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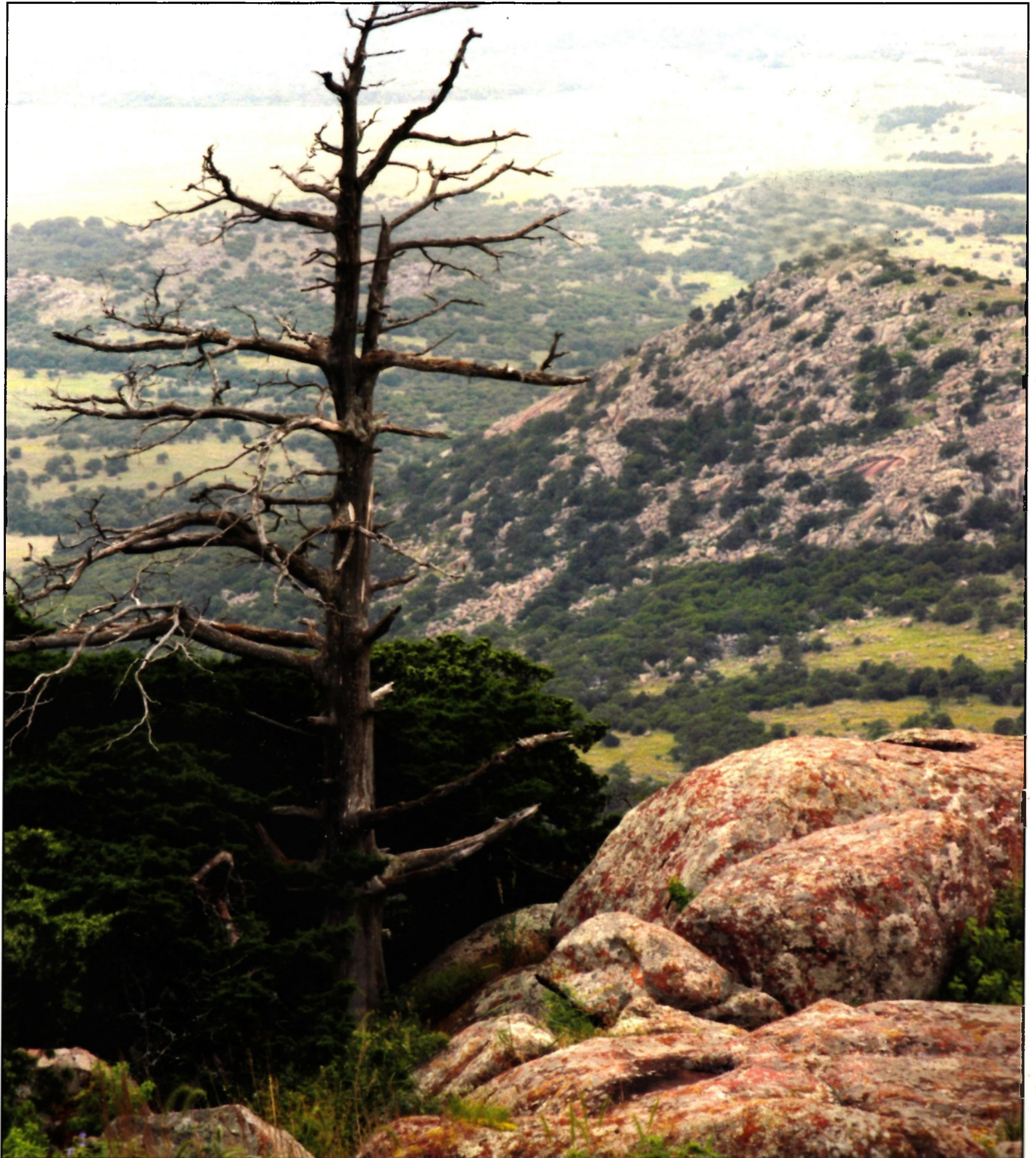
WESTVIEW

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W E S T V I E W

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Stylesheet

1. Submissions should be typed on 8.5" x 11" white paper; prose should be double spaced. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope.
2. Submitted artwork should be suitable for black and white reproduction. Work should be no larger than 8.5" x 14". However, photographs or slides of larger works may be submitted.
3. Include a brief biographical sketch for our contributors' notes.
4. Submissions and correspondence may be sent to:
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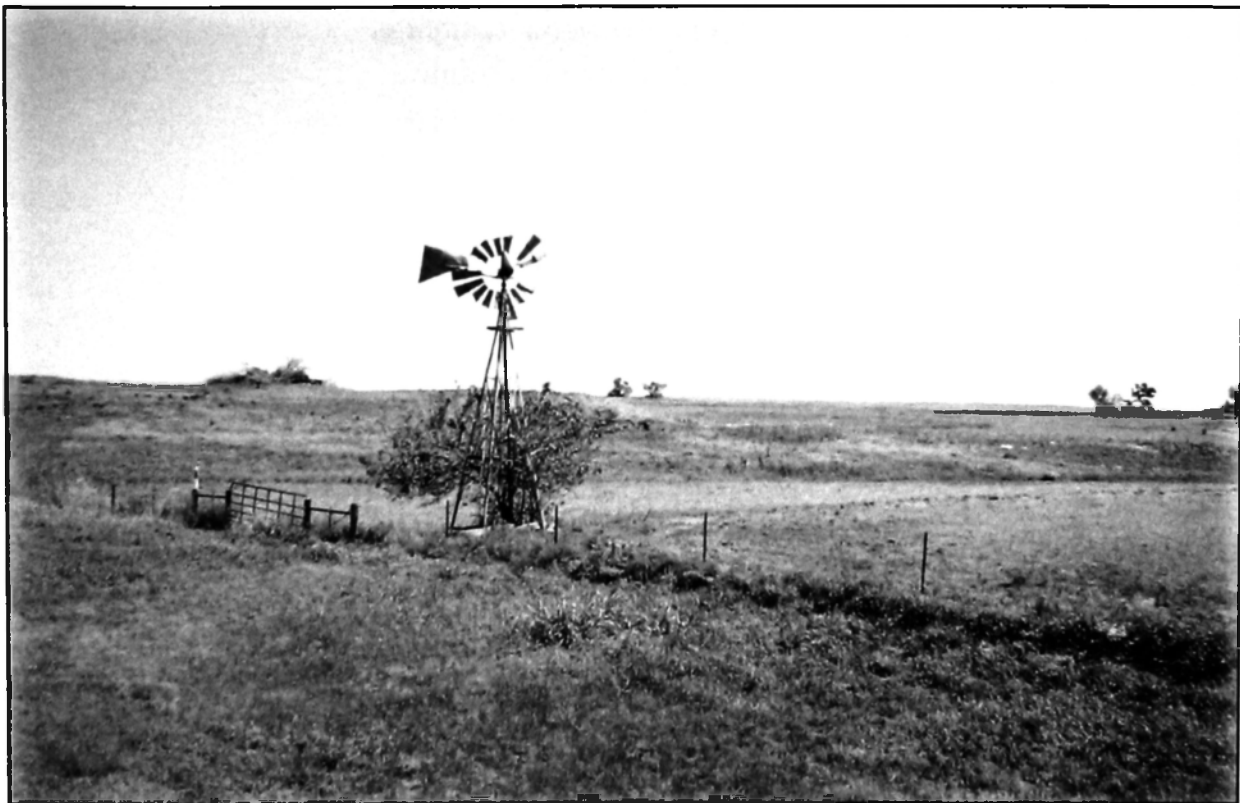


Photo by Kevin Collins



Herd Mentality

by Hannah Craig

At various hours, humans become cattle. It's true;
imagine two hundred head packed tight
between stoplights on Washington Ave
and you'll start to have a clue. Or

at the copy machine, heavy hips of the secretary —
eyes moist, mouth pursed in cud. The low bassoon
of a drunk neighbor mooing out *Louie, Louie*
just past three a.m. Team jerseys, a herd

of motion and focus—to devour, to stay whole.
Most of us have an inner lip that chews and chews.
That considers, through all hours, and seven
unstoppable stomachs, if this life is enough.

If there might be something better than the worry
over bills and foreign wars. The wife who barely
speaks. The kids who need to eat. In the next paddock
there might be a bull or some other predestined leader.

There might be a horn or hoof companion. Laughter
hung like fists of clover. Despite these possibilities,
there are still concerns. How hard is it to find work
that cows can do? What kind of herd is that, crossing

in front of the plaza? The cow-life is hard; a shoulder, a calf.
Someone is gored. Another falls to its knees and the herd,
trembling, surges forward. Where, where is the down-hole
for downers? *Animals*, someone says. Someone else agrees.



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall



Cardinal Red

by Kent Hiatt

There's no accounting for his color.

Tulip red is much too bold for birds
in Nature's predatory world; flowers
get away with look-at-me flamboyance;
in the animal kingdom, prudence dictates
lower profiles and subtle fashion sense.

Now take the robin—he's conservative.

Despite the red-breast name his overall
appearance is subdued, the vest no more
than an orange-brown accessory
that complements a mostly modest look;
he's right at home with the earth-tone set.

But not my flashy friend; for him to blend,
he'd have to stand beside a fire hydrant;
fading in the background doesn't seem
to be his style though; the limelight guides
him with its beacon to a landing on
my open lawn like it was center stage;
and there he stands, unprotected, acting
unconcerned and cavalier, almost cocky,
even as the neighbor's cat is eying him
and staking out a place behind the fence.

It makes no sense to me, defying order
and denying preservation's instinct;

Nature doesn't offer explanations though;
and Beauty never justifies itself.



The Etymology of Entomology

by Brent Fisk

Halfway up a tree
a cicada has split its back,
climbed from its body like
a spirit from the grave.
All day the ghosts gather,
haunt me from above.
They speak with the voice of heat.

Death is like a fat black cricket.
At night it finds a way into the room,
gets close, its legs working against its body
make a music too harsh and beautiful for sleep.

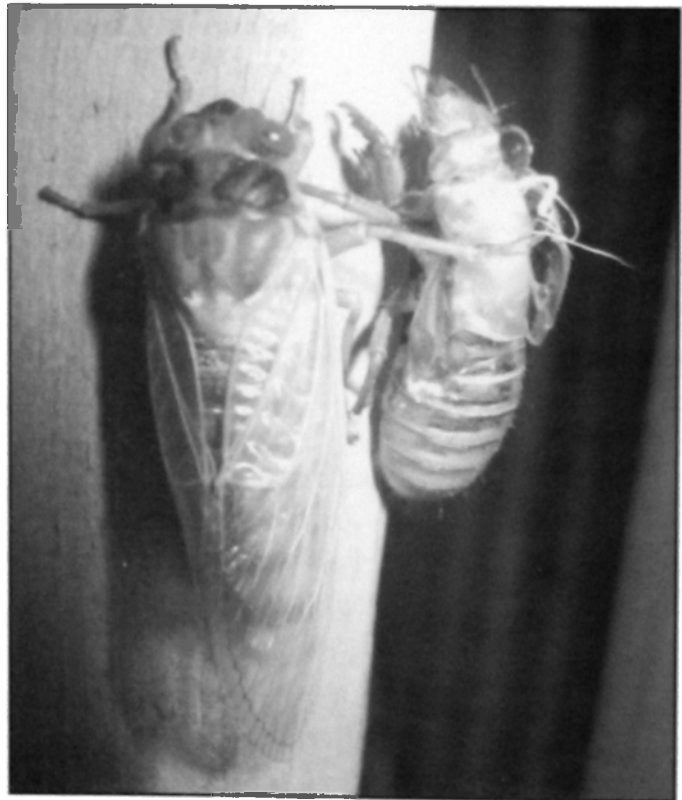


Photo by Susan Argus

The Beanstalk Tree

by Stacy Poritzky

Molly doesn't remember exactly when she sees him for the first time. She really only notices him because at 10:30 in the morning on a sweltering July day you usually don't see men like him at the gym. She can tell right off he isn't one of the bodybuilders with their huge biceps, grunting loudly as they push out one more set. His look is more refined; he's tall—about 6'3"—and slim with light brown hair and an intelligent face. She remembers thinking he looked vaguely familiar and trying to figure out how she knew him. A few days later, while she is in the frozen food aisle at Star Market, her hand poised over a neon-colored box of Chloe's favorite Popsicles, it comes to her. The reason she had recognized him is that he looks so much like the composite image she had mentally created years ago of the type of man she wanted to marry. Molly smiles slightly as she places the box of Popsicles in her grocery cart; her husband, Sam, who is short with dark, curly hair, looks nothing like him.

Molly has been working out every morning at the same gym for over ten years. She usually keeps to herself, her headphones attached to the bright yellow Walkman Velcroed around her wrist, as she expertly makes her way through the maze of free weights and cardio equipment. Over the years, she has developed only a few acquaintances at the gym, purposely avoiding the herds of spandex-clad women who move together like cattle from the locker room to their Spinning classes, noisily comparing manicurists and school districts. Although Molly is occasionally approached at the gym by men, drawn she assumes to her long blonde hair and toned physique, their attempts at conversation have always seemed feeble and halfhearted to her, and anyway, she is not the flirtatious type.

Maybe because he bears such a striking resemblance to the man who had played the central role in her single fantasies, or perhaps just because she

is bored, Molly starts searching for him each morning when she arrives at the gym. While she lifts her weights and runs on the treadmill, she watches him weave through the cavernous room. She notices how he takes his time, stopping often to chat with friends, and she wonders to herself how he knows them and what they are talking about. Molly sees him lying on a bench, pressing an eighty-pound barbell, and she stares at him, mesmerized, as his chest rises and shudders and falls.

All summer long, she watches. Finally, one day as she is leaving the gym, Molly points him out to one of the young girls who works behind the front desk. "Hey, do you happen to know who that guy is?" Molly asks.

Looking up from the blender where she is mixing a protein drink, the girl turns in the direction where Molly is gazing. "Who? The guy wearing the University of Michigan T-shirt?" she asks over the noisy whirring sound of the machine. Molly nods.

The young girl switches off the blender and smiles. She takes the lid off and peers inside, inspecting the creamy liquid. As she pours it into a large Fitness World paper cup, she says, "Sure. Everyone knows Neil—he's been working out here for years. Nice guy. He teaches English over at Emerson College."

Molly thanks her and walks slowly out of the gym, rolling his name around her mouth for a few moments. She gets into her car, opening the windows to let some air in. An academic, she thinks, putting her key into the ignition. He probably doesn't have classes until later in the day. That explains how he can be at the gym at 10:00 in the morning, when most of the men that Molly knows have already been at work for hours. Like Sam, her husband, she thinks, who at this very moment, is probably sitting in his large corner office on the 33rd floor of One Financial Center, his brow



furrowed as he peers at his computer screen and analyzes stock prices, his phone perched between his shoulder and chin.

Molly wakes up early, just before daybreak. The windows in the bedroom are open, and the New England air feels crisp. *Summer is over*, she thinks; *in a few weeks, the girls will be back at school*. As she lies in bed, her mind still fuzzy with sleep, Molly feels a strange sensation, a shifting of sorts.

She looks over at Sam, burrowed under the covers, making the same soft whistling sound he always makes when he is in a deep sleep. She props herself up on her elbows and surveys the room, lit by the pale orange and purple-blue hues of dawn. *Wasn't that chair closer to the wall*, she wonders. *And what about her purse over there on the bureau?* She could have sworn she had left it on her night table last night before she had gone to sleep. It's as if someone has crept into their bedroom during the dead of night and moved everything around, ever so slightly. Shaking her head, she lies back down and shuts her eyes tightly. When she does, she sees an image of Neil in his blue mesh shorts and T-shirt, lying on a bench, pressing a barbell.

Sometime near the end of August, right around Sam's 45th birthday, Molly believes that Neil has noticed her, too. Whenever she looks up, he is either standing nearby or heading in her direction. On a few occasions, he's actually smiled at her over the machines and nodded hello. Is it possible that Neil has noticed that she's been watching him all this time? She had tried so hard to be discreet. Or has she somehow summoned him to her? Is her longing for him so powerful, so potent, that it is being telepathically communicated to him? Whenever he comes too close, Molly feels dizzy, sick almost. Every nerve-ending in her body is poised, ready to react. Flustered, she moves away.

When fall arrives, the air feels brisker than ever.

The burnt-red and yellow leaves that the landscapers rake into neat piles each week are larger and more colorful than Molly remembers. She wakes early every morning, bursting with energy. She begins to make extravagant breakfasts for her family: thick pieces of French toast topped with fresh blueberries, Spanish omelettes with green peppers and imported mushrooms, homemade oatmeal with fresh ground cinnamon, even cheese popovers and corn bread from scratch. Sam and the girls come down the stairs each morning, sniffing the air, marveling at the food. While they sit at the table, drinking fresh-squeezed orange juice, Molly leans against the granite island, her arms wrapped around her waist, pulling her short robe tightly against her body. She watches them eat, barely able to conceal her impatience to have them finish and be out of the house.

Sam finally wipes his mouth with his napkin and stands up. He walks to the mirror in the hallway, adjusts his tie. He gets his navy wool coat out of the closet and holds it up close to the hallway light, inspecting it for any dust that may have collected during the night. He shakes it slightly, then folds it lengthwise in half, and places it neatly over his left arm. Picking up his briefcase, he pecks Molly on the cheek before going into the garage. Molly and the girls stop talking for an instant and listen to the noisy metal sound of the electric garage door opening and closing.

A few minutes later, Molly walks into the mudroom, and like a magician pulling a trio of rabbits out of a black silk hat, she reappears in the kitchen with the girls' backpacks and fleece jackets. She hugs each daughter and then watches as they walk down the long pebbled driveway to the mailbox where they wait for the school bus. Lily and Chloe are whispering to each other, little clouds of steam coming from their mouths. Tamara trails a few yards behind them, kicking at the stray leaves with her Barbie sneakers. Molly waits in the mudroom, watching them through the small leaded-glass window, twisting a piece of her long



blonde hair around her forefinger. By the time the bus arrives, the hair is coiled tightly around her finger like a snake.

Molly turns around and hurries up the peach-carpeted circular staircase and down the hallway that leads to the master bathroom, her favorite room in the house. She locks the door behind her and switches the radio on the marble counter to 98.5 FM Classic Rock. She unties her robe and shrugs it off her shoulders, letting it fall to the floor. Pulling her short silk nightgown over her head, she turns on the water in the shower. Molly washes quickly and then wraps a towel around herself and sits down on the small wicker chair in front of her vanity. While she dries her hair and applies her makeup, she sings softly along with the music.

When she's done, she looks in the mirror. Her face is flushed, right above her cheekbones, and her eyes are shining. She looks prettier than she usually does. Standing up, Molly marvels at how ridiculously happy it makes her just knowing that in twenty minutes, she'll be at the gym, in the same room as Neil, breathing the same air.

Walking into her closet, Molly pulls open a drawer, rustling through it until she finds the right pair of black tights and her favorite tank top. She dresses quickly, puts on her sneakers and heads back downstairs. As she grabs her keys from the hook on the wall, she checks the clock on the oven and nods with satisfaction. It's 9:50. Perfect. She'll get to the gym by 10:00, right around the time that he gets there.

Molly and Sam take the girls to Florida for the Christmas school break. Her first day back at the gym, Molly has just begun her workout when Neil walks directly over to her, motioning with his hands for her to remove her headphones. Molly's breath quickens; her fingers tremble as she takes them off.

"Happy New Year," he says, his tone so casual that Molly is confused. *Is he talking to me?* she wonders, glancing around. She looks up at him,

and he is watching her face intently, his eyes dark and serious.

Molly's face flushes. She takes a deep breath, struggling to collect herself. "Thanks...same to you."

"I hope I'm not intruding. I see you here a lot... and I just thought I'd say hello."

"No, no, that's fine," Molly says. "It's strange really, how you can walk by the same people here, day in and day out, without saying hello. It seems wrong, somehow." Her voice is echoing loudly in her head, and she knows she's babbling. "Well, anyway," she says, shaking her head, "I'm Molly." She extends her hand.

"Neil," he says, shaking her hand. "Nice to meet you." His hands are big, larger than Sam's, and she likes the way he shakes her hand. He has a solid grip, but not too firm—he doesn't crush her fingers together like so many people seem to do these days, just to make sure you know they're capable.

Neil asks Molly about herself, and she tells him she lives in the next town and is married with three daughters.

"You don't look like you could possibly have three children," he says. People say this to Molly all the time—so often, in fact, that she usually doesn't give it much thought. But when Neil says it, it actually sounds like a compliment.

"Thanks," she says. "Chloe's our oldest—she's eleven but she thinks she's fifteen." Molly rolls her eyes. "My middle one is Lily—she's eight years old, and then Tamara, the baby, is five." God, she's prattling on again. She stops and looks up at Neil, but he's listening attentively, nodding his head.

"Do you work?" he asks.

"Not anymore. I used to," she says, "but I stopped six years ago, right before Tamara was born." She pauses. "What do you do?"

When he tells her, Molly feigns surprise. "An English professor? That's so great. I read all of the time—really, at least a book, sometimes two, a week." It's true, but when she hears herself say-



ing it, she's embarrassed by how silly she sounds. Molly tucks her hair behind her ears. "I majored in Economics when I was in college," Molly says. "Sometimes though, I really wish I had studied literature."

"Really?" Neil says. "It's not too late, you know. You could always go back to school."

"Maybe." She pauses. "My life is kind of hectic right now." She looks back up at him. "Do you have any kids?"

Neil draws his head back and opens his eyes wide in mock horror. Laughing, he raises his eyebrows, shakes his head. "I'm not even married. I'm thirty-two," he adds, as if that explained everything.

Although she had never really thought about his age, she had assumed he was about the same age as she. "I'm ten years older than you," she says, quickly. The second it comes out of her mouth she regrets it, wondering if he'll think she's too old.

Neil shrugs, unfazed. "Really? You look a lot younger." He brings his water bottle to his lips and takes a long sip. "So what type of work did you do before you had kids?"

"I was in advertising for ten years; I was a copywriter," she says. "In Manhattan for ten years, and then for a few years in Boston."

"You were in Manhattan? I went to NYU for undergrad," he says.

"You're kidding? We lived right near Washington Square," she says. "When did you live there?"

"I graduated in 1992," he says, "so...from '88 to '92."

"That's so weird," says Molly, "we lived there from '89 to '91." They both laugh, and Neil starts talking about some of the places where he used to hang out. They discover that they had both gone to several of the same bars and restaurants and that each had spent a lot of time at the same neighborhood bookstore.

When Molly finally happens to glance at her watch, she is surprised by the time. "Wow, it's already 12:00," she says. "I've got to get going."

Neil smiles. "Hey...it was nice talking to you."

"Yeah," says Molly. "Same here." She hesitates for a second and then walks toward the lockers. Molly can feel his eyes watching her as she crosses the room. Just as she is about to go into the locker room, he calls out to her.

"Molly?" She turns around. He's still standing in the spot where they were talking, clear across the room. "Thanks," he yells out, a broad grin on his face.

Molly looks at Neil and tilts her head, as if to ask him, "What for?"

"For saying hi," he shouts back, as if it's obvious. A heavyset brunette running on the treadmill looks up at Neil, frowning. He ignores her, his eyes on Molly.

Molly blushes. Smiling, she mouths back, "You're welcome." For the rest of the day, Molly can't stop thinking about Neil. As she shops for groceries and picks up Sam's shirts at the dry cleaners, cleans up the breakfast dishes and makes the beds, drives the girls home from soccer and helps them with their homework, cooks dinner and loads the dishwasher, Molly goes over every detail, every word of their conversation.

Later that night, she climbs into bed next to Sam, who is thumbing through the latest issue of *Golf and Leisure*, his reading glasses perched on the tip of his nose. "Does Lily have a basketball game tomorrow?" he asks.

"Uh-huh," Molly nods.

"What time?"

"5:30 at the middle school gym," she says.

"I'll try to leave work early so I can come," he says.

"She'll love that."

"OK then," he says, as he turns a page without looking at her. Molly turns off the light above her side of the bed and closes her eyes. *It's remarkable,*



she thinks. Neil is literally the first person she's spoken to in years who seems sincerely interested in the part of her that isn't a wife and mother—a part of herself that even she often forgets still exists. Molly rolls on to her side and pulls the thick down comforter up over her shoulders, wondering suddenly what it would be like to be sleeping next to Neil's long, slim body, his large hands wrapped around her waist.

The next morning, in the light of day, Molly is terrified by the intensity of her feelings. It's as if Neil has moved into the house, taken up permanent residency in the empty guest room at the end of the hall, his gym shorts and U of Michigan T-shirt folded neatly in the dresser, his Nike sneakers with the big black swooshes tucked beneath the bed. When she brushes her teeth, Molly imagines him standing in the corner, talking to her. While she makes her coffee, she feels him sitting at the table, watching her, waiting.

Molly resolves not to go to the gym. For three days, she fills her mornings with other activities. On the fourth day, a Friday, it dawns on her that if she doesn't go to the gym, she'll have to wait until Monday to see Neil. She hurriedly throws her things into her gym bag.

By coincidence (or fate, she wonders later), Molly arrives at the entrance to the gym at precisely the same moment as Neil. He greets her warmly and holds the large glass door open for her as they walk in together. "I haven't seen you since Monday," he says, his forehead furrowed. "I thought you work out every day?"

He must like me if he's keeping track of my schedule, she thinks. "I usually do, but one of my daughters was home sick with flu."

"What are you working on today?" he asks.

"Legs and biceps," Molly says.

"Want some company?" Neil asks.

"Sure," she says. Her heart is pounding. "Let me put my stuff away. I'll be right out." Molly walks quickly to the locker room. When she comes

back out, Neil is waiting for her by the water fountain.

Molly and Neil move methodically through the gym, discussing which muscle group they will target and which exercise they will do. They talk as they work out, mostly about literature and music; the only time they are quiet is during the last few reps of a set, when the weights feel heavier. Molly tells him her favorite authors are Joyce Carol Oates and John Steinbeck; Neil nods approvingly and says he likes Richard Ford and Andre Dubus—the father, he says, not the son. They discover they both spend at least part of each Sunday doing the *New York Times* crossword puzzle ("Pen or pencil?" asks Neil) and that they both love playing board games, especially Scrabble and Othello.

He asks her who her favorite musician is, and when she tells him Joni Mitchell, he shakes his head in disbelief. "Oh God, no," he says laughing. "She's so depressing."

"She is not," Molly protests. "She's a genius." She looks up at Neil from the chair where she is doing bicep curls. He's explaining to her why Buddy Holly is the greatest musician of all time. Molly notes that Neil's bottom front tooth on the right side is out of alignment and that he obviously hasn't shaved for a day or two. She decides that he's the best-looking man she has ever seen.

From that day forward, all through the long, cold winter, they meet at the gym every day at 10:00 to work out together. By the time the snow has melted and signs of spring are emerging, Molly has heard every detail of his childhood, his family, his friends, his work. She knows the name of his college roommate who works as a general doctor in the Appalachians. She knows how self-conscious Neil is about his love handles and that he's worried he's going to lose all his hair before he is 40 because his grandfather did. Although Molly never talks about Sam, Neil tells her all about the different women he sees, bemoaning the flaws in each that he invariably discovers after only a few dates.



She knows Neil's up late at night worrying about whether he'll make tenure, and that when he can't sleep, he works on a book he's been writing for over three years about the history of game shows.

Neil knows all about Molly, too. He's heard about her nutty mother who drives her crazy, and about how hard it was for Molly when her father passed away from cancer when she was sixteen. He knows she slept with a lot of boys in college and that she did acid twice. Neil has heard about how Molly used to be so bored at work that she would sneak out for a few hours in the middle of the day to go to the movies, where she would prop her legs up on the chair in front of her and go through two boxes of Raisinets. Molly has told him how hard it is to buy shoes for her size 10 1/2 feet and how much she hates having to check off the box next to

Homemaker whenever she fills out a form that asks for Occupation. He knows that Lily gives her a hard time and that she worries about Chloe feeling left out because she's a middle child.

The only topic that Molly and Neil never, ever discuss is what they mean to each other. For Molly, the time she spends with Neil each morning is what keeps her going for the rest of the day. She feels alive for the first time in her life, even though she knows how silly that sounds.

The days are getting warmer and the school year is coming to an end. At home, Sam and the girls enthusiastically discuss summer camp and make plans for their annual vacation on Lake Winnepesaukee. Molly sits quietly at the dining room table, studying her hands. The thought

of not seeing Neil for two weeks is painful. Sam looks over at her, shaking his head slightly in disapproval.

Sam's known about Neil for months now. Early on, she had decided to be open with Sam about her relationship with Neil. Although she considered it unlikely, Molly knew there was a possibility that Sam might somehow find out that she was working out with some guy at the gym. "Neil's just a friend," she had told Sam. "Of course it's platonic. For God's sake, he's ten years younger than me," she had said, rolling her eyes. "He's like a little brother."

Molly thought that being open about Neil might make her relationship with him seem less threatening to Sam, but the strategy backfires. Like a fourteen-year-old girl who can't stop talking about the boy she has a crush on, Molly ends up mentioning Neil far too often, and Sam soon realizes that Molly and Neil are more than friends.

His first reaction is confusion. "We have a good marriage; what is he giving you that I can't?" he asks. Molly holds her position, insisting that she and Neil are just good friends. Before long, Sam's confusion changes to anger, and he starts arguing with her about the amount of time she spends at the gym each day. "Why does it take you two hours at the gym?" he asks. And then finally, "If you don't care that much about him and you know it bothers me, then why don't you just switch gyms?" he challenges.

The marriage is infected. Molly's bad habits, which Sam has grudgingly tolerated for years, are now completely unacceptable to him. "Does every single light in the house have to be on all the time?" he mutters each night when he arrives home from work, walking through the hallways of their house, angrily switching off lights. As he opens the bills, he shakes his head in disgust. "What did you need at Saks that cost \$329?" When she's pouring lukewarm wonton soup from a greasy take-out container into ceramic bowls, Sam rolls his eyes, "You ordered in again? Too busy to cook



today, huh?"

Molly starts avoiding Sam whenever she can, limiting their conversations to terse discussions of the children and their activities.

The summer is unusually rainy and humid. Lily and Chloe are at sleepaway camp and Molly drops Tamara off each morning at a nearby day camp. Sam's been working long hours at the office, leaving early and coming home late.

Molly is sitting at the kitchen table alone in her house eating lunch—a container of yogurt and a can of Diet Coke. The television, turned to the 12:30 local news, drones on in the background. Right now, she thinks, Neil's eating lunch with his father. At the gym this morning, Neil had said he was taking his father out to lunch for his birthday and had asked Molly where they should go. A seafood restaurant, he had said. Nothing too pretentious, because his dad wasn't like that, he had added. Molly had recommended The Seafarer, a small restaurant in the next town that catered mostly to workers in a nearby industrial park. Molly had been there once, years ago, after looking at some carpet in one of the showrooms with her interior designer.

She imagines Neil and his father having lunch, sitting in white plastic chairs at one of the little tables covered with red checkerboard plastic cloth. She can see Neil waiting for the waitress to bring out his food, an amber-colored bottle of Sam Adams in front of him, the scent of fried fish floating out from the kitchen. Molly feels a jagged pang of regret. She'll never eat at a restaurant with Neil; she'll never meet his father. She'll never go to the movies with him or to the beach or to a concert. They'll never stay up late watching TV together or jump into the car for an impulsive road trip. She'll never know what it would feel like to wake up in the middle of the night and see Neil lying in bed next to her, fast asleep.

Molly swirls the spoon around and around in the Dannon container until the consistency of the

yogurt gets so thin it drips off the side of the spoon. No, she thinks. I'll be married to Sam for the rest of my life. I will never ask him for a divorce. I couldn't do that to him or the kids. Sam's a nice man, a good husband, a great father. It's not his fault that we've grown apart.

Molly's known for a long time, way before she met Neil, that her marriage with Sam was unraveling. Although they had been very happy during the early years of their marriage, over time the day-to-day grind of living, the routine of it all, had created a wedge between them. They had been so intent on making sure they were being good parents, so focused on paying the bills on time and decorating the house just so, that at some undefined moment, they had stopped talking to one another, stopped listening, stopped being a couple.

Molly had stood by silently, a witness to and an accomplice in the steady deterioration of their marriage. She had seen it happening but hadn't done a thing about it. It had been easier that way. She had assumed that one day, when things got bad enough or when they had more free time, they would both make it a priority to work on their marriage, to figure out how to regain the closeness that they had once shared. The important thing was that Sam had always been in love with her and had gone out of his way to make sure she was happy.

Until now.

The girls come back from summer camp, suntanned and independent. It's Saturday morning and Sam takes them to the mall so that Molly can pack up for their trip to the lake. They are leaving the day after tomorrow, and Molly has packed only for Tamara so far. She is in Chloe's room, stacking shorts and bathing suits and underwear into neat piles in a suitcase, when a wave of exhaustion rolls over her. She moves the suitcase off the twin bed and lies down. Turning on her side, she looks out the window at the huge maple tree that takes up most of their backyard. When the girls were little, they had named it the Beanstalk Tree because it



grew so quickly. Twelve years ago, when they had first moved in, the newly-planted tree had stood barely two feet tall. To their amazement, by the time Lily was born only a few months later, it had tripled in size.

Three years later, when they brought Chloe home from the hospital, Lily insisted they measure the tree and record its height in Chloe's baby book. Sam had dragged the heavy 16-foot metal ladder out from the garage and propped it against the side of the tree. Molly had steadied

the ladder for him, still in her maternity jeans, her breasts swollen with milk, while Sam cautiously made his way up to the top. "Twenty feet!" he had yelled down. Lily had twirled around with excitement, while Molly looked up at Sam, wondering what she had done to deserve all of this happiness.

Molly gets up and walks over to the window, her eyes moving up to the top of the Beanstalk. It must be well over fifty feet by now, towering over the telephone poles on either side of their house. The branches are beginning to encroach on the neighbors' lawns again, and Molly reminds herself to call and schedule the tree people to trim the branches.

She turns to the clock—Sam and the girls are probably eating lunch at the mall now. She imag-

ines them sitting in the Food Court, the girls eating Happy Meals, Sam eating a slice of pizza. Neil's probably at home, in front of his computer screen, doing research for his book.

This is unbearable, she thinks. *When I'm at home with Sam, all I think about is how much I wish I were with Neil. But then when I am with Neil, I'm miserable because we never acknowledge our true feelings for each other; I never touch him or hold him.* From her perspective, she's feeling all of the guilt that goes along with having an affair without any of the pleasure.

A gust of wind moves against the maple tree, its large branches swaying back and forth. *I need to be with Neil, really be with him*, she thinks, *even if it's just for a few hours. Even if it's just one time.*

It's 10:10 on Monday morning, and the temperature outside is already 92 degrees. When she walks into the air-conditioned gym, her skin feels clammy. Neil is waiting for her by the cardio equipment. They decide to start with biceps, and as they walk over to the free weights, Neil begins telling her about a rooftop barbecue he had gone to the previous night, where the host had gotten so drunk that he had passed out right in the middle of grilling the hamburgers. Molly tries to pay attention, to laugh at all the right moments, but her heart is pounding so loudly she can hardly hear what Neil is saying. When he finally finishes the story, Molly says, "I really need to talk to you about something."

"Yeah?" Neil says. He has picked up two 15-pound weights and begins a set of bicep curls. His eyes are on the mirror, watching his reflection. "Look at those guns," he says, motioning to his biceps and grinning.

Molly smiles. "I'll wait until you are done."

He finishes and hands her the weights. "Your turn." Molly looks at the weights in her hands for a second and then slowly leans down and places them on the floor. She sits down on the worn red leather bench and looks up at Neil.

When he sees the serious look on her face, he



sits down next to her, a few inches away on the bench. "We have to talk," she repeats. "About us..." she says quietly.

"What about us?" he asks.

"I just can't go on like this anymore," Molly says slowly, shaking her head.

"Like what?" Neil asks, looking confused.

"Like never talking about our relationship," she says.

"What do you want to talk about?" he asks. He is looking at her strangely.

She can't believe how hard Neil is making this. "About how difficult it is for us to not really be together," she blurts out. The dam opens and the words pour out. "Do you have any idea how hard it is for me at home? You've invaded my life. I think about you all of the time, from the second I wake up until the moment I go to sleep. I've never felt about anyone the way I feel about you, and seeing you for a few hours each morning is just not enough." Molly pauses, her heart racing. She looks at Neil. "We deserve more."

Neil turns and stares out the window of the gym, his face frozen into an expression that she has never seen before. Her eyes follow his, and she watches as a FedEx truck pulls up to the front of the gym. The driver gets out, a white and purple envelope in his hand, and heads toward the entrance. In the background, she can hear the muffled sound of disco music coming from an aerobic class in an adjacent room.

Slowly, Neil turns to her. Very softly, so softly that she has to strain just to hear him, he says, "I am so sorry, Molly, but I just don't feel that way about you. I had no idea..." his voice trails off. "Jesus Christ, you should have said something a long time ago." He looks back out the window. "Why didn't you say something?" he repeats, shaking his head.

Molly looks down at her hands, blinking back tears. *It's impossible. There is absolutely no way, no way at all, that he does not love me.* Molly shakes her head and looks at him. "I don't believe you,"

she says finally.

"Well, you should," he replies.

"Well, I can't," she whispers back angrily. Molly stands up and walks away quickly.

Two days later, Molly and Sam are in New Hampshire, sitting on white Adirondack chairs on a small knoll that lies between the shingled house they rent and the lake. The sun is shining brilliantly and the air is dry. Sam has on shorts and a golf T-shirt; Molly is wearing a black bikini, dark sunglasses covering her eyes. Lily is lying on a huge banana-shaped float in the middle of the lake, reading *Teen* magazine while she suns herself. Chloe and Tamara are sitting on the grass, a few feet from the shore, drinking lemonade juice boxes and eating M&Ms with their eyes closed, trying to guess what colors they've got in their mouths.

Molly leans her head back against the hard wooden slats of the chair. The sun is beating down against her face, burning into her face, making her head pound. *This must be how you feel when someone you love dies,* she thinks. *Like shit.* Last night, she had told Sam that she wasn't feeling well and had gone to bed right after dinner. She had slept straight through the night, not waking up until past noon on the following day. She had heard Sam downstairs making lunch for the girls, but had waited until they had finished and gone back down to the lake before getting up and making her way into the kitchen. Glancing at the sink, which was overflowing with dishes from last night's dinner and this morning's breakfast and lunch, Molly had turned right around and headed back upstairs to put on her bathing suit.

"Did you put lotion on your face?" asks Sam. "The sun is really strong today."

"Yep," she says. "Before I came out." *Maybe Neil is scared to get involved with me because I'm married and have kids,* she thinks.

Sam leans over, putting his face two inches away from hers. He squints his eyes, checking to make sure she really has sunscreen on her face.





He's worried about her wrinkles; sun damage is one of his pet peeves. "Really?" he asks.

"Yes," she says irritably. *Maybe Neil thinks I'm too old; I am 10 years older than he.* Molly looks out on the lake. It's like a sheet of glass today; the only movement is right around Lily's float.

Sam leans over and reaches for her hand. "Want to buy a couple of live lobsters and cook them tonight?" he asks.

"Sure," Molly nods her head. *Is it a moral issue for Neil?*

"You won't mind the mess in the kitchen?" he asks.

"Nope." *But if that's the case, what has the whole relationship been about?* Maybe his feelings aren't as strong as hers, but they're not just friends, she's sure of that.

Her head is pounding. Molly closes her eyes.

"I said yellow," Tamara whines, opening her mouth to reveal the brown and yellow remnants of a half-eaten M&M.

"You said red, you liar!" Chloe screams. Molly looks over just in time to see Tamara smack Chloe on the arm. Chloe pinches her back hard and Tamara starts to cry. Both girls come running toward Molly, crying, "Mommy, Mommy." Molly sits up and looks sternly at both girls. Sam's eyes are closed; he's either asleep or pretending to be.

"Chloe, please don't tease your little sister. And Tamara, if Chloe is bothering you, you can't hit her. You have to tell me first. Then, I can take care of it." Molly lies back down. *So this is it*, she thinks. Her life stretches out before her like parallel yellow lines in the middle of a perfectly flat and endless highway.

"But, Mom," wails Tamara. "You never help us. All you ever do is sleep."

"Yeah, Mom," Chloe says accusingly. "You never play with us; you never do anything with

us. You've been sleeping ever since we got here." Molly sits up wearily and looks over at Sam. He's sitting up now, too, looking at her, his eyes full of disappointment.

Sam stands up and takes off his shirt. "You do look tired, Honey. Why don't you rest?" Molly knows he is being sarcastic.

Turning his back to her, he takes off his sunglasses and puts them down on his chair. He scoops up Chloe in one arm and Tamara in the other. "Everyone in the water," he yells. Sam runs toward the lake, staggering from the weight of the children. He leaps into the water, throwing the shrieking girls high up in the air. Molly stares at the lake as Chloe and Tamara's bodies shatter the stillness, creating huge swells of water. Molly doesn't notice the girls resurface, grinning and laughing. Her eyes are tracking the waves as they travel across the lake, getting smaller and smaller. When they finally disappear, reabsorbed into lake, she leans back and closes her eyes.



Autumn Song

by Scott K. Odom

Sometimes I try to get my wife to dance
this little dance with me. Do you love
me. Do you love me. Do you love me.

She grows weary. She keeps
her own counsel, sighs and looks
out the window.

Where the sea is dark and choppy.
Where a coppery light fails.

Near shore dark rocks
jut from the swirling waters.
You can't stand there long enough
to see it happen, but they are being
worn down to nothing.

Sometimes I have long, convoluted
conversations with her on the drive to town.
I glide through my steps, surefooted,
avoiding the pitfalls.

She is moved by my grace and
our hands touch softly.
But this is imagined and I
am often silent.

She tells me nothing
is on her mind.

I busy myself
building little houses of paper
so I can burn them
down.

She's looking at me now.
I look beyond her to the sea.



Unwritten Laws

by Kevin Collins

My first trips to Candlestick were with Grandpa. Grandpa had been a terrorist in the old country, but he mended his ways over here and became a bootlegger. After repeal, he went legit, bought a bar on Castro Street, and put his kids through college. Then he got old and started taking his grandson to baseball games. He never really lost his brogue, and it would get especially pronounced when he was wry: he'd add a syllable, a sort of "dh" produced by a roll of the tongue. When I was 8 or 9, late in the season, he pointed out a batter in the on-deck circle, Ollie Brown, and told me that they'd just brought him in. I asked from where.

"The trees-dh."

I wrestled with that one. One of my baseball cards, Lew Krause's, used the phrase "beating the bushes" for minor-league prospects, and my little mind set to work on connecting the bushes to the trees. I never quite got Grandpa's racism at the time. It was different from the racism of indigenous Americans—less vicious but less explainable than our racism—but it was racism just the same. Of course, it wasn't remarkable that I didn't get Grandpa's racism: it didn't strike me as odd that the stands around me were full of Whites, Latins, and Asians, but that the thousands of Black fans in the park were all in the grandstand beyond the right-field fence. They had a separate entrance, separate bathrooms, separate concession stands. When a homerun went over the right-field fence, only Blacks could get the souvenir ball. Mays, Cepeda, Felipe Alou, and other righties sent occasional shots over that fence, but most of their homers went elsewhere; the patron saint of the right-field Blacks was Willie McCovey. He was—as I am—all left. He didn't have to raise an arm to show you his left-handedness: you could see it in the way he stood. And when he came to bat, that grandstand would practically empty as kids and even adults lined the fence to catch the home

run balls that came with alarming regularity, often over the heads of the fans, into the stands they'd just vacated. Everyone but the Blacks was denied those souvenir balls, and everyone but the Blacks paid six bucks for reserved seats. The Blacks paid seventy-five cents. Segregation wasn't strictly enforced at Candlestick as it was in some other big-league parks, but the difference of \$5.25 in the price of a ticket got the job done pretty well.

After Grandpa died, I'd buy an occasional six-dollar seat with my paper-route money, and there was one summer when I didn't see the Giants at all. Later, I'd get every so often on a summer weekday the season tickets that my dad's firm held: Section 10, Row 5, Seats 9,10,11, and 12. Sometimes I'd bring three friends, be a high-roller for a day. More often, I'd sell the four seats for twenty bucks, buy a single seat elsewhere, and pocket the fourteen dollar difference.

But nearly half of the 300-or-so games I saw at Candlestick were during my two years as a vendor. I'd stalk the stands in a starched white linen shirt, a beige change apron, and a round, white paper hat, selling whatever I was assigned by the Stevens brothers. Racks of sodas with cellophane sealed over the mouths of their waxed-cardboard cups. Peanuts. Programs. Almost invariably on those cold San Francisco summer days that Mark Twain sneered at, ice cream, with a flat splintery wooden spoon for every customer. For double headers, and at practically no other time (that was my good and bad luck), I tended to get hot dogs. Except for beer, which I couldn't have sold for another seven years anyway, hot dogs were easily the biggest money makers, but they also demanded more work than the other concessions. They weren't like the hermetically-sealed ballpark dogs you see today. I'd strap over my shoulders a huge tin crate—vendors called it a can—with a tub of Sterno at the bottom of it to keep warm the quart or so of water in which



the wieners sat. Most of the space in the can was taken up by buns, five or six twelve-packs in cellophane. There was a pot near the top of the can for mustard and for the plastic stick used to slap the mustard onto the dog.

I got pretty good at making hot dogs, but to some of the older vendors, it was an art form; a couple of them looked like Buddy Rich, later in his career, when he'd become the center of his own band, when he'd moved the drum kit to the front of the band, the front of the stage, and made himself the visual center of the act, attacking his cymbals and cowbells by frenzied rote, as though he could do it in his sleep but chose to do it awake because it was not something to be missed. The hot dog vendor's two sticks were a two-tined fork and the mustard stick. The real pros I learned from could have the hot dog halfway down the customer's throat before the poor soul would catch his breath from the shock of watching it being assembled. The right hand flicks lightly with the fork to open a pack of buns then jabs more sharply down into the simmering pot of dogs while the left hand snaps out a napkin, grabs a bun with it, and opens the bun just in time for it to receive the wiener. Then the same right hand that wields the fork pulls the mustard stick from its yellow-brown puddle—mustard stick poised between the middle and ring fingers—slaps it across the dog and exchanges the masterpiece for sixty cents, usually without the vendor even having to look down at the whole process.

I tended to look. I never got very good at the process, not like those guys, anyway. I hung on for only two years. They wanted union dues when I turned sixteen, and my football coaches got fed up with my missing summer practice. Besides, I was a southpaw, and the hot dog cans were made, like everything else, for righties. I wonder, with a few more years, if I would have compensated the way that lefty golfers do, especially on power strokes, with right-handed clubs or the way that lefties do playing right-handed bass guitars. But I didn't stick around to find out.

My vending years were just past the prime of Mays, smackdab in the primes of McCovey and Marichal, just when Jim Ray Hart started to see that he wasn't great—the question was in doubt for a while—and when Bobby Bonds started to wonder if maybe he was. Some days, popcorn or program days, I'd let the customers find me and I'd concentrate on the green, on the black, white, and orange, on the blue, or on the gray, or on the startling blue at 1:00 P.M. that would turn gray in wind-blown streaks by 3:30.

My vending years were during the renovation of the park for football. The 49ers were moving in, so management enclosed the stadium and replaced the Blacks-only right-field grandstand with football-only seats that would fold away in the summer, ending forever at Candlestick both segregation and the seventy-five cent ticket. The enclosure was also supposed to soften the legendary winds that blew off the bay and into the park, but it had the opposite effect, creating micro-climates seen nowhere else in the world, creating unpredictable gusts that would blow infants out of mothers' arms and blow off not only hats and jackets but, in one case I heard of, a shoe.

For the whole two years, I was one of the three or four youngest guys. They stopped hiring snotnoses for a while just after I got the job. And some of the older guys, guys who were trying to feed kids on a vendor's commissions, would make it pretty clear that they didn't like it when I got hot dogs while they were stuck with peanuts or sodas for a double-header. I'd get a lot of bad looks and an occasional comment when the assignments came out and even during the games.

There was a tacit truce between games of a double-header, though. Between games, usually without any advance planning, vendors would gather together in the mezzanine, forget their animosities like lions and zebras at the watering hole, and set up little stores: a beer guy would find a hot dog guy, and a peanut guy, a soda guy, an ice cream guy, and a souvenir guy would join up, but never



two vendors of the same product.

There were a few spots on the mezzanine where between-games stores would always appear, but usually the location was up to the hot dog guy. He had to keep a respectful distance from the counters, the permanent stores selling the same products, and he had to pick a spot where there would be traffic, where fans would go to stretch their legs.

The hot dog guy was always the center of these ephemeral little stores, and he was usually flanked by a soda guy and a beer guy. The hot dog guy was the center of the store because the hot dogs drew the fans to the store, where they might incidentally pick up a soda or a bobbin'-head doll for the kids. But the hot dog guy was also the center of the store because of that two-tined fork.

A vendor's very mobility during the game was a sort of protection against pickpockets, but between games, vendors were fair game. I'd come up twenty dollars short a couple of times—a whole day's work or more—without even knowing I'd been robbed. One time, one of those popcorn days dedicated more to indolence and baseball than to mobility and commerce, it dawned on me that someone was feeling my hip. I looked down and saw that some fellow in a Dodgers' cap had his hand in one of my apron pockets. Luckily, it was an empty pocket. I looked him in his Dodger-blue eyes. He managed an embarrassed "I tried" shrug, and he disappeared into the crowd.

At an impromptu between-games store, though, vendors weren't protected by mobility. Their numbers offered some protection: shoulder-to-shoulder, only the two outside guys were fully exposed. But the chief deterrent against pickpockets was the hot dog fork. Though I'd seen the fork in violent action a couple of times—one crook actually made off with a fork sticking a half-inch into the back of his hand—its greatest deterrent value was in its reputation. Vendors told stories of the fork, and judging from the relative freedom that hot dog guys had from pickpockets, the bad guys told stories too. Smart ones wouldn't mess with a hot dog vendor

if they could dip the same five bucks out of the apron of a defenseless peanut guy.

And the unwritten law at a between-games store is that the hot dog fork protects all of the store's vendors, at least those within arm's length of the hot dog guy.

1971 was a year that the Giants made the playoffs. It was shortly after the league had introduced divisions, and they won the West before losing in the playoffs to Roberto Clemente, Willie Stargell, and Pirates. On a cool July Sunday that year, in the bottom of the ninth of the opening game of a twin-bill with the Phillies, I hauled my hot dog can to the mezzanine to scout out a spot to set up a store. Before the first game ended, I was joined by Manuel Flores and Danny the Queer Peanut Vendor. Manuel had graduated two years before me from our K-8 school. He was selling souvenirs that day, and his souvenirs shout (which I think he'd stolen from an older vendor who had just died) was "Groovy Souvies!"

Danny was probably not much older than I am today, but people seemed to age faster in 1971, and he struck me as being both too old and too small to be hauling peanuts around. But he got peanuts every day. Most vendors faced some pre-game hopes and fears: one of the Stevens brothers—usually Jack—would call out your name and your commodity before you'd get a clear idea of how the day would go. Not Danny. He'd just cut in line ahead of the others—no one seemed to mind—pick up a day's worth of peanut tickets and his first load, and sit in the stands as the park filled up. When he was working, he would call out "peanuts" in almost a whisper. A whisper was about all he had.

I was just getting a fairly solid idea of what "Queer" meant, and even then, Danny didn't strike me as particularly Queer, though he was certainly a bit queer. The vendor scuttlebutt had it that he'd once asked another vendor to tie his apron in the back for him, and the name stuck. Everyone called him Danny the Queer Peanut Vendor—even a guy



who, looking back, was likely as gay as daisies in springtime—but no one called him that to his face. No one said much at all to his face.

Manuel, Danny, and I made a few sales before the first game ended, but our store wasn't complete until the other vendors came out, with the fans, after a Giants' ninth-inning rally fell just short.

Our beer guy was Red. Red was named for the color of his face, which looked even redder for the curly snow-white hair atop it. He was one of the oldest vendors, and he was always hustling, calling out his rhythmic shout in a basso profundo: "Hey beer! Cold beer! Bottle o' beer! Gotta have beer!" (Red was almost always assigned beer—if not with quite the regularity that Danny the Queer got peanuts—and he'd curse a blue basso-profundo streak if he got anything but beer or hot dogs.) "Hello, boys," he said, turning his back to us as Danny took a step away from me to let Red slide between us. The twins—Gino, inconsolable with ice cream on a cool day, and Marco, even glummer if possible since the program vendors who'd usually switch to peanuts in the third inning had to hang onto their unprofitable programs longer for double headers—arrived together and split up, each staking out an end of the store, setting up just behind Manuel and Danny respectively so that fans couldn't get behind us.

Everyone and his mom wanted a hot dog and a beer between those two games. Red was popping the lids off as many as three bottles at a time and overturning them into cups, taking dollars—a beer cost a dollar—without having to fuss with change. I was feeling a bit more left-handed even than usual that day, but I was holding my own. Manuel and Danny made few sales and Gino and Marco almost none despite the growing crowd around the store.

An irritated voice came from behind the crowd: "You guys, like, got a soda guy?"

"No!" boomed Red, "Get back here."

It was Dick, and he pushed his way through the crowd, turning his back as he went, and squeezed

in between Manuel and me.

On the first day I'd ever been assigned hot dogs—in September of the previous year—Dick wondered aloud and bitterly from behind his peanut can how many hot dogs this twerp could sell. He never quite said anything after that—not anything I could hear—but his luck seemed to be about as bad on double-header days as mine was good, and he usually made it clear through a look or a sigh that my need for baseball cards or licorice sticks or comic books was starving his wife and kids or making him miss payments on the GTO or depriving him of reefer or French magazines. He was about thirty, long, tall, and straight. He had a long, straight nose; long, tall, black sideburns; and crocodile skin like the kid at school who had picked at his chicken pox.

The word I'd heard most frequently from Dick in the time we'd worked together was his name, Dick, and he seemed especially loud and proud when he said it. I'd overheard in snatches of his conversation expressions like "That's the way Dick sees it" and "Better not mess with Dick," and I once heard him being introduced to a new vendor who hadn't heard his name right.

"I'm sorry: Did he say your name was Rick?"

"No, not Rick, DICK," as though his D was all that separated mankind from the apes.

It was another unwritten law at between-games stores that the hot dog guy needed a little more space than anyone else for stabbing bun wrappers and slapping on mustard and the rest of the Buddy Rich routine, but Dick was crowding me, maybe on purpose, and sighing when we bumped elbows.

A lady ordered two hot dogs just as I was finding my rhythm, and she cried "No" when I slapped the mustard on the first of them. I looked up at her.

"I want mayonnaise."

"We don't have mayonnaise, Lady. You can have it with mustard, or you can have it dry."

"What do you mean you don't have mayon-





Photo courtesy ballparksofamerica.com

naise?"

Dick intervened. "Who the hell puts mayonnaise on a hot dog?"

The lady said she'd take one with mustard and the other dry, and I felt an odd sort of gratitude toward Dick. Then we bumped elbows again, and he said, "Come on!"

I flipped open my extra bun compartment with the fork, and I saw that I was running low. I should have stocked up in the top of the ninth. I was more concerned about what Red, Manuel, and especially Dick would think of me than I was about any lost commissions that might result.

Dick got annoyed with a customer. "A twenty? You're going to buy a twenty-five-cent soda with

a twenty? I got a bunch of quarters here, Mister. I can't break a twenty. Hey, Red? You break a twenty?"

"Yeah, pro'ly," Red boomed.

They met behind me to make their exchange as I slathered mustard on another hot dog, and I noticed out of the corner of my eye a hand reaching into Dick's change apron.

Not without thinking—I thought about it for a second or two longer than I should have—I brought the fork down onto the intruding hand and nailed it squarely with both tines. The mustard stick, between my middle and ring fingers, went along for the ride, and the mustard splattered both the thief and a couple of my customers.

The pickpocket whelped at a high pitch and turned to run. He was a kid no older than me, a skinny Filipino. Manuel reached out to grab him, but the souvenir can is packed with dangling pennants and fragile dolls, so he couldn't commit to much of an effort. We looked at each other, and he nodded and grinned.

I looked up to my customers and waited for them to praise me or chasten me.

"Two," said a fat man, "lots of mustard."

"What?"

"Two dogs, lots of mustard."

I looked down at my fork and saw that a tiny chunk of red meat adorned one of the tines.

I looked over to Danny, who whispered "peanuts" as a gust took the paper hat off his head and straight up into the sky.

"Hey! Two dogs, lots of mustard, will ya!"

I wiped the fork off on my change apron and danced up two dogs with lots of mustard.

"A dollar twenty."

Dick settled back into his spot and bitterly counted out the nineteen dollars and seventy-five cents change for his customer. Gino and Marco gave up even before the crowd broke around our store, and I saw them out of the corner of my eye—each with a splintery wooden spoon—sharing one of Gino's ice creams as I slapped mustard on another dog, softly and wearily now, but using a lot of elbow, like Buddy Rich with the brushes.

The P.A. announcer began to call the line-ups for the second game, and the crowd started to

thin. At the precise instant that the store became unprofitable, Red set out for the greener pastures of the stands.

Manuel tapped me on the shoulder, and when I looked at him, he extended his hand to me. When I took it, he twisted the handshake into the "Soul Brothers' Shake" with the interlocking thumbs. "Mighty, mighty Wildcats," he said, referring to the mascot for his year at our school. The mascot changed every year; it was always some sort of fearsome feline, but while Manuel's year was the Wildcats, my year was the mighty, mighty Panthers. Still, I got Manuel's point. He released my hand and headed up the ramp to the upper deck.

Dick had opened one of his sodas, a Seven-up, and was drinking it. I flipped open my bun compartment with the fork and saw that I had just one bun left. Then I looked into the opaque quart of water and saw that I had just one wiener too. The commissaries counted buns but always just estimated wieners, and it happened almost never that the quantities were the same. I hadn't eaten all day, and everything in nature suggested that I eat the last hot dog myself. Something just outside of nature, though, argued against it. I wiped the fork against my change apron again and headed for the commissary above section four to reload.

"Hey," said Dick, and I stopped to look at him. "Smooth."

He had seen my work.

"I'm Dick."

"I'm.....Kevin."



Guilt

by Margaret H. Brooks

...and sometimes I wish the rains would come
and swell the creeks and stir the mud
from their hard, dry banks and upset
the weak trees, which would ride,
root over branch, with the current

...and without concern for havoc
I would plunge into the roiling water
and save a stranger
 ...for it is only a stranger
 a mother can save...

and when I, with murky water dripping
from my arms and running down my cheeks,
bore the child to his father,
I would see in his eyes
something akin to forgiveness
but more like the understanding
of a man with his own roots
 to remember...



The Distance between Shadow and Hour

by Judson Simmons

Everything we ever thought
we'd forgotten, is waiting here —
parked at the end of the universe.

The dandelion's candescent teardrops
blown to the wind, each last sip
poured out, or the conscious honks
which press against back bumpers —
they pass through the heat, begin
a slow ascent from the earth.

Crisscross clipped hair, swept away
and settled against the cool floor
of a barbershop, the floors painted
by slanted shadows. A shudder.
A tremble — like a child caught
in late autumn downpour — just try

to remember that first smile
which broke a hush and calm.
Those outstretched arms shifting
towards dusk or that slight part
between neck and hairline —
followed by bursts like sudden embraces.

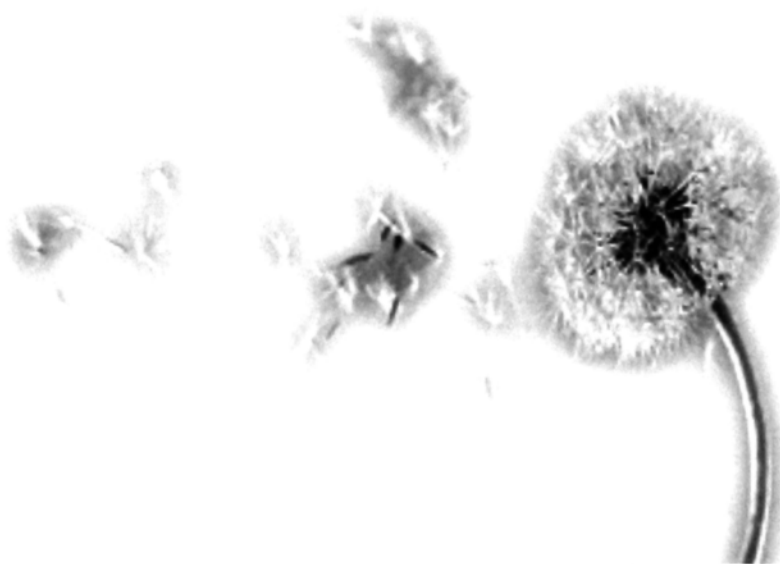


Photo by Benjamin Cummings



The Cousin Couple

by Richard Fellingner

I'm good at remembering jokes; not names and faces, but apparently I have a special file in my brain that saves jokes. So when Benjamin Hemlock came to my law office and told me his latest problem, it brought to mind a redneck joke I once heard on cable TV. The comic was a skinny guy with a shaggy mustache who makes a nice living with redneck humor. I can't remember the guy's name, but the joke was this: "You know you're a redneck if you go to family reunions to meet women." That's what popped into my mind when Benjamin told me the county wouldn't let him marry his cousin.

This is Carlisle, Pennsylvania, a small college town surrounded by farms and highways. Dickinson College and Penn State's law school are here, as is the county courthouse, but the town may be best known as "the trucking capital of the world." Benjamin drives a big rig, and he came to me three years ago about his DUI charge. I got him into a probationary program for first offenders, and he kept his commercial license. It was no big deal, really, because I usually get first offenders into the program if they plea. How did I remember his case? I looked up his file when he called to set up an appointment to see me again.

It was almost lunchtime on a Friday in January, and I couldn't decide between a ham sandwich and pastrami. I remember food just as well as jokes. Benjamin came in and he looked like his old self. He's a tall guy with knees that buckle when he walks. He has droopy eyes and a scruffy face and crooked sideburns.

"What's up, Ben?" I said, holding out a hand for him to shake.

"It's Benjamin," he said, and he shook my hand listlessly.

"Right," I said. "Benjamin." I motioned to the chair in front of my desk and said, "Have a seat and tell me what's up."

Her name is Helen Hemlock, and she and Benjamin didn't know each other well when they were kids. Their dads were brothers who didn't like each other. They hooked up about eight years ago after sitting next to each other at the wedding reception for Benjamin's sister. He didn't say where it was, but I pictured them munching Swedish meatballs together at the local firehouse. They didn't start dating right away, but started playing pinochle together and eventually acted on "the signals" they were sending each other. That's how Benjamin put it—signals. Now they say they're in love and want a June wedding of their own. They live together on the northern edge of the county, just south of where the Tuscarora Trail comes out of the mountains. For the wedding, they're eying a nice bed-and-breakfast just outside of Gettysburg, but they haven't booked it yet.

When they went to the courthouse for the marriage license, the clerk gave them a funny look after noticing their last names were the same. Imagine, getting funny looks when you're aiming to marry your cousin! The clerk asked if they were already related, and they immediately confessed. The clerk disappeared into a back room and came out with a supervisor, who explained the Pennsylvania law prohibiting first cousins from marrying. The supervisor also mentioned something about birth defects, but Benjamin and Helen insisted they weren't going to have kids. The supervisor said that it doesn't matter, the law is the law. Benjamin wants me to file a suit asking for an exception to the law if they promise not to have kids. Helen is 45 and Benjamin is 42.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" I asked him.

"Oh, yeah," he said. "Helen looked it all up. Lotsa states let cousins marry, like Virginia. She looked it all up on the Internet."

"How long have you, uh, lived together?"



“‘Bout five years.”

“I can’t tell you that your chances of winning are good. I do some family law, and maybe I can file something like that, but I don’t know what our chances would be.”

“I see.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Sure as sure can be.”

“It will cost you around three thousand dollars to file a suit like that in Common Pleas Court. And that’s just if we win. An appeal would cost you much more.”

I could see the wheels turning in his mind before he spoke.

“We can do three thousand dollars,” he said. When he finally said it, he spoke with conviction, and I sensed a stubborn streak.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” I asked again. “A case like this would probably end up in the news. Why don’t you let me do some research before we go through with this.”

“We’d really like your help,” he said. “I really appreciated your help when I got arrested, ‘cause it saved my job. But we’re gonna file this no matter what. Helen found out that you don’t need a lawyer if you don’t want one, but I told her I wanted to talk to you first.”

I wondered what a case like this would do for my career. Media attention is normally a good thing for attorneys (as long as they spell your name right, we like to say). But is it good to be linked to a couple of crackpot cousins who want to marry? Would I become the local legal laughingstock? I could refer them to another lawyer—a family law specialist in Harrisburg—but I knew that would cost them a lot more than \$3,000. And from looking at Benjamin, I figured that was probably more than they had to spend on a lost cause. So with Benjamin and Helen apparently dead set on this, I wondered if they should have help. My heart doesn’t usually bleed for folks, but from what I knew about Benjamin—a truck-driving, DUI convict who wouldn’t recognize a razor and wants to

marry his own damn cousin—I figured he only has about one ounce of dignity left in that big, lanky body of his. Maybe someone should keep him from embarrassing himself, help him save that single ounce. That’s what I thought.

“Okay,” I said cautiously. “Why don’t we set something up for next week? I want to do some research. No guarantees, but we can talk again next week. Does that sound good? Maybe you could bring Helen with you, and we’ll talk some more.”

The wheels turned. “That sounds fine,” he said.

I’m not married. I’m 36 and I’ve always dated a lot, but my friends tell me that my standards are too high. They say I should put less emphasis on looks and find a girl with personality. The closest I came to getting married was my last year of law school, when I moved in with a girl named Gina for a couple months. We sometimes talked dreamily about getting married, but only after having too many drinks. We were in law school here in Carlisle, and she was a year behind me, but she dropped out and tried to coax me into moving to California with her. I realized I was getting stuck with the rent, which led to a big fight, and it all ended when Gina threw my wallet in the toilet and wished me luck with the bills.

Right now I’m trying to figure out my relationship with a gorgeous paralegal from Harrisburg. Her name is Erin, and she’s tall and leggy, but I’m not sure she’s the type to settle down either. This is our second try at it. The first time, she broke it off because she couldn’t give up on an old relationship with the local TV weather guy. She went back to him, then came back to me. Maybe I shouldn’t expect much from a girl who likes TV weather guys.

Anyway, I found only a little case history on cousins who wanted to marry, though I didn’t waste much time digging around for it either. The law basically prohibits blood relatives from mar-



rying, and a couple old rulings interpreted first cousins as blood relatives. The most recent case was filed two years ago in Blair County, about 100 miles away. A pair of middle-aged cousins there wanted to marry, but they lost. Bad news. But in one of those old cases, I found an opinion where a Superior Court justice harped on the need to prevent cousins from having children with birth defects. Considering Benjamin and Helen were promising not to reproduce—and thank God for that, at least—maybe I could hang a case on that old ruling and argue that the law shouldn't apply to them. It stood a snowball's chance in hell, but that's all I could come up with. I knew I had to talk them out of this.

I also did my own online research, and I learned that Benjamin was right about Virginia allowing first cousins to marry. About half the states allow it, and Maryland was the closest, but there was a movement in the Maryland legislature to put a stop to it. I'm guessing any Maryland lawmakers who want to end cousin marriages don't have to fret about getting reelected.

I also learned there's a national movement out there for the acceptance of cousin marriages. They have websites where they tell each other their problems and commiserate. They give each other tips on things like breaking the news to family and tying the knot. They call themselves "cousin couples." They apparently say it with a straight face.

The cousin couple came to my office the next Friday, after I'd polished off a cheesesteak with onions. I had imagined that Benjamin and Helen would look alike, but they didn't. One of them apparently had gotten Mom's genes. Helen is a big-boned woman with hands like baseball mitts. She isn't fat—just thick. She has a piggy nose and beady eyes that shoot out of her face like laser beams. She is one intense-looking woman.

"Onions!" Helen said, sniffing around my office when she came in. "Somebody's meal is still in the air."

"My lunch," I said. "I often eat at my desk.

We could go somewhere else. I have a conference room right—"

"Oh, no," she said. "I like the smell of food in a room. Makes it homey."

"Unless it's fish," Benjamin said.

"I suppose you're right," I said, smiling. "Okay then, why don't you two have a seat. I've been doing some research."

Helen sat on the edge of her chair and leaned forward. I leaned back in my chair, trying to put some space between us. She made a sweeping motion with her right arm—as if she were starting her own engine—and slapped the side of her knee with her hand.

"Couples like us are quite misunderstood," she said. "Did you know that laws against cousin marriages don't exist in Europe or Canada? Not in Mexico either. Did you? Huh? Did you know that the first prime minister of Canada married his first cousin? Did you know that Mary and Joseph were probably first cousins? Did you? Huh?"

"Interesting," I said. "But—"

"It is very interesting," she said. "Did you know that almost half the states allow cousin marriages? Did you? Did you know that state laws against cousin marriages predate genetic science, and that cousin couples have a lower rate of miscarriages? Did you? Huh? Not that we want children. We don't, and we can promise a judge that. I'm past that point in life, sad as it is."

"She's done all the research," Benjamin said.

I thought about the joke where the guy tells his wife that women talk twice as much as men. The wife says, "Of course, because we have to repeat everything we say to you." And the guy says, "What's that?"

"What we want," Helen said, "is to have our bond recognized just like any other. And we want it recognized here in our home state. We've talked about driving to Maryland or Virginia to be wed, but that's a thorny issue. We don't want to live somewhere that won't properly recognize our bond, and we don't want some overzealous



district attorney prosecuting us when we come home. We've heard about that happening to other cousin couples."

So they were already calling it "a bond." I was beginning to realize there was no chance of talking them out of this. I couldn't even think of how to start trying.

"And another thing," Helen said, "we really don't want to move. We cherish our home. We grew up near here, and we have a big property here. Benjamin loves to hit golf balls into the woods from the backyard. I collect porcelain cows, and there is such a great market for that around here. It's just so perfect for us here, except for that one law."

"I understand," I said. I paused just to be sure I could get a word in, and I took in the image of Benjamin knocking golf balls into the woods, which struck me as odd. I had imagined him as the type to knock off groundhogs with a shotgun. Helen leaned back in her chair, apparently giving me clearance to speak. "Actually," I said, "I did know some of what you mentioned."

"Good," she said, slapping her knee.

"But here in Pennsylvania," I said, "the law is pretty clear. I've done some research, and I can't say this is a strong case. A case like this was rejected recently in another county. There is still an angle or two we can pursue, but I want to tell you up front that they're not strong."

Benjamin and Helen looked at each other and seemed to be reading each other's eyes. They turned their eyes back toward me, and Helen said, "Go on."

I should have said no to Benjamin at the very beginning—an unequivocal no, the kind that sends a guy out the door with his tail between his legs. But I didn't, and that was my fault.

Instead I hemmed and hawed. I led them along. Now they were looking at me, wondering what I would do to get them legally married right here at home. It was my bed; I'd made it, and now it was time for me to sleep in it.

"Can I ask how your relatives feel about this?"

I asked. "I'm just curious."

"It's been hell to pay," Benjamin said. "My folks stopped talking to us, so did my sister, but my brother seems okay with it. Her dad passed on, and we haven't told her mom yet 'cause we don't think she'll take it well."

"That's always a difficult issue for cousin couples," Helen said. "We're hoping everyone will come to understand. Sometimes a person's mind can be slow to open."

I suppose I had an open mind—if nothing else—because I explained my strategy for their suit against the county. They gave me the go-ahead, and we made the arrangements to file it. It took a few days, but the courthouse reporter for the local paper eventually found the case, and it was the lead story that day. My name, spelled correctly, appeared only once near the end of the story. The reporter never called me for an interview, apparently satisfied with the lengthy interview she got when she called Helen Hemlock.

It was a warm, sunny day when Benjamin and Helen went to court. It was mid-March but felt like mid-May. Judge Bonnie Moser had the case, which would have been an advantage for me in any other case. Judge Bonnie was a small woman with a thin mustache that you could only see up close. She always kept a straight face and rarely telegraphed her thoughts. You had to listen closely to her rulings and instructions to gauge how she was leaning in a case, and until now, she had always given me leeway.

Glenn Grove, the county solicitor, had filed a motion to dismiss the suit, and that's what the hearing was about. I knew Glenn from around the courthouse, and I thought he was a nice enough guy. He was the type for three-martini lunches, and he always wore a bow tie and had impeccable hair. I saw him on my way into the courthouse.

"Why is money green?" Glenn said with a wink.

"I've heard that one before," I said. "It's be-



cause lawyers pick it before it's ripe. Good one, Glenn, but this isn't about their money. He's an old client."

"Sure," he said. His tone was patronizing, and I could tell he didn't buy it.

I met Benjamin and Helen on a bench outside the courtroom, and we reviewed our strategy for the hearing. I would call them both as witnesses. They should look the judge in the eye when they spoke, obey her instructions, and not argue with her. And try to relax.

The hearing took up most of the morning, though it moved along at a nice pace. Glenn called only one witness, the supervisor of the county Marriage License Bureau. He was a nervous man who carefully explained the law and bureau practices. The only other person in the courtroom was the local newspaper reporter, a girl who looked like a college kid but must have been in her mid-20s.

Judge Bonnie rarely interrupted the witnesses to ask questions, and only once did Glenn object to anyone's testimony. Helen was on the stand, and Glenn claimed she was making a speech instead of answering my question about the day they were denied a license.

"I can assure you," Helen was saying, "that we love each other in the purest sense."

Judge Bonnie sustained Glenn's objection. And when it was over, she dismissed the case.

"The law is clear," Judge Bonnie said. She looked at me and said, "You cite an opinion that seeks to explain the rationale for the law, but that may only be part of the rationale. Moreover, any exceptions to the law must be spelled out in the law itself, and the law allows for no exceptions. The defendant's motion for dismissal is granted."

Benjamin bowed his head, and Helen stared straight ahead, running her tongue across her lips. They didn't say a word at first. Soon Benjamin lifted his head and stood up slowly. He put his hand on Helen's shoulder and squeezed gently. "Let's go," he said. "We tried."

"I'm sorry," I said, and I led them out of the

courtroom.

In the hallway, the newspaper reporter approached us. Helen said she didn't feel like talking, and Benjamin shook his head no. I took the reporter aside, and she asked me how they felt about the ruling and whether they would appeal.

"All I can tell you is that this is something they really believed in," I said.

I huddled with Benjamin and Helen before they left, and they told me they didn't want to appeal. They didn't see any point to it and wanted to get on with their lives.

"What are you going to do next?" I asked.

"We've been preparing for an outcome like this," Helen said. "We want to be somewhere we're accepted, at least in the eyes of the law."

"Will you move?"

"We still have some thinking to do," Benjamin said.

I nodded and told them to call me if they needed anything, especially if they changed their mind about the appeal. They left the courthouse holding hands.

About a month later, just before the deadline for filing the appeal, I called their house, and the phone was disconnected. After work that day, I drove up to their house.

They had a small Cape Cod home about 20 minutes from town. It was along a flat stretch of road at the base of the mountain, and all the homes were at least 100 yards apart. There was a "For Sale" sign in the yard. It seemed like a well-kept yard that hadn't gotten a good raking since the winter. Red and yellow tulips were blooming amid some weeds in a pair of flower beds that lined the front of the house. It was getting dark, but the lights were out, and the house looked shuttered. I walked up on the little front porch and peeked through a window.

I could see an empty mantle above the fireplace, and I imagined Helen's porcelain cows lined up on it. I imagined Benjamin lumbering into the house after 12 hours on the road, cracking open



a can of beer and stretching out on a La-Z-Boy. I also imagined him out in the yard on a weekend afternoon, slapping golf balls into the trees while Helen filled the house with the smell of her cooking. She seemed like the meatloaf type, didn't she? Or maybe her tastes were more eclectic: I wouldn't be surprised to learn that she prepared a mean sushi.

People often ask me if I really believed Benjamin and Helen should have been allowed to marry, and I always say no. That's what people are interested in hearing about, and that's the only answer people can accept. But I was saddened that they were gone, and I tell people that, too.



Angel Fire, New Mexico

by Mary Cimarolli

At daybreak
winter sky's goose-down
spills white, flaky feathers to swaddle the earth,
and pond lies frozen beneath the froth.
The forest awakens from darkness,
and stone wall masquerades as peaks of white meringue.

By afternoon
winds swell and lift the snowflakes
to announce a stand of trees.
Warrior-like, wind howls its power.
Soon, arms of evening will soothe it to sleep.

Sun pulls the darkling shade.
Moon sweeps over quiescent sphere,
and starlight angels fire the night.
In the still outdoors, like Faust, I murmur,
"Stay, golden moment. Stay."



Photo by Joel Kendall



As Large as the Universe

by Rick Taylor

Even as the credits begin rolling,
I'm burning to get home
to reenact with play guns
what we've just observed
on the screen.
How many times does Billy the Kid
meet his demise
at the hands of Pat Garrett,
as I assume one role or the other,
victorious or dead,
triumphant or sprawled,
depending upon the chosen scenario?

That same desire to create
grips me in maturity
with an identical eruption
of bursting energy,
only now the end product
is poetry instead of movie plots,
prose instead of gunfire.
Coming directly from life as it does,
the new inspiration can be
as small as a robin's egg
or as large as the universe.

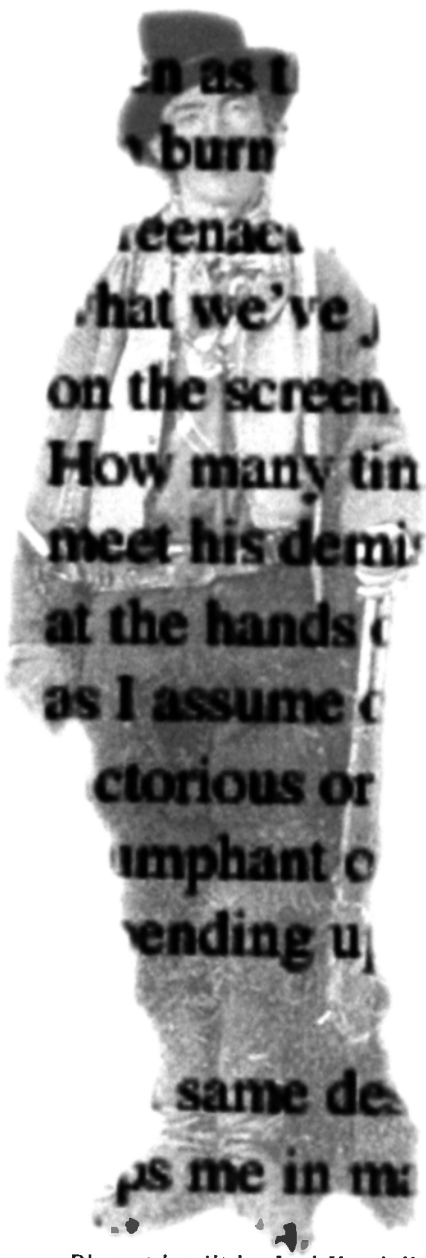


Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall



My Two Daughters

by Edward Hurst

Elizabeth and Hannah, night and day, born on June 4th, now ten years of age. Beautiful girls with long pigtails, bright eyes and quick wits. Hannah is astonishingly quick verbally. The CRCT is a measurement of language and math skills. The highest possible score in language is 450 points. Hannah scored 450 while fighting with Elizabeth night and day.

Hannah jokes with her brother Casey, "Maybe you could do better than...no wait, there are no more numbers." Hannah has a sense of humor and sarcastic wit beyond her age. She invents words in ways that I can't match. I am proud of her because she is amazing and because she is my daughter.

Elizabeth. Elizabeth is *not* Hannah. Elizabeth is fighting demons I can't see. I want desperately to help her, but I am lost. Elizabeth appears identical to Hannah, but Elizabeth is...different. She must check her homework six times each day. Her mother or I must read the list of homework assignments to her, seeing that each is completed and in her book bag. Any mistakes in this procedure means we must start over—from the beginning.

Bedtime is the worst. Everyone is tired, but Elizabeth cannot go to sleep until she successfully completes numerous rituals, satisfies numerous compulsions. A week ago my wife broke. She could do no more, so I had to help Elizabeth finish her rituals. It was 2 a.m. Her face and hands were red and chapped from scrubbing. The rituals seem circular in nature, a racetrack hell with no pit stop—and no final victory lap.

Elizabeth does not enjoy these demon voices pushing her any more than I do. That night I tried to force the demons to release my little girl. I took her to her bedroom and held her in bed telling her, "You don't need to do this; it's not necessary."

"I don't want to wash my face again. It hurts. But I have to." She pleaded with me, "Let me wash my hands and face just one more time." Each time

requires a new washcloth. A pile of washcloths beside the bathroom sink each morning re-tells a story I wish to forget.

Hannah can't sleep. Hannah needs her rest or she won't be able to maintain those perfect grades. Sometimes I lose my temper with Elizabeth. She gets between my perfect daughter and me. Then I calm myself and remember it's not her fault. She needs my help to fight the voices in her head that won't let her rest, won't let her be more like Hannah.

I helped Hannah with her math homework the other day while Elizabeth was sleeping. Hannah's fifth grade teacher is introducing the class to decimals. I read a question to Hannah.

"There are three pieces of cloth. One piece is .75 meters, another is .80 meters, and the final piece is .85 meters; which is shortest?"

"The one that's .75 meters... duh," Hannah said, rolling her eyes.

She can be a smart aleck. "That was sort of easy wasn't it, Hannah?"

"They just dolled up some second grade work by *decimalitizing* it," she replied.

I laughed at this and sent her to play so that I could finish my reading and prepare to face Elizabeth and her stupid rituals later in the evening.

The rituals went smoothly that day. The teeth were brushed for the required four minutes plus an additional thirty seconds to make up for any mistakes. The hourglass timer must lay on its side while she rinses and spits—this is not brushing. The face and hands are washed before the teeth are brushed, washed after the teeth are brushed, and then washed other times for which I see neither rhyme nor reason.

She is happy that the voices have been so lenient with her tonight. Not only does she get to bed earlier, she does not have to face her parents' anger while defending her rituals. Elizabeth is a smart



girl, too; she realizes that the rituals are useless and time consuming, but she cannot stop.

I try to explain Elizabeth's compulsions to others in a way that is understandable. Imagine you are a responsible person who goes to school or holds down a job. You feel compelled to show up each day and perform your duties. Now turn the world upside down. Everyone you love screams at you to quit school or quit work. You are confused. You know you must perform your duties, but everyone who matters says you should stop. This is the situation of my daughter. She feels compelled to perform acts that others find ridiculous. I know all this. But sympathy is in short supply at 2 a.m.

What should she do? Some rituals do not require outside help. It is the rituals requiring her parents' help that are the most painful. Her parents are ill and anxious. This causes them to make mistakes in the rituals. Mistakes require repetition; tension mounts, anger. It's best not to remember these times.

Meanwhile, Hannah is invited to join the Beta club and do other neat stuff that Elizabeth would enjoy. But Elizabeth has no time.

My only daughter's name is Hannah Elizabeth Hurst, and her stunning gifts came at a price.



Hans Bethe at Cornell

by Daniel R. Schwarz

(10/18/01):

“The beginning of the universe
must be older than the oldest stars.
I was called in when astronomers,
seemed to have shown
by their deft measurements
that the oldest stars were older than the universe,”
he says with a twinkle in his eye.
Speaking with his heavy German accent,
but lucid and witty, totally focused at 95,
gesturing, looking at his audience,
using overhead graphics,
he unravels the mysteries of the universe,
to an audience of thirty in a crowded elegant seminar room.
He speaks of giants and dwarfs among the stars,
even as we think we are watching a giant
among if not dwarfs us ordinary humans.

His phrases whirl about in the cosmos of my mind:
“In the core of stars;” “the temperature at the center of the sun”
His periodic silences — pregnant pauses —
reveal a mind at work, as hot and
active as the stars he describes:
“I spent lots of evenings on these problems
but not as much energy as the supernova.”
Isn’t his mind like the “excited state of energy”
he attributes to the stellar world?

Listening, watching, I am puzzled by
“ $C+H \Rightarrow N$ 17 and $12C + 11 \rightarrow 13N + Y$ ”
Yet I find in the folds of his speech
a kind of order and his delight in the
pleasures of sharing his discoveries.
Five weeks after the twin towers tumbled,
I exalt in this affirmation of learning
in time of turmoil,
and am humbled.

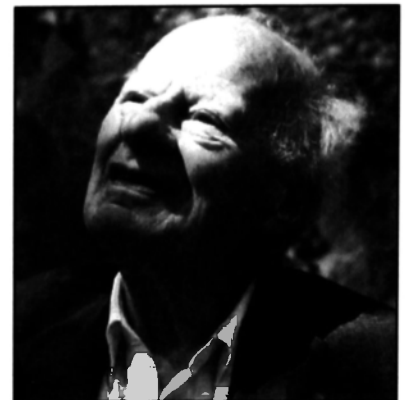


Photo courtesy Cornell
University



Risen

by Eric Obame

Your eyes were closed
Blood leaked out of your nose
Your mouth was slightly open
I heard that in that final second your body is at ease
Whether it is heaven opening the gate or your mind letting go
I hope it is true
That way I will know that you didn't try to reach the surface
Until that last moment of life

Angels greeting you with warmth and smiles
God's light filling you with peace
Your brain shuts down releasing chemicals
To make the transition to nothingness easy

Your skin was cold
And you were as stiff as a board
When I carried you out of the water
Your stomach round from the
Fluid
Fell from my eyes
You were in there for quite a long time
I was in bed watching *Braveheart*
While you were busy dying
You must have called for help
I did not hear your cries

I know that like you others I love will die, and I will die
It is natural
An ending gives meaning and value to life and relationships
I will see my heart beat only through the window of memories
And I will one day also be a memory
You are in my window now and often—you always made me happy
Never again will I fail anyone like I failed you
My best, my true, my childhood friend
For that I thank Lord Death



Saving Sunday

by Rosemary M. Magee

Shortly after my son left home for his first year of college, I lost his dog. That we eventually found her again provides proof of the power of persistence—accompanied by sweet miracles, accidental epiphanies, and the manifold kindnesses of family, friends, and strangers.

The original appearance of Sunday the dog in our lives came at the inspiration and invitation of Sean on his 14th birthday. Outshining all of the eager, earnest yellow dogs at the pound in her shy beauty, Sunday was rescued by Sean from some other more ordinary fate in life. According to oral tradition at the pound, this lovely creature had been left there one Sunday night in December, hence her name. Later that month, on the bright Atlanta wintry day we brought our new pet home, Sean—also shy and lovely with yellow hair, lopsided grin, and freckles turning into pimples—whispered pledges of enduring love into Sunday's floppy ears. She trembled in his arms. Some combination of abuse, neglect, and genetic predisposition had made Sunday skittish, especially around strangers and, also, we were soon to discover, wary of doors. When we arrived home, Sean coaxed her inside, created a bed from old towels and, worrying that she was too silent, set out to teach her how to bark.

Gradually Sunday settled into the rhythms and byways of our household, although remaining reluctant around strangers—while now successful in barking at them—and still fearful of doors. It was difficult getting Sunday inside when she was outside and outside when she was in the house. However, all four human members of our family also had our own quirks, failings, and anxieties, not to mention those of our elderly deaf and blind cat. And so we accepted Sunday's frailties and learned to love her, most especially for what she meant to Sean.

Eventually Sean's adventures into adolescence took him more frequently away from home. Sunday

remained faithful in her love of him, her rescuer. She slept in his room even when he was not there. As activities and romances filled up larger portions of Sean's time and heart, Sunday gradually bonded also with my husband, who made certain that she had regular meals, fresh water, treats of Swiss cheese, and frequent outings. Sean's sister and I, relegated to the back-up crew, filled in when necessary. Graceful and timid as a deer, Sunday seldom acknowledged our existence in her world; she avoided us as much as she did both doors and strangers.

The week Sean began his freshman year of college on the other side of the continent from Atlanta; his sister, too, left home for graduate school in the Midwest, and his father started a work project on the West Coast. All of these departures meant that Sunday and I were left at home, alone together. That I was in charge of this dog (and she of me) made us both uneasy. As much as Sunday had steered clear of me, I had done my best to avoid emotional entanglements with pets or plants while my children were growing up. I had, from a distance of course, admired Sunday for her bashful beauty and steadfast love of Sean. Beyond that, we were simply co-inhabitants of a regularly chaotic household.

Within a single week our large suburban home—previously abuzz with cell phones, computers, DVDs, teenage happenings, and various heated negotiations—turned indescribably still and silent. Neither Sunday nor I, left to our own devices, made much noise. We eyed one another with suspicion; begrudgingly she accepted her meals from me, and even, when pressed by internal urges, would pass through doorways, from inside to outside and then hesitantly back indoors again.

I took my new responsibilities seriously, my other charges in life dispatched to places far distant from Atlanta, Georgia. If working late, I worried



about Sunday in much the same way that I had worried about my children, especially anxious when afternoon thunderstorms threatened. Sunday was terrified of dark clouds, loud noises, and shifts in barometric pressure. And she, in turn, gave me comfort by just being there in my sudden solitude, even on occasion seeming happy to see me. Our relationship settled into satisfactory patterns—that is, until unforeseen events caused us to lose touch with one another.

On my way out of town for a business trip to New York City, I escorted Sunday to the kennel. Pleased that I'd been able to corral, leash, and load her into the car, I arrived with plenty of time for us to take a short walk. Sunday, anxious but compliant, nosed around the well-kept shrubs and grass surrounding the kennel. Barking dogs on the other side of the wall nearby made her even more tense than usual, as if she had unresolved recollections of her original pound plight. As we neared the kennel door, she suddenly balked. Rearing up like a horse, she managed upon her descent to pull her head straight through her collar, simultaneously backing away from me. She accomplished this feat with such ease that it almost seemed she'd planned the whole maneuver. Scared yet hopeful, I took a few steps forward, and at first it seemed that Sunday might come back to me—until two overly-efficient kennel attendants emerged, having observed this episode through the glass door. With the appearance of the two strangers, Sunday took off in a streak, a blur of yellow that left me with only empty leash and collar in my hands.

"Is she part greyhound?" one of the young men questioned me.

"We think so," I managed to reply forlornly.

Right before our eyes, Sunday, running down a busy street, vanished into the thick air of Atlanta as if she'd never existed. Trailing after her, calling out her name, and then frantically driving my car throughout the nearby neighborhood, now a tangle of traffic and a maze of trees, revealed nothing to me or the kennel attendants. My heart ached as I

knew immediately that I had failed in the single most important duty left to me by my family, with Sean still a new unsettled freshman in college so very far away.

Words are too small, too contained, too ordinary and orderly to express my misery. Somehow, eventually, after consulting my husband out in California, I made it to the Atlanta airport for my business trip, catching a later New York flight and then sobbing on the airplane. By the time I landed, my husband had left a voice mail indicating that he had rallied various neighbors and enlisted his running buddies, and they were searching throughout the neighborhood of the kennel, which was not in the immediate vicinity of our home. They all responded right away to his call for help, as if they had been waiting for just this moment to repay favors, to demonstrate that friendship reigns, to show solidarity even when we had all been pulled apart.

Conducting the search and rescue mission for Sunday from the West Coast, my husband created detailed maps, complex strategies, and colorful flyers. I spoke to Sean by phone on Day 2 of this painful episode. He knew at the start of the conversation from the sound of my voice that I was upset. Reluctant to disrupt his first few weeks at college, I recognized just the same that I needed to tell him the truth. I did so sooner rather than later on the advice of his older sister who coached me from Michigan. He listened quietly as I explained the situation, my voice breaking under the strain of letting him down. He then spoke softly.

"Oh Mom, it's just Sunday. We've done everything we've known how to do to take care of her, to love her, and to give her a good home." His first instinct was to comfort me. I cried inwardly at the thought of his distant kindness. When he then called his father, I learned afterward that he broke down. As I talked to Sean over the next few days, keeping him posted on the rescue plans, he expressed sadness and worry but also awe at all who had come to our aid.



My husband, son, daughter, and I, located in various corners of the country, kept in constant touch. When I returned to Atlanta from New York, I rejoined the rescue mission, already convinced that it was a hopeless cause but prepared to do whatever was necessary to be able to say to myself, and to Sean, that I'd done what I could. At the direction of my husband, our friends continued to explore avenues and streets, to walk throughout the woods, and to post flyers. I haunted the various pounds and shelters in the area. We all came to know a bedraggled nearby neighborhood and several homeless men who camped behind an elementary school next to the creeks. I asked them to keep a lookout for Sunday, thinking that she might find those who are alone and homeless not quite so strange.

In all that time we had only one likely Sunday sighting: a woman who took early morning walks called my husband on his cell phone to say that she had seen a dog, possibly matching our lost dog's description. Buoyed by this report, my husband re-posted the search team and decided to fly home for the weekend from California. He was convinced that Sunday would recognize the sound of his pickup truck, respond to his calls, and magically reappear in our lives. I was prepared to let him enjoy this fantasy for as long as possible.

My husband spent two full days that weekend, from early dawn to well beyond dusk, wandering down streets, questioning strangers and passersby, handing out flyers, and speaking to homeless wayfarers. A man of enormous persistence, in the very marrow of his bones he believes that missing items (from car keys to needles in haystacks) can be found; he also believes that he is the best person to find them. And he is usually right. But the weekend was hurtling by, and come Monday morning he would need to return to the California project. Both of us disheartened, late on the night before his planned departure, we started a quarrel, one that had been resting latent, submerged beneath the layers of our lives—about being apart and adrift, all of the changes, the departures, the losses.

With Sunday's disappearance I'd come to realize that I felt alone just at the moment when it seemed my husband and I might start a new life together in the aftermath of raising two children. Long evening walks, a movie in the afternoon, sleeping late on weekends, and traveling to new places—all of these simple pleasures and more were part of the future I'd envisioned as we completed one phase of our lives and started another. But soon, once again, on the very next day I'd be by myself, this time not even with Sunday to keep me company.

Surprised by these new emotions, my husband, who'd been intermittently unemployed over the four years prior to the California project, was at a loss as to how to respond. We prepared for bed, his face, his being, covered with confusion. In the midst of all of these feelings, the beeper on his cell phone went off, signaling that a message had been left. When he checked the voice mail, his expression, with just the squint of his very blue eyes, turned from confusion and frustration to disbelief. He handed me the phone and replayed the message. The deep voice of a man we'd never met, a stranger identifying himself as Courtney who lives behind Whole Foods, simply stated, "I think I may have your lost dog. She showed up today in my carport."

My husband returned the call as I pulled on jeans and sweatshirt over my nightgown. Very late, after 11:30 p.m. on that Sunday night in September, we headed into the darkness of a cul-de-sac on the other side of a very busy street, about a mile from where our dog had originally disappeared. A friend of Courtney's, who'd been visiting his house, had seen the various flyers in the neighborhood. "I think some people are looking for that dog," the friend had told him. Courtney managed to guide the exhausted creature into his utility room. There she sat trembling in a corner when we arrived.

Without even a collar to identify her, somehow Sunday had survived almost two weeks in the heavily trafficked urban jungle of Atlanta—and



we will never know how she did it. She seemed at first glance much the same, just skinnier, her hind-quarters especially bony. Yet, when we brought her home, we watched her sprint and spin around the front yard with a newfound bravado not formerly part of her spirit. Without a moment's hesitation, she entered our house nonchalantly through the once-dreaded front door.

All of this local drama occurred in the aftermath of a devastating hurricane in our nation, one where the agonized, desperate faces of families filled airwaves and newspapers. Over those two weeks, I felt guilty for so much attention given to our own small loss when other families confronted greater dislocation and tragedy. But we, too, were experiencing a special kind of sorrow. Through it all, the kindness of friends, neighbors, and strangers provided a safe haven for our scattered family, mysteriously connected by a common loss and rediscovery. Suddenly we were all much closer together.

As for the argument my husband and I had started that Sunday night, it magically faded away—as if never begun—with the reappearance of our lost dog. As for Sean and his sister, they quickly returned their attentions to newfound challenges and relationships in their homes away from home. And as for Sunday, she'd experienced a canine conversion, an epiphany of sorts. In the days that followed she was more playful, more carefree, more approachable, more contented. When my husband returned to California, Sunday and I were also more united, as if we'd suffered some terrible ordeal together, as if we had rescued

one another from the whimsy of fortune and the ravages of loneliness.

Following Sunday's reappearance, there was great rejoicing on the Internet and on cell phones all across the country from Atlanta, Georgia, to Walla Walla, Washington, to Ann Arbor, Michigan and beyond. Adding to the occasionally compassionate mysteries of fate, the same weekend my husband came home to find Sunday, he'd been contacted by an Atlanta firm about a job. Reluctant at first to abandon California midway through a project, yet recognizing the importance of this particular moment in our lives, he returned the call and subsequently was offered the job.

When Sean went off to college across the country, he left Sunday behind in my care. Allowing my youngest child to travel so far away nearly broke my heart, and being in charge of his dog gave me a sense of closeness to him. Losing Sunday, the dog he had rescued, made me aware of how fragile, how tenuous connections can be, how quickly they can vanish into thin air. With her return, due to the kindness of friends and strangers and the persistence of my husband, our family found unity in our own private, separate journeys.

Thus on two Sundays, divided in time by years of developments and departures too numerous to recount, a lovely dog was rescued. Just as she was transformed by these Sunday salvations, both times her presence, and her intervening absence, taught us more than we thought we needed to know about ourselves—and also about love, friendship, and reconciliation.



Windfarm

by John Bradshaw

White giants harvest the intangible,
Whirling madly in the gale,
To catch the breath of power.
The force of the invisible
Is greater than you can imagine;
You cannot see it but you hear it howl—
Untouchable, yes, but it is there.
Proof is in the mad arms pinwheeling,
Spinning urgently, reaching out
To the screaming Jet Stream;
You can see the towers tremble
Almost to the point of catastrophe
Still rooted deep enough to transform
Wailing wind into the humming electric.

All *true* miracles are the work
Of engineers of the air.

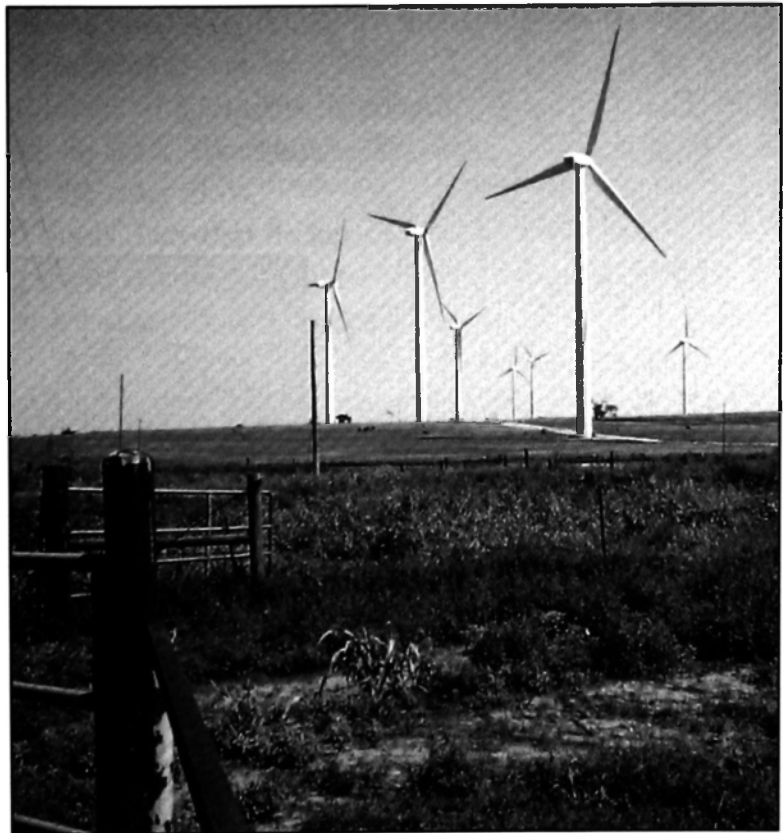


Photo by Kevin Collins



On the Beara Peninsula

by Matthew Brennan

For Bev

I sit here sipping a Sonoma Merlot
in southwest Ireland, taking in the view:

The sun has set the coast on fire, cresting
a hill of broken rocks and fuchsia hedges,

and Coulagh Bay's a luminous blue.
Beyond, the Atlantic tends to black,

so soon the fields will steep in night,
will mark what's missing, what's lost beneath

the starless sky on land and sea.

Yet out my window
gnats are basking in a golden haze —

hanging in mid-air. So I do what can be done:
Hold up my cup to the light, while the light lasts.



Photo courtesy pbs.org



Night-Piece in Cork at the Ambassador Hotel

by Matthew Brennan

Unable to sleep at 3 a.m., I go
to the open window of my third-floor room,
looming high up on Military Hill:
Downtown unfolds beneath me like a quilt,
the river stitching this hillside to uplands
in the south. Farther off, beyond the darkness,
the river herring-bones into the Sea.
Tonight, there is no light from stars for miles.

It makes me think of my own flesh and blood,
the brood that came from Tipperary
and County Cork, but now are gone and never
known by us. They must have trooped to town
on market days, before first dawn light,
when stars were threads in the dark open skies,
furrows in fields that later led them home.

The lights that pulse in this too-quiet night
can't animate the dead and can't return
to Cork what shined in their long-ended lives.
But surely some illumination comes
from rooftops and lamps of Brennans listed still
in the Cork city phone book. Even now
I see the surface of the river glow,
a candle lit on All Souls' Day that flickers
until the wick burns out and its last light
changes to smoke, the way a river empties
into a bay, its water sewn into the sea.



The Food Bank

by Suzanne Walsh

I'd only been down to the food bank on one other occasion. It was a basket of mixed reactions—gratitude and humiliation dominated; disappointment and frustration layered themselves thinly behind necessity, not to mention guilt. Yes, the guilt based on the belief that the truly, truly desperate wouldn't have those other emotions. The food bank was in a small wooden annex to some city building. I stood in line, the late morning sun warming my sense of displacement. The lady behind the desk asked my name and if I'd ever been there before. I practically whispered my name, "Eliza Jackson," and muttered a muted "Yes." I showed her my ID.

They take down your name so as to prevent people from going through more than once. The fellow behind me, also in his mid-twenties, was clearly a regular. He was bursting with cheer. "Hey ladies," he said through my back, "anything special this week? Any of those fresh apples left?" His lightness bounced around the room, finding cracks to shine through.

I thought I was portraying a decent mood until I found myself an impenetrable shadow slinking to the first counter. "Meat or fish, hamburger or canned tuna?" asked the portly woman with no expression.

"Meat, please," I answered. She handed me a cellophane-wrapped blob of ground beef which I plopped into the plastic bag I'd been given. I'd have preferred tuna but knew the kids would like the hamburger. I knew I couldn't have both because last time I'd been a real pain by asking for half and half. "We leave the tuna for those who are real vegetarians," she'd said.

Today, she turned toward the light, and her voice took on a singsong quality, "Odey, now you know if you want the good stuff, you've got to come early."

"I thought you'd save me some." He opened his arms palms up in expectation.

"First come, first served, sweetie," came her contralto reply.

I stood looking around. Where to next? The bread box or the vegetable bin? The vegetable bin had a mix of potatoes and carrots, so few that I could see the bottom of the box. There was a self-serve plastic bag at the side, but I knew I was being watched. The rumble of rooting around echoed my own discomfort. I grabbed four of the giant horse carrots and four potatoes, leaving about the same in the box. I glanced behind myself self-consciously as I felt someone near. I saw now what I hadn't noticed before—sunshine Odey was in fact Odey Durns, who had grown up two streets over from me in our middle-class suburb back east. I straightened and looked harder, his face melting in and out of the teenage mold that had been set in my memory. He looked back, head cocked to one side.

We both said at the same time, "Are you..." and then stopped to let the other continue. I went first. "Aren't you Odey Durns who used to live on Bellevue?"

"And you're Little Elli Jackson, aren't you?"

We both paused for a moment, smiling. For me it was a long moment of recognizing where we were. A moment of wanting to say, "What the hell happened to you?" Here we were in the club of those incapable of feeding themselves (temporarily at least, I told myself).

"How's your sister? Eleanor, wasn't it?" I faked a bit of bad memory. I knew full well it was Eleanor. Ellawhore, duh! She was jeered at. The kind of girl, older than us, who held her nose jumping off the low board at the pool and entered the water knees bent and flatfooted. The kind that didn't fit, that served as a warning to us younger ones as to the potential social torment that might await if you



weren't paying attention. Oh God, did he think I was one of the ones jeering and am now getting my just deserts foraging in dim lighting for roots?

"She's good. Married, living in Ontario," he smiled.

I nodded. "Good, good. Any kids?"

"Yeah, she has two boys."

Right, of course people don't stay trapped in an awkward midair stance for life; they move on and become accepted into gentler circumstances. Some people, anyway. Odey was always kind of cool; he seemed to think the food bank was where it was at these days. I was frozen in between torture and envy. "What about you? Do you have kids?" Throughout this exchange the question as to why he was here hung in my mind, and I thought he must be wondering the same about me. This was not exactly the trip to Europe or university education our neighborhood had promised. But if it even occurred to him there was no sign.

"Yup, I have three," he beamed.

"Me too," I added. I then became very interested in what was in the bags, seemingly assessing my take for the week, feeling a little shy.

"Listen," continued Odey, "there are other food banks around, you know. Uh huh, they are open on different days. If you make the rounds you can actually get some good stuff. That's why I'm late here; I had the days mixed up. You really do have to come early to get the good stuff."

"I don't want to sound ungrateful, but what is the 'good stuff'?" I croaked through a half smile.

"Oh, some fresher bread and more choice in the canned soups, more fruit and veg. The veg don't keep, so they don't get much, y'know."

I was transported out of embarrassment and into the present. Odey's knowledge of these survival techniques had unhumiliated me as I made mental note of potential food sources.

He smiled, he laughed, the old neighborhood vanished like a veneer, and we were the real unvarnished wood underneath. I might as well be here if I'm here, I thought, but being raw wood left me somewhat vulnerable.

We never mentioned the circumstances that led either of us to meet, and when we parted it was in a lighthearted, "See you around" kind of way. I wanted to run away from Odey and the charity schedule. I wanted to buy albacore tuna without a fiscal dilemma. I found myself refusing to be comfortable.

When I came back the following week, I looked for him, the smattering of the familiar, the doorway to acceptance. I began to emulate his demeanour. The shackles of pride that had been so heavy were unlocked for me—unlocked by the brother of Eleanor Durn, Ellawhore, for whom I'd once felt sorry. Here was food for the taking; yeah, so beggars can't be choosers, but the misery is optional. This isn't Africa, after all.

"Hey Lorna, any fresh fruit left?" I practically hummed. I was met with a blank stare; I clearly didn't have Odey's charm. I couldn't even pull off the food bank without looking like a misfit.

Then, there she was, right there with me, the ghost of pre-splash Eleanor Durn, hovering over the water after springing off the board, a little dribble of added spittle for dramatic effect, staring blankly as she always seemed to, not even alarmed at her condition. I took her aside midair and said, "It might go better if you point your toes, straighten your legs and back, and don't pull your bikini up to your armpits." But no, that wasn't quite right. Maybe I'll just say "hi" and try not to be afraid it's catching. No, "hi" seemed glib. Finally I did my own midair rendition of the funky chicken with complete abandon, as gangly and joyful as I could manage.

Amid the sound of the water blasting open, I heard a faint voice when I surfaced, alone again and gradually focused; Lorna the food bank lady was speaking. "You know what, dear; we just might have some nice crisp apples." I think I saw a wink. I wiped the water from my eyes and came up for air.

"That would be great! It's a perfect day for apples."



A Time to Walk the Ocean Floor

by Rick Taylor

R.E.M. sleep descends.
Time now to walk the ocean floor,
just you and I,
content that our dream
will negate any need
for gills or breathing tubes.

As we descend,
the colors change —
ivory turns to emerald, emerald to azure,
azure to grey, and grey to coal-black.
Down deep our imaginary lights snap on.
How many wrecked ships do we see —
Freighters, destroyers, battleships, cruisers, submarines —
All sent here to the bottom to rust and decay?

Your white, linen gown
undulates rhythmically as you walk.
You stumble in slow motion,
and I reach out to steady you.
How beautiful you are
in this dream-like reverie,
red tresses rising and falling
like silk under trance.
If only I could tell you of my love,
but nothing save bubbles comes forth
when my mouth opens
to express my adulation.



I point as if to say, *Look there!*
A freighter torn by war
has rolled on its side,
spilling its contents into the sand.
Devoured by sea worms and time,
its crew has long since departed.
Further on, a wrecked galleon
shows even less,
just a small mound
in which to hide its gold.

Think of the crashes and watery blasts
as battles and hurricanes rage up top.
To its victims the Ocean says,
*Come unto me
for comfort and rest.
No issue, however grave,
no agony, however acute,
can have meaning down here
where silence reigns.*



*Photo (detail) by Joel
Kendall*



Cavod

by Kimberly L. Becker

What happens to the risks we never take?
Do they sink out of sight
only to resurrect later as regret?

Who is to say that the leap of one life
would not be considered cowardice in another?

I'd say odds are that our risks
are our best hopes that, unrealized,
abscess into anger.
But who knows?
Maybe you do.

Tell me.

And another thing:
Do the years just run on
or do people really change,
deep down?

As the hawk circles,
a few feathers loosen
and fall to earth:
Does it know
(in its magnificence)
that a part of itself
has been cast off,
no longer needed?
(Never mind that its loss gifts someone below)

Does it feel
(in its glory)
a sense of loss
or only the luxurious air as it assumes the up-drafting currents?



Éclairs to Derrières

by Elizabeth Gallu

Anna walked out of the dressing room, took a short, disgusted look at how her spandex swimsuit failed to hoist the sag in her bosom, and said it was time to work at creating a winning personality because the rest of her had gone south. *Don't you think it's a little too late for that*, I felt like saying. But as soon as I thought it I was burdened by guilt.

This visit to the gym was the best I could come up with to encourage Anna to do something other than shop and drink during her week-long visit. Since her arrival four days earlier we'd hit three malls and three bargain outlets where she didn't hesitate to buy, buy, buy. Prices were better here in the south than up north, she insisted. "I'll need another suitcase just to carry everything back," she said, half-kidding. But it didn't stop her from ringing up the next purchase. In between shopping, if she didn't have a margarita in her hand, then it was a glass of Pinot Grigio. And when I suggested a steam and a swim at my little neighborhood workout facility, she only agreed to come when she learned there were no men.

"No men on the premises," I assured her. "It's ladies only."

In fact, I told her, I could no longer imagine going to a gym where men pumped iron and eyeballed female bottoms and sweated up the workout equipment with sweaty male sweat; I'd about had it with men these days. I loved my husband and my son, and there were some men whose company I thoroughly enjoyed—there were some good men, of course. But, as a whole, I found them a disappointing lot. Even thinking a thought like this got those pangs of guilt roiling because it was against my religion to think ill of anyone, even men. Like I never should've thought ill of Anna, thinking what I did about it being too late for her to create a winning personality. She was, after all, my friend, and where the mean-spirited notion came from, so swift and out of the blue, I don't know. Though the

truth is, I liked her better long distance than four days in a row.

At this time of day, the busy lunch crowd had scattered and the after-work crowd had yet to arrive, so things were fairly quiet at Ladies First. In the changing area the occasional locker banged shut, several women styled their hair in front of the mirror, and a woman still damp from the shower sat wrapped in a towel waiting for the massage therapist. From every indication it was a regular afternoon, but lately a certain pall and unspoken anxiety loomed over the gym that a drop-in visitor like Anna might not notice. People laughed less. There weren't so many smiles, and that's because three weeks earlier a popular long-timer had died suddenly from a heart attack. Rumor was she'd been preparing to go out to dinner with her fiancé, but before she had a chance to apply lipstick and change her earrings, she simply dropped dead, and that was the end of it.

I'd known the woman only casually from yoga class. But I hadn't been back to class since her demise because of the empty space next to where I usually rolled out my purple mat. That and the nervous shortness of breath that happened whenever I remembered her doing triangle pose and downward-facing dog kept me away.

Before Brenda died, she'd been the poster child for successful weight loss and renewed vitality. Her before-and-after photos were Scotch-taped to various walls in the gym, and newcomers, especially those with more than 50 pounds to lose, looked to her for inspiration. For her entire adult life she'd been overweight, but for the last two years she gleefully wore a size eight. Once I asked her about her greatest motivation and she answered, "Well, it's not vanity. I want to live a long and healthy life." But after her abrupt passing I started having suspicions about the purported benefits of diet and



exercise. I also started to have suspicions about even getting up in the morning and walking down the drive to pick up the mail, because there was no stopping the unstoppable, but maybe I could postpone it if I just stayed put.

As Anna and I moved to the pool area from the changing room, we tiptoed in our flip-flops so as not to slip on the wet tile floor. Anna gripped a bottle of Evian and I carried a basket stuffed with towels, creams, and leave-in conditioner. On our way, we passed a wall with another photo of Brenda taped to it. In this shot, a blond, trim, and beaming Brenda was holding up a pair of extra-extra-large sweatpants, a relic from her plus-size past. The photo was a sad and glad reminder that it really is possible to get in the best shape ever, and it really is possible to drop dead at any minute without the slightest warning. Then, after rounding a corner and passing a sign on the wall saying "Absolutely No Exfoliation!" we came to the wet area.

In the pool there was a group of older ladies not looking anything like a dolled-up Joan Collins does at age 70. This wizened bunch was always here about this time of day. The women never swam. They just bobbed in the shallow end and socialized, catching up on the events of the week and filling one another in on family affairs. To protect their hair from occasional splashes, most of them wore shower caps pulled down near their eyebrows, and one woman wore a tall, pointy cap, something like a magician's hat, only in clear plastic.

Dear God, Mother-Father, whoever you are up there, out there, in me and in all things, please remind me never to wear ridiculous hats or shower caps in public when I reach old age. This was my first thought upon seeing them, and it was pretty much the same thought I always had whenever I saw the bunch of them together. Though as soon as I thought it, I immediately apologized: *Sorry. Sorry. Who am I to say something about someone's shower cap? Who am I to look down my nose?* After which came Anna's under-the-breath remark

once she got a look at the gals in the water: "Shoot me if I end up like our friends with the head gear," she said to me.

Well, she's got that one right, I remarked to myself right on the heels of my inner and sincere apology. *Only, shoot her first and me second.*

We'd decided to start off with the steam room and upon entering were nearly done-in by a blast of eucalyptus. Someone had been a little too liberal with the Vicks, or "essential oil," as the staff called it, but plenty of times I'd seen them throw in good old-fashioned Vicks.

"Oh, this is great. This is heavenly," Anna said once she adjusted to the heat and the clear-your-sinuses aroma.

"Aren't you glad we came?" I answered. I eased back against the wall, enjoying the feel of hot tiles against my skin.

"Ahh..." Anna sighed. Then she was silent for the next five minutes, a five minutes that went by much too quickly considering she hadn't stopped talking since the day she arrived.

During the past four days, every conversation (if you could call it that) consisted of Anna railing against her well-heeled siblings, bemoaning her loss of elasticity and personal wealth, and strolling down memory lane with my memories: "Remember when you slept with Dave Talley? Remember when you slept with Eric Richards? Hey, remember when you slept with Mario Valenzo?"

"I never slept with Mario Valenzo," I corrected her.

"No? I was sure you did. I slept with him," she said with a naughty-me edge to her voice.

"Congratulations. How can you remember all that stuff? It's ancient history, isn't it?"

"Well, those were the good old days as far as I'm concerned," she said. But I couldn't disagree more because, for me, those were the bad old days. I had absolutely no desire to start counting off a list of failed romances and under-the-influence one-night stands. Didn't she understand that my current



life was far superior to my old one? After four days in my home, hadn't she seen for herself the kind of life I lead? A life of moderation, a contemplative life shared with a fabulous, fix-anything husband. Not one of those full-of-himself types from way back when with tobacco-stained fingers clutching a dog-eared copy of *Naked Lunch* or poems by Charles Bukowski.

The woman has the insight of a wall plug. I suddenly thought to myself while looking over at Anna's barely-visible silhouette clouded over by steam. I was enjoying the silence that came from Anna's not talking. But too bad I couldn't keep my own mind quiet, and as soon as I compared her to a wall plug the inner apologies started up again as I kept reminding myself that this kind of thinking was entirely against my religion.

Oh, sorry. Sorry again. Please forgive me. Heal me of my old ways. Help me see the good. Help me know the light. Oh shit! Who the heck is talking, anyway? Me? God? Mother, is that you?

Sometimes all this self-talk got me totally confused. I could never keep track of just who exactly was communicating with me. Was it me, myself or I, or some other entity, a kind angel, perhaps, or a devious, troublemaking interloper from the subtle but unsavory realms? If God were talking to me would He/She keep apologizing for all the bad things I kept thinking, like a parent might apologize for a child's bad behavior? Or was it God that instigated the remorse before I took over with my pathetic string of I'm sorrys?

My religion didn't always cure what ailed me or still the waters, though maybe that's because, according to some who knew me, I really didn't have one. But to me I did, even if it was of my own making. It was the do-good, empty the mind of needless negativity, Yahweh, Yeshua, Oh Great Spirit, Heavenly Mother of Womb and Tomb, Buddha Nature, Sri-Sri Ramakrishna, As sala'amu Alaikum, God Speed, Om Shanti Shalom, all for one, one for all religion. The "crackpot approach,"

as Anna called it last night over dinner. Another reason she was getting on my nerves.

"At least pick a goddamn tradition and stick with it," she said after tossing back her second glass of wine.

"Please, I really wish you wouldn't speak that way."

"What way?"

"You know. G-damn."

"Oh, for Christ's sake," she said.

"Yes, exactly. That too." I was off swears and taking holy names in vain. But so far "oh, shit" kept slipping out of my mouth, and still the F word made its way into the atmosphere whenever I wrestled wire hangers and that frigging Saran Wrap that always clings together and wraps around itself.

Did serene and slender Brenda ever blow her stack at Saran Wrap? I now suddenly wondered. Probably not — she seemed way too cool-headed, unlike me, who, at the moment, was literally steaming. Sweat rolled down my forehead and followed the curves of my face downward to the bony spot between my breasts, the spot I sometimes caught myself admiring.

Did Brenda even have the slightest hint on that day of days that it would be her last? Will Anna stay this quiet once we get in the Jacuzzi? Please God, I really want you to exist. Will the fog of baffling illusion ever roll back to reveal a pure and radiant light? I hoped so.

Yet beneath the steam surrounding us was a mess of cracked and rotting tiles. A jagged tile was right now irritating my tender bum. And the thought of this unsightly mosaic got me nervous about the bigger, more mysterious underside of what we cannot see. So again I questioned: *Will the fog of baffling illusion perhaps roll back to reveal something likewise gone to pieces, or worse, short on radiant light?* I hoped not. I was hoping for and betting on the light. *Let there be light,* I said to myself, more as a jittery plea than any forceful command.

"Hey, how are you doing over there? Is it too



hot?" I called out to Anna.

"It's pretty hot. I think I'll take a swim. Too bad I forgot my shower cap. I'll feel out of place."

"Well, don't forget to rinse off before you get in the pool. I'll be out in a minute."

"Okeydokey," she replied, and just as she walked out, two Korean women walked in carrying small wooden stools and a plastic bag.

The Korean women had the most beautiful skin, not an ounce of fat or cellulite. Sometimes, like today, I stared at their skin in admiration and envy. Through a break in the mist I could see the silkiness of their flesh. Even the old women were blessed with smooth, taut skin, although a droop at the corners of their mouths and a hollowing out at the cheek gave their age away. The old ones still looked old. Like the one now sitting on her stool who began scraping her feet with a pumice stone.

Oh, boy. Here she goes with the exfoliation.

No matter how many signs the staff posted up about no exfoliation, somebody always went ahead and exfoliated anyway. Today it was this one, last week it was Suze, the one originally from Michigan who never stopped talking about classroom discipline going down the drain. And last month I caught myself pulling out a tube of papaya scrub and getting ready to rub it onto my face because no one was in the steam room to witness the crime.

Better not do it, I cautioned myself.

But who's going to see? There's nobody in here, I answered.

Maybe God will.

Oh, for crying out loud. Now the lord of the universe is keeping tabs on steam-room exfoliation? I need to clean my pores and stave off the ravages of time. Is there some law against it? I wanted to know.

Yes, The Law of the Gym. The Ladies First code of ethics that prohibits polishing and rubbing off of dead skin in public. Remember: Absolutely No Exfoliation! So I curbed my urge to scrub and peel just as I now curbed my urge to say something

to the woman with the pumice stone because as she rubbed she did so very carefully, holding a towel beneath her foot to collect the scales and debris.

After a rinse and a swig of not-quite-cool-enough water, I slipped into the pool. To the right of me, the ladies bobbed. From the far side of the pool, Anna waved. I put my goggles on, inhaled deeply, and swam some laps. In the blue underworld of water, I sought refuge from everything outside—the hot, gum-on-your-shoe summer streets, a mailbox full of needless paper destined for the trash, and Internet access to things I don't want access to. From the inside, I sought relief as well: my relentless, opinionated opinions, the after-the-fact, sheepish apologies, and the nothing-in-particular onslaught of unwelcome dialogue.

I swam past water-wrinkled feet and the ruffle of a skirted swimsuit. Under the water, I saw a leaf that had trailed someone into the pool. It drifted in slow motion and then gently spiraled to the floor. When I came up for air, I saw a circle of pink-and-yellow shower caps and one pointed steeple. The woman in the steeple cap was lifting Styrofoam dumbbells and listening to Mary Louise tell about a trip to Asheville and a wine tasting at the Biltmore Estate. And then I saw Anna emerge from the pool, pull up the straps of her swimsuit, and walk over to the Jacuzzi. Again she waved as she sank into a swirl of warm water.

She really does have a good heart, I said to myself.

She always takes in stray animals and finds each one a home. She bakes pumpkin bread for elderly neighbors. The problem had more to do with the passing time, not her. We'd changed, that's all. The time had relieved me of my agonies but more deeply planted hers. We had known each other way too long to let having nothing in common anymore break us apart. So what if she wanted to remember the good old days and I didn't?

So what if she'd polished off my supply of wine without offering to buy at least one bottle? Did it really matter that she had a habit of making snide





Photograph courtesy www.thevalults.ie

remarks about people's appearance and attire? "Get a load of the Botox babe in the red capris," she'd said about a woman last night at Lemon Moon. Was it of any real consequence that she poked fun at my religion? For someone who believed only in the power of hair color from a bottle, was it so terrible that she referred to my spiritual journey as

the "presto-chango, flavor-of-the-month" method of worship?

By now, I'd moved from the pool into the Jacuzzi, where I sat with Anna and listened to her talk about the South Beach Diet. She liked this diet because on it you're allowed to eat avocados,

although recently her favorite diet was the Why French Women Don't Get Fat Diet, because on that one you're allowed to drink wine.

"Life's too short to drink bad wine," was her cheery bumper-sticker remark upon opening some of my not-too-shabby reserve stock from the pantry the other night. "Isn't that right, kiddo?" She sounded like my older brother, always calling me "kiddo."

"No doubt about it," I'd answered back as she pulled out the cork. *Especially when you're not paying for it.*

But I was over that, my gripes about the wine. And for the time being I'd stopped caring about the emptied bottles, preferring instead to savor the feel of bubbling hot water and pulsating jets. Though soon enough I braced myself as Anna launched into a mini-tirade against her once-wealthy, still-contemptible former spouse: Mr. Another One Bites The Dust, husband number three.

Personally, I'd never been high on Teddy and his chunky gold rings and designer labels. So, as I listened to Anna bitch and poke fun at his preening and his weekly manicures, I became aware that I was getting a little too eager to hear all the bad things she had to say about him. I was also aware that over in the pool the shower cap brigade had started thinning out some. One by one, the ladies padded off to the showers, passing by the wall with that photo of Brenda holding up her oversized sweatpants. Droplets of water led the way for each one behind the other. Someone carried a pink beach towel. I noticed a stripe of sweat collecting above

Anna's upper lip, and for a minute I felt a touch of lightheadedness from so much heat.

"Are you hungry?" I asked Anna. I could wait, but could she?

"I will be later."

Then as casually as I'd asked about her appetite, I asked her if she ever thought much about dying.

"Oh, you're cheerful today, darling," she answered. "Do you know something I don't know?"

"No. Just remembering one of the women here. She died a few weeks ago. I can't stop thinking about her."

"Too many chocolate éclairs, perhaps?" Anna said, nodding slightly toward an alarmingly heavy woman who moved with great effort toward the swimming pool.

"Maybe not enough," I replied. "Who knows?"

"Ashes to ashes, éclairs to derrières" is what she said next. "By the way, did you know that a diet is when you have to go to great lengths to change your width?"

"Sweets are the destiny that shape our ends," I shot back.

For the rest of the afternoon, Anna and I dawdled around one of those mall-like antique places looking at old porcelain, hand-sewn quilts, and "Gee I'd like to buy it but I have no place to put it" armoires. Then, at the onset of evening we had an early dinner at Taqueria Los Hermanos,



but my husband declined to join us by inventing something to fix. "You girls go talk," he said, holding an electric drill in his hand. My husband was always calling women "girls." Even his 90-year-old grandmother was a girl, but she didn't seem to mind being one, nor will I when I'm 90, I suppose (if I live that long).

"Wow, what a catch that one is," Anna said about my husband on our way out the door. And even I was impressed with his perfect behavior during her stay, not to mention his European charms.

"Oh yeah," I answered. "He's the best. If only he was rich."

"Well, if he was rich he wouldn't have married you," she said matter-of-factly, without a hint of ha-ha in her voice.

Oh really? How awfully swell of you to say so, I wanted to say. But later I would wonder: Is this true? I wasn't exactly Issabella Rossellini. He wasn't waking up each day to a sizzling Penelope Cruz.

Against a background of mariachi music, Anna and I sat comfortably, and I listened to her recount another one of my early affairs and lament her rising condo fees. After day four, tomorrow would be day five of Anna's visit, and after that, the fond farewell. Our skin was still glowing from the afternoon steam, though maybe the margaritas helped bring out the blush in our cheeks. As for the chips and salsa, we were on round two, so I bent slightly to one side and unbuttoned my waistband, and then I tugged at my snug-fitting pants.

Before this visit, five years had gone by. Five

years of phone calls, emails, and remembering birthdays helped sustain a friendship born out of inexhaustible youth, and before that another four, five, six years had passed in between visits. I probably wouldn't see Anna again for who knows how long? And it was only a matter of time until I wouldn't see her ever, or if I did, it wouldn't be on Planet Earth.

Bits and pieces of conversation from surrounding tables competed for my attention as we took our time over chile rellenos and lime-grilled shrimp. To the right of me, somebody was mad as hell about something, and to the left, another one was thrilling over a trip to southern France. Anna told me a funny something she thought I'd like: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single oyster," she said laughingly. I'd heard this one before and laughed along with her. Then I told her a funny something I thought she'd appreciate: "Only borrow money from pessimists—they don't expect it back."

I wrapped my lips around the rim of my glass, tasting salt and sour and a hint of sweet. The people in our lives come and they go, I thought to myself. A friend from college died last year of leukemia; Brenda, gone; my middle brother not dead but vanished. A list of here-today, gone-tomorrow expanding at a pace I dared not ponder. But when I did, a swig of my drink seemed the proper send-off to those gone before me. The second belt paid homage to even the annoying ones still here.

Ashes to ashes.

Éclairs to derrières.



The Formula

by Dennis K. Ross

The old whiskey bottle
we found in the trash back of the old barn
held it all:
ketchup and kerosene,
furniture polish, vanilla,
red crepe paper, turpentine.
A map was carefully drawn
black crayon on a paper bag
and the formula hidden to protect its power,
buried under the fence
near the potato field and the goats.
We fought wars over that formula,
broom corn spears and bags of fine Kansas dust
gathered from the dry cracked ground.
The formula was magic we knew,
enough magic to cure momma
from the craziness and repair the car,
enough magic to keep
our Prairie Schooner trailer from the bill-men,
enough magic
to make everything okay again.



After the Fall

by Askold Skalsky

She told me I was dirt. A muckball on the face of the green earth. Then she pointed her finger. "Look at yourself." (I was standing in my old checkered robe, three days of stubble on my face, eyes baggy, hair unwashed.) "Who would ever want you?" I reminded her that man was an exceptional kind of theophany, a *copula mundi*. Because he was made in God's image, his innermost being shared in divine unknowability. "No more copulas for you, buzzo," she shot back and slammed the door on her way out, leaving me sagging like a thirsty plum, exiled in postlapsarian dust.



Photo by Joel Kendall



Visitation

by Nina S. Corwin

Sometimes they slip by
in the guise of rodents,

or sneaking through airwaves
and telephone lines.

she tapes the windows, plugs faucets
and drains with wads of gum, builds towers

of empty soup cans that will topple
with a warning clatter if disrupted

in the dark. At night she pushes
the dresser in front of the door.

Across the room, the TV screen
she smashed last month

will no longer broadcast
their subliminal messages.

like an old man's mouth,
it gapes back at her.

Sometimes she hears them whispering,
rearranging the clothes that hang in the closet,

shuffling her shoes just to taunt her.
she suspects them of urinating in her milk,

injecting poison into the bottles of pills
that gather in the medicine cabinet.

She knows it sounds crazy
so she doesn't try to explain,

but she suspects it's because they are jealous.
Or because she knows their secrets.

Sometimes, she think it's her womb they want:
Because she might give birth to the chosen.



Sylvia Williams, Boarding House Owner

by Robert Cooperman

Ever since I first run into
that crazy white man, John Sprockett,
he couldn't keep a thing from me
like I was the confiding sister he never had.
He started me in the boarding house trade
after sampling my biscuits and gravy
when he found me wandering like Israelites
after I run off from Master and Missus
and he'd given up killing Kansas folks
that believed in freeing us slaves.

John said he was ashamed of that episode,
but he can't keep himself from killing.
This time, it's Reverend Burden,
who, I admit, used to quote Jesus at me:
"Slaves, obey your masters."
I pointed out to that toad-spit
there wasn't no slaves no more,
and my shotgun—propped under his nose—
could outargue Jesus if He demanded
room and board, but no coins to pay.

John insisted Burden was biding
his time for a midnight exaltation.
"Let me see to him," John spat;
I said no, not wanting that sorry ghost
interfering with my sleep.
Still, John did kill him,
as a kindness to the Preacher's widow.

Should've been Eagle Feather's job:
a blind man can see he'd laugh
at Apache torture
if her fingers were to scissor
his black hair off his face.

Gambler Longstreet's taking bets
on how it happened. I put a dollar on
"Accident." Longstreet chuckled,
"As innocent as God made you black."
I smiled and said, "You may be right."



Max Longstreet, Gambler, Speculates on the Death of Reverend Burden

by Robert Cooperman

I've turned
his unfortunate demise
to profit, taking bets
on whose hand shoved him
from this world.

My pick?
Sheriff Dennehy,
though it makes
no difference to me
who Our Law kills
so long as I run
my honest faro table.

Whenever Widow Burden's
within pissing distance,
he tips his hat, smiles
greasy as a bear
about to make a meal
of a prime doe.

Even that colored
boarding house owner
laid a bet.
"Accident!" she chimed
simple enough to believe
Burden slipped.

Preacher would've burned
her out, for sure,
if not for her partner,
John Sprockett.

He recites poetry
to her of an evening,
though I doubt
she understands
a word
of his nonsense.



William Eagle Feather Gives Lavinia Burden a New Name

by Robert Cooperman

After she stumbled
into my camp that once,
I tried to forget
she'd sat like an angel by my fire,
her hair gold as sunflowers.
When our eyes locked,
her face turned red as mine.

If I'd spoke my feelings plain
in town, Sheriff would've made
a dancing aspen leaf of me.
But all I could think of
was Widow Burden brushing out
her golden fiddle strands.

So last night I crept up
to her cottage—my heart
pounding like a war drum—
and whispered,
“Hair Filled With Sun,”
her smile bright as daisies
when she took my hand,
and led me to Paradise.

How all this will end
I fear to think,
but even a half-breed
can dream.



John Sprockett Considers the Widow Burden and William Eagle Feather

by Robert Cooperman

They're stuck as molasses,
that's the problem:
her a preacher's widow,
him a half-breed folks tolerate
for being a Shakespeare
at tracking long riders.

He knew I did the Preacher,
and why, but kept silent,
so I owe him.

Still, a lynch mob might pin
Preacher's death on them:
aside from that opera singer
whose voice can sharp-shoot glass,
our one entertainment's
a hanging, and if a woman
does that mortal waltz,
even better,
like that Calico-Sally
exalted for blasting
her fancy-man beater

After the one time
I rode her, she returned
to reading poetry.
I recited one; she sobbed,
"I'll do you free from now on,"
like I was her golden knight.
Neither poetry nor me
could save her,
though I can help Miss Lavinia
and her half-breed sparker:
pay my debt to that whore.



William Eagle Feather, After a Visit from Chief Many Horses

by Robert Cooperman

He's one pure-blood
that don't spit
when I cross his path.
At least the tribes
hate me honest:
don't act
like they're saving
my soul for Jesus.

They've got no future:
whites rounding them up
for reservation-jails,
claim it's an honor
to scratch the soil
and not hunt the buffalo
disappearing like the magic
tricks I seen once,
at a medicine show.

Many Horses knows
I can keep my mouth shut
about his plans
for a ghost-dance battle.
I could almost hear him
chant his death-song.

When he was gone,
I dreamed of
Hair Filled With Sun,
and the night we'd spent
the nights and days and nights
we might spend,
if folks just leave us alone.

To be continued in future issues

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

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



Last Flight

by D.M. Gordon

In a coastal cave streaked with rose
and ash, just safe above the lanes
of white-capped waves,
I watch the long-tailed phoenix fly,
something morbid in its silence,
so determined, so immense that were there sun,
the day would darken more,
so near, I hear the whip of wings,
the whistle of its tail — a feathered river jeweled
with tangled lines and unsuccessful hooks.
A flash and then it's gone.



Illustration by Greg Martin



Contributors

Kimberly Becker grew up in North Carolina, earning a B.A. in English with Highest Honors in Creative Writing and an M.A. in German Language and Literature from UNC – Chapel Hill. Her work has appeared in *Parting Gifts* and *South Carolina Review*. She lives with her family near Washington, D.C. and enjoys obedience training with her Belgian Malinois rescue dog.

John Bradshaw was born in Colorado and ostensibly raised in California. After a tour in the Navy (where he served as a mop-technician in the Aleutian Islands), he turned his calloused hand and jaded eye to academia (a small country hidden in the Alps). He has attended universities in Louisiana, Iowa, and Oklahoma (and has yet to be apprehended). Bradshaw is currently teaching English and Philosophy at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. He winters in Weatherford and summers in Norman. But he poems wherever he can.

Matthew Brennan teaches courses in poetry writing and literature at Indiana State University. He has published two small-press volumes of poems and has contributed poems to journals, such as *Sewanee Review*, *Patterson Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*. His poem "The Sublime" took first place in the 1999 Thomas Merton Center Prize contest, a contest judged by Wendell Berry.

Margaret H. Brooks was born in 1913 to American missionary parents in Talas, Turkey. Her poems are saturated with her love of nature and reflect travels to Europe and South America, both as a child and an adult. She graduated from Smith College and studied at Brown University, Johns Hopkins, and Oklahoma State University, where she later taught, after earning a Ph.D. in plant genetics.

Mary Cimarolli has published poetry in four Texas anthologies: *Voices Within*, *New Texas*, *A Galaxy of Verse*, and *The Poetry Society of Texas: Book of the Year*. Her memoir, *The Bootlegger's Other Daughter*, was chosen as one of three finalists in 2004 for the PEN/Martha Albrand Award for the Art of the Memoir. She lives with her husband in Richardson, Texas and Angel Fire, New Mexico.

Kevin Collins was born at a very early age. Since that day, he has been editing. He edits for *Westview*, he edits articles, he edits books, he edits stories, he edits poetry, and he edits grant proposals. He edits for students, he edits for peers, and he edits for those far greater than he will ever be. He'll edit anything that moves as well as certain pieces that lack any kinesia at all.

Robert Cooperman's third collection, *The Widow's Burden*, is available from Western Reflections Publishing Co., P.O. Box 1647, Montrose, CO 81402-1647. His

work has appeared in *The Centennial Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and *North Dakota Quarterly*. His first book, *In the Household of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, was published by the University Press of Florida.

Nina Corwin is the author of *Conversations with Friendly Demons and Tainted Saints* (Puddin'head Press, 1999), a collection of poetry. Her work has been published in *Nimrod*, *Poetry East*, *Evansville*, *Spoon River*, *Cider Press*, and *Potomac Reviews*.

Hannah Craig lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her work is current or forthcoming in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Euphony*, and *Potomac*.

As a veteran newspaper reporter, **Richard Fellingner** covers the Pennsylvania Capitol for a group of newspapers. His nonfiction has been published in *Philadelphia Magazine*, and he has won many state and regional journalism awards over a twelve-year career. He is a native of Altoona, Pennsylvania, residing currently in Camp Hill with his wife and son.

Elizabeth Gallu is a graduate of Smith College, and she has a degree in Comparative Religion from Harvard University. She received a Fulbright award for research in the Transylvania region of Romania, where she lived for three years. Her work has appeared in *Glimmer Train*, *North American Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, and others.

As the Writer-in-Residence at Forbes Library in Northampton, MA, **D. M. Gordon** has developed many programs for writers and readers, including a dynamic weekly public forum on contemporary poetry. She also works as the senior poetry editor for the *Patchwork Journal* and serves on the faculty of Writers in Progress in Florence, Massachusetts.

Kent Hiatt served for six years as a pilot in the Navy and then worked for Delta Airlines until retiring in 2003. He retired early in order to spend more time with his wife and four children and to help with his wife's preschool business. He and his family lived in Florida, California, Hawaii, and Boston before settling down in McHenry County, Illinois.

Edward Hurst is in recovery from some fashion choices imposed on him in childhood. He maintains a website on Southern humor (www.southernhumor.com), contributes columns and cartoons to the *Villa Rica Voice* and the *Oxford So and So*, and writes jokes for itinerant trick-shot pool players. He is currently working on *Chaos Squared*, a novel about crime-solving pool players.



Rosemary M. Magee is Vice President and Secretary of Emory University, where she is responsible for supporting and developing university governance structures. She holds a doctorate in Literature and Religion, and she focuses on southern women writers. As a regular artist in residence at the Hambidge Center in north Georgia, she writes short stories and creative nonfiction. Her work has appeared in *South Atlantic Review*, *Atlanta Magazine*, *Fine Print*, *Iron horse*, and many other journals.

Eric Obame was born in Africa and raised in Europe for a good part of his childhood. He has lived in the U.S. since 1983. He received a Master's Degree in Film from Towson University in Maryland, and he has written three scripts. His poems have appeared in *Unrorean*, *Offerings*, and other publications.

Scott Odom works as a detective with a sheriff's department on the central coast of California. He is a member of the department's SWAT team, assigned to the general criminal bullpen where he handles investigations on crimes from embezzlement to homicide. His poetry has appeared in an anthology, *Off the Cuffs*, and online on *Perihelion*, *In Posse Review*, and *MiPoesis*. He has work forthcoming in *Gulf Coast*, *Poet Lore*, and *The Yalobusha Review*.

Stