office.

"Oh, you mean my father. Sorry. Joseph McMillan, Dr. Joseph McMillan."

The man leaned forward in his desk chair and craned his neck outside of the reception window Court stood in front of. There was no one else in the lobby except for Papa, who sat and smiled politely when he saw the man's giant head.

"Okay, why don't you come on in? I'll give you the tour."

He motioned her toward a door that led inside the facility and buzzed her in. He was waiting on the other side, basketball player tall.

"Hi, I'm Aaron Rondo, but everyone calls me Rondo."

He put out his hand and she took it, watching her pudgy one vanish inside his rough catcher's mitt of a hand. She walked past him and started into the facility.

"Aren't you forgetting something?"

She checked. Purse, yes. Phone, yes. Keys, yes.

"I don't think so."

"Well, if your dad is going to live here, I think he should see if he likes it first."

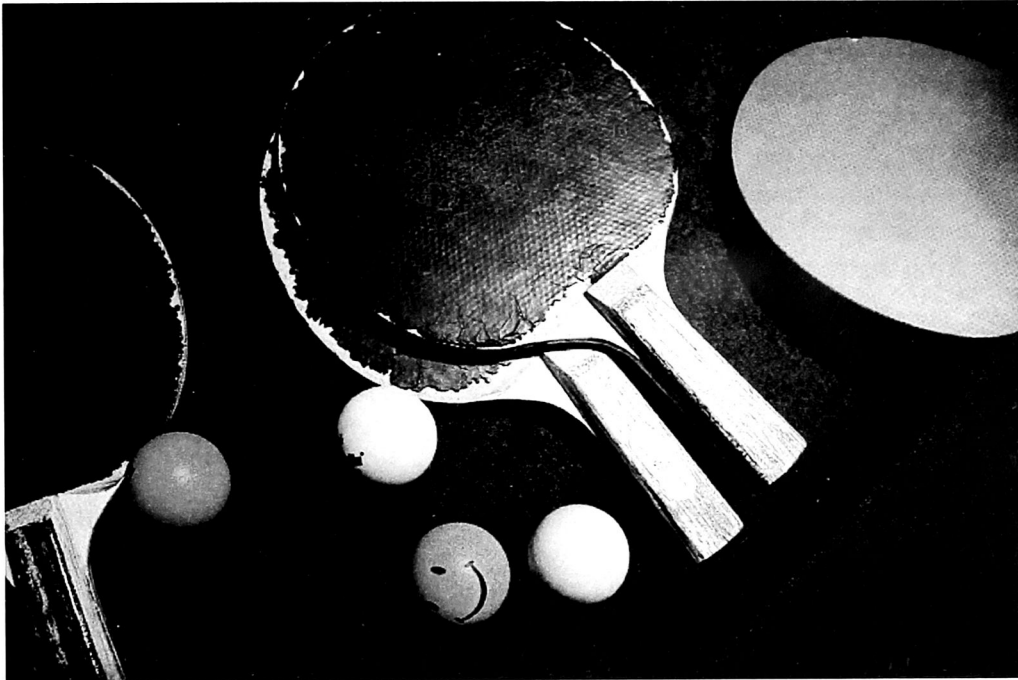
Embarrassed, Court tried to shrink as Rondo glided by her, almost rubbing against her. She was surprised by his gracefulness, his airplane-wing arm holding the door open. He gave a catcall whistle to get Papa's attention.

"Hey, Dr. Mac, you play ping pong?"

On the twenty-ninth, the wind was blowing hard first thing, wrecking the surface of Donner Lake. The timing of the bad weather caused her to question everything about the paddleboard enterprise. First off, even with the wetsuit she could barely get into, the water was going to be freezing when she fell, and she was going to fall, a lot. She'd watched other newbies kerplunk themselves again and again into the cold lake, and Court was bigger than all of them. Why didn't she just join the gym? Why couldn't she get over her fear of people looking at her the way she looked at herself? She'd thought, on the relative privacy of the lake (for the most part) and in a tight wetsuit that made her appear round rather than obese, she could find an exercise to do each and every morning to lose weight. The access couldn't have been easier. She just had to step off her dock onto the paddleboard. If she got good and didn't fall, she wouldn't even get wet. Plus, after the equipment purchase, the activity was completely free. Now, the first black clouds since she'd put Papa in the home sucked the motivation out of her and down into the pit where she'd lived since she realized Ricky would never marry her. That was over three years ago. She wasn't fat then, only heavy. Why had she stayed? Why had she wasted so much time? She wondered if it was too early for chocolate.

That evening, though, was perfect for Court to go off her new diet and over to the Big Chief to stock up on cookies, pies, and chocolate cake. On her way out of the market, the guilt of what she carried in the two brown bags gnawed at her. She decided to unload some of it to Papa, who could use as many extra calories as possible. He liked sweets if they were handed to him, but they didn't sing to him in dreams the way they did to her.

The center's reception desk was empty, not unexpected since it was after nine. She used the code family members were given and opened the door to surprise Papa with dessert, but his room was empty too. There were few people anywhere. Court wasn't worried because the center's residents were elderly and likely in bed, but she heard voices and followed them to the entertainment room, where her father stood, glistening in the fluorescent light, playing ping pong, surrounded by a crowd of cheering residents.



He was playing Rondo, running the skinny colossus from side to side until the younger man missed. She didn't even know her father could play ping pong, but there he was hitting the ball as though there was nothing wrong with him.

"Where did you learn to play ping pong?" Court asked, incredulously.

"In the Navy, but I played the most at NASA," he said, then served the ball. Rondo smacked it into the net.

"Your dad's a ping pong master. I'm lucky to return one serve. I would never have accepted him if I'd known that. He's making me look bad." Rondo smiled and went under the table to retrieve the ball. He had to go all the way to his knees first and then slide on them while scrunched down so he wouldn't hit his head. While Rondo was easing himself under the table, Papa looked at Court with an expression she'd seen before, when he wasn't sure why he couldn't drive anymore.

"Dad?" he said and cocked his head.

What they told her would happen one day, had happened. He didn't know who she was. She felt wobbly, like she'd just stepped on her paddleboard and was hanging on for dear life.

"Papa, it's me. Courtney."

Now he was confused, as he had been in their garage sitting behind the wheel of the Olds Delta 88.

Court ran out just as Rondo was extricating himself from under the table.

He knocked on her window, startling her. For a moment, she thought it might be

Papa, sneaking out to say he'd been dehydrated from the game and lost his wits for a second, but it was Rondo.

"Hey."

"Hi."

"I'm really sorry about that," he said, shivering in a gray t-shirt outside the car. September wasn't over and the Truckee nights were already biting. She saw he was wet from the game. "Can I get in for a minute?" he asked.

"Oh, sure." She scrambled to hide the wrappers from the individually wrapped double chocolate, chocolate chip cookies that were her favorite. She'd just gotten rid of the evidence when he opened the door, folded himself up, and then down into the passenger seat.

"Can we not talk about what just happened?" she asked.

"Sure."

"The seat goes back."

Rondo reached around but couldn't find the latch, so she leaned over and helped him, her bosom on his knee causing him to jerk. Finally, he pushed back while she held the latch, but the seat wouldn't budge. Then she remembered the bag of paddleboard stuff on the floor directly behind him.

"Wait." Court turned and twisted herself into the backseat and grabbed the bag. She tried to pull it but it ripped, forcing her to throw the items one by one onto the backseat. Because of his height, Rondo was easily able to see them.

"Whoa, new wetsuit."

"I'm taking it back."

"It doesn't fit?"

"I just don't need it."

She turned back to face forward, but his attention stayed on the backseat.

"You got a personal floatation device too."

"I'm returning it all tomorrow."

Now he turned toward her, his head held at an angle so to not scrape the roof.

"Why did you buy it?"

He wasn't a handsome man; his face was scary in the bad lighting inside her Volvo, though being crushed uncomfortably in the improperly adjusted front seat was probably the main reason for his grim expression. But, he did seem kind.

"It was just an idea I had to lose some weight. Another in a long list. For example, I'm on this diet called The Wrest. You buy this app and pay a monthly fee and then you take a picture of everything you eat. If the food is bad for you or you have too much, you have to 'wrest' the food off your plate or an alarm sounds. It's really annoying."

They both spotted a cookie wrapper she'd missed on the dashboard of the car. Court

quickly grabbed it.

"Does it work?"

"Does it look like it?"

He smiled. At least he had nice teeth. Nice and nice teeth. He was already two things up on Ricky.

"How long have you worked at the center?" she asked.

