



3-1-2009

Westview: Vol. 29, Iss. 2 (Fall/Winter 2009)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), [Photography Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2009) "Westview: Vol. 29, Iss. 2 (Fall/Winter 2009)," *Westview*: Vol. 29 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol29/iss2/1>

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.



A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

WESTVIEW

VOLUME 29

NUMBER 2

FALL/WINTER 2009

\$6.00



clay

Editor James Silver
Managing Editor Kevin Collins
Publications Manager Joel Kendall
Nonfiction Editor Kelly Moor
Electronic Submissions Editor Helen Maxson
Assistant Editors John Bradshaw
Kelly Parker
Michele Charles

Fine Art Director EK Jeong
Graphic Design Director Xiaomiao Wang
Fine Art Assistant Todd Parker

Westview is published semiannually by the Department of Language and Literature at Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

Westview publishes fiction, poetry, prose poems, drama, nonfiction, book reviews, literary criticism, and artwork. *Westview* holds first rights for all works published.

Subscription for two years (four issues): \$15 in United States; \$25 out of country. Single issues: \$6 including postage. Checks may be made payable to *Westview*; 100 Campus Drive; Weatherford, OK 73096.

Stylesheet

1. Submissions should be typed on 8.5" x 11" white paper; prose should be double spaced. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope.
2. Submitted artwork should be suitable for black and white reproduction. Work should be no larger than 8.5" x 14". However, photographs or slides of larger works may be submitted.
3. Include a brief biographical sketch for our contributors' notes.
4. Submissions and correspondence may be sent to
James Silver
Editor, *Westview*
100 Campus Drive
Southwestern Oklahoma State University
Weatherford, OK 73096
Art works may be sent to EK Jeong at the same address.

Please visit our website at
<http://www.swosu.edu/resources/publications/westview>

Cover photograph by Kathleen Gunton

WESTVIEW

- 4 Julie Barton Absolution
- 16 Richard T. Rauch Heartstrings
- 18 Judy Beelaar Heaven: a Detail
- 19 Harvey Spurlock Fried Apples
- 28 Katherine (Morgan) Whitt Hawks of the Spirit Path
- 29 Andrew H. Oerke *Noche de Los Muertos: San Miguel de Allende*
- 30 Andrew H. Oerke Plato's Cabin
- 31 Naomi Ruth Lowinsky Psalm for Whales
- 32 Brad Buchanan The Meadowlarks
- 33 Lenny Levine The Power of Positive Pessimism
- 39 Diane Kathleen Groll Connolly October Gardener
- 40 Jed Myers The Greatest Attraction
- 41 Eva-Maria Sher I Am Yellow
- 42 Tracy DeBrincat I Am Not about to Make Excuses for the Undertow
- 43 Eva-Maria Sher I Wanted to Sleep Like a Baby
- 44 Gail Seneca Ambassador
- 53 Elizabeth Burk The Road Widow
- 54 Gregory W. Randall Chess Moves

Contents

- 55 **Toni L. Wilkes** Flight
- 56 **Nancy Cavers Dougherty** His and Hers
- 57 **Dan Schwarz** My Father at 90
- 58 **Dan Schwarz** Her World at 53
- 59 **Pat Sturm** Should Hamlet Plant a Garden?
- 60 **Karl S. Monroe** The Untouchables
- 64 **Toni L. Wilkes** Swept Away
- 65 **Carlyn Finke** Winter's Song
- 66 **Contributors' notes**



Photo By: EK Jeong

Absolution:

Julie Barton

I should've known something had happened when Jeanine came to work so early. She pulled open the main cabin's creaky screen door at five-thirty, when the sun was barely creeping over the hill. I'd only drunk one cup of coffee, and Jeanine looked awful. She'd been head counselor at my camp for six years, and her appearance had always been impeccable—hair in a perky ponytail, clothes ironed and carefully chosen, a shiny silver whistle dangling from a bright green rope encircling her neck. But there she stood, all raccoon-eyed from old mascara, mismatched clothes—an old red sweater, wrinkled khakis, and dusty, black flip-flops.

"Jim," she said, her eyes wildly searching for me. "Jim."

"I'm right here," I said, standing at the coffeemaker, mildly amused by the whole scene.

"A camper got shot," she said. "A camper got killed. Oh my God, Jim; what are we going to do?"



I took a long while to process what she said. The worst accident we'd ever had was when little Ronnie Fusco almost drowned in the lake after getting knocked out by a flying boogie board. Over the years, we'd had a few broken arms and a badly fractured leg, but it seemed that Jeanine must've had the story wrong.

"What?" I said. "Wait. What?"

"Ethan Mosley. One of the senior campers."

"Dear God," I said. Ethan was one of my favorites.

"He and two other boys snuck out last night after lights out and went to Crown Burger. Then Crown Burger got robbed." She bent over like she had a stomach cramp, and her voice was cracking with every other word. "And the man shot Ethan."

I felt a drop in my gut. I put my coffee cup on the table.

"Which other boys? Are they okay?"

"Scott and Mikey. They ran outside, but Ethan tried to stop the guy or

something, and he got shot. We have to call his parents. What are we going to do?"

My fingers looked gray, all limp and useless on the desk. I could hear buzzing in my ears. Jeanine watched me with wide eyes, waiting for me to tell her how to handle the crisis. I was silent.

"We have to call his parents," she said.

"No," I said. I couldn't fathom doing so. I thought of my son, Lee. "Who called you?" I asked, feeling both cowardly and grateful that I'd long ago given the police department Jeanine's number as the camp's emergency contact.

"Officer Murray," she said, handing me a piece of paper with his phone number scribbled on it. "He wants you to call him."

"You go home," I said, coughing a little. "Get dressed. I'm going to need you to run camp today. Where are Scott and Mikey?"

"They're down at the police station," she said.

"Okay. You go. Don't tell the other campers. I'll think about how to tell everyone." She started to walk toward the door. "Oh, man," I said under my breath, my hand sitting inert on the phone. I couldn't possibly make this phone call. Would they ask me to come to the crime scene? To identify his body? My job is to make sure these children are safe and happy. A bit of vomit surged to the back of my throat. The sun was half up over the hill, and I could already tell it was going to be a sweltering day. "Someone tell me this is a nightmare," I said as I picked up the phone and dialed.

Officer Murray told me that, as far as they could tell, the man wanted the money from the cash register. The girl behind the register was too terrified to do anything, crying and curled up under the soda dispenser, so Ethan went to help. Scott and Mikey ran outside, but they watched through the window. They said Ethan went behind the counter and bent over to ask the girl how to open the register. The man must've thought he was going to tell her to push an alarm button or call the police, so he shoved Ethan and the girl into the back room and put them in the freezer. Then, Officer Murray said, "For reasons we can't discern, he shot them both dead-center in the back."

I sat there at my desk, listening with horror, thinking that I wanted none of it. I wanted to go out and get on the bullhorn and wake up the campers, as I would normally do. Officer Murray started talking again, and I could feel myself sinking, as if I were in a locked car that had just careened off the bend and was being swallowed on all sides by black water. I would have to deal with this reality. A child had died in my care. I put the phone down and ran to the bathroom to throw up, all acid and coffee. I wiped my mouth with a hand towel and came back to the phone.

"Hello? You all right, Jim?" Officer Murray asked. "I'll need you to come down to get these boys and deal with some of the ugly formalities that go with a case like this."

"Yes," I said. "I'll be there as fast as I can." My feet went all jittery. I ran to my truck and floored the pedal all the way to the police station.

The whole way there, I thought of my thirty-something-year-old son. If I'd lost him when he was 17, I think I might've died myself. Seventeen. Such a bright time, a time of such promise and hope. Of course, when Lee was 17, his mom died, and that loss pretty much took all the hope out of him. Amelia had colon cancer, and we hadn't caught it in time. Even when she told me that she was passing blood, I never suggested that she go to the doctor. God knows she never would've gone on her own. I just figured she had hemorrhoids. We were getting old, nudging 60. Things were supposed to start falling apart a little bit. Just not that much.

She died a month before Lee left for Oberlin. We were happy because he'd chosen a college only an hour away, a good college too. And despite being bald and emaciated, Amelia was still all talk about getting Lee settled in his dorm room, buying him a new comforter for his bed, a new stereo, and maybe even a computer. Then, the next week, she started to feel bad again, so we took her to the hospital. They said it was pneumonia. It took her in three days. As she died, Lee held one hand, and I held the other. "Save me a seat," I said, trying to make her smile. But she didn't smile, and moments later I lost my girl.

In the car on the way home from the hospital, Lee was silent, spent from crying. I didn't expect him to say anything, but he did. "She's not going to be able to save you a fucking seat, Dad," he said, "because you're going to go to hell for not telling her to go to the doctor. For being so worried about your fucking camp that you neglected your own wife. Jesus Christ!" He started punching the dashboard, and I saw fury unlike anything I'd ever seen. Spit was flying from his mouth; veins popped out on his forehead. I thought about pulling the car over but just kept driving, staying between the lines and letting my son rage. I knew he was mourning. I knew he was angry. I hoped he didn't mean what he said.

•

At the police station, I saw Scott Bradshaw and Mikey Davis sitting together on a long wooden bench. They were hunched over, pale and exhausted. When they saw me, they sat quietly, like war veterans who couldn't talk about what they'd seen. I knelt down in front of them. "You boys okay?" I asked. They nodded. "I'm so sorry, boys. I'm so sorry." Mikey's chin started quivering and he burst out with one loud sob. I put my hand on his leg, and he didn't move, just cried quietly. Scott stared at the floor. "We'll call your parents so you can talk to them about what happened. Maybe go home for a while." They both nodded again. "Okay," I said, "I'm going to talk to Officer Murray." But I couldn't quite leave them yet. I stayed there, kneeling on the floor, putting one hand on each of their shoulders. "This is not your fault," I said.

Scott spoke, his voice calm and clear. "Yes it is. It's my fault. I was the one who wanted to sneak out. Ethan wanted to stay and play cards." He stared at the floor as he spoke.

"Son," I said, "you can't help that some very disturbed person robbed the

Crown Burger. You're not responsible. Got it?" He didn't move. "Scott? Look at me." Finally, he looked up, his eyes bloodshot and sunken, but still the eyes of a child. "You are not responsible for this," I said slowly. He blinked and nodded once, then looked back down.

Officer Murray came down the hallway and waved me toward him. I squeezed the boys' shoulders and then followed Officer Murray to his office. He and I were familiar with each other. His crew always helped direct traffic on arrival and departure days, and they kept an eye out for our kids when they did stupid things like sneak out after hours. More than once, they'd brought campers to my cabin in the middle of the night. Officer Murray sat down at his desk, and I sat in a chair opposite him.

"Awful tragedy," he said. "Just awful. That girl was a Havens High School grad. She was saving money to go to junior college in Cleveland." He paused, pushed his thick glasses up the greasy bridge of his nose. "No sign of the suspect yet. He ran out the back entrance and sped off in a red pickup. We've got an APB for his make and model. No one got the plates, though. Such a shame. And the bastard didn't even get a penny. All this blood for nothing."

I sat there thinking that were he to ask me to come with him to the morgue to identify the body, I might throw up again. I hadn't eaten anything, but I was sure my body could figure out a way to vomit. "I can't see the body," I said. "If that's something you need me to do. I just can't yet."

"Okay," he said. He looked down at his desk, then pushed a clear plastic bag toward me. "These were in his possession." In the bag were a Swiss Army knife, a cabin key, and Ethan's wallet. I took the bag and stood up.

"I'll go and tell his parents," I said. I couldn't bear the thought of them getting a phone call from a policeman with this kind of news. "Can you get Scott and Mikey back to camp?"

"Okay," he said, nodding and biting his lip.

"Take them straight to Jeanine. She should be in the cabin next to mine," I said as I stood up. "Ask her to call their parents and tell them to do what they think's best." I walked out before he could protest.

I saw the boys to Officer Murray's car, told them to get back to camp, clean up, eat something, and go to Jeanine. As they drove away, I stood still with the plastic bag in my hand. I opened it. I tried not to look at the picture on Ethan's driver's license, his goofy grin, his disheveled brown hair that was always dangling in his eyes. 43 Poplar Drive, Pittsburgh, PA. It would take about an hour and a half to get there. I got in my car and began to drive.

•

I remembered Ethan's parents from when they dropped him off at the beginning of each summer. I liked them both. His father was clean-cut, with a salt-and-pepper goatee, and he had a rigid, bony build. His mother's voice was loud and raspy, like Ethan's, and it looked like she hadn't cut her brown hair since 1973. She was heavy and wore a long, bright pink, flowery skirt and a purple tank top that exposed her thick upper arms. They were all smiles when

Ethan was around, and Ethan had a way of jiving his dad, making him burst out with deep belly laughs. As I pulled onto Interstate 80, I tried to remember everything about them.

Ethan had been coming to Rollicking Hills since he was about 12 years old, and he was proud to have become a senior camper. He was incredible with the younger campers, especially the boys. He could dissolve a fight in two seconds just by standing between the kids. Then he'd squat down and talk to them, get to the heart of what was wrong. None of the other senior campers possessed that kind of maturity. At 6'2", he was a star baseball player in high school. Last summer he'd dated a sweet, pretty junior camper named Ashley. And when he broke off with her early this summer, she cried for weeks. I saw her crying once, sitting in the semicircle of tree trunks that makes the amphitheater. She was holding court with several overly concerned 15-year-old girls. "I just don't understand," she wept. "I loved him so much." He had graduated from high school just a few weeks earlier, and he would be heading off to Ohio State in the fall. He told me he wanted to be a veterinarian. Scott and Mikey were going to Ohio State too, and they were planning to room together. I loved the idea and told them so over supper one night not long before. I knew they'd keep each other in line. But now Ethan was gone. I shuddered and gripped the steering wheel.

I thought of my son again, about when I took him to college. After unloading the car and hauling the boxes into Lee's dorm room, I was the only one to say goodbye. Amelia would've made the moment so perfectly sweet and sad. She would've been crying and laughing at the same time, touching Lee, holding his hand, and telling him to have a great time, to enjoy every moment of college. She would have given him perfect advice, something I never would've thought to say. But, instead, Lee and I hugged with an awkward mistiming. He squeezed first, then I squeezed, and then we both let go fast, like we felt we'd done it wrong. I had the urge to lean in and hug him again, but I didn't. "See ya," he said, and he turned around and walked back into the dorm. "Bye, son," I said, but I wasn't sure he heard me.

Looking at my dashboard, I saw that I was doing 90, and realized that I hadn't really been paying attention to the road since leaving the police station. With the gas tank barely a quarter full, I pulled off at the next exit. I needed to compose myself, buy a map of Pittsburgh, get some food.

I bought a Snickers bar, a bag of chips, and a jug of soda. As I walked back to my car, I had this urge to call someone. Anyone. I needed someone to talk to; I knew that much. I needed to tell someone other than Ethan's parents what had happened, as if in preparation to say the words to them. Thinking of Scott and Mikey, so traumatized, I cringed to think that this event would be their camp story. Not how great it was spending so much time outdoors, making lifelong friends, practicing independence. Rather, their friend got shot at a burger joint when he tried to help some innocent girl.

I walked over to the gas station's payphone and used my credit card to call Lee. He was living in Washington, D.C. now, married to a powerful lady named

Diane, who didn't seem to like me very much. When he answered, I tried to sound calm, but I don't think I did. "Something's happened, Lee."

"Dad?" I knew what he was thinking. It wasn't really like me to call him. I called on holidays and his birthday, and, once, I even drove to D.C. to visit him. But we'd just drifted apart. We didn't really have much to talk about. He's an Internet marketing manager; his wife's a lobbyist. I barely know what those job titles meant. Neither of us watched sports much anymore, so we always ended up talking about the camp—which cabins were getting rehabbed, how the developers from Cleveland were getting too close for comfort and how new subdivisions were popping up not 20 miles from us. But Lee always seemed bored by such talk, irritated even, so I just stopped calling and visiting, and I'm ashamed to say that when I stood at that phone booth, I couldn't remember the last time I'd talked to my son.

"A camper got shot at the Crown Burger," I said.

"What?" Lee said.

"And he died." I didn't know what else to say.

"Oh my God," Lee said. "What were they doing at the Crown Burger?"

"Well," I stammered, fighting an urge to hang up the phone. "Come on, Lee. You know. Campers sneak out all the time. It's what they do."

"Yeah, but, Jesus Christ. That is awful."

I shoved a hand into my pocket and looked around at the gas station, at all the normal people with their normal lives. "Well, I just wanted to let you know," I said. "I'm on the way to inform his parents."

"My God, Dad. Are you okay?" His question seemed insincere, like he didn't really care how I was. I hated having this feeling when calling my son, that all I wanted was to say good-bye. I needed Amelia here. I needed Amelia to be standing next to me, telling me everything would be okay.

"I'm fine," I said. "I just wanted you to know. I'll call you later when I get home."

"Okay, Dad. Be careful, okay? Drive carefully," Lee said, and I smiled, just a little.

It seemed like the hour-and-a-half drive lasted about ten minutes. I parked in front of Ethan's house and could see that his parents were home. Their house was a modest two-story brick colonial, with a bright-green front lawn and beds of Hostas blooming with purple flowers. It was eight-thirty on a Friday morning, and Ethan's parents were probably bustling around, getting ready for work.

As I got out of the car, the sight of a well-worn basketball hoop in the driveway made my knees almost buckle. Never had I felt my body move so slowly and heavily. I paused, studied my worn sneakers on the green doormat that said "Welcome!" in white plastic script with colorful flowers around the letters. Then I inhaled, held my breath, and rang the doorbell. Ethan's mom, Georgia, answered the door, all smiles and smelling like shampoo. I exhaled

as if her opening the door had sucked the air right out of my lungs. I watched her face register who I was, and that I was at their doorstep early on a Friday morning. She put her hand on her mouth.

"What happened?" she asked behind her fingers, stepping back a little, like she feared that what I was about to say might physically harm her.

"Hi, Georgia," I said. My heart knocked violently in my chest. I wanted to fall down there on that spot. I wanted to run back to the police station, revive her son, and tell her that everything was all right. "I have some awful news." The words came out so cold and regular. "Can I come in?" I asked, my body a different animal entirely than my brain.

"Connor!" Georgia yelled. "Something's happened!" I could sense that she would become hysterical. Part of me wanted to leave her a note with the awful news and take off, avoid seeing the whole scene entirely, and part of me wanted to watch it all, to see her fall on the floor and kick and scream and pull out her hair in protest. Connor walked toward the door, holding a cereal bowl in one hand, a spoon in the other.

"Hi," he said, either trying to be polite or not registering who I was.

"I am so sorry to tell you that, last night, your son and two other boys snuck out of camp and went to the Crown Burger a mile down the road. While they were there, the restaurant was robbed, and the man had a gun." I could feel my lips tightening, my throat clenching in protest. "I'm so sorry. Ethan was killed." I bent over involuntarily as I said it.

"Killed? He's dead? Ethan's dead?" Georgia whispered.

Georgia turned to Connor and put her face to his chest. He dropped his cereal bowl. Milk splattered onto the welcome mat and my shoes. He held her like he knew what was coming. Georgia screamed. She made a sound like a dying animal or a train screeching, an unworldly sound. Connor closed his eyes. It looked like her scream hurt his chest, like the sound cut through his body. His face was the palest white, and his mouth hung open.

I stood there feeling like I should go, leave them to this awful, private moment. But then they turned to me and started asking questions. Was I sure he was dead? Was he in a hospital? Could they see him? And I told them that he'd been declared dead at the scene and that he was in the morgue. When I said the word "morgue," Georgia sank down to the floor. Her denim skirt rode up to her knees, exposing her dry, pink kneecaps.

"I'll drive you to Ohio, and you can decide if you want to see him," I said. Georgia didn't say anything, but Connor nodded.

"Yes, we'll want to do that," he said. I wanted to tell them about Amelia, about how I knew death and how I mourn daily for her. I wanted to tell them

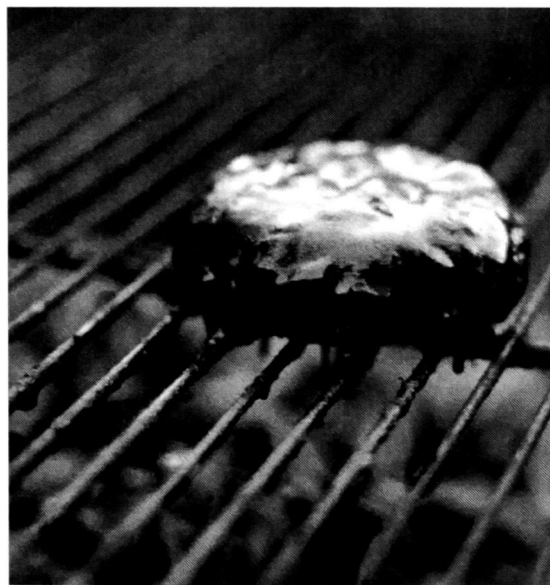


Photo by Robert S. Donovan

that I have dreams that I'm trying to save her from menacing things like sharks and tsunamis, but I never can. I wanted to tell them that I should've kept Ethan safe, that his death was something I should've been able to prevent. Instead, we shared an awkward silence before Connor said, "Well," and walked away from the front door. Georgia followed him. A few minutes later they returned with a small duffel bag for the trip.

We made a silent, slow procession to my car. Connor practically carried Georgia, and he laid her down in the backseat. I wondered if she'd taken some Valium, because her body was limp, and she was mumbling nonsense. Connor sat in the front seat next to me, and I started the car, listening to Georgia's crying in the backseat. I couldn't imagine why Connor wanted to sit next to me. I half hoped that they'd just want to caravan behind me and that I could make the drive alone, but when I made that suggestion, Connor told me he would prefer I drove, because it would be safer. If I were he, I wouldn't have been thinking about safety. I would've pummeled me in the front yard, threatened my life for letting someone take the boy's. Instead, he just sat twisted in my passenger's seat, one hand on Georgia's hip as he turned away from her to watch the road.

Not long into the drive, Georgia's eyes closed. "I think she's sleeping," Connor said. "Probably feels like the only way she can survive right now is to be asleep. Isn't that some defense mechanism in the wild? Don't some animals, when turned upside down or when they go into shock, they just sleep? Makes sense evolutionarily."

I nodded and gave Connor a little smile. I could see by the empty look on his face that nothing had registered with him yet. He reminded me of myself when I lost Amelia. I felt like I could run a marathon the day after she passed. I actually worked in the yard all day. I put new flowers in all around our main cabin. I bought the brightest flowers I could, because I knew Amelia would've liked them and because they made me feel alive. There were red, fuchsia, and yellow petunias, and that afternoon, when I finally stepped back to admire what I had accomplished, the flowers only looked imperfect, the soil lumpy, the spacing uneven. The next day I woke up crying. I've never had that happen before or since. I opened my eyes, and there were tears on my cheeks. That was the first in a series of really dark days. I can't really tell if I'm out of them yet. It's been twelve years but everything started to blend together after a while—the dark and the light.

Connor was staring out the window at the sky.

"You okay, Connor?" I said.

"This is the day I've lived in fear of since the day Ethan was born. That day is here." He paused. I didn't say anything. "Now that it's here, it feels so strange and calm. Like I've always known it would come. Like that fear was preparing me for this moment. But I just felt like we were in the clear for some reason. Just recently, I'd started feeling that. Like now that he was older, I didn't have to worry about him chasing a ball across the street and getting hit by a car. I didn't have to fret that he was out all night, because he knew how to take

care of himself. He knew how to take care of everyone else too. I just thought I didn't need to worry anymore." He held his hand on his cheek, as if to see if stubble had grown since his morning shave.

"Ethan was a spectacular young man," I said, and Connor turned to me.

"Yeah?" he said.

"Oh, beyond a doubt. The children used to hang off of his arms like little monkeys." I noticed that I was speaking in past tense, and I paused, unsure for a moment how to continue. "He took them on nature hikes and pointed out every living creature. They would all scramble to sign up for his hikes. Never a spot left. Everyone wanted to be around Ethan." I could hear myself talking, but I couldn't focus on what I was saying. I couldn't tell if it was helping or hurting. I just felt this pit in my stomach, this awful sour feeling. Here I was, the grim reaper personified, sitting there waxing poetic about this poor boy's too-wonderful-for-words life. I stopped, turned to Connor, wanting to pull over the car, wake up Georgia, tell her they could have everything I owned, that I would give up the camp, all that I loved, if only they would find a way to not let this ruin them.

Connor looked like he was in a trance, like he hadn't heard anything I'd said, didn't even remember speaking himself. I figured the silence was for the best. I just drove and began to count the fields on the right side of the road, guessing the crops: soybeans, corn, alfalfa. All that dirt, that fresh, green growth in those sprawling fields, and I could smell nothing but dry, metallic exhaust. My tongue felt thick. I thought about what I might do after I'd taken Connor and Georgia back to Pittsburgh. Chop down that evergreen that's been leaning next to the dock, plant flowers, maybe call Lee again.

•

When we pulled into the police station, Georgia said, "We're here," from the backseat, startling both me and Connor. We hadn't heard her wake up or move, but she had her car door open before I'd even finished pulling into the parking lot. "Sorry," Connor said before jumping out and running to catch up with her.

I turned off the engine and got out of the car, an act so ordinary that, for a moment, I imagined I was simply going to the hardware store or about to put gas in my car. One glance at the police station and reality kicked in. Inside at the front desk, Georgia paused and looked at me like I terrified her, eyes wide, mouth pushed down, hands clenched at her chest. I stepped back and sat on a bench next to the entrance and waited until someone called me in.

I waited a long time on that bench. No one talked to me, but everyone looked at me like I'd just lost a family member. I went outside after one of the secretaries saw me and shook her head like she pitied me. I began to pace in front of the station and thought about how we could prevent something like this from happening again. I pictured a barbed wire fence around the perimeter of the camp, or tracking devices around the kids' ankles so that we would know

if they'd snuck out. Was that what we would come to? Monitoring them like this? Security guards at summer camp?

I sat down on the steps and thought about Ethan. This summer I'd barely talked to him, really. I saw him in senior camper meetings, waved at him when we passed on the path to the dining hall. He was one that I never worried about. Last summer he had pulled a classic prank on the girl campers. He put a Milky Way in the lake when all the girls were having a swim lesson, then walked nonchalantly out onto the deck and shouted, "Doody! Doody in the lake!" The girls ran out screaming. A few were gagging, and Ethan and Scott were doubled over on the dock, laughing so hard that they could barely breathe. A senior girl camper lodged a formal complaint, and I had to admonish him, tell him he was out of line. I sat there on those steps, wishing that I'd winked as I punished him, done something to show him that he was the kind of kid I loved having at my camp. Then I heard a voice behind me.

"He's out here enjoying the afternoon!" It was Georgia. "He let my son die, and he's out here getting a suntan!" she screamed. I stood up and tried to speak, to hug her, anything. But she began hitting me in the chest. Her face was ashen gray, her eyes red and bloodshot. "My son! You killed him!" she said, growling and pushing me, all hair and fists and fingernails. I grabbed her wrists. They were thick and cold and weak. I held her until Connor and one of the policemen came outside and pulled her away from me. She crumpled, her body limp, like she was going to melt into the ground, but then she stood up and screamed, another wild-eyed, loud, crazy scream, and it seemed just right for what she was going through. I felt my body letting go, like it had no more capacity for stress like this. I would've welcomed a heart attack or a stroke. Instead, I just sat down like an invalid and felt dizzy. I watched as Connor and the police officer each held one of Georgia's arms and led her to the back of an unmarked police car. Officer Dwight came and told me he would drive Georgia and Connor to Pittsburgh. "No sense in you going through more than you already have," he said. I thanked him. "She'd just seen the body, Jim. She didn't mean what she said."

"Okay," I said. I looked at Connor, who stood at the door of the police car, watching me. Then he slid down into the backseat with Georgia and closed the door quietly. Officer Dwight gave me a little wave, started the car, and drove away.

I talked to Officer Murray for a while, filled out paperwork, and listened to him explain the formalities of a murder case like this one. After that I went to my car and started back to camp. It was late afternoon; the light on the horizon was turning a warm golden. I didn't feel like planting flowers or chopping down trees. I didn't feel like doing anything. When I pulled up to the cabin, I sat in my car for a while with the the door open, longing for familiar sounds: splashing down at the lake, children laughing, feet crunching on gravel. But all was eerily silent.

That night at dinner I had to stand up in front of all the campers and explain what had happened. The girls were crying. The boys were on guard, like cave men preparing to attack someone who had invaded their village. The hubbub was comforting for me, all of us mourning together.

Later, I locked myself inside my cabin, turned off the phone's ringer, and worried about how long we would all be reeling, how this tragedy would change my camp forever. I ignored all of the messages from panicking parents. It was dusk, and the sky had turned a brilliant orange outside, but I felt only like hiding.

A knock came on the door, but I didn't answer it, just sat as quietly as I could, hoping whoever it was would go away. I'd had enough. I couldn't continue to act like everything would be okay, like I knew exactly how to heal and move on. I peered around the corner and saw Lee cupping his hands on the window like he did when he was a boy, spying on me and Amelia as we discussed his future were she to pass away. I stood there blinking like someone had shone a bright light in my eyes. I imagined that he had come to tell me that he forgave me for everything, that we needed to talk, to be close again. I didn't hesitate. I ran to the door, opened it, feeling myself teetering, unstable.

"Son," I said and looked up. But it wasn't Lee. It was one of the other senior campers, a good friend of Ethan's, coming to tell me that he and some other boys had decided to begin a night patrol, to make sure campers would never try to sneak out again. His cheeks were flushed and his brown hair blown back as he urgently explained that they'd made a chart with three-hour shifts and that they intended to start that night. I interrupted him. "Listen," I said, "you kids just all need to go on with your regular life at camp. Don't worry. You'll be safe. You just leave the protecting to me. Okay, son?"

I put my hand on his shoulder. The boy looked up at me, squinting a little, as if he didn't trust a word I said.

• • •

HeartStrings

Richard T. Rauch

Too early, of course, too anxious, he'll think.
Just smile, cock your head, breathe, think coy — oh, no,
not you, not now:

who are you trying to kid?

*Ms. Boring, Ms. Plain, face too round, feet too
square, hair too thin, neck, waist, thighs, ass —
well, but I do feel pretty good in this dress.*

Stop drumming the table; think, yes, order,
drink, yes, wine, no, bourbon, leave the silver
alone — pie-round face panning a coy smile
to the fawning waiter, angular feet
delicately contoured in shiny pumps,
fidgeting, fingers running through her hair,
swept up, touching the lapis at her neck,
shifting from one silked cheek to the other,
haloed in her favorite, too-expensive scent.

Hmm exquisite posture sophisticated
not beautiful but certainly interesting
demure yes very feminine alone
she must be waiting for someone some jerk.

No doubt everyone is staring. Prom queen



Photo By EraPheralia Vintage (there...every now & then)

sneers, blind date jeers, such a fool to think — no,
not again:

*you? a date? who do you think you're
fooling? Ms. Loser, Ms. Dull, neckwaistthighs — I
should order another. No, it's too late....*

She knew her exit would be too abrupt,
too clumsy. So she did what she was and just
stood up, slipping a ten under her plate,
averting her glistening eyes, smoothing
her dress, turning heads in her wake, inciting
thrills of mystery in the eyes that trailed her
as she, feigning calm, blindly left the room.

What she hadn't thought, of course,
to contemplate or even consider
was her cell's dead battery,
his flat tire at the flower shop,
the possibilities in her chances —

Hey share a taxi....

Heaven

a detail

Judy Bebelaar



Photo By EK Jeong

Just to the right of God's finger
about to touch Adam's
is the hare's meadow.
Lie down, part the green blades gently
and you'll find bright eyes
looking back into yours,
a muscled gray haunch,
a long furry foot, black nails.
Dürer had a near-death experience
June 12, 1494, in which he briefly visited
this small corner of heaven.
It's always dawn here,
June, clear skies,
dew on the tender grass
where two lovers lie.

Hell: a Detail

No animals here, none anywhere.
In this small corner of hell,
the Devil's back pocket,
Marvin Gaye sings. Father, Father,
as the bullet whirs toward him;
always it is the moment before
metal explodes into flesh.
Startled people in winged shadows
look up to see a plane
about to enter a great tower.
A boy in a cell tears his jeans into strips,
makes a noose, looks for a hook,
the edge of a door high enough.
A mother holds a knife
to the throat of a terrified child.
Bright drops spill.
The bombardier has his hand on the lever
that will release Little Boy.



*Harvey
Spurlock*

Rain cooled my face as I climbed the hill. The moon had slipped behind a dark cloud, leaving the path illuminated only by the dim light from our house, the most recent in a series of too-small rundown structures we'd referred to as home. I pictured the trees in the owner's orchard above the house bowed down with apples. A plate of Virginia's fried apples would be soothing on a hung-over stomach in the morning. The old man certainly had eaten heartily, even claimed Virginia's were "the best fried apples in Red Fox," the morning he hit the road for the last time eleven years ago. I should have picked apples earlier—we had permission to—but true to my nature, I'd been engaged in less wholesome activities. On the porch, I shook moisture from my shoulder-length hair and then opened the door with the toe of my boot. I strode toward the kitchen.

The scene was cozy. My mother, wife, sister, and brother—Virginia, Roseanne, Billie, and David—were playing a game of Rook. Country music whined lowly from somewhere in the background. I let my eyelids droop and leveled my gaze on David, shirtless, displaying his rippling muscles. Dark curly hair jutted from beneath his ball cap. My younger brother remained intent on his cards, refusing to acknowledge my glare.

"Hello, perfect people." The words oozed out almost against my will. I'd come from Uncle Elmer's and was wired tight.

"You're still drunk, aren't you, Wesley?" said Roseanne.

"Dog drunk and aimin' to get drunker."

"I'll bet you don't have a dime left and nothing to show for it."

I didn't have any money. To show for part of it, I had a revolver tucked through the belt under my army field jacket. Two days ago I'd been walking my dogs near the head of the hollow when I came across a scrap heap with a lot of aluminum and copper in it. Borrowing my uncle's pickup, I hauled the metal to the junkyard. What I didn't spend on the firearm, Uncle Elmer and I put into wine.

"You should have gone right with him to the junkyard, Roseanne," said Virginia. "Give a Slagle a dollar and he'll be into the closest bottle and onto the first whore he comes to. I oughta know. I was married to one of the bastards for thirteen years." My mother spoke in a monotone. She'd uttered words to the same effect countless times. "I finally got rid of him. But I've still got eight of his brats driving me to an early grave."

"It's your play, Granny," said David. None of us had ever called Virginia by any variation of the word "mother." At forty-four, she had a pretty but used-up looking face. Straight dark hair hung halfway down her back. She tossed down her last card. David swept the trick into his pile. He didn't have to total up points: Billie and he had them all.

There were few lulls in Virginia's ill humor. Much of it no doubt resulted from health problems, mainly bad lungs and nerves. She had had four light heart attacks, all of them before the old man said his final good-by.

I leaned against the doorframe and fingered the loose rounds in my jacket pocket. The revolver's cylinder contained a single bullet.

Uncle Elmer and I had spent most of the day drinking wine. It was late afternoon when he came to on his bare mattress. Seated cross-legged on the floor, I handed him the nearly empty wine bottle. "Treat it with respect," I said. "That's it." I neglected to mention that while he slept I had retrieved an empty flask from

the trash, filled it half full and tucked it into the inside pocket of my field jacket for later on.

"We'd have more if you hadn't bought that pissy-assed pistol." He tipped the bottle to his thin lips.

I laughed sheepishly. "I was hoping you'd forget about that, favorite uncle."

"You might as well have flushed the money down the commode."

I took the revolver out of my belt. "It sure is pretty. It ought to be good for something."

"It might make a hood ornament for my pickup. Or better yet, I could use it to perform brain surgery on myself. Now that would be a surefire cure for the shakes."

That line of reasoning led to my suggesting a game of chance. His long face broke into a slow grin. "Son, you've lost all your marbles."

I took a round out of my jacket pocket and chambered it. "Let's see who goes first." Laying the revolver on the floor, I gave it a spin. Around and around it went, until it came to rest pointed under his chin. "Best of luck to you, Uncle. May I have the honor of being a pallbearer?"

"You flatter me, Nephew. I was totally unaware of the depth of your affection." He swung his legs over the side of the bed and his bony hand crawled across the weapon. With an artistic flourish, he laid the business end against his temple.

I sipped wine and tried not to contemplate the consequences. Then I realized how badly his hand was trembling. "Pull that baby!" I said. "I'll tell everybody that you were as cool as a cucumber. Cooler than one of Granny's cucumbers, I'll say."

His entire wine-soaked body was quaking, the corners of his mouth drooping. "I'd hate to make you a liar, boy," he muttered.

"Watch me, old man." I swiped the gun out of his hand and rammed it to my head. The click of metal on metal reverberated behind my eyeballs. My leaden arm eased the revolver to the floor. "Guess I didn't beat the odds," I stammered.

"Lord, boy! I could have never faced Virginia if it had gone off."

"Yeah, she'd want to wring my neck too. I've got a headache. I was on cloud nine for a split-second, though." I looked down reflectively. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Shoot...er, sure."

"Did you ever think about blowing my daddy away?"

He rubbed his prickly chin. "Not really. What he did to me was nothing out of the ordinary for him. So I didn't take it personally. And he didn't do a whole lot of damage. The kids were grown. What was left of my marriage wasn't worth worrying about."

"But he was walking all over you, man—and laughing about it. Wouldn't you have loved to watch his big, wide smirking face explode into a million pieces?"

"For Virginia's sake I might have. But, as crazy as it sounds, she probably would have hated me for it. I think she still cared for the sapsucker. I would have only hurt her and myself."

"You wouldn't have had to pull the trigger. You could have aimed in between his eyes just to watch him squirm, and squirm, and squirm—until he was sweating blood."

Uncle Elmer's head came up and his wine-glazed eyes fixed on mine. "Get rid of that gun, Wesley. When you leave here, drop it down a deep, dark well."

"I hear you, Uncle." I lifted the bottle off of the floor. "Here, you can have that last little bit. I'm going to go find a well."

"You people must be cheatin'," snapped Virginia. David was dealing a fresh hand. "That'd be just like a Slagle." She reached for the tobacco can and book of papers. "Some of my kids are worse than others, but none of them are worth a damn."

I assumed David, although now tarnished, remained her favorite, while I was at the other end of the scale.

"I've never seen such a lot as the Slagles. Drunkards, cheaters, wife-beaters, thieves, whore-hoppers...."

"Leave the whore-hopping part out of it for me," I said.

"Watch your mouth to me, boy! I'll put you on the road."

"I've never been out on Roseanne."

"Are you calling me a liar? Nobody calls me a liar in my own house."

"Are you going to bid, Granny?" asked David.

"How can I bid on this pissy-assed hand?"

I backed off into the dark living room, dropped onto the broken-down couch, and took out my wine. I wasn't sure why I defended my faithfulness. If not for my slightly stooped shoulders, due to childhood rheumatic fever, and my features now marred by a knife scar down my cheek, I probably would be like the rest of them in that respect. The old man certainly had a way with the women. And they couldn't seem to help themselves around David. He bewitched the ladies as automatically as wine did me.

As Virginia never ceased reminding me, I had most of my old man's bad habits—as David did not. David didn't drink or steal. No. It wasn't entirely true that David wasn't a thief. He merely was more cunning at manipulating Virginia into excusing his unsavory traits.

About the time I drained my last drop of wine, the Rook game ended. David—supposedly a victim of brain damage from a bicycle accident—and Billie were easy winners. "You say you aren't a whore-hopper, Wesley," said Virginia. "But to my notion, all Slagles are born whore-hoppers, and you're a Slagle. Hah! I guess I got you there."

Billie laughed. "How can Wesley say he isn't a whore-hopper?" She was seventeen; long gold earrings dangled below her short blond hair. "He's married to a whore."

"Aw, you can't blame Roseanne too much," said Virginia. Her face was lit up. "Look at what she's married to. She probably knew he'd let her get away with it. I believe Ballard would have done the same. I just didn't have sense enough to run around on him like he did me. Roseanne could have taken it outside of the family, though." Her sharp-featured face dropped the glow. "That's the part of it I can't abide."

"I'm ashamed to walk out of the holler," Billie jumped back in, "when every-

body knows my brother's married to a slut."

"What about you, little sister?" I said. "You've been out on Doyle plenty of times."

"That's a little different, Wesley. I'm getting my divorce. And I'm not even living with the sonofabitch."

"We weren't living together either." I'd been in prison, doing five to twenty years for armed robbery. Virginia got me out after eight months by proving that Clyde Conley had lied about the gun. I didn't have it when I went into the house, but picked it up inside.

Roseanne's eyes remained on the table. I supposed that had she not been in Virginia's house she would have gone after Billie by now. But then I didn't seem to know my wife anymore. When locked up, I wrote her a Valentine poem. In it I claimed to have looked into her toenails and seen the universe: a stolen line of course, but penned with sincerity at the time. Once home I soon was told what she'd done. I looked at her toes and saw nothing but cheap nail polish.

"Roseanne's worse than a dog or a cat," scoffed Billie.

I peered down at the empty wine bottle and dropped it onto the floor. Rising, I strode into the kitchen and let out a long, low growl.

"You sit right back down, Wesley!" shouted Virginia.

Starting around the table, my hands formed into claws. I lunged at David. He leaned away, almost toppling out of his chair. "This is between you and Billie, Wesley." There was a tight grin on his handsome face.

"Keep right on, Wesley, and you'll be the death of me!" cried Virginia. "That's what you want anyway. That's what you all want!"

I struggled to calm myself.

"If I was you, Granny, I wouldn't let Wesley back in here," said Billie, "at least not when he's been drinking."

I whirled toward my sister. Yanking her out of the chair, I pinned her arms to her sides and lifted her off the floor. "I ought to thump some respect into you," I said. She spit in my face. Hoisting her higher, ignoring her wild kicking, I shoved her against the kitchen cabinets.

"I'm going to Clyde's to call the law," Virginia announced. She was halfway across the living room.

I dropped Billie. Catching up with Virginia as she opened the door, I latched onto her wrist. "I was only trying to shut her up."

"You're a madman, Wesley!" Quivering with rage, she was frantically gasping for breath, nearly sinking to her knees. Her very existence seemed to dangle by a flimsy thread. She jerked her arm loose from my grip. It slashed through the window by the door.

A rock whizzed by my head. Billie, now in the yard, turned and ran toward Clyde's. "Now look what you've done!" wailed Virginia. A long, thin line of blood welled up on the back of her hand.

"It was an accident, I swear."

"Accident, my ass! I've done more for you than the rest of my kids put together and this is the only way you know how to repay me. I should have dropped you off of a cliff the day you were born, Wesley Wayne Slagle."

"I love you." My eyes, near tears, sought hers, searching for any glimmer of understanding. There was none.

In the apple orchard, I sat on the wet grass, my back against a twisted tree trunk. The rain had eased up. Virginia had every right to despise me. She stayed with me day and night when I lay in the hospital at age fourteen expected to die with rheumatic fever. She hired an old woman to watch the other kids, eventually paying her off by getting down on her knees to scrub floors. It had to be her devotion alone that pulled me through.

Four years later, she took on extra house cleaning and washing to send me to trade school. She was determined to give me an opportunity neither she nor anyone else in our family had ever known. She slaved over others' laundry until two in the morning and was back up at five to cook breakfast. No wonder her health was gone!

I did fine in the school—until the day a pair of boots in a downtown store caught my eye. I didn't need them. But they were shiny and new and stealing them looked easy. I was caught and expelled. With one rash act I sealed shut the door to my future and extinguished every last flicker of my mother's love. David's transgression was minor compared to mine.

The trees around me were heavy with apples. Virginia wasn't well enough to pick them, and the others were too lazy. It was growing late in the fall, so not many breakfasts with fried apples were left. We'd probably be living somewhere without an orchard next year. I resolved to pick apples the next day.

After a while two cruisers pulled up to the house. I stayed where I was, prepared to hightail it into the woods. But they didn't come after me. The moon was out, and the rain had stopped by the time they left. I slunk down to the kitchen window.

David lay back in his chair, an easy smile on his wide face. One hand encircled a mug of coffee, while the other arm dangled loosely, a cigarette between his fingers. "I don't know why I let Wesley come in here and start his shit," he said. "I guess I just can't stand to hurt nobody."

"It's Billie's ass I oughta kick for not busting his head with that rock before he put my hand through the window," said Virginia. A rag was wrapped around her hand. "I swear, there's nothing sorrier in this world than a drunken Slagle." She patted her chest. "Lordy, I felt like a goner for a few minutes. My heart isn't back to normal yet."

"That's what upsets me the most, Granny," said David. "Him coming in here like that when he knows you're in bad health."

"I was afraid that rock would kill him," said Billie.

Virginia took a drag on her cigarette. "It probably only would have knocked him cold." She broke into a throaty laugh. "I guess killing him would put a stop to it, though."

They all, except Roseanne, had a hearty laugh. David's nearly silent laugh



Photo by inspector 81

lasted longer than the others. I crept away from the window.

I hurried down the hill, no doubt much like the old man had time and again after slithering out of bed and tiptoeing from the house. Likely he intended to be back before sunup. But it might be eight to ten months before he returned, most often after rambling through one of the neighboring states with a woman who was footing the bill.

He and I had walked up Red Fox Hollow one cloud-covered evening three years before my rheumatic fever set in. "I probably ought to pay a visit to the Burleson home," he said, as we passed their property. Seeing the house dark and the car gone, I observed that they were probably at church.

"It does appear that way." The old man grinned, revealing even but stained teeth. His soiled ball cap was pulled low over his dark curly hair, the bill shading his eyes. "George never did pay me the entire price for an old Chevy I let him have last year. I, more than anyone, hated to see the transmission go out on him the first day, but that doesn't change the fact that he owes me money. He gave me his word." The old man's words were rolling out low and easy, well oiled with regret and the effort to understand. I felt badly for both men that the transaction had been less than a success.

"I suspect he's thought better of it by now, though. It wouldn't surprise me if he's got the money laid out but just can't remember to give it to me. Being as I could use it right now, I might go have me a look-see."

The old man whistled softly as he worked around the house until he found a window that opened into one of the bedrooms. He gave me a boost up and through. I waited on the couch in the living room, while he went through the rest of the place, still whistling a traditional favorite. "Camp Town Races," I think it was. What bothered me most was that our boots had muddied Mrs. Burleson's spotless carpet.

"George must be keeping that money in his pocket," said the old man, emerging into the living room. "I'll bet Ressie's got something good to eat, though. She always did, especially when George wasn't around. But then...that's another story."

Fried chicken with all the fixings was in the refrigerator. I said I wasn't hungry. The old man tore into the bowls of cold food with both hands.

"We could take some with us," I said, after it looked like he was done. "There's nothing to eat at the house."

"Good suggestion, son...Wesley. Good suggestion, indeed. And we'd do exactly that, if we had the time and the means to pack it up the holler. But church should've let out by now. I can visualize them popping in at the wrong moment. Now that I've got me a full belly, I've got an honest-to-goodness urge to go poof." His hand flew open like he'd made himself disappear down his own sleeve. We left the dishes on the table.

We were nearing our house when he said, "Mum's the word about where we've been. Your mother, as much as I've tried to enlighten her, never will be able to come to grips with the overall picture. She's always had what you call a one-track mind. The way she keeps after you about book learning is a good example of that. Why, she's even got you packing your studies back and forth to school. When I was your age, if I did go to school it was with a half-pint of pappy's corn

whiskey in my hip pocket and not much on my mind but chasing tail. I know deep down in my soul that her intentions are as good as gold, bless her heart. But, doggone it, I'm speaking as a father now, Son." He stopped walking and peered down at me, tugging the bill of his cap even lower. "I, for the life of me, don't recall a Slagle ever allowing his mama to turn him purely into a bookworm." He resumed walking. "There's simply more to the old ballgame than that. In fact, one of my objectives tonight was to give you an introductory course into the survival side of life."

I didn't go to school with a half-pint of corn whiskey in my hip pocket after that night. (My pappy wasn't running a still.) But I did stop carrying books home. It wasn't that the old man was around that often to catch me at it, but I could visualize him popping in at the wrong moment.

Despite the old man's waywardness and his otherwise inhumane treatment of Virginia, she stuck by him until the affair with Uncle Elmer's wife came to light. Afterward, she maintained that the one thing she couldn't tolerate was breaking the marriage vows with someone in the family; apparently, she recently had modified those sentiments in regard to one member of the family.

I headed on down the hollow to find an uncle with a bottle.

•

Near noon the next day I returned. No one spoke to me when I walked into the house and sat on the couch. The rag on Virginia's hand and the cardboard covering the broken window were painful reminders of the night before. I was shaky but clearheaded enough to face the rest of the day without another bottle of wine.

After a time I stood up and said I was going to pick some apples. David sat shirtless at the kitchen table where he'd been sipping coffee and chain-smoking cigarettes, while the women busied themselves tidying up the house. My eyes settled on him. "You want to lend me a hand, Son?"

"I'd like to, Wesley." He looked up at me, an expression of manufactured sincerity spreading across his face. "But my back's been bothering me all morning. I'd have to struggle just to make it up that hill right now." He reached for the tobacco can.

"Suit yourself. Let me put it this way though: either you pick apples or you won't be eating any for breakfast."

He licked a cigarette paper and grinned. "Evidently, I won't be eating any then." He tugged on the bill of his cap.

I took the bucket from the back porch and climbed the hill; a gentle breeze took the edge off my hangover. When I got back and set down the full bucket, Billie grabbed an apple. "Those are for breakfast," snapped Virginia.

"Let her have one." I shrugged. "Nobody else better get into them, though."

David was the first into the kitchen when Virginia called us for supper. He piled four pork chops and a large mound of potatoes on his plate. The others took two pieces of meat apiece. One was left by the time I got to the stove. I put it on Virginia's empty place. "Don't you want that, Wesley?"

"Not after all the wine I drank yesterday," I muttered.
She ate half of it and forked the rest over to me.

•

The mountain air was cool and fresh the following morning as I gazed from the front porch down the hill through a light mist. I fingered the loose bullets still in my jacket pocket. Then I pulled the revolver out of my belt, thinking that I should have taken Uncle Elmer's advice and gotten rid of it by now. I'd sell it today. I removed the one round from the cylinder and dropped it into my pocket with the others.

It had been from another Red Fox front porch that I watched the old man make his farewell walk. My rheumatic fever hadn't been diagnosed yet. Before rounding the bend in the road, he turned and looked back. He stood there for a long time, while tears formed in my eyes. Then he tugged on the bill of his cap and went on his way. I knew he wouldn't be coming back.

Virginia called me for breakfast.

David removed his ball cap and placed it on the table. His dark curly hair was parted down the middle and still wet from the shower. His plate was heaped with eggs, gravy, and bread. As I eased into the chair across from him, his hand went to the steaming bowl of apples. "Doggone it, Son," I said. "I hate to see you reaching for those apples."

"You boys don't need to fight so early in the morning," grumbled Virginia. She sat at the head of the table, to my left, David's right. The rag was gone from her hand.

David held the bowl in front of him and flashed a comfortable smile. "I wasn't going to eat any. But they just look too good to pass up." He dipped out an ample helping and handed me the bowl.

"They smell good too," I said, spooning out some. "In fact, the only thing I see wrong with them is that they're on your plate."

I stood up and pulled the empty revolver out of my belt. I never got it aimed in between his eyes; never saw the expression on his face.

Virginia came up, clawing toward me. Her hands clenched and went to her chest. She crashed down on the table, dead.

•

•

•

Hawks of the Spirit Path

Katherine (Morgan) Whitt

Messengers of communication and remembrance
On pinions of purpose and intent
Soar across my path
When my heart yearns for contentment;

Heart thoughts fly on unspoken wings
Traveling a path between planes that cannot be seen
But perceived.

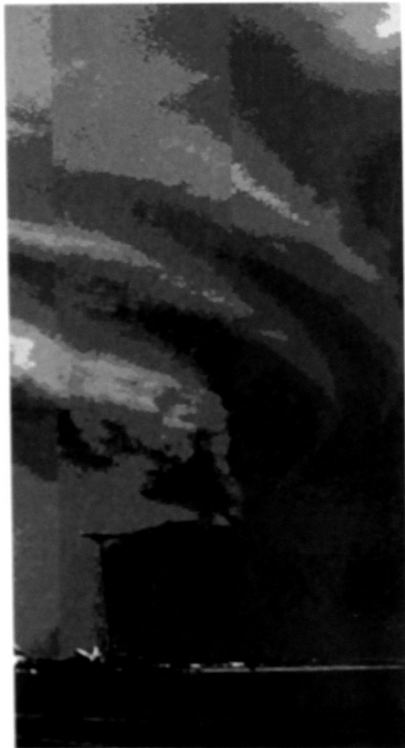
At times it is an unconscious plea;
Sometimes my spirit calls to you beyond....
I know with instinct that you respond
When I spy the red-tailed hawk.

If my need demands more than one,
Hawk after Hawk positions itself in varying poses
In my line of sight;
I feel their presence before I see....
That's how I know that you sent them to me,
My gratitude and respect to you,
Hawks of the Spirit Path.

No matter how thin the blood becomes
through generational lines,
It retains the knowledge of our forefathers;

They traveled the Spirit Path and returned
With the awareness of two paths of existence.
Through their blood, my blood,
I know that these feelings
Of thought are metaphysical:

All is revealed through my spirit eyes
As my heart soars to you on the wings of my totem.
My gratitude and respect to you,
Hawks of the Spirit Path.



Graphic by EK Jeong

*In loving memory of my father,
John Joe Morgan*

NOCHES - DE LOS - MUERTOS

San Miguel de Allende

Andrew H. Oerke

A green fluorescent skeleton snatches my shadow
and flings its dark sleeves round his neck for a cape
and says he'll give it back if I make him a swap:
He's dying to barter his bones for my breath,
and hang my flesh on the mast of his wingspread.

Thistly fingers enter me and it's as if
I had fleshed *him* out and left myself a shipwreck
on a rusty shore. The pirate struts off
as the body I was though no one saw the flip
of identities. I dangle away stiff
as a puppet and rickety as a skeleton.

I'm looking for someone to confirm me
as myself, since I have lost the secret
of how to put myself together again.

What kind of man is he who has lost his shadow?

Before I know what is happening,
we're waltzing in front of the plaza
and everyone picks up tempo in a toe-tapping,
thigh-slapping jubilation at apogee
level and pace. The crowd swells to see if
this mobile of calcium can cop my soul.
His death is the antidote to my life;
I am the flip side of the dancing dead.

PLATO'S CABIN

Andrew H. Oerke

The Old Man sat swinging on his throne, swaying
on his back porch in the sky, and waving
his scepter and plastic rattle like a fool.
Clouds thundered appreciation. So He pulled the throttle
of the universe out to full speed, and raving
and ranting like Ophelia, He went winging
east to get west, till He arrived at Twilight's redwoods,
where he camped out for good in his rocking chair, like so,
and dreamt another world into existence,
but realized too late it looked just like the last one.

Psalm — for — the Whales

Naomi Ruth Lowinsky

The heaven is Yours, the earth too.

— Psalm 89



Painting by Nikki Janzen

Yours is the sun, awakening seeds
in the dark. They leap to the sky,
as palm trees bearing coconuts,
as mangoes thrusting flowers
into our hands.

Yours are the roots. Yours the fervent
purple and pink bougainvillea, Yours the moon
whose fingers play with the tides,

Yours the pelicans, dipping their wings
to touch You, Yours the mountains
who praise You in rustling ferns
and in stone. Yours our eyes
which behold
You,
feed us bananas, papayas, grapes;
we learn to make wine.

We who have walked on the moon
and sent pieces of metal to Mars
have forgotten —

*For everything taken,
something must be given back —*

The whales keep track
of our debt. They sing of blasts
under seas, of glaciers gone
to muck, of salmon that can't
make it home.

They sing and they sing, those whales,
Your prophets.

The Meadowlarks

Brad Buchanan

The brush of our hands, considered truly,
contained a kiss; there was holy urgency
in our touches in the back of the car.
We were first thrown together as others drove
that dreadful and delightful road
to the merciful meadow. We lay in grooved
oblivion—your dark hair in my lungs
waiting for those to whom we owed
our love to forgive that debt and leave.
And then the tiny, almost earthbound
butterflies, like puppies caressing
your absent face with faint paws—velvet
vermin cuckolding me before
I had ever known such open air,
such an unexpected, dreamlike lark
whose wings folded up even as they took flight.

the **P**ower
of **P**ositive
Pessimism

Lenny Levine

"Hi, Rick. It's great to finally meet you."

"Hi, Denise. Same here."

We were standing in the waiting area at the Olive Garden restaurant. I'd spotted her as soon as I came in the door and was relieved to see that she looked as good as her picture. Her appearance proved me wrong, and I'm always happy to be proven wrong.

You're supposed to hope for the best and expect the worst. Well, I don't know about the first part, but I'm really good at the second. In fact, I think it's lucky to expect the worst. They say it's always what you don't expect that gets you, so, by that reasoning, every bad thing I can think of is automatically less likely to happen.

I know it sounds strange. But like the guy in New York with the talisman that protects his apartment from tigers, I'd say it's worked so far. Although it probably cost me my marriage.

The maître d', who looked like he was still in college, led us to a window table. As I walked behind Denise, I took grateful note of the slimness of her body. In my preemptive imaginings, I'd had her about 20 pounds heavier than her online photo and assumed it had been taken years before. Mistaken on both counts, and good for me.

We'd met two weeks earlier on e-Together.com after they'd matched us in "25 Crucial Compatibility Categories." A flurry of e-mails between us was followed by the next step—going out to dinner. We'd picked the Olive Garden in Danbury because it was equidistant from the two Connecticut towns where we lived.

Now, as we settled in at the table, came the obligatory awkward moment.

"So," I said with what felt like a cheesy smile.

"So," she answered with a self-conscious smile of her own.

I tried to remember what grade she'd said she taught. Was it fourth grade?

"How were your kids today?" I asked, taking the safe route.

"Crazed. They always are before Christmas vacation."

"Same for me at the store." I manage a TFM franchise at the Waterbury Mall. It stands for Today's Favorite Music, but we joke that it really stands for Total Fricking Mess. I thought it was a little too soon to share that with her. "People are nuts this time of the year," I wound up saying.

She nodded and we buried our faces in the menus. Off to a pretty unimpressive start, I thought.

The waitress came over and we ordered. Tuscan chicken for her, veal Marsala for me, Chianti and a Caesar salad for each of us. The waitress departed.

"So, how's your band?" she asked. My profile mentioned that I play guitar and jam on weekends with other amateur musicians.

"It's not really a band yet. We're just having fun at this point, nothing serious. Although we could use a good keyboard player." Her profile said she played piano. It was one of our "25 Crucial Compatibility Categories."

"I wouldn't be good enough." She smiled and gave a modest shrug. "I'm okay for playing at school assemblies, but that's about it. What kind of stuff do you do?"

"Eagles, Springsteen, some Kenny Loggins. I'd like us to do Steely Dan songs, but nobody has the chops."

"I love Steely Dan."

The waitress arrived with our glasses of wine and the salads.

"Do you think their later albums come up to *Aja* or *The Royal Scam*?" I asked, and we were on our way.

As dinner progressed, we talked about a whole lot of things: politics (we both voted for Obama), movies (loved *Slum Dog* and *Milk*, hated *Benjamin Button*, thought it was unfair that *Gran Torino* didn't get nominated for anything), books (read all of Kurt Vonnegut, not crazy about Dan Brown), sports (we're both Mets fans), and a few of the other 25 pillars of crucial compatibility. It felt comfortable.

There was also some mention of our exes. "Tim and I got married too soon," she said. "We were fresh out of high school and didn't know anything. But he's a nice guy, and we're still friends."

I told her Marian and I were a similar story, that we'd dated only for six months before we got married, and after five years, we realized it wasn't working. Neither marriage had produced any children, and that was a good thing. But we still wanted to have them someday.

The date seemed to be going great, except that it wasn't. Something indefinable was missing, at least for me. I became increasingly aware of a tiny rasp in her voice, and I wondered if it was the kind of thing that would ultimately get on my nerves. Her eyes seemed too small and intense. I didn't know if I liked the way she'd occasionally reach up and play with her hair.

There was also the feeling that I wasn't scoring many points either. An observation meant to be funny would sometimes get only a fleeting smile. Her attention seemed to wander. I thought I saw her frown when a piece of zucchini accidentally fell off my fork as I was talking. There seemed to be no spark between us, no exciting sense of possibility.

This is never going to happen, I realized, with as much glum certainty as I had ever felt in my life.

As I considered that thought, a thump rattled the window next to us. Then a whoop of insane laughter came from the parking lot outside. We looked out the window.

A woman in a dark, full-length coat had stumbled against the side of the building, and she and her male companion were finding her fall hysterically funny.

"Whassa matter wi' you?" he called out, slurring the words. "I gotta carry ya to the goddamn car?"

"Screw you!" she screamed at him, lurching away from the window. "I'm gonna wind up carryin' you; tha's wha's gonna happen." She staggered and almost fell, making him crack up anew.

We could see them clearly under the lights of the parking lot as they wove their way toward a cream-colored Mercedes, arguing boozily. He was struggling to get the keys from his coat pocket.

"Those people are going to die tonight," said Denise. "And they're going to kill other people while they do so."

She said it in a flat tone of voice, like it was an immutable fact that nothing could alter.

"I should go out there," I said, pushing my chair away from the table. "Try and stop them."

"I should go with you," she said, getting up too.

I could see through the window that the guy had unlocked the car and was starting to climb in. The woman swayed unsteadily on the other side, yelling at him to unlock her door. If we hurried, maybe we could get to them.

Suddenly, flashing lights came into view, and a police cruiser pulled up beside them. It must've been patrolling the area just at that moment. A cop got out. We watched as he questioned the couple and put them through a quick sobriety test. Then he told them to get into the back of the cruiser. We smiled at each other as we sat back down.

"Well," said Denise, almost to herself, "it worked again."

I blinked in surprise. Could that possibly mean what I thought it did?

"What worked?" I asked.

"Oh, it's silly; never mind."

"No, really," I insisted.

She blushed and looked down. "I had a premonition that something bad would happen, and it didn't. I always predict bad things; that's how my mind works. Tim used to get furious with me about it. I know it's only superstition, but I actually think it helps prevent bad things from happening. You probably think I'm crazy."

I looked at her for a long moment.

"Can I tell you a story?" I asked her.

She nodded.

"When I was sixteen my dad was diagnosed with stage-four lung cancer. They



Photo by Kansas Poetry (Patrick)

said he'd live for a month at most, and there was nothing anyone could do."

I told her about the devastation that had wracked our family, how my mom and my older sister kept saying we should pray for him, that we should think good thoughts, keep visualizing him as healthy again, sending out as much positive energy as we could.

"I tried, but I couldn't do it. All I could think of was that he was going to die,

and that afterward, we'd blame ourselves. If we'd just prayed a little harder, or had more positive thoughts....For me, it would've made the death twice as horrible.

"So I secretly started visualizing him gone. I imagined the funeral, then the three of us living without him. I saw the empty space at the table. I pictured his closet, full of clothes he'd never wear again, and my mom finally able to get rid of them after a year or so. I saw it all."

I told Denise that it didn't make me feel guilty. "It was just my way of preparing for the blow," I said. "I didn't believe it could affect anything, positive or negative. I didn't think it mattered. And then, three weeks later, his cancer went into complete remission."

"We couldn't believe it. My mom and sister were sure it was their prayers and positive energy. I just went along with them, but I wondered."

"A couple of years later, my dad and I were at a Mets game. He's a terrific man, by the way; I think you'd like him. Great musician. Used to be one of the top studio guitarists in New York. Anyhow, I don't know why, but I decided to tell him what was going through my mind during those weeks when he almost died. I didn't know what his reaction would be, but I sure wasn't expecting what I heard."

"He said, 'Don't ever tell your mother this, but I never thought I was going to make it either. Not once. Right up to the moment they told me I was okay, I was absolutely certain I was going to die.'"

"That's when I realized that maybe things just happen no matter what, or maybe we can influence them for good or bad; who knows? But if you add up all our premonitions that came true against all the ones that didn't, 'didn't' wins by a landslide. So why not take advantage of it?"

She was staring across the table at me with eyes that were not small and intense. They were wide in fascination, and they were beautiful.

"Can I tell you something?" she said.

"Sure."

"My brother Rob is in Afghanistan. Every day I wake up thinking he's dead. I see him getting blown up by an I.E.D. or a suicide attack; I see him getting ambushed. I even imagine him being killed by friendly fire, or electrocuted in one of those improperly wired showers we hear about. I think of as many ways as I can for him to die. I can't stop doing it, and I don't want to, because every day he stays alive, I think I'm helping somehow. Tim used to tell me it was sick to think that way, so I stopped talking to him about it."

"Marian was the same," I said. "Even after I decided to keep it to myself, she'd still look at me funny and say, 'I know what you're thinking and it's disgusting'."

We both sighed, almost in unison.

"Do you suppose we're the only two people in the world who feel this way?" I asked. "I've never met anyone else," she said, and the tiny rasp in her voice sounded incredibly sexy.

I had the sudden urge to ask her to come home with me. We'd have a drink, talk some more. Maybe, if things were right.... But it was too soon; I couldn't. It might spoil everything. "Would you like to do this again?" I said. "I'd love to." "Tomorrow night?" "That would be wonderful." She began to idly play with her hair again. It was so cute. How could I have thought otherwise?

We split the check, as agreed, and the waitress took our credit cards.

"Maybe someone who works here will steal our identities," I suggested.

"Maybe we'll get salmonella from the raw egg in the Caesar salad."

We both cracked up all the way out of the restaurant into the parking lot. As I walked her to her car, we traded doomsday scenarios the way jazz musicians trade solos. "Maybe we'll each run into some black ice on the road and have a serious accident." "Maybe we'll run into drivers that are drunker than that couple." "Maybe we'll each get home and find out our houses were robbed." "No, no, even better. Maybe we'll each walk in on a robbery in progress, get taken hostage, and tortured for our PIN numbers."

We were laughing uncontrollably as we kept trying to top each other. Suddenly a voice called out from somewhere on our left.

"Denise!"

We turned toward the sound. "Oh my God," she said. "Tim!"

He was walking toward us, a blond-haired, good-looking man in a gray parka. "I'm sorry; I don't mean to interrupt," he said meekly to her, "but could I talk to you just for a minute? Please?"

She hesitated. "Okay," she said uncertainly. "Tim, this is Rick."

"Hi," he said, barely taking his eyes off her. "Could we talk privately? Just for a minute?"

She turned to me, flustered. "Do you mind, Rick?"

"No, no, of course." What else could I say?

They moved down the row of cars and spoke softly. I couldn't hear them, but I could see their body language, his face pleading, hers immobile at first, then growing softer and more accepting. They seemed to take forever, as my stomach sank lower and lower. Finally they finished, and she came back to where I was standing.

"He says he was wrong about everything," she told me. "He wants us to try again, that he understands now where I'm coming from, that I only want good things to happen, not bad. I don't know what to say, Rick; I still love him. I never expected this."

"I know," I said. "Neither did I. That's why it happened."

"Well, I guess we can't think of everything."

"No, we can't."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be," I said. "This was a great dinner, and I'll always be glad I met you." "I will too," she said wistfully, then turned and walked away.

As I watched her, the woman who would surely have been my soul mate, leave my life, one thought took shape in my mind.

I'll never find someone. I'll grow old, and I'll die a miserable, lonely man. There. I was starting to feel better already.

•

•

•

October Gardener

Kathy Connolly

The digging had not gone as planned
the morning I found the old stone wall, buried.

I was only looking for a place where
yellow daffodils could bloom in seven months.
But shovel scraped and complained and finally became useless;
rake, trowel, and pitchfork fell one by one.
Finally, my fingers scratched away the black compost,
broke the hold of well-fed, netted roots,
violated the dark domiciles of earthworms
and worked the mystery without regard for the disturbance.
Each scoop of vinegar-scented leaf mold suggested
one or two centuries of Octobers
had slowly buried the work of master masons.
And I had brought an old wall to light for the first time
since who knew when, wakened it
from how many years of sleep.

Who, when, why, how? How far did it stretch?
My questions, predictable;
only one answer clear:
the builders were not available for conversation.
And before I could finish imagining which archives, which experts,
the wall itself silently offered to share,
not dates, names or boundaries,
nor anything expected,
but recited instead that other history—
the one of years turning,
of what is left when the work is done,
the impermanence of masons,
the hope for daffodils,
and the coming and going of gardeners.

The Greatest Attraction

Jed Myers

What gravity's done, given the years
it's had to twist its fine wires
tighter to our flesh and frames—
tethered our brows, shoulders, spines,
down, closer to its own
center, where all the lines
the planet's mass makes coalesce
in the white-hot darkness, pressed
as any earthly matter gets,
as utter thoughtlessness, dense
crowd of countless atoms crammed
into a stadium with no exit
signs, a seething blind
theater in the round, sold out
season after season, the greatest
attraction of all time. All
the people have tickets, tucked
inside their most private pockets
of living tissue. What gravity's done is
issue a pass to every body.

Wherever we are, we're in line.
The stuff of us would be fine
if drop chutes opened under our feet.
You and I, Love, as much
as we care to dance, or dare
to leap at a chance, to eat
the earth's fruits, to shine
in one another's eyes by moonlight,
or to make a fire between us
before we sleep, it's clear
our calcium, cobalt, and iron are trying
to go deep, to get into the act
that makes the great heat, to join
the packed ecstatic plasma core,
the molten metal heart of the world.
I can't imagine a better reason
than this—earth-gravity's treasonous
wish—for urging our own spirits,
wingless, weightless, while in the midst
of our one mortal season, to soar.

I am Yellow

Eva-Maria Sher

the yellow of a farm-fresh egg yolk
laid by a happy hen.
I am yellow
strong, protective—
like the sign for
“Ducks Crossing”
or children, hand in hand,
going to school.

I am yellow—sometimes
pale, almost green
with envy
tasting of lime
bitter and hopeless.
But then I am
Crayola yellow
primary
ordinary
cheerful
useful
in everyone’s picture everywhere.

Sometimes I am
the secret touch in the throat
of a foxglove.
You might catch me as pollen
on the legs of a small working bee.
I’m not hot
like sun or fire
but I am cool
silvery
like the moon who
comforts the sleepless
at night.

I am yellow.



I Am
Not
ABOUT
to Make
EXCUSES
for The
UNDERTOW
Tracy DeBrincat

How else are we supposed to experience death's little peep show
if not for bad decisions before Thanksgiving dinner?

The shore was still hot; the sun a dark, low pumpkin.

"Oh, yes, the briny deep. Let's go make love in the sea!"

As though water masks were the sexiest equipment we had
and vodka shots had nothing to do with it.

As though a momentary conjugal urge would cast
temporary amnesia over our history of trouble:

negligent misapplications of context,

deliberate repetition of bad behavior,

desperate lovers swinging from trapezes in the dark—

at least they wanted us, or

so we imagined as we stole into friends' empty apartments or

succumbed to stuttering taxicab acrobatics.

As it was we built that museum together,

erecting our monuments, sculpting in shame.

While I ate mouthfuls of sand under the wave's pummeling roil

(it wasn't that big, not the biggest I'd seen,

but who says love isn't for sissies?),

there was a moment of something like

happiness, like

peace, knowing I could go out any second

exactly the way I'd come in.



I wanted to sleep like a baby

Eva-Maria Sher

I was in a bike race.

I wore cleats and was
pedaling hard;

I was winning...

Hundreds of fellow racers
pressed down on me.

I became afraid and
dropped my bike...

My mother always said
*When you hear St. Paul's
six o'clock bells, come on
home, it'll be getting
dark...*

But I was walking in some
strange village. Lights were
coming on in the cottages.
My cleats made a lonely sound
on the cobblestones...

Neighbors were saying
good night across fences
and from front doors. I wanted
to sit with them at their
kitchen table...

I wanted to inhale the
fragrance of their soup
their evening bread—
the sound of their
laughter...

I wanted to open the door
to one of their bedrooms and crawl
under a down comforter—

I wanted to sleep
like a baby...

I wanted that murmur
of voices across the hall
wanted the strip of light
through the half-closed door—
wanted to...

Get up in the morning
and ask for the way home.



Ambassador

Gail Seneca

A tattered poster flapped on the lamppost outside Mother's apartment building where she had died, with me at her bedside, a week before. EMBRACE LOVE! RELEASE LOSS! SWAMI NANDI DAS. JANUARY 18, 8 P.M. HYATT. I looked left and right in the snowy street devoid of pedestrians. Undetected, I ripped the flyer free and stuffed it into my purse.

Sickly sweet incense permeated the Hyatt, where a line of people, most fingering prayer beads in hushed reverence, snaked along the corridor. Their downcast eyes granted me the anonymity I needed. I hadn't accomplished much in my thirty-five years, despite an almost-completed degree from Oberlin, some musical talent, and a modest inheritance from my banker father. He'd turn over in his grave if he could see me spending his dwindling legacy on a guru.

Inside the bland ballroom a riot of color erupted on the stage, where garlands of marigolds and fuschias draped a larger than life-size photograph of the guru. The devotees bowed, hands in prayer, as they filed past the photo; I copied their gestures on my way through the sea of metal chairs to the back row.

Musicians began, and encouraged by the lively beat of the tabla, I joined the chanting. Eventually the tempo slowed and the percussion faded away, leaving only an ethereal song hovering in the air and the entire audience swaying, dreamy-eyed. The guru, dwarfed by his photograph, crossed the stage swiftly, as lithe as a cat on a hunt. He folded himself into full lotus position on a huge, gold cushion and scanned the room with eyes outlined in kohl—eyes that were dark, intense, and as deep as Himalayan lakes. On his hairless, boyish face, the eyes popped out like warnings. His powerful gaze swept the room in silence and pounced on me. In an instant he saw all of me—my unfulfilled promise as a pianist; my messy affair with Charles, my music professor; my parents' endless disappointment in me; and my wild hope that I could be loved nevertheless. I choked back a startled sob. Blood rushed to my face. The guru's gaze moved on, but his power stayed with me, as searing as fire.

His upcoming retreat in India sucked me like a magnet out of the vacuum of my life. Mother's death had rendered me homeless; I'd been unemployed and single for months. In India I would recreate myself. I stuffed a suitcase with antibiotics, soap, and 10 pounds of trail mix, imagining it could protect me from the hazards of rural India, which ranged from snakebites to dengue fever, according to the guidebooks. But as soon as I arrived, I understood the reality—no suitcase, no matter how well-outfitted, could insulate me from the malodorous, deafening, Technicolored chaos of India. I was on my own.

A white Ambassador, the anachronistic brand of Hindustan Motors first manufactured during the Raj and apparently not updated since then, awaited me at the airport like history repeating itself. On the 8-hour trip to Bihar, India's poorest state, the car jostled along treacherous, half-built roads. Whether they were being reconstructed or demolished wasn't obvious.

The village of Sati slapped me like a wet towel—hot, heavy, and smothering. Despite stifling heat, Sati teemed with pilgrims flocking to its single Buddhist site,

a great stone temple set in a spindly grove of dessicated trees where the Buddha supposedly delivered a sermon 2,500 years ago. The cows, dogs, goats, chickens, and homeless sadhus wandering the streets, the women with sun-dried bricks of dung on their heads and the throngs of near-naked children suggested that little had changed since then. Decrepit tour buses with clothes hung across every grimy window clogged the main street, spewing black exhaust as they dodged cows and street vendors. In broken English my driver proudly insisted that he show me the temple.

We entered, bombarded by an amplified soundtrack of monastic chants, as a group of Sri Lankans in white pajamas performed their rituals. They circumambulated the temple, touched their foreheads to its stone steps, and prostrated themselves before the coruscating Buddha image, which had been so ornamented by flakes of gold leaf applied by the devout that the bulbous face had lost its features. Indifferent to the rituals, beggars pleaded, hawkers peddled, and fast-talking "guides" dabbed the pilgrims with vermillion, enticements for "tours" that always led to the guide's souvenir stand, according to my driver. Despite his admonitions, I longed for a dot of vermillion myself—to mark this great adventure, for which I could hardly believe I'd found the courage.

Swami Nandi Das, or Swami-ji, as we called him—"ji" being the all-purpose honorific of India—had set up shop in a bug-infested, ancient Shiva temple on the outskirts of town. There, a pale German copied my passport number. "Full payment." She arched an eyebrow as she counted my dollars, then she yawned and pocketed the cash. "That's it."

"But where do I stay?" I asked, my voice rising into the hysterical range.

Her clear, green eyes bored through me. "A guesthouse. Like everybody else." Pointing vaguely to my right, she dismissed me. "Puja at nine. Don't be late."

I'd told the driver to go, but the Ambassador stood at the temple gate. "Please come," the driver said, his mustache twitching above generous, betel-stained lips.

Numbly, I dragged my suitcase back to the car. "I need a guesthouse," I said.

"Madam, I am taking you. Very nice guesthouse." The engine coughed to a start.

The "very nice guesthouse" offered no hot water in the bathroom shared by four rooms, including my windowless cell. With the faucet in the fully open position, a trickle of brownish sludge spurted intermittently between splashes of cold water. I cringed. You can do this, I told myself. Shivering, I persevered through a chilly but thorough sponge bath and wished that Mother could witness my pluck. She'd be proud.

In the grainy mirror I saw myself, a pasty, less-elegant version of her: the high forehead, deeply furrowed with grave concern; the aquiline nose; the oversized teeth; and the nearly translucent skin stretched tight over high cheekbones. Even toward the end, when Mother's body emitted a stale, musty odor, her face radi-

ated a gentle nobility. Through Charles's affairs, my string of failed auditions, and my haunting, often debilitating sense of inadequacy, Mother never gave up on me, her only child. She never gave up even on her efforts to tame my wayward hair.

On my thirty-fifth birthday, when I'd lost yet another job and Charles had seduced yet another coed, Mother welcomed me into her home, a condominium on Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square, an address which represented the apotheosis of success for her but utter defeat for me. Thirty-five years old and back home with Mother, in a retirement community! But she was my last hope. Charles's new flame had moved in, and budget cuts had savaged my temporary teaching job, leaving me without even unemployment benefits.

Mother shared the condo with the latest of her beloved French poodles, Franklin. (Father had joked that Mother loved the poodles more than us, but I thought she just appreciated their malleability. Dogs do as they're told, unlike daughters and husbands.) Our living arrangement was brutally shortened by Mother's diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and her death within three months. As with everything in her life, Mother planned her death with poise. Near the end she asked me to read aloud to her from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* so she could "prepare."

The plumbing groaned, signaling an end to the water and my bath. Back in my room, I discovered that the "very nice guesthouse" lacked bedsheets, toilet paper, and towels. So did my suitcase. The Ambassador driver saluted me as I left the guesthouse to shop. "I am taking you where?" He opened the car door, and I slid in, realizing I had no idea where to shop. I smiled weakly at the driver, whose name I didn't know. "Sheets and towels," I said.

"Madam, I am looking." He blared the horn as he revved the engine.

The entire hamlet of Sati lacked sheets and towels, it seemed, so we headed to the trafficked knot of Patna, the nearest city.

Just after nine p.m., I bungled through the crowd at Swami-ji's temple, embarrassed to be late. "Om Shanti, Om Shanti," Swami-ji sang as he rocked in flowing robes on the raised platform at the front of the hall. Fifty or so Westerners, some with copious dreadlocks—Mother would be horrified—sat on the torn-up linoleum before the guru, their eyelids heavy. Not my kind of people, I thought, but India was the end of the line for me: I had to fit in. I crouched next to a young woman with a shaved head and crossed my legs with considerable discomfort. The soles of my feet were black from just the quick passage into the room. A mosquito descended onto my big toe. As I flicked it away, the woman shot me a chiding look. The insect buzzed to the pink ankle of the bearded man in front of me, who sat perfectly still despite the attack. I have a lot to learn, I thought. I closed my eyes and resolved to do it.

The guru spoke in sonorous, comforting tones. "Hare Om. Grief dissolves in love. Love abounds. Love is looking for you. You are loved." Tears trickled down my neck. "Offer devotion to the guru. Om Shanti. Embrace love through the guru."

I swayed with the crowd, stumbling over the strange words of the chants but

intent on participating to the fullest. This had to work. I recalled the scent of the new girl's perfume on Charles' shirt and the sight of Mother's shoulders sinking as she asked, wearily, "What now, Helen?" Redoubling my efforts, I sang louder. The tightness in my chest began to ease, and the memories evaporated as the chant settled into a calming chorus. Through half-closed eyes, I watched devotees creep on their knees to the guru's platform, bow their heads, and touch his feet. Occasionally, he patted their heads; usually, he ignored them. Regardless of the reception, they crept back to their places, their faces beaming with joy.

A nudge from the German signaled my turn. My heart raced as I crawled to the guru. At the platform, my hand on his toes, I felt him tap my head, then span it with his long fingers, covering my crown in a firm embrace. A flash of radiance pulsed through me, as cold and brilliant as moonlight. Like a prism, the light expanded into a rainbow, revealing vibrant colors one by one, each bathing me in its unique warmth. When the deep violet appeared, I snuggled into it, small and secure, like an infant swaddled in a down quilt.

A tap from the German interrupted the fantasy. My eyes opened to see the guru shrouded in a purple aura. The man was magic.

As I staggered out the temple gate, my driver greeted me with a knowing smile. "You have the shakti bat!"

"The what?"

"The holy touch," he said, grinning.

The cacophony of India reverberated through the car—earsplitting Hindi opera, unmuffled car motors, incessant honking, and occasional blasts of what sounded like gunfire.

"You are happy, madam?" the driver asked.

"Elated," I said.

"What is that, madam?"

I wondered what words could describe my comfort, even as I perched on the stiff seat of the Ambassador? How could I explain that Swami-ji had nestled the memory of Mother in a soft, forgiving place in my heart? That I felt so saturated with love that there was no space for grief?

Unfurling my mosquito net in my room, I searched for hooks to secure it but found nothing but elaborate cobwebs. On tiptoes, I stood on the bed and tried to attach the net to



Photo by Yogasant

the blades of the broken ceiling fan. The fluorescent tube flickered, and the room went black. Gingerly, I felt my way out to the shabby courtyard, where a group of Tibetans cooked meat over a campfire. "Power cut," the guesthouse owner called from the darkness.

"I can't see to put up my net," I protested.

"You are sleeping now," he said. I laughed out loud, applied some bug juice, and did as I was told.

Clanging bells and monkey screeches woke me around dawn. Stretching my arms, I startled at the red welts that covered them, my legs and torso. I hummed the guru's chant and tried to recall the bliss of the temple. The welts began to itch furiously.

The Ambassador took me to a stall marked with a red cross just steps from the guesthouse. Through enormous eyeglasses taped together at the bridge, a dark man leered at my swollen arm, which I presented to him like a disease. "I am curing you, madam," he said. He handed me a dusty bottle with a Hindi label.

In my dank room, I guessed at a dosage, swigged it, and went back to bed. Within minutes there was a banging at the door. A lean, shirtless man waggled his head at me in the distinctly Indian manner that meant something I had yet to decipher. Pointing at a pile of my clothes on the floor, he said, "Laundry, madam?"

I counted out some clammy underwear, a few shirts, and a pair of pants.

"Morning?" he asked with an exaggerated waggle.

I nodded, wondering what I was agreeing to.

When I awoke near noon, I was ravenous. My driver was sound asleep, his bare feet stuck out of the Ambassador window. For the first time, I ventured out on my own. Instantly, a child attached himself to my leg. "One rupee, one rupee," he called. Sores covered his mouth, his left eye wandered aimlessly, and a stream of milky-colored mucous hung from his nose and smeared my pant leg. "One rupee!" he shouted, as if I didn't understand. I dug into my pocket and passed him a coin. He ran away, and soon a crowd of ragged kids surrounded me. "One rupee, one pen, sweets," they shouted, like an indictment of my wealth. I ducked into the pharmacy stall, the only place I knew, and pointed at my temple. Wide-eyed, the kids watched my every move. "Headache," I said.

Mother's headaches had nauseated her all her life. Migraines sent her to bed for entire days, in rooms with drawn curtains and unplugged phones. Even in those times, Mother allowed me to lie beside her and spill out my problems. With the cancer her headaches intensified, and sometimes she shut me out, mumbling that she needed "some peace." I hated myself for causing her so much upset, and I hated her a little too, for acknowledging it.

At the pharmacist's direction, I swallowed a pill at the stall with my bottled water and bought six more tablets, which he counted out with precision. Trailed by the band of children, I proceeded on my search for food. Huge potholes on the street, swerving rickshaws, and mounds of shit—cow, dog, human?—slowed

my progress. My stomach churned. Bicycle rickshaws jingled their bells, veered to a halt within inches of me, and their ropy-legged drivers demanded, "Going, madam?"

I veered to avoid a pack of barking dogs. Their fur sprang up in filthy, multicolored patches. Entire skeletons were visible beneath their diseased skin. Someone on the plane had assured me that Indian street dogs were rabid; for these dogs, rabies was probably only one of the maladies.

Mother's last poodle, an always coifed and well-mannered animal, accompanied her to the end, nestling beside her increasingly bony body day and night. Even after Mother weakened so much that she couldn't speak, she found the strength to stroke Franklin's coiled hair and to kiss his long nose. In his perfection Franklin provided Mother a comfort that I, with my split ends and disordered life, could not. Mother died with one hand on his back. I'd reached for the other, but she pulled it away.

•

"Breathe in love, breathe out loss. Om Shanti. Breathe in life, breathe out death. Hare Om." The temple reeked of patchouli and flowers. "Breathe in the guru." In my mind's eye, a lavender hue surrounded Swami-ji. "Breathe out loss." Mother appeared, bathed in purple, her face held in the brown hands of the guru. He stroked her skin, smoothing its furrows. A slight smile curled Mother's thin lips.

The Ambassador stalled on the way back to the guesthouse that night, caught in a snarl of cars, rickshaws, cows, and people. Headed by a team of white horses, a parade of wildly dancing men spilled into the headlights, flailing their arms high in the smoky air, gyrating to the charivari of horns and drums behind them. A wavy line of boys with lighted chandeliers on their heads flanked the procession. "Indian marriage, madam," the driver said. "You are seeing?" He wagged his head. "No going." He opened the back door for me, and I leaned on the boxy car, observing the thickening crowd until a sari-clad, veiled woman pulled me into the parade. Gently, my driver pushed me toward her. "For luck," he said. Shyly, I began to swing my hips. The woman pumped her bangled arms into the air, and I raised my hands in imitation. A roar of appreciation rose from the dancing men. The woman wriggled more vigorously and locked her dark eyes onto mine. Layers of garish eye makeup couldn't conceal bushy eyebrows. I squinted at her—at him?—and stopped dancing. "Madam?" a male voice said from behind the veil.

Panicky, I pushed my way through the crazed crowd toward the safety of the Ambassador. A familiar figure—the laundry man!—pirouetted drunkenly toward me. "Madam," he shouted. "I have washed your bra." The dancers howled.

By the third temple night, I felt faint with hunger. So far I'd eaten only prasad—

holy sweets at the temple—and mountains of trail mix. Even as the guru sang his soothing chants, I couldn't meditate, couldn't even close my eyes without dizziness overtaking me. I watched the devotees touch the guru's feet and their faces transform into angelic masks. After her darshan, a willowy woman in a tunic that clung to her heavy breasts slipped behind a curtain near the platform instead of crawling back into the crowd. When the puja ended that night and everyone filed out, she wasn't among us. She'd been chosen, I supposed, for sex. Mother's cynical lawyer had warned me about lusty gurus, but who was I to judge? Swami-ji had opened me to love.

When I entered the temple grounds the next day, I saw a man pissing into the scrubby bush near the door. I gagged but barged boldly past him. Everywhere in this town, everywhere in India for all I knew, men whipped out their penises as carelessly as they jeered at me on the street. Was Swami-ji just as crude?

He didn't seem so during the afternoon ceremony when he tied delicate ribbons around our wrists, anointed us with our spiritual names, and sealed them with smudges of sandalwood on our third eyes. I became Uma, the goddess of beauty. Mother would have disagreed.

When I touched Swami-ji's feet that night, I glanced up at him and saw him flick his chin toward the curtain. It was unmistakable—he was inviting me to join the harem. Shaky on my knees, I crept back to my place and tried to sing the last chants of the evening, but I'd forgotten the words.

The Ambassador wasn't waiting when I emerged into the black night, so I began the short walk to the guesthouse alone. Only a few omelet makers, their carts illuminated by single candles, lined the main street. The trinket stalls had closed long ago, and the tourist buses had roared away. I focused my new pocket flashlight on the treacherous pavement and edged forward. My attention was so concentrated on the ground that I didn't see the three teenagers until they had circled me and groped my breasts. "Help!" I screamed. The boys ran away, their sandals flopping on the pavement, their laughter peeling through the dark. I ran, too, and fell into a deep pothole, scraping my palms. "Ow!" I cried and felt hot tears sting my cheeks. A cloven hoof landed near my thumb, and a cow sniffed my hair. Her hot breath made my skin crawl. "Madam." A crippled beggar lurched toward me. "I am helping you," he said. I snatched my bag off the street, got up, and ran home.

The German stopped me when I next entered the temple. "You are releasing loss?" she asked, unsmiling, her arms crossed on her ample chest.

More than loss, I thought. I'm releasing everything that's held me back. I'm surviving India. But I simply nodded my head in agreement.

"You may thank Swami-ji tonight. After your darshan, go behind the red curtain. Wait there."

At the platform, I touched his feet and felt his toes spring up into my fingers. I jerked my head up at him; he licked his lips. Instead of creeping behind the

curtain, I ran out of the building.

The German grabbed me as I opened the temple gate. "Where are you going?"

"I'm through," I said.

"You must offer devotion to Swami-ji."

"No," I panted. "I already paid."

"You've learned nothing." She spit into the dirt between my feet. "Don't come back."

As I opened the gate, I half wanted her to stop me, but she had turned away.

In a dream that night, Mother shook her head with disapproval. "You should do something with your hair," she said. "And get married." I woke up shouting "No!" And then I smiled. Before India, I couldn't recall saying "no." And now I'd said it twice—in 12 hours.

In the morning, I strolled through Sati with an unfamiliar sense of authority. A bus heaved to the gate of the Buddhist temple and dumped a load of Japanese with multiple cameras hung around their necks. Ragged children accosted them, and starving dogs scoured their path for crumbs. To avoid the chaos, I lowered myself onto the outer temple steps and waited for the crowd to clear. Across from me, a red-robed monk twirled his prayer wheel, his dull eyes fixed on me but not apprehending me. Mother had gazed that way when I read from the Tibetan Book, as if she saw something beyond me, as if I didn't matter. It was the look she adopted whenever I recounted how, yet again, something had gone awry in my life.

I glared at the monk and stood, trying to intimidate him with my height. "No," I said, insisting finally on my own significance, on my right to claim a place in the world, even without a man or Mother's approval. The monk tilted his head, but his eyes didn't follow me. They were vacant, rheumy, and immobile. He hadn't disregarded me; he hadn't seen me at all. Panting, a three-legged dog with greasy fur sidled up to him and cuddled into his robes. "Ah," the blind monk exhaled audibly and stroked the mangy animal.

Swami-ji had taught me that love was everywhere; I had only to embrace it. "Namaste," I greeted the monk.

"Namaste!" His face opened into a toothless, glorious smile.

•

•

•

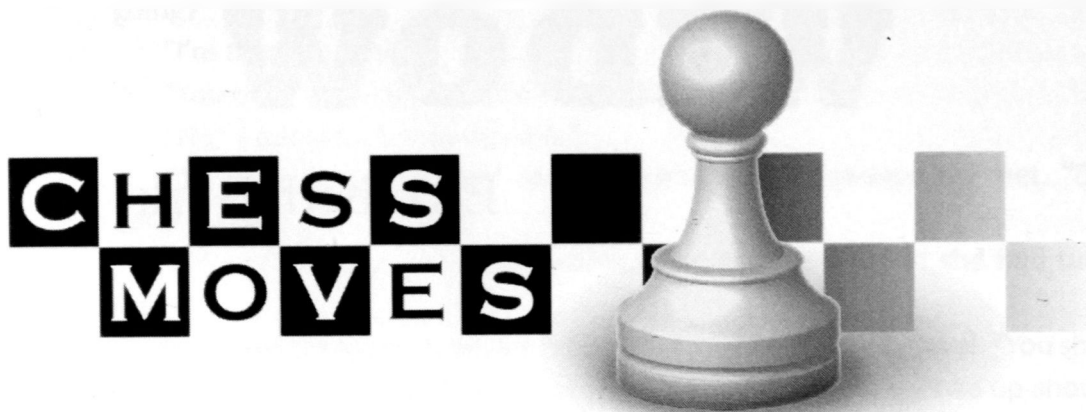
The Road WIDOW

Elizabeth Burk

When you are gone
each city you are in
lights up like a red beacon,
beckons like a neon sign,
like Broadway dancers
and go-go girls.
I see bars, strangers, ex-wives,
imagined worlds
where you loved others
and left, or were left behind.

My body tilts south where you
have gone. I taste cane sugar,
feel the wilting heat. I am
surrounded by gnarled, weepy
trees;
ancient limbs reaching out
over sultry swamps where the
murky deep rises, merges with
reflections of trees and sky.
The phone rings—
bereft of touch, our disembodied words
crash against each other like marbles
colliding, spinning
into distant corners of context.

Now deep into another swamp, I tread
carefully on slippery rocks;
alligators glide by, silent,
hyacinths float amid the water's debris;
silvery tree stumps, glistening, erect,
poke through still waters like cocked
bayonets, awaiting your return.



Gregory W. Randall

A lighthouse keeper off the coast of
Ireland once flashed his chess moves
on cloud cover to his opponent on the
shore. And so a kingdom once fell

when a king slew a bishop. On clear nights,
the keeper of light would contemplate
the death cry of sea winds and the
inhabitants of cobalt surges engulfing

his perch in the universe. At times, he'd even
consider the expanse of continents. Nights,
devoid of clouds, he'd rotate the chessboard,
root first for a black cavalier, then position

an ivory rook for the kill. Like Yahweh on
Old Testament battlefields, fickle and cruel,
he'd pick his teeth with a fishbone, then
flip a coin: black or white? black or white?

FLIGHT

Toni L. Wilkes

Warm porch boards creak as she coils
into a small ball against clapboard siding.
Her grandfather'd always been a rumpled,
tweedy mystery to her. Somewhere inside,

guests jostle through a tangle of stiff sandwiches,
slices of brown bread flip open like wings of a book
smeared with tuna or chicken or deviled ham.
Only her mother would serve deviled ham at a funeral

and not see the irony in that. Somewhere inside,
her brother tosses playing cards into sloppy piles, plays war
with their cousins. Bored, she slips into the crowd and
trails her uncle down the hallway. He stares

at the bathroom floor, its cracks and water-stains.
Peeling paint flakes where he brushes it by the toilet.
At the sink, he fingers his father's shaving brush,
twirls it in the mug. She wonders how often he'd

watched his father shave, wonders if he saw tenderness
in him. She'd only known the reek of cigarettes
and garage oils, a man who walled himself in the shed,
only came out for meals, an occasional cribbage game.

Her uncle thumps a shaving strop against his thigh, then
smacks the tub over and over and over, sounding like
the snap of tree limbs heavy with snow. Chatterings
of the crowd go dumb. Footfalls drum toward them.

She grabs the back of his shirt, scrambles him to
a backdoor where he wheels, the strap flaccid
in his fist. Go—just go! He scowls, shrugs, then
makes a swift flight into the night. She couldn't tell

if it was grief, anger, or relief. It didn't matter.



his and hers

Nancy Cavers Dougherty

Tin baths
 one steamed
to stars
 one cooled
to Mars

 twinned as
olive-branched
grins


handheld
 silence

moon
rising
 Great Owl hoot

scoop of etched
 wing reflects

a cusp of leaf

tender as a plaid
of words
 yet swum



my Father • AT • 90

Dan Schwarz

"I have never been confused in my life," I heard this frail, bent man, my father, say when I told him I had gotten lost driving from Tampa to Bradenton.

Our body language speaks our differences.
His eyes eagerly seek approval which I,
Haunted by recurring nightmares, grudgingly withhold.
No sooner do I warmly kiss my mother,
than I back up warily when he leans to kiss me,
as if still desperately trying to keep him out.
I am frozen in memory, an awkward boy
dwelling in his weird house of outrageous generalization,
bathing daily in his critical loquacity,
quivering again before threatened physical wrath.

Metamorphosized into a
shrunk, wizened old man,
garrulous, deaf, complaining about infirmities
without knowing what they are,
proclaiming once
more his intention to live past a hundred,
he will always be
large man, physically threatening,
bullying with corrosive, acerbic remarks,
harping on my inadequacies,
scolding, blaming, whining—and I
the fearful confused boy
reduced to screams for help that go unanswered.

Wandering in stained labyrinth of past,
Now in my sixties, well along in my own death walk,
living for decades with fear of replicating my father's errors,
fretting about rejection from my own children,
fearing detritus of guilt when he dies,
knowing that deep, festering wounds
prevented my being ministering
son I might have been, I tremble,
wondering how his ashes will shadow me.

Her World at 53

Dan Schwarz

I.

She lives in her thoughts alone,
greying and pale at fifty-three,
rearranging mental furniture,
dusting dowdy slipcovers,
tidying drawing rooms
of her small experiences,
polishing woodwork of occasional bliss,
staring at boudoir bedspread,
quilted with disappointments,
she savors dregs of travels past,
smiling as she counted the cost,
recounted passing interludes of passion,
brief affairs, cold nights
with partially enabled married men;
she rehearses conversations
borrowing wisdom, bromides,
from discoveries made
decades ago in imagined worlds.

No peacock she,
costumed performatively,
feathers furled—
rather brown wren,
dressing for function,
never quite right.
Her little hands and face,
her nervous darting walk,
bespeak fastidious temperament,
alternating with fatigue.
She has gentleness of
still summer nights.
But she speaks in monotone
as if her world
were a faculty meeting,
I a colleague.

Should Hamlet Plant a Garden

*Pat
Sturm*

To garden or not to garden: that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to live with native offerings
Or take arms against a sea of invading weeds
And by opposing, end them. To plant: to cultivate;
Forevermore; and with a crepemyrtle we say we end
The wilderness and the stickerburrs
That flesh is scratched by, 'tis a landscape
Devoutly to be wish'd. To plant: to cultivate;
To cultivate: perchance to impress the neighbors: aye, there's the rub;
For in that judgment, what criticisms may come
When we have chosen daylilies, wildflowers, grasses, that
Must offend some neighbors and cost us the respect
Of those who cannot break the bonds of begonias.
For who would bear the snickers and stares from snail-paced vehicles,
The sneers of non-gardeners, the rose gardeners' superiority,
The pangs of the envious, the city's abatement laws,
The insolence of Master Gardeners, and the spurns
From the lazy with no patience, when those neighbors themselves
Harbor crabgrass beneath their cedar trees? Who bears the struggle
To grunt and sweat under hoeing and mowing and watering
But that the dread of drought and blistering heat,
Those extreme conditions from which coleus and petunias
And fanflowers cannot return, breaks the will
And makes us rather throw up our hands and say to hell with it
Rather than hie ourselves to the plant nursery for more?
Thus failure does make cowards of us all,
And thus the vision of a perfect landscape
Withers with the idea of yellow leaves and bare ground
And pure hard labor of digging and petting and replanting.
With this possibility, the cowards turn awry
And lose the name of gardener.



the UNTOUCHABLES

by Karl S. Monroe

*Uncounted molehills
scarring the shaggy greensward
still not a mountain*

Nobody ever comes to Juanita Bay Park to see the moles.¹ They are vermin, fit to be drowned, poisoned, or smashed with the flat of a shovel.

Have you ever seen a mole at Juanita Bay? No, really—have you? I've started asking people, frequent visitors to the park. None has ever seen a mole here, but then, they are not looking. Surprisingly, some of these gentle folk volunteer that they have killed a mole, though not in the park. I'll bet no one has ever seen a mole at Juanita Bay.² All we see are the small piles of fresh earth, literally hundreds of them, heaped upon the long-abandoned fairways.

The photographers of Juanita Bay never erect their tripods amid the molehills, hoping to capture a spot of action with their 600-millimeter lenses. They live for the eagles, grebes, and beavers—even the basking western painted turtles. We visitors do not embrace the idea that moles enjoy the protection of the wildlife sanctuary. And Juanita visitors are not alone. Google the word "moles" with "National Geographic" and you'll find no encomia to the endearing qualities of these hardy insectivores. We are a mole-hating nation.

At Juanita Bay Park, the moles have built a stronghold on an upland south of the main path. Well, maybe not a stronghold—how do we know the piles are not decoys against humans, so treacherous for their hacking, flooding, and poisoning? There are benches in this area, but they are intended for taking in the vista of the wetlands and the glistening inlet. You will never see a bench-back memorial to:

*Justin Myopia
Greatest Friend Ever
To the Moles of Juanita Bay
Man, We Really Dig You*

I never met Justin, but you know what they say about his enchantment with moles. It began quite by accident. He was walking in the park when he dropped his glasses, and he fell to his knees to search for them. He found them atop a molehill, where he came face to face with a mole. They found each other entrancing, though Justin later admitted that if he'd been wearing his glasses, he might have thought the mole repulsive. Eventually he was able to distinguish more than 6,000 individual moles from at least 30 generations, entirely by posture, breathing pattern, and body odor. This is what they say, although the story could be apocryphal.

If you can't muster any affection for the moles at Juanita Bay, you could at least try feeling gratitude that they don't increase the foot traffic. Imagine how crowded our park would be if the upshore grassland were occupied by a prairie dog colony! Maybe I could do something to help the moles. I used to think that someday I would count the molehills in the park. When I posted my census, people would begin to take the moles seriously. But I'm too random to carry out such a task. Precision is the watchword:

¹Juanita Bay is a small inlet on the eastern shore of Lake Washington, opposite Seattle, and the site of a small nature preserve.

²On reflection, I realize I may have been asking the wrong people if they've ever seen a mole at Juanita Bay. The park has a strict leash law, flouted by a few neighbors who slip in via the back entrance to run their dogs on what used to be the ninth fairway. (For about 40 years, this was the location of a nine-hole golf course.) Guess what—that area is relatively free of molehills!

You can't just wander from hill to hill with a tally sheet. Wait a minute! Have I already counted this one?

For awhile I thought the park could be divided into sectors, like a potential subdivision. A high school biology class could count the hills and try to establish a ratio of hills to population. That poses problems too. An adult mole can create between 50 and 100 new hills a month. As I examine the molehills, I see that only a few consist of fresh earth. Most are in some state of degradation. Any proper census would have to develop a system of grading hills by age. And it couldn't be done in one dramatic visit. After you take your initial count, you'll have to make frequent visits, hoping to calculate the rate of new hill formation so you can extrapolate growth of population. As a biology teacher, how would you like to explain that even if your students flunked the latest standardized test, their knowledge of moles is unprecedented?

So my plans for a census have fallen into a deep sand trap. But I want to do something for these harried little creatures, because their hills are under attack. Flattened by huge waffle stompers. Branded by large canine paw prints. Bisected by mountain-bike tire tracks. Kicked and scattered. Alone among the creatures in this park, moles are responsible for their own protection.

People, this is a nature preserve! These are not pests; in some regions, they are relatively rare.³ They are insectivores, but they favor earthworms and enjoy vegetation. And they're busy, consuming 70 percent of their body weight daily to maintain that frame of seven to nine inches. They have a name—they're Townsend's moles. They're named for a 19th-century naturalist-explorer, John Kirk Townsend, who joined an 1834 trek to the Oregon Territory. Eight birds and mammals are named for Townsend. I guess that would make the mole kissing cousins with Townsend's warbler, also seen at Juanita Bay.

I've wracked my brain to come up with an idea that could work even a small change in the hatred our species harbors for moles. My friends—even my family!—dismiss my ideas as laughable, but in the spirit of moledom, I remain undeterred. Some of my ideas are whimsical, but whimsy is off the mark. We need seriousness of purpose, a sense of discipline. And a card that people won't be ashamed to carry. Please see the next page to find out how you can join us.



³In 1999, the British Columbia Ministry of Wildlife published a paper on threats to an isolated population of Townsend's moles in the province, lamenting the cost of protecting the creatures and the challenge of educating the public to respect them.

Membership Application

Justin Myopia Tunneling Brigade

Mole name⁴ _____

Post Office Box No.⁵ _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Have you ever killed a mole?⁶ Under what circumstances? _____

(Use additional pages if necessary.)

List your three favorite mole traits.⁷

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

How will you act to improve mole habitat in your neighborhood?

1. _____ 2. _____

Volunteers are urgently needed to further the brigade's work. So far we have two action companies, both nonviolent and anonymous. Please check one or both.

_____ **The Picket Fence Company.** Post cute, tiny (and biodegradable!) picket fences on neighborhood molehills, with banner: *Home of Mr. and Mrs. Mole.*⁸

_____ **Dam the Hose Company.** Deposit bright-colored, biodegradable plugs in garden hoses, with streamer: *Save the moles!*

Please complete and mail to:

Justin Myopia Tunneling Brigade
P.O. Box 8" Under
Kirkland, WA 98033

•

⁴Anonymity should be our watchword. Always, always test the air, like a mole reaching the surface.

⁵No street addresses, please! Must we elaborate on the obvious? We must avoid retaliation!

⁶We wish you no pain. But remember—confession is the best way to rid ourselves of shame.

⁷If your answer is "I don't know," don't worry. Developing affection for our beneficiary can take time. The most popular choices so far: myopia, industriousness, native species, no ridiculous gender specialization, and humility.

⁸Banners distributed by our LGBT subgroup say: Home of Mrs. and Mrs. Mole

SWEPT AWAY

Toni L. Wilkes

He'd come to her in
the middle of her life.
He begs her to stay
with him, live with him,
marry.

Waves toss boats
beyond Proposal Rock.
Gazing in the distant
dark, she weaves stories,
excursions they will
make, takes in her lower lip,
releases it

a rogue wave crests
the rock. He turns into
it resisting its pull. She
bends away from him
receding with the wave.
Her short black hair stands
out against the froth; her sallow
face breathing through the fog.



Winter's Song

Carlyn Finke

Sleet grays the sleepy sky.

The wind blows a cold tune.

The bawdy sparrow sings

His sharpened cry in a

Blue home of damp hedgewood.

His wings beat the cold away

In fruitless flight as he

Serenades the ice goodnight.

Julie Hill Barton grew up in the forests of central Ohio and graduated *cum laude* from Kenyan College with a major in English and a minor in women's studies. She worked for several years at Microsoft Corporation in Redmond, Washington, first as an editor and later as a marketing director. Holding an M.A. in women's studies and an MFA in fiction writing from Vermont College, she lives now in Piedmont, California. Her work has appeared in *Caduceus*, *Folio*, *Louisiana Literature*, and *The South Carolina Review*.

Judy Bebelaar is a retired San Francisco public school teacher of English and creative writing. She hosts a reading series featuring Bay Area Writing Project teachers in Oakland, CA. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including *Alchemy*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Flyway*, and *The Griffin*. She is currently working on a book about experiences at an alternative school.

The poems and essays of **Bradley W. Buchanan** have appeared in numerous journals worldwide, such as *Canadian Literature*, *Fulcrum*, *Grain*, and *Journal of Modern Literature*. He is a board member of the Sacramento Poetry Center. A book of poems, entitled *Swimming the Mirror: Poems for My Daughter* (2008), has become the first publication of a new Sacramento-based operation called Roan Press.

A native New Yorker, **Elizabeth Burk** lived and traveled abroad for several years after college. She works now in private practice as a psychologist/psychoanalyst in Westchester County. She married a Cajun man from southwest Louisiana, and she claims that her relationships with her husband and that state have inspired much of her writing. Her work has appeared in *The Louisiana Review* and *Wisconsin Review*.

Kathy Connolly writes essays, poems, and short stories on contemporary women, family, technology, nature, and gardening. Her work has appeared widely in venues such as *Carquinez Poetry Review*, *Inspirit*, *The MacGuffin*, and *North Atlantic Review*. In 2005 she received a writer's residency at the Dorset Writers' Colony. She works also as Web content developer on the topic of human resources management and has authored many print articles.

Tracy DeBrincat is a freelance advertising consultant in the entertainment industry. Her first novel manuscript, *Every Porpoise under Heaven*, received the 1996 Washington Award for fiction, and her story, "Troglodyte," was second runner up for the 2007 Chicago Literary Awards. Her fiction and poetry has appeared in *Cadillac Cicatrix*, *The Coe Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Phantasmagoria*, *Rio Grande Review*, and other journals.

Originally from Wellesley, MA, **Nancy Cavers Dougherty** lives now with her husband in Sebastopol, CA. Her educational background includes a B.A. in history from Northwestern University and a master's degree in public administration from Sonoma State University in California. She has advocated for local organizations addressing homelessness and child welfare issues, and she co-founded the Teen Counseling Project of Sonoma County. Her poems have appeared in *Ars Poetica*, *descant*, *Language and Culture*, and *Snakeskin Poetry Webzine*.

Carlyn R. Finke is a senior English major at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma.

Lenny Levine graduated in 1962 from Brooklyn College with a B.A. in speech and theater. Thereafter he became a folk singer, a folk-rock singer, a studio singer, and a composer. He has written songs and sung backup for Billy Joel, Neil Diamond, and others. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Cairn*, *The Dirty Goat*, *The Griffin*, *The Jabberwock Review*, and *RiverSedge*.

Naomi Ruth Lowinsky works as a Jungian analyst in private practice in Berkeley, CA and as the poetry and fiction editor of *Psychological Perspectives*, which is published by the Los Angeles Jung Institute. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in several journals, including *Argestes*, *Comstock Review*, *Euphony*, *Nassau Review*, *Tightrope*, and *Southern Humanities Review*.

When **Karl S. Monroe** first drove across the marshes of Juanita Bay in Kirkland, Washington, he could not possibly have known that he was beginning a love affair with the wetlands that would persist throughout his lifetime. A retired journalist, he serves as the Director of the Field-Seattle, a small nonprofit group that organizes peer review groups for artists and writers. His other passions include tai chi, meditation, and working with young writers.

Born in Philadelphia, **Jed Myers** studied poetry at Tufts University and served as the editor of *Tufts Literary Magazine*. His psychiatry career led him to Seattle, where he lives with his wife and three children. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *Cascade*, *The Distillery*, *Fugue*, *Wisconsin Review*, and other journals. His poetry has also been read on NPR.

Andrew H. Oerke returned recently to poetry, his first love, after many years in development work with the Peace Corps and other voluntary organizations. His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, *Poetry*, and numerous other magazines. In 2006, two books of his poetry, *African Stiltdancer* and *San Miguel de Allende*, were published jointly by Swan Books and the UN Society for Writers and Artists. The books received the United Nations Literature Award.

Gregory W. Randall received the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize for 2008, and he was a finalist for the Stan and Tom Wick Poetry Prize. While at St. Olaf College, he majored in English and Latin. He claims that classical music by composers such as Sibelius and Brahms continues to inform both the structure and pacing of his poetry. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in journals such as *Bitter Oleander*, *Cream City Review*, *Pedestal*, *Sow's Ear*, and *Southern California Review*.

Richard T. Rauch lives and writes along Bayou Lacombe in southeast Louisiana. Born in the suburbs of New Orleans, he earned a B.S. in physics from Louisiana State University and an M.A. and Ph.D. from SUNY Stony Brook. His career in academia and government has taken him to New York, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and back home to Louisiana. Currently, he manages rocket propulsion test activities at NASA's Stennis Space Center in Mississippi as part of the Constellation Program to send explorers back to the moon and on to Mars.

Dan Schwarz is the Stephen H. Weiss Presidential Fellow at Cornell University. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles and several books. His poetry has appeared in *Ithaca Times*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, and other journals.

Born in New York City, **Gail Seneca** earned a Ph.D. in sociology from NYU and taught at the university level for several years before switching careers to finance. Twenty-five years later she had built and sold a successful management firm, founded another company, and taken it public. When she retired to pursue writing, she wanted to tell women's stories—tales of memories and dreams that she has found underrepresented in the literature.

Eva-Marie Sher, who was born in Germany at the end of World War II, started writing poetry almost as soon as she could spell. After coming to the United States at age 17, she studied literature and the expressive arts, became a citizen, got married, and adopted three children. After her children had grown, she returned to poetry, writing this time in her second language from the perspective of an elder woman trying to find a place in a society that values youth, material success, and the external journey of life. Her work is forthcoming in *Big Scream*, *California Quarterly*, and *G.W. Review*.

Harvey Spurlock of Conway, Arkansas has had a story published in *The Evansville Review*, and his short story, "The Sad Tale of Angel Sonora," appeared in a prior issue of *Westview* (Volume 25, number 1). Other stories are forthcoming in *The Chariton Review* and *Puckerbrush Review*.

Pat Sturm has finally grown into poetry. Backed by a good deal of theatrical, teaching, writing, reading, and gardening experience, she can now cull from masters of all genres. In the summer of 2009, she was selected to read at the Woodie Guthrie Festival with poets from England, Scotland, North Dakota, Texas, and many other places. She takes great joy in being smackdab in the middle of it all.

Over sixteen years ago **Katherine Whitt** traded the halls of SWOSU for those of Arapaho-Butler Schools. But she always finds her way back to SWOSU through colleagues and new friends. She encourages her students to pursue writing in all forms, but poetry for her is a curative purging of intellect and emotion.

Toni L. Wilkes's chapbook, *Stepping Through Moons*, published by Finishing Line Press, has been nominated for the California Book Award and the PEN USA Literary Award. Her poem, "Once Again," first published in *POEM*, received a 2009 Pushcart Prize nomination. Toni's recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Confrontation*, *Cream City*, *Dos Passos Review*, *Hayden's Ferry*, *Soundings East*, *Southern Humanities Review* and other noted journals. Toni lives in Santa Rosa, CA with her husband Gregory W. Randall, where they host a quarterly poetry salon in their home.

Illustrations

- 3 Photograph by EK Jeong
- 5 Photograph by ktylerconk
- 11 Photograph by Robert S. Donovan
- 17 Photograph by EraPhernalia Vintage (there...every now & then)
- 18 Photograph by EK Jeong
- 24 Photograph by inspector 81
- 28 Graphic by EK Jeong
- 31 Painting By Nikki Janzen
- 36 Photograph by Kansas Poetry (Patrick)
- 48 Photograph by yogasanft



*Specialist in
Fine Diamonds &
Colored Gemstones*

107 West Main ♦ P.O. Box 689 ♦ Weatherford, Oklahoma 73096
1-800-533-4380 ♦ 1-580-772-3113 ♦ fax: 580-772-8705

TELEPHONE
580-772-3207

DAVID D. DUNCAN LAWYER

305 FIRST NATIONAL CENTER P.O. BOX 1648
11 EAST MAIN STREET WEATHERFORD, OK 73096

"Your Community Owned Bank"



National Bank and Trust Company
Member F.D.I.C.

4 ATM LOCATIONS

- STUDENT UNION LOBBY
SWOSU CAMPUS
- UNITED SUPERMARKET
920 E. MAIN
- WASHINGTON AND DAVIS
120 S. MARKET
CORDELL, OK

24 HOUR BANKING

JUST CALL 772-6789 TO
ACCESS ALL OF YOUR
ACCOUNTS

WEATHERFORD
1100 E. MAIN
(580) 772-5575

CORDELL
120 S. MARKET
(580) 832-3352

ED BERRONG

Insurance & Real Estate



*"The Agency
Service Built"*



520 E. Main
Weatherford
Phone 580-772-3329



LOCAL OKLAHOMA BANK

FSB
FDIC INSURED

Weatherford Office
(580) 772-7441
109 E. Franklin

P.O. Box 271
Weatherford, OK
73096



...get the image

.....**Bluncks**
memories made to last a lifetime

SENIOR • FAMILY • WEDDING
GLAMOUR • TEENAGE CASUAL • ABC
ATHLETIC • SCHOOL DAY

...PHOTOGRAPHY...

1-800-8-BLUNCK

Clinton, Elk City, Enid, Lawton, Moore, Weatherford OK,
Amarillo TX.

HOOKED ON BOOKS

*your
book
headquarters*

580-772-2062
104 E. Main • Weatherford

Hooked on Books

MEMBER FDIC

BancFirst

122 North Broadway, Weatherford OK. 73096 772.5541

Don't miss an issue!

W E S T V I E W

MAIL THIS SUBSCRIPTION FORM
ALONG WITH A CHECK
OR MONEY ORDER PAYABLE TO:
WESTVIEW
100 CAMPUS DRIVE
WEATHERFORD, OKLAHOMA 73096

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Gift subscription:

To buy a subscription for families or friends, put
the gift recipient's address in this box. Fill out your
address on the subscription form.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

(CHECK ONE) ☐ \$6/ISSUE

☐ \$15/4 ISSUES

☐ \$25/4 ISSUES
OUT OF COUNTRY

WESTVIEW

Published semiannually by
the Department of Language and Literature
of the School of Arts and Sciences,
Southwestern Oklahoma State University
Weatherford, Oklahoma 73096

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
WEATHERFORD, OK
73096
PERMIT 57



1

*****AUTO**5-DIGIT 73096

Al Harris Library- Copy

Serials Department

100 Campus Dr

Weatherford OK 73096-3001