"I'm part time. I do construction too, but winter's coming so it gets kind of slow."

"What kind of construction?"

"Carpentry, mainly, but I can do a bit of everything. Except painting. I do not do painting." He said the last part like it was a punch line and she was supposed to laugh, so she did, but it only served to make him nervous and they both got quiet.

"I've have to get back. I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

"I'm not."

"Yeah, I can understand that."

"Can you? Do you see fathers not recognize their own child for the first time often?"

She didn't mean it to sound the way it did, mean and bitter, but it drove him to open the door. He pulled one knee into his chest, then swung it out onto the ground, then did the same with his other leg. When he was clear, he stood and disappeared from her view. She leaned down and tried to find him like he was the moon, lurking somewhere just out of sight. Then, he was knocking on her window again, and she lowered it this time.

"If you want to hang onto that stuff," he said, pointing at the SUP equipment on the backseat, "I'll teach you how to paddleboard. I go every morning."

It was not possible.

"Well, me and my—"

"Dog. You have a black dog."

"Yeah, I guess you've seen us."

"I hear you."

He looked as confused as Papa had.

"I hear your paddle strike the water. It's what inspired me to buy all that stupid stuff."

"Oh, now it's my fault."

"Yes, Rondo, it is."

"Then, the least I can do is teach you how."



Privacy

by Brian Glaser

My daughter has a red Moleskine notebook and the ambition to keep a journal every day.

I began when I was older than she is now and wrote in a cryptic script so that my emotional disloyalties wouldn't be found out.

She sometimes writes on our bed, leaning against the headboard with her legs folded, and she leaves the book on her bedside table when she goes to school.

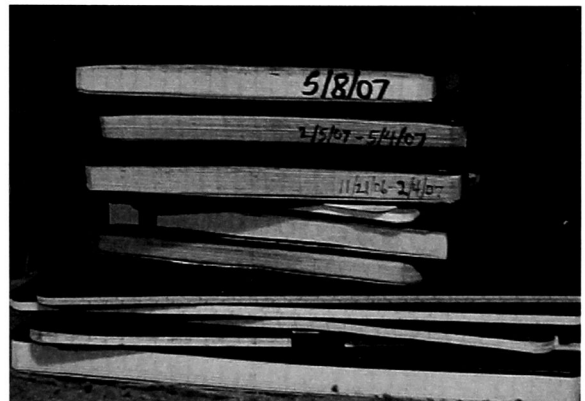
What a wonderful thing to have discovered a project for her new ability to write.

What a blessing to look forward to what she has to tell herself every day.

How long will the journal last? When will she begin to be apprehensive about what she has to say?

So I ask myself privately, remembering that privacy protects not only the one with misgivings,

but also those who don't have them yet, those who don't have them but could.



The Heron

by Brian Glaser

My mother sees visitations from my father in butterflies and hummingbirds—even squirrels.

Which is why, returning after the interment of my father's ashes to her home, I knew we had to summon her from the house to see the white heron in her yard.

I watched it first, long enough to see it pluck a lizard from beneath a bush and chomp on it a few times before pulling it down its gullet.

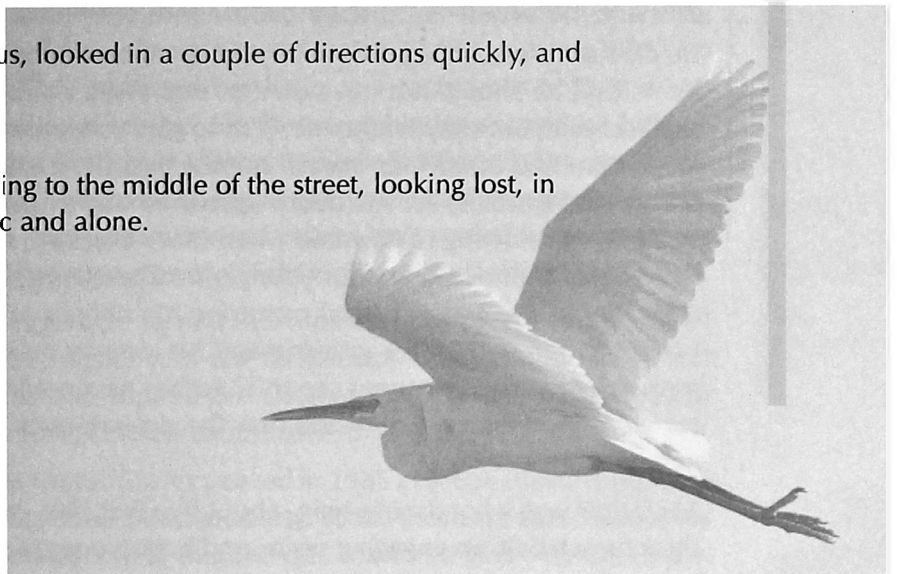
She saw a visitation but seemed self-consciously subdued about it, as if her response was somewhat vitiated by my skepticism, or rather the skepticism she thought I'd have.

Because I was at least affected by her reaction, and I wondered what my father would have made of this coincidence, part of me imagining he was somewhere nearby to know of it.

And this made it especially sad for me when we returned to the yard after dinner and saw the heron still hunting there.

It walked a pace or two toward us, looked in a couple of directions quickly, and flapped listlessly off the lawn,

rising maybe three feet and floating to the middle of the street, looking lost, in search of something else, beatific and alone.



Ducks Are Not Chickens

by Susan Knox

My father, Robert Bruce Unkefer, was named by his mother, Mary Elizabeth, for the medieval Scottish king, Robert “the Bruce.” Mary Elizabeth loved books and had read *A Grandfather’s Tale, a History of Scotland* written by Sir Walter Scott for his grandson. Scott told of Robert “the Bruce” hiding in Ireland after his troops were defeated by the English. While lying on his bed looking up at the cabin ceiling, he spotted a spider trying to attach a thread between two beams. Bruce watched her make six attempts, and it brought to mind his six defeats. He decided if the spider connected on the seventh effort, he would try a seventh time to capture the throne. The spider made it. Bruce went on to gain the Scottish crown and rule for twenty-three years.

Did my grandmother name her fifth baby Robert Bruce because she hoped to imbue her son with the same courage and persistence as the Scottish king, or did she simply like the name? Mary Elizabeth died before I was born, so I never got to ask her, but judging by the number of times my father told the story, his name made him feel special.

My father was the middle child of nine. He was said to be Mary Elizabeth’s favorite, but my mother said his siblings looked down on him because they thought he wasn’t as smart as they were. I’ve thought about this over the years and have concluded he was simply different. I think Mary Elizabeth recognized his sensitive nature, not valued or understood in a boy, and tried to safeguard him. Maybe the other children were jealous of her protection. He was a careful person who hated to make a mistake, easily took offense, and found it difficult to express his feelings (you know siblings—they seize on what they consider deficiencies and tease, which probably made him even more cautious.)

He died of colon cancer at age sixty-six, and I mentioned in conversations with my aunts that he should not have died of that disease. I believed he got insufficient medical care, but they said to me, “I’m so glad you know this. He always ate poorly, loved ham and other fatty meat.” In other words, it was his fault. Their pouncing on his responsibility for his death saddened and angered me for my father. The aunts were referring to the time when Mary Elizabeth had died at age fifty-three. Father was eighteen with four younger brothers at home. He used to fry ham for their dinner. He was proud of nurturing his siblings and often told us the story. I think it was part of his grieving and his way to make up for the loss of their mother. How could they not see this? Father never talked about his mother when we were growing up—evidence that the despair over her early death was deep and unexpressed.

My father was a handsome man, about five feet, five inches tall with brown eyes, thick brown hair, an engaging smile, and boyish energy. He was shy with strangers,

his co-workers, and his children. My first memory of him was after he'd broken his leg when the work horses he was driving were spooked by a pheasant flying out of the wheat stalks. He sat in our living room, his cast-covered leg supported on a pine-green ottoman. I was two and hesitant to approach him. He surprised me with his welcoming smile and held out his arms to take me on his lap. My vivid memory of gratitude for his openness tells me he was usually timid, even with his first-born.

Behind my father's shyness was a quick laugh, a vulnerability to criticism, and an enthusiasm for learning about the natural world. My father was a farmer like his father and his father before him. They did not own large farms, but they were able to raise livestock, grow grains to feed the animals, and provide fruits, milk, meat, vegetables, and eggs for their large families.

Father married Marie Worley in 1938, and they built a bungalow north of my grandfather's farm just outside the village of Minerva, Ohio. Father was working for his father, farming and working on his sawmill.

One summer morning in 1946 my father stopped by Minerva Grain and Feed and learned the Elliott property was for sale. In what I can only imagine was a fit of ecstasy at the thought of having his own farm, Father made an offer on the spot. With three children in a two-bedroom house, Father and Mother must have been talking about housing alternatives. My dad probably thought the farm was a perfect solution. I can see him hurrying home to my mother with his thrilling news. I imagine he was shocked when she wasn't enthusiastic. He offered to withdraw from the deal, but she told him no—he'd shaken hands. He couldn't sully his good name by reneging.

This behavior was typical of my mother. While she was a strong woman, she always deferred to my father. I've always believed she wanted to strengthen his confidence, maybe as his mother intended when she named him. My parents' relationship was a love affair. It was clear to me—there was a special look that often passed between them—that they valued each other above anyone else, including their children. My father always kissed Mother good-bye, even if he was just walking to the barn. And, he kissed her hello and patted her bottom when he returned. When we gathered around the kitchen table for supper, he held us in check. "Don't start eating until your mother is seated. After all, she made this for you, so honor the cook." He loved to tease her. One night at supper he said, "Marie, you like change so much. I'm surprised you haven't traded me in for a new husband." Their relationship was a wonderful example for their children.

We moved to the eighty-eight-acre farm in northeastern Ohio, two miles east of Minerva. The three-storied, eighty-year-old farmhouse was painted white and surrounded by maple trees that topped the slate roofline. It was a pretty place with a scarlet barn, milk house, chicken coop, corncrib, and shed.

The number of farms in the United States peaked in 1935 at seven million and were in decline when Father bought the Elliott property. Today there are two million. My father's siblings are a good example of this change. The three girls—Helen, Grace,



and Mildred—married professional men and moved away from the countryside. Of the six boys, only Kenneth farmed, but he also had a sawmill, which produced most of his income. The other brothers moved to Columbus, Ohio, and Phoenix, Arizona and formed their own businesses. A generation earlier, most if not all would have become farmers or married farmers. Only my father tried to make a go of farming.

Daddy's farm was his passion. I can still see him perched on the metal seat of his school-bus-yellow Minneapolis Moline tractor, plowing, harrowing, or planting his fields with an old brown-felt fedora on his head and an R. G. Dunn cigar clamped between his teeth. He was a hard worker, and I watched him clean cow udders every morning and every evening before attaching them to the electric milking machine, load the manure spreader after the cows and pigs wintered in the barn, or butcher a hog in the fall with the help of boyhood friends Oscar and Johnny Carson. The only time I saw him sit and relax was when he read *The Farm Journal* or we had visitors.

With Daddy's dedication, I've wondered why our neighbors with large families were able to live off the land, but he had to work as a linotype operator at the *Minerva Leader*. I still don't know the answer. Maybe others had more tillable acreage; maybe they cut corners; maybe they were better managers. I do know Father disapproved of our neighbors' ways, saying they didn't respect the land, and they cheated their customers by hiding rotten strawberries in the bottom of the baskets. Father never did that; he fed bad produce to the pigs. When he sold sweet corn (and people raved about the quality of our corn), he always added

extra ears in case one wasn't perfect. He rotated his crops and periodically plowed under a field of alfalfa so future farmers could continue to enjoy rich, fertile soil. He loved the land.

Even though it was clear he had strong feelings for his family, Father had trouble expressing them. I don't remember him ever telling me he loved me or that he was proud of me. Those sentiments were passed on by my mother in the form of "Your father said...." When my sister, Nancy, and her boyfriend, Chuck, decided to get married, they told my parents one evening while sitting around the kitchen table. Chuck opened the discussion, "I'd like your permission to marry Nancy." Father scraped his chair back from the table, stood up, said, "I have to go to the barn," and left my mother in charge of the blessing. He had difficulties at the wedding too. In a brand-new suit my mother insisted he buy, Father walked Nancy down the aisle at St. Paul's Lutheran Church. He stood with her at the altar, then abruptly stepped back, turned around, and sat beside my mother, leaning over to whisper that the flowers' scent made him dizzy. I think he was worried about his voice croaking when he answered the minister's question about who gives this woman. His voice often cracked; it may have been his only expression of emotion.

After he died and I was helping my mother with family finances, she confided that Father would never take a tax deduction for farm buildings and equipment depreciation—a legitimate deduction. She seemed frustrated by this and said he was afraid it would trigger an IRS audit. As a CPA, this knowledge saddened me. How fearful he must have been. It brought back some childhood memories of my father's approach to life.

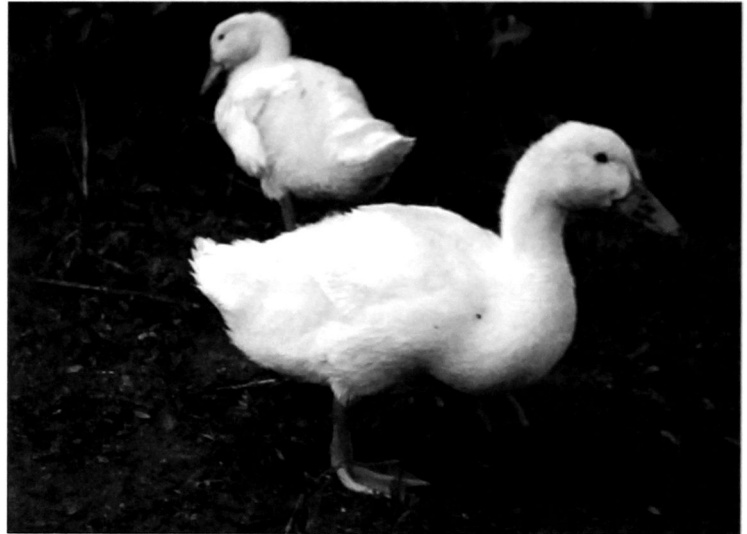
Father always told us never to drive on a holiday—it was too dangerous. We were never to use the word "pregnant"; instead, a woman was "expecting." My sister and I never saw a cow artificially inseminated or a calf being born. We never saw an animal being killed before butchering. Father had a Victorian sensibility when it came to his daughters.

We were warned to be thrifty and husband our money. He recounted stories of people in our village whose lives had been ruined by bankruptcy. Others, especially during the Depression, who had no money, no job, no place to live, were sent to work houses—horrible, cruel places. Father related newspaper accounts of people who stole and were imprisoned—shoplifters, bank robbers, embezzlers, and petty thieves. One could never recover from the shame of being incarcerated and, after he or she was released from jail, normal life would be out of the question. These lessons were repeatedly taught, and even today, when I read of a seemingly reputable businessperson going to jail, I shudder with the shame of it. So when my father committed a crime, even though it was an honest mistake, I was scared.

One summer day in 1953, Father noticed a large bird circling our farm. He thought it was a chicken hawk scoping out our Leghorns, scratching in the dirt for bugs and grubs. He got his rifle, loaded it, raised it to his shoulder, and sighted the bird. It was a true shot, and the bird plunged toward us. It landed on the lawn beside the house. We ran over to take a look. It was a bald eagle—unknown in our part

of Ohio. I'll never forget the stricken look on my father's face. He had killed our country's national symbol, an act punishable by a \$5,000 fine and/or one year in jail. Congress had passed the Eagle Act in 1940, and newspapers had carried the story with a lot of coverage, so my father was aware of the penalties. Even if he wasn't jailed, the fine would ruin us. Our farm had cost \$8,000, and my parents couldn't meet the monthly mortgage payment. My grandfather had paid off the debt, and they made small payments to him. How would they pay a fine? Father swore us all to secrecy and buried the bird. We never spoke of this again. I was twelve at the time, and I realized my father could make a mistake, that he was frightened, and that there are shades of truth.

Every Friday night, we butchered twenty-five chickens for Saturday delivery to regular customers. Butchering a bird consisted of catching, chopping, dunking, plucking, singeing, eviscerating, tweezing, scrubbing, and cooling. Father handled the head chopping. We gathered on a grassy knoll near the barn's lower level, formed a circle around a gray steel bucket of boiling hot water, picked up a chicken by its legs from the pile of carcasses, dipped it in the hot water, and started plucking—the sodden feathers clattering the grass like dirty snow. It was a family affair, like sitting around the kitchen table for supper, except here I felt on equal footing with my parents. We all



had the same job to do, we all worked fast so the water didn't cool down before we finished, and we all took pride in how well we plucked our pullets.

Father always seemed happy as we gathered round. We talked about what was happening in our lives, and I sometimes cursed the way my father did, just to see him smile and wink at my mother, who was not happy with my language.

My father liked roasted duck and, with food on his mind, went to the hatchery where he regularly bought chicks. He smiled at our surprise and delight when he returned home with thirty Pekin ducklings in heavy cardboard boxes. We raised them in cages, and when the ducks lost their daffodil down and grew creamy white feathers, we took them to Little Sandy Creek that ran the length of our pasture and beyond. They swam as though they were swans—heads erect, orange bills protruding, and rumps slightly elevated. The drakes' tail feathers curled like a comma; think Donald Duck—he's a Pekin. Like Donald, our ducks couldn't fly—they were too heavy.

My brother, Jim, and I recently talked about our ducks. “They were smart,” he said. “They knew once the cows were driven in for the evening milking, it was time to waddle to the barnyard where they would be fed corn and wheat. They were well-fed, fat ducks.”

Father was proud of our ducks sailing up and down Little Sandy Creek. As he said, they were a picture. Neighbors commented on them, too, because, unlike our other animals—our Jersey and Holstein milking cows, American Yorkshire hogs, Leghorn chickens, and Trixie and Ginger, bad-tempered ponies—the ducks had no boundaries, no fences to keep them confined, and they swam miles beyond our farm, delighting our neighbors as they passed by—an example of Father’s fine farm husbandry.

Because we were old hands at dressing chickens, when it came time to harvest part of our duck flock, we expected to make short work of it. We assembled around the steaming bucket and dipped our decapitated ducks in hot water, and we started plucking. Those feathers did not come out. It was as though the feathers were glued to the duck. We looked to my dad for plucking pointers. His feathers were stuck too. Finally, we adjourned in the kitchen, the dead ducks on the grass outside, brother Tom guarding them.

Father ran his fingers through his hair as though he was trying to stimulate a solution in his brain. We huddled around the kitchen table, throwing out ideas. We tried using the blunt side of the butcher knife as leverage against the feathers’ shafts to pry them out. No luck. We tried pliers. The feathers didn’t budge. Mom suggested we dip the ducks in melted paraffin and peel off the feathers when the wax hardened. It didn’t work. At some point, we got the giggles because it was about the only thing we could do, and it was funny.

I was transfixed by our attempts to create a solution and impressed with my parents’ teamwork. It was one of those unforgettable moments of insight and clarity that comes in childhood. It was a harbinger of times to come, when I would lead brainstorming sessions with my staff or participate with others in coming up with new ideas.

Finally, Father called the hatchery where he’d purchased the ducklings, and they referred him to a meat processing plant. He loaded the duck carcasses into the back of his powder-blue Ford pickup, and the next day we had perfectly cleaned, ready-for-the-freezer ducks.

“Do you remember the duck massacre?” my brother Jim asked. I vaguely recalled the incident, but I would have been fifteen at the time, and I had boys on my mind—not ducks. Jim told me the story.

“We still had half the flock, and one evening the ducks didn’t come in for their regular feeding,” Jim said. “The next day, I hiked along the creek and came across their bloody bodies. Neighbor boys with guns had waited for our ducks to swim by and picked them off. One survived, his beak missing, and because he couldn’t eat, he starved to death. Dad was pretty upset about the brutality and waste, but there was nothing we could do. It was the end of our ducks. Dad didn’t have the heart

to start with a new flock.”

Not long after this episode, my father was stricken with rheumatoid arthritis. He was forty-one years old and spent much of the next year bed-ridden. He was prescribed Cortisone and took Bayer aspirin by the handful to abate the pain. He tried bee-sting treatments but had to discontinue them when he had an anaphylactic reaction to the shots of bee venom. Somehow he rallied, returned to his job, and maintained the farm. I still marvel at his resolve.

My father died twenty-four years later, in 1980. One of the last times we were together was in the farmhouse kitchen, where I was frying green tomatoes. I looked out the kitchen windows—my father’s wheat field ripened, sparrows flitted among the stalks, searching for grains, and Little Sandy Creek, brown and sluggish, twisted through the empty pasture. Father had sold his dairy herd.

It was August, two months since his colostomy. Father stood near me as I tended the tomatoes. He was shorter than I remembered, but still handsome and smiling his sweet smile. He pointed to the pan and whispered, “I wish I could eat those.” Thrush had coated his throat and mouth. I was sad to see him so ill, but couldn’t express my feelings for fear of crying. I felt closer to him than I ever had.

I kissed my father good-bye when I left that day. His shyness and mine mixed in a way that made it almost impossible for us to show physical affection, but I knew he was pleased, and I must have known it might be my last chance to show my father I loved him.

A few years after his death, Mother sold our farm and moved into town. I’m glad Father didn’t live to see his land sold to the neighbors, the house sold to strangers, equipment and household belongings auctioned off. I don’t think he could have borne it.

But, he never pressured any of his children to take over the farm. He wanted more for us. “You’ll always have a job if you have a college education,” he promised, the Depression still vivid in his mind. All four of his children adopted this mantra, we got our college degrees, and we went on to professional careers.

The last time I was in Minerva was for my mother’s funeral in August, 2003. I made a nostalgic tour of driving Route 30 east out of Minerva, turned on Stump Road, and slowly drove by my childhood home. The front porch had been pulled down. It looked as though the house had given up its welcome. A circular drive had been cut into the lawn in front of the house. The huge maple trees were gone; they would have been over one hundred years old. The two tall viburnums that had anchored the yard near the country road were gone. The lilac gracing the side of the driveway, the last bush to bloom in spring, was gone.



Outlook III

by Joan Kincaid

Suddenly, sleep seems the only solution
The howling dog waits to be let in
The lavender banner with Earth on it floats
We are on a late moonlight walk
Sometimes, it's best not to look at anything
All these poems and words hiding in books
Even the best poets are trapped there
So are ordinary things
I, for one, prefer them to remain secret.

We decide too fast to cure something
When you're in the dark,
There is no way in or out sometimes
No one seems to get it.
You make little repartee,
Unaware of who you are

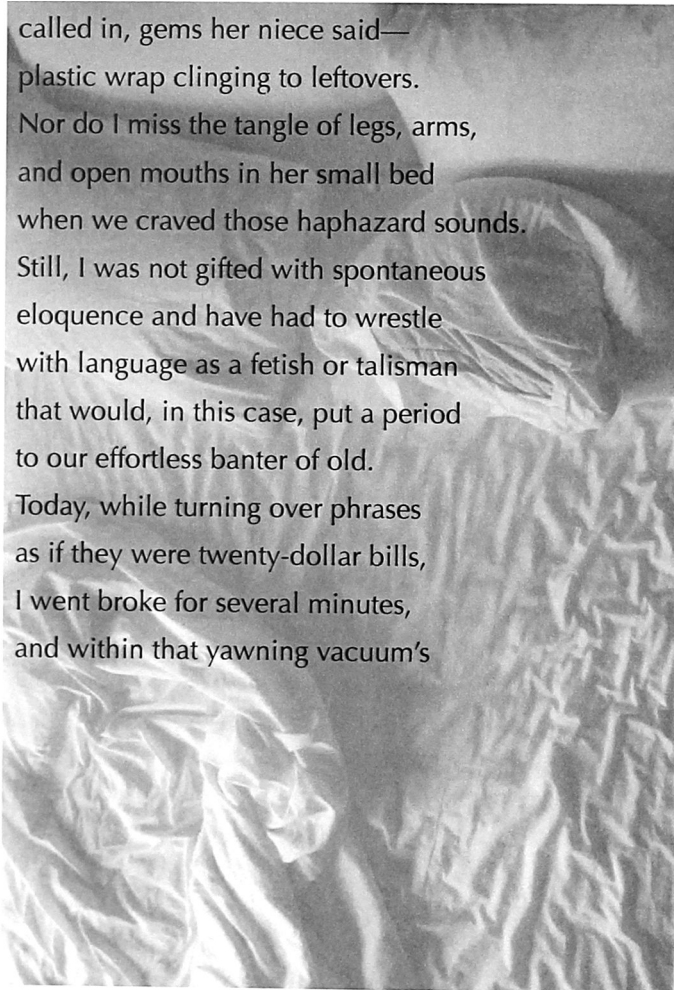
The soiled tablecloth from last night's porch dinner
Has been run through the machine
Tonight it will be fresh and clean on the round table
Where the birch tree sways gently in candle light,
And the lone owl calls to something down the block.
Crickets and Katydids fade in the late summer night
Passers-by beyond the hedge observe us in shadows.



Slouching Toward Prufrock

by John Graves Morris

The woman who once stuffed me full
of telephone talk on Sundays
no longer even acknowledges cards,
and in the years since, her voice
in my ear has ceased forever, Lorelei
in reverse. I keep opening my mouth
so that it can blossom into speech.
I haven't missed a thing she spoke of—
her verbatim recitation of who-did-
whom dirt at work, the chits her mother
called in, gems her niece said—
plastic wrap clinging to leftovers.
Nor do I miss the tangle of legs, arms,
and open mouths in her small bed
when we craved those haphazard sounds.
Still, I was not gifted with spontaneous
eloquence and have had to wrestle
with language as a fetish or talisman
that would, in this case, put a period
to our effortless banter of old.
Today, while turning over phrases
as if they were twenty-dollar bills,
I went broke for several minutes,
and within that yawning vacuum's



sudden clarity, I remembered her
leaning slightly forward, eyes shining,
speaking to me, of all people, at a party
with that eager up-ticked inflection
and intimate lilt that stamped me:
as the then witness to her dailyness,
I simply mattered more than anyone else.
After all these years, I still miss that
song, and now, completely puffed up
with empty air, I can croon
nothing that would bring it back.



Walking Home to My Trailer

by James Valvis

I couldn't get over how much trailers looked like coffins.

The park seemed a funeral field after a mass suicide,
a Jonestown where the people decided to tidy up
after themselves. I once had a black lab
that did everything with me, but he went off
and breathed his last in the woods.

That was what it was like watching neighbors return
from nights out at the bar, stumbling into their trailers.

First, they'd embalm their bodies.

Now, they lay their souls to rest.

The only thing left to someone else was the burial,
the tossing of dirt on the whole of their lives,
which eventually came along as a pink slip at work
or their wives packing one afternoon.

I had to walk by their bald lawns to get home
after my shift at the gas station.

and what got to me was how neat it all was,
how sanitary and safe. Even the messes were clean,
even the madness the sane kind of insanity.

Complaining was common, but the quietest corners
in any community are its cemeteries.

I thought about this every night, trudging
by those trailers, and then I opened the door of my own,
climbed straight into bed, and slept.

Earthquake

by James Valvis

An explosion and then the floor
shakes like jelly
while your one-year-old daughter
sits on the rocking chair
across the house in her bedroom
you weave with books falling
one hand on your head
an idiotic umbrella
and then you're into the hallway
pushing open the door
the bedroom expanding, rolling
your daughter riding the rocking chair
like a bucking bull machine
and it's only when you grab her
that she starts to scream
as if the real danger in the world
is the fear in your eyes

Letter to Tobi from Willcox, Arizona

by J.C. Alfier

The plangent rumble of the Union Pacific
is closer than a guardian angel. A dust devil

gathers what debris it needs to dance beyond
the rusted arrow all desert towns have that point

to shops and motels no longer there—none
can tell me how long they've been gone.

In Rix's tavern, I dump whiskey into my beer.
The man next to me has the eyes of someone

staring deeply into fire. His day job is hauling off
foreclosed and abandoned trailers—anything

metal, he adds. Today, he's in town to fetch
his grandson, whose mother can't be found.

He abruptly digresses, says storms in deserts
show the world's forgotten that water can cut

stone. A man comes up, and they both move
to the open patio and light up. In a surge

of shadow, desert doves sweep past them,
a lumbering grace, hushed by distance.



Sonoran Desert Offering

by J.C. Alfier

Threading thick, blue storms at the world's
eastern edge, dawnlight crawls slow
as a Promised land spy. No rambler
could troop this ground, breathe its syllables
of thorn or claw without debt to drought
or sudden storm that brims the cutbank.

A driftwood arbor, raised decades back,
surrounds your skin with shadow. Seething
granite cools in mounting hours as silence
breaks at the surge of a startled black-tail.

A flash of fool's gold, a rattler's low
rustle through saltbush, earth loosened
where the season's final rains wrought
poppies and windflowers, human prints
are unmade. And these roads, these burning
roads, as intimate as your outstretched hand.

Women Without a Voice

by Daniel Daly

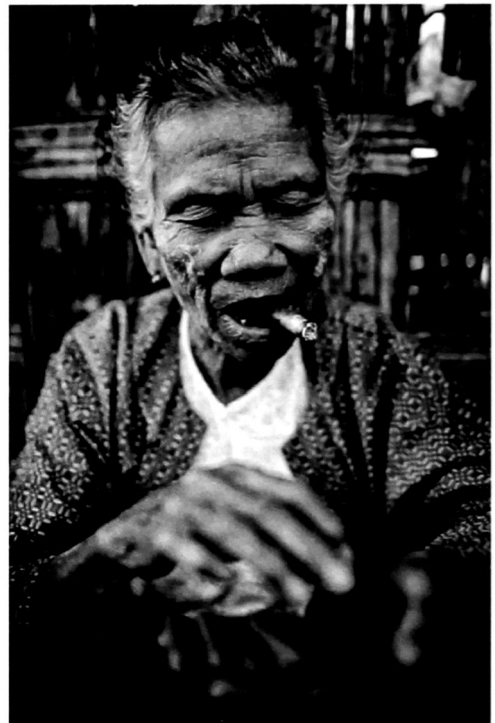
A dim shop. Half of Tachileik sliding
off shelves and tables, dust everywhere,
a good sign. We lift it, study it, as if
it were a text, arcane, compelling.
Doll-lady strokes it with rings
popping around her index fingers.
Listen. So pretty its sound. Buddha Music...
That is music you never hear. Listen.
Listen. You will never hear this
any other place. Want it?

Outside, the Burma rain is misting to glitter
on the street. A passing bike rider waves,
cries out, Cheap...Polo...Camels.
Saris sweep past, thin as wind.
A spray of birds trim a weary tree.

We hear them then, women we glided by
in the middle of a compound, silent,
announced by the trishaw drivers.
American, hey you buy things American.
Show you good prices. Marlboro, flashlight.
Show you pretty ladies scrub at the well.

We hear them then, stillborn voices,
as if coins glittered in a dim pool.
Or sheaves of wheat touched by wind
turned to rumor in the softness of light
returning, surging over in-roads
and distant valleys. Where the evening
air breathes its own being. Where
we drift easily into our journeys.

A land in the middle of a country.



Fish Needs a Bicycle

by Deborah L. Cox

Brian had good bones. He made the girls laugh, and he listened to Depeche Mode. He brought an edge to our private Church of Christ school. He also had a tiny grooming problem, which I chalked up to his transition from North to South. We discovered Brian's problem one September morning as sunshine flared down on the sidewalks of Waltham Christian College. Brian walked the path that connected his dorm—on the college side of campus—to our academy building on the other side. We watched him approach in the rearview mirror as we waited at the stoplight near the main Waltham gates. He carried a snare drum and two tote bags full of books.

"That looks like your new guy," said David through a mouthful of cinnamon toast. My younger brother made it his business to know everyone in my senior class of 1984.

"It is," I said. Brian wore jeans and an untucked white button-down. "Poor thing—lugging all that across campus." Something broke open inside me.

"Should we see if he wants a ride?" said Mother. My two youngest brothers sat up front, so the only remaining spot was beside me. She pulled our cream-colored Pontiac to the side of the street, beside the men's dorm where last April's suicide compelled the university to remodel a north wing. David cranked down his window, and the squeak of old brakes bounced off the curb. Our sedan featured a chipping paint job on the doors, and cheap cigarette lingered from a previous owner and pinched our sinuses. I cringed and waved him over. Mother popped the trunk and in clunked the drum and the book satchels. As Brian climbed into the backseat beside me, another smell pierced the air. My mother, in the rearview mirror, pressed her top lip down in a deliberate, confirmatory sniff.

Later that afternoon she greeted me. "Your new friend needs some deodorant."

I overlooked his B.O. to focus on other qualities. Brian made eye contact. He spoke in a voice one could use to teach kindergarten children. Just under his skin, he mocked us all. He belonged in Detroit with his diving team. His seething counterculture felt familiar, like visiting an orchestra hall in a faraway city.

We talked after school, the side of my face pasted with makeup and sweat to the receiver of the goldenrod phone that hung in my family's kitchen. I pulled the curly cord around the corner into the living room, where I sat cross-legged under the heirloom baby grand from West Texas. The steam of giggles and sighs filled my lap.

"I'll major in business, so I can work for a big corporation like my dad." I pictured his 42-year-old father, dark-suited in a boardroom, flanked on either side by multicolor pie charts. "I'll keep playing drums," he said, "and I'll try out for the Waltham Wishbones." Brian memorized the glossy Waltham University brochures before he arrived here as a high school senior. The Waltham Wishbones sang Broadway tunes and John Denver for the big recruitment events. I thought they

were cheesy. I had no plans beyond just showing up for college, one block away from high school. I held only one college goal, and he was quite possibly on the other end of the phone line.

"You're different, Lizzie—not like those other girls," Brian said. "People at Waltham Academy have no idea how anemic they are."

Anemic is a good word, I thought. They eschew classical music. They laugh at the ballet. They think it's a sin to go to the Easter Cantata at the big Baptist church downtown because of the instrumental music.

Brian applauded my abstinence from the cheer squad to focus on piano. "That was wise," he said. He didn't care if I mastered my Bach Inventions, but his commiseration comforted me. He sang the Doobies over the phone from atop his bunk in his Levis and white socks.

I ate up his words, and a seduction took place under the threadbare canopy of my parents' marriage. I opened my locker on Monday morning to a bouquet of roses and daisies wrapped with pink ribbon. In front of the arrangement a Hallmark card read, you are the most beautiful and the smartest person I have ever met, signed in black with loops like dragonflies.

"Hey, I keep trying to call you, but your phone is always busy." Mallory gave a quizzical look, and my face grew warm. "We still on for Friday?" Fridays meant off-campus pizza and off-the-record honesty.

"Definitely. We have a lot to talk about."

The week folded in on itself like a blanket—end to end. A blur of classrooms and hymns and little brothers. I lived for Friday. I was falling in love. I hated Leigh Anne Martin—who made the homecoming court, even though she was just a junior, while I sat in the cold, stinging bleachers with everybody else. My father hated my mother. I reasoned, if she would lose thirty pounds and learn to keep her mouth shut, she could maybe save her marriage. I got these sudden blasts of resentment toward my alma mater. This perplexing build-up could only be witnessed by one friend. Mallory shrugged off Waltham while she wore its required skirts and seduced its boys.

"So let me get this straight." She set our pizza in the middle of the table. "Your dad thinks Bob Gearing is a marriage counselor?" Mallory squinted at me. My father. In the principal's office. Seeking help for his troubled marriage. Gearing, playing counselor. Gearing made his daughters wear dresses at all times, even in P.E. class. He loved first and second Timothy, especially the passages about women keeping silent. He wore polyester pants that bulged on one hip where he kept his wallet, and he forbade his wife from having a job.

"I know. It's absurd."

"But of all the non-counselor types I know at Waltham, why Mr. Gearing?"

"He doesn't want to improve the marriage. He wants her to be quiet and leave him alone."

"He thinks Gearing will help with that." She said it as a realization of fact. Truth sometimes gushes out before you fully believe it, like bulk oatmeal shooting from a dispenser onto the floor.

Saturday night I stood on tiptoe, watching for Brian to materialize in the crowd of co-eds outside the big auditorium on the hill for the campus movie. When I spotted him, he was smiling at me as he climbed the pebbly stairs. We clasped hands in the cool darkness of The Grover. *Rocky*, with shit, damn, and hell bleeped out.

On Monday morning, a yellow envelope leaned against a row of textbooks in my locker. I opened it in the dark of the cubby. *I gave up a lot for you, but it was all worth it.* I hid my smile behind the painted metal door and continued reading. *I can't believe there's a person like you in a place like this.* Infusions of warmth, blood, and joy. Boys, I'd known since third grade, passed in the hall with blank faces—no greeting, no nod, and no smile. This new boy treated me like a rare orchid.

It rained every week that fall, soaked and misted the campus, sticking oak leaves to the sidewalks and the seats of the famous white swings that dotted its main lawn—the swings famous for proliferating Church of Christ marriages. Brian and I sat in those damp swings. People walked by and looked at us. So we searched out dark places to plant my family Pontiac, some campus lot or the tall shadows behind the Kroger store. We had only minutes. I felt his lips and his breath inside the giant steel boat. Stale cigarette became an aphrodisiac. After the first gentle kiss, and then the second, visions of domestic bliss spooled: Waltham Married Student Apartments, Brian and I cozied up on our furnished couch, no parents, and no teachers.

Curfew parted us, breathless and panting.

Monday morning in Home Economics, groin-stirring memories of his hands on my neck and his kisses under a full moon dizzied me with total life purpose. It became nearly impossible to focus on convection ovens and turkey basters. Another week passed.

Friday, Missing Persons sang in the floor of the car from a battery-powered jam box as Mallory and I sped to Mazzio's in her brown Maverick.

"Don't you love Mrs. Hoovie's sweaters?" she asked over the lunch-hour clatter and the scent of basil and fresh dough with garlic butter. "Just slap me if I ever wear a flower garden on my rear end."

"I will, and buy me a girdle if my bladder gets as big as Coach Ellis's."



"Did you hear what he said in his Earth Science class?" she said. I shook my head no.

"He was talking about virginity." She licked marinara off her thumb. "He said, 'A girl who's not a virgin is like a car with no wheels'—or something like that."

I nodded. "Bad analogy."

"That doesn't shock you?"

"Is it supposed to?" I said, anesthetized. Discussing it was something new.

"I still can't believe Mr. Gearing stapled my skirt," Mallory said. Last April, we girls flounced out to the track for an afternoon of spectating, all of us in our required dresses. The wind twirled our hair, and we huddled together on the wooden bleachers to keep warm.

"I feel so violated," she said. I loved her vocabulary. Mallory transported my introduction to feminism all the way from a similar Christian school in Alabama, which now seemed cosmopolitan by contrast. "He brought his stapler to the track!" she said, and I viewed myself as if through her eyes, not knowing I should be offended that the principal of Waltham Academy would close a girl's wrap-skirt by hand and fasten it shut.

"So tell me about Brian," she said.

"Mmmm." I obliged. "Well, he's really sweet. He talks about Michigan." I told her about his big high school in the city, his diving team. "He's very, um, spiritual."

"How so?"

"He likes to write little sermons," I said. "He says he would be a preacher someday, but there's not enough money in it."

"What do your parents think of him?" she asked. "I mean, he's a rock drummer."

I shrugged. "He said he'd be happy to play with the college orchestra if my dad needed him."

"And your dad lets you go out with him?" Mallory knew I struggled for every minute away from the house. Cruising down the main avenue on Friday nights, I checked my watch constantly as the sun fell behind the downtown buildings. I had to be home by ten.

"He doesn't know. He's not home much anymore."

"Symphony?"

"Yeah. Which is good. He leaves for Memphis on Friday, and we don't see him again until Sunday night." I barely noticed my own curiosity. Why did Dad stay away all weekend when home was just a thirty-minute drive? Why did he spend so many hours at post offices and bus terminals? What made him loathe my mother? These questions hovered like little ghosts.

I love you Brian penned on notebook paper ripped from metal spirals. Fall misted into winter. I wafted through the academic week, and my focus zeroed in on Friday. I slogged through Christmas break while Brian was in Michigan. *I want to make a*

life together, he wrote. Do you love me more than you love Waltham Academy? he pleaded.

I hid the letters from my parents, who now slept in separate rooms. Brian returned in January and we clung to each other that first Friday evening in the shadows of *The Grover. Raiders of the Lost Ark* played on the big screen, punctuated with bleeps. "I want to marry you, Lizzie," he said.

Later, Brian's hands wandered under my tomato-red blouse. We held each other against the side of the Pontiac under a starry March sky. Our breath made little bursts of fog, our bodies warming each other. I went home that night and wrote him back.

Dear Brian,

I feel like God brought you directly to me. I never imagined I'd meet someone as generous and wonderful as you. When we're apart, I think of you constantly. In fact, I think you've given meaning to my life. I want to be with you forever.

I love you.

Lizzie

Somehow, despite an immaculate locker delivery, the letter made its way into the hands of Principal Gearing.

Friday morning in Home Economics, I clutched my wedding portfolio while Claire, our homecoming queen, presented hers. We'd anticipated this assignment since the seventh grade.

"Here's the fabric for my sisters' dresses." She pointed to a swatch the shade of yellow I'd seen on baby dresses and tiny butterflies.

We collected bridal magazines, ribbon samples, and Gorham pamphlets. We designed budgets for honeymoons, cakes, and flowers. Every bridesmaid in my wedding plan wore a different color. My rainbow of friends carried candles in tiny round goldfish bowls. My undisclosed wedding site—obviously not the Waltham University Church—boasted a giant panel of mosaic chunk glass behind a stone altar. Best of all, I hired an organist and a live trumpeter. No one else planned their music—they assumed the *a cappella* balcony singers would appear and sing, "God Give Us Christian Homes."

Claire pointed out the princess neckline of her white dress. Then, a knock at the door. A scrap of yellow paper handed in and passed to me.

Mr. Gearing would like to see you in his office.

I shuddered. The air went hot on my skin. I rushed away from girlfriends and plastic notebooks. My heart thudded as I tiptoed down the hall and into the office. The secretary waved me back to the inner chamber where he sat. His short body poked up from behind an enormous oak desk, shirt sleeves revealing the dark thatch of hair on his arms and his cheap drugstore watch. She closed the door behind me. Someone must be dead.

Gearing waved a piece of paper in front of him. My stomach dropped.

"Do you recognize this?" he asked, smiling. He unfolded it, and I saw my right-tilting cursive running along the top of the paper. He read it aloud, "Dear Brian, I feel like God has brought you directly to me.... When we're apart, I think of you constantly." Gearing licked his overlapping front teeth and grinned at me. "It seems to me, young lady," he said, "that you and this boy are becoming very close."

I said nothing, pressed my lips together.

"I could have you expelled," he smiled, "because it sounds like the two of you are having sexual relations."

"What?" I sucked in air, not believing.

"I plan to call your daddy," Gearing went on, his voice a kazoo.

I shook my head. "It's not what you think." But, I couldn't speak any of the words that mattered: love, marriage, engagement, and silverware.

"I know lots of girls who have sinned," he said.

Heat seared my neck and chest. It was all over.

"You need to know that, er, becoming too close to this boy is, em, probably not a good idea. It can lead to sin."

I took in the contradiction with shallow breaths. One line of Waltham rhetoric said we should find Christian mates, avail ourselves of the plentitude of baptized singles. Girls should prepare for motherhood and Corning Ware. Think reproductive thoughts. Men should prepare for ministry and the heading of households. A competing line said: KEEP YOUR LEGS CROSSED, GIRLS. Stay in the light. Stay in a group. Stay out of cars. Faculty scrutinized couples who held hands in public. Sermons on impure touching cropped up every fall and spring, reminding me of The Fixx, "One Thing Leads To Another." Doing our jobs put us at risk for losing our souls.

I staggered from Gearing's office. How ironic! My father perched his bony bottom in the same chair a few months before. One of us had too much fun—the other, not enough. I darted into the yellow restroom as tears surfaced, scalded, and fell. Though he never touched me, never checked my skirt length, Mr. Gearing had peeped at me as if through a bedroom window. I held onto a sink to steady myself. A fragment sprang to mind as I wiped salt water from under my eyes: "thou sufferest that woman Jezebel...to seduce my servants to commit fornication."

* * *

"It's none of his stinking business!" Mallory screamed into the windshield. She wanted to say damn. Her whole body shook. We sat in her Maverick and stared out at gray sky, leftover glazed doughnuts between us by the gear shift in their white bakery bag. "How can he just call your dad and tell him you're having sex?!"

"He can do whatever he wants." I sat motionless. Maybe I could live in her car for a few weeks—park in a remote, wooded lot, figure out my next move, change my name, take a Greyhound to Dallas, and get a job ringing up groceries at Tom Thumb.

"I'm going to give him a piece of my mind," she said. I looked at her with tiny clicks of rotation making me so different so fast I could not feel it and would not feel it for another seven years.

A red vintage bicycle separated me from my father. I crouched behind it on the tapestry sofa that became his bed at night and focused my eyes on the rusty springs under the seat. He shook, and capillaries in his face rose to the surface. His index finger pointed at me, then returned to his neck, again and again.

"I don't want to see you go down that road, Elizabeth."

My father's bicycle triggered a vacation memory. Posters covered the inside of an urban store window—peace signs in wavy ribbons of color, the Beatles crossing the street in a line, fuzzy black lettering and outlines of slogans in neon. *Keep on Truckin'. Do Your Own Thing.* One with big red lips and a tongue made of the American flag. In the center of it all, a picture of a trout perched on the seat of a bike. It read, *A Woman Needs a Man Like...* Mother shooed us away, but the poster stuck in my mind like an unsolved riddle.

"If you get married too young, you'll throw away all your talent!" my father yelled. He received the call from Principal Gearing earlier that day. My father practiced in front of his wall of diplomas and glossy conductor photos as the black rotary phone rang. He ignored it for seven trills, a bar and a half of the Mendelssohn concerto. His violin teacher from DePaul smoked a cigarette—all coolness and naughtiness, eavesdropping on the talk with Bob Gearing.

"You're too young to stop practicing and studying!"

So many ironies hit that wall, paint balls exploding in streaks and blobs all over those men in tuxes and turtlenecks.

"Your mother and I have to keep a closer watch. You still live under our roof."

Anytime he said, "your mother and I," I took note. Anytime he appeared poised to hit me, but did not, I took note. Anytime he expressed concern for my welfare, instead of indignation at my rebuffing of family devotionals, I took note.

"We brought you kids here to Waltham so you could get a Christian education."

"I thought you brought us here to find Christian mates."

His hand went up, and he stopped it. "I should slap your face, young lady."

Hate fired my lungs like a ceramic stove. About the time I perceived traces of warmth, he always reminded me how twisted things were between us.

"You—d—don't—ever—t—talk—to—m—me—like—that," he said. "I'm still your daddy."

The next week, Mallory gave Mr. Gearing a piece of her mind. She reported back to me in the safety of her Maverick.

"He said, 'Young lady, I've seen plenty of girls become lost to sin,'" she said. "'Girls try to seduce me all the time.' Can you believe that?"

"Gross," I said. "You've got to be kidding."

"I'm not kidding. He said some girl tried to take her clothes off, begged him not to kick her out of school. He told her to keep them on—he didn't want to see anything." We grasped the edges of what was happening. Neither of us said it. We tiptoed around the Bible-based sexual harassment, not giving it a name. It's easier to blame your mother for her failed marriage than it is to tease apart the subtleties of why her husband can't have sex with her.

The spring weeks warmed us. Mallory and I addressed our graduation parchments. Another college boy killed himself, hung from a necktie in his dorm room. They called it an accident. One hundred yards from that dorm, four consecutive weddings in teal, peach, mauve, and baby blue took place on the college lawn with the white swings.



Sea Cradles

by Gwynn O'Gara

Racing boats with sails of smoke
clog the channel. Soldiers patrol
the sand. *¡Ya viene el presidente!*
Children go on playing. How fragile
our coconuts. Between earthquakes,
land and sea stutter; we teeter, not
knowing where we'll fall. In this salt
soup, she tore love's thorny flesh.
Silence pinned her, a bug on a tray,
till she grew invisible wings.
Shells in her bed, kelp in her hair,
the backs of men pull her, all nerves.



Lares and Penates

by Gwynn O'Gara

After a Roman Offering Bowl, Anonymous

I never hear my tongue. Smashed
on the museum floor, I miss my
earth-bed in the underground

chamber, and the altar before.
No one sings, presses their lips
to mine, or hands me around.

Gloved hands placed me on
a pedestal under strong lamps.
Light is friend half the time.

Shards on marble. Clean fingers
may piece my prayers together,
and the dancing. I was better part

of a household beside the hearth
where laws start. Hands shaped
me to bring blessings of grain

and wine, children and joy, and
there was an abundance of each.
I wish I'd died with my family,

those frolicking limbs. They
buried me before the war and
I missed being sacked. Fired

for eternity, I live on, in pieces,
my heart empty of wine, my lip
bereft of others. Little *urna tita*

begs you, Ceres, let time grind
me into grain that I may feel lips
again and whisper, *Here, tongue.*



Contributors

J.C. Alfier is author of *The Wolf Yearling* (Silver Birch Press, 2013) and *Idyll for a Vanishing River* (Glass Lyre Press, forthcoming). In 2013, he was a finalist in the Press 53 Poetry Contest and short-listed for the Fermoy International Poetry Festival in Ireland. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *New York Quarterly*, *Louisville Review* and *Arkansas Review*.

Donovan Bradshaw, seventeen years old, graduated in May 2015 from Norman North High School, Oklahoma. Donovan was born in Oklahoma City and intends to study engineering at the University of Oklahoma in the fall. His other interests include history, science fiction, and gaming. He has camped the Canadian wilderness, sailed the Atlantic Ocean just off the coast of Florida, and hopes to tramp the byways of Europe.

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

Deborah L. Cox is a board-certified psychologist and co-author of two books: *The Anger Advantage* (Broadway, 2003) and *Women's Anger: Clinical and Developmental Perspectives* (Brunner-Routledge, 1999). Her articles have been published in *Psychology Tomorrow*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Prevention*, and *Redbook*. She attended Gotham Writers' Workshops from 2005-2010 and studied with Kyle Minor, Ana Maria Spagna, and Kerry Cohen.

Tonya Dale is currently the Director of Communications at Kemper CPA Group LLP, and her article "Leverage Social Media to Train, Protect, and Elevate Your

Employees" was published in the PR News' Employee Communications Guidebook. Her work is forthcoming in *Ragazine*. She has been a lifelong resident of Indiana and is a graduate of Indiana University, where she received her BA, and of Indiana Wesleyan University, where she received her MBA. Dale attended the Midwest Writers' Workshop in Muncie, Indiana, in July 2015. When not writing, she enjoys walking and running and has participated in four 5K races. She is a dog and cat lover and has one of each.

Daniel Daly has placed poetry in *Poetry*, *Poetry East*, *NY Times*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Brilliant Corners*, and elsewhere. His last collection won the Tennessee Chapbook Prize in 2011.

Frank De Canio was born and bred in New Jersey and currently works in New York. He loves music from Bach to Dory Previn, Amy Beach to Amy Winehouse, World Music, Latin, and opera. Shakespeare is his consolation, and writing is his hobby. De Canio likes Dylan Thomas, Keats, Wallace Stevens, Frost, Ginsburg, and Sylvia Plath as poets.

Mike Emery grew up in the Lost River Valley of east/central Idaho—cow country, the last of the "Old West." He left knowing all he needed to about cows, coyotes, fences, rattlesnakes, fly fishing, hunting, and drinking beer, but not much about the background basics for a modicum of learning. As an undergrad at Occidental College, Emery worked a variety of odd jobs to finance his degree in psychology and philosophy. From there, he attended the Teachers College at Columbia University for his Ph.D. in clinical psychology, but he credits his true education to the city of New York itself. He went on to spend some time in the Peace Corps before returning to Idaho, quitting psychology, and buying a ranch. Emery's decision to return to professional practice led him to work for the court system as a forensic psychologist—handling competency, child custody, personal injury, and criminal sentencing issues. Now semi-retired, he came to New Mexico via the Creativity and Madness continuing education series and now lives at an artist's colony in El Morro. His writing has been published in *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Schuykill Valley Journal*, and *The Zuni Mountain*

Poets: An Anthology, edited by John Carter-North, Margaret Gross, and Thomas Davis.

Brian Glaser has been published in *Ploughshares*, *Literary Imagination*, *North American Review* and other journals.

John Grey is an Australian-born poet. He has recently been published in *International Poetry Review*, *Chrysalis*, and the science fiction anthology *Futuredaze* with work upcoming in *Potomac Review*, *Sanskrit*, and *Fox Cry Review*.

K.S. Hardy lives in a historic oil boom town in the swamp lands of Ohio, which sparks the creative flame by necessity. His poetry has recently appeared in *Valley Voices*, *Barbaric Yawp*, *Old Red Kimono*, *Weird Tales*, and many more. Short stories have been published in *Tales of the Talisman*, *Evangel*, *Beyond Centauri*, and "The Van Gogh Collection" in the *Still Points Art Quarterly*.

Ivan Hobson is a recent graduate of San Francisco State University's MFA program. He is also a fourth generation machinist working with his dad in the two-employee shop Ivan's great-grandfather built in 1935. His poetry has recently appeared, or is forthcoming, in publications including *The North American Review*, *The South Dakota Review*, *California Quarterly*, and Ted Kooser's weekly column, *American Life in Poetry*.

Robert Kerbeck has fiction forthcoming in *Willow Review*. He graduated with a B.A. in English from the University of Pennsylvania, where he was a writer for *The Daily Pennsylvanian*. A member of the Actors Studio, Kerbeck has worked extensively in theater, film, and television, appearing in lead roles in major shows and earning several awards. He currently lives in Malibu and owns a successful corporate intelligence firm.

Joan Kincaid's latest book is *Being Here: New and Selected Poems 1988-2012*. She also has a new online book with John M. Bennett, *Now Blank Sky*. Kincaid currently has work in *Clackamas*, *Comstock Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Hawaii Review*, *Paris Atlantic*, *Limestone Poetry Review*, *Licking River Review*, *Iodine*, *Hampden*, *Sydney Poetry Review*,

Main Street Rag, *Santa Clara Review*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *The Laughing Dog*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Folio*, *Cross Currents*, *Georgetown Review*, *Edgz*, 88, *Oyez*, *Modern Haiku*, *Iconoclast*, *Lynx Eye*, *Yalobusha Review*, *Yemassee*, *Mother Earth Journal*, *Tule Review*, and *Picayune Journal*.

Susan Knox's book, *Financial Basics: A Money Management Guide for Students*, was published by the Ohio State University Press in 2004. Other works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Blue Lyra Review*, *CALYX*, *Forge*, *The MacGuffin*, *Melusine*, *Monkey Puzzle*, *Pisgah Review*, *The Rusty Nail*, *Signs of Life*, *Still Crazy*, *Sunday Ink*, *Wild Violet*, *Words & Images*, and *Zone 3*. She lives in Seattle.

John Graves Morris, Professor of English at Cameron University, is the author of *Noise and Stories* (Plain View Press, 2008). His poems have appeared in journals such as *The Chariton Review*, *The Concho River Review*, *Jelly Bucket*, *The Great Plains Review*, *Sugar Mule* (with poems that were reprinted in Jeanetta Calhoun Mish's anthology of Oklahoma writing, *Ain't Nobody Can Sing Like Me*), *Westview*, *Crosstimbers*, and others. A poem also appeared recently in Dorothy Alexander's anthology *Elegant Rage: a Poetic Tribute to Woody Guthrie*. He is finishing the manuscript for a second collection to be entitled *Unwritten Histories*. Morris' poetry appears in the winter 2015 (31.1) issue of *Westview*. Three times the featured writer at the *Westview Writers' Festival*, he lives in Lawton.

An MFA from a State University? No. **Lance Nizami** has no formal training in the Arts. He is active in the world's most competitive profession, yet without an institutional appointment. He started writing poetry during a long airplane flight in 2010 and has written much since then in-flight.

Gwynn O'Gara, Sonoma County Poet Laureate Emerita 2010-2012, is the author of *Snake Woman Poems* (Beatitude Press) and two chapbooks, *Fixer-Upper* (d-press) and *Winter at Green Haven* (Word Temple Press). She lives in

northern California and has taught with California Poets in the schools for over twenty years.

Over the years, **Angela Shupe** has been fortunate to workshop her writing with noted writer S. Kirk Walsh and noted short story author Lawrence Dorr. A graduate of the University of Detroit Mercy, she received her Bachelor of Arts in English, Cum Laude in 1993. Her writing has appeared in various publications including *Wild Violet Literary Journal*, *Relevant Magazine*, and *Women's Adventure Magazine*. In 2011, one of her essays was awarded a Silver SOLAS award for travel writing from *Travelers' Tales*. Another essay of Shupe's was chosen as a finalist in the 2012 *Biographile* Short Memoir Contest on overcoming loss.

Scott Woods writes from the Connecticut shoreline. His work has appeared in *The MacGuffin*, *The Blotter*, *Booth*, and elsewhere.

James Valvis is the author of *How to Say Goodbye* (Aortic Books, 2011). His poems or stories have appeared in journals such as *Anderbo*, *Arts & Letters*, *Baltimore Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Hanging Loose*, *LA Review*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry East*, *River Styx*, and many others. His poetry has been featured in *Verse Daily* and the Best American Poetry website. His fiction was chosen for the 2013 Sundress Best of the Net. A former U.S. Army soldier, he lives near Seattle.

Lee Clark Zumpe, an entertainment columnist with *Tampa Bay Newspapers*, earned his bachelor's in English at the University of South Florida. He began writing poetry and fiction in the early 1990s. His work has regularly appeared in a variety of literary journals and genre magazines over the last two decades. Publication credits include *Tiferet*, *Zillah*, *The Ugly Tree*, *Modern Drunkard Magazine*, *Red Owl*, *Jones Av.*, *Main Street Rag*, *Space & Time*, *Mythic Delirium* and *Weird Tales*. Zumpe lives on the west coast of Florida with his wife and daughter.

Photos and illustrations

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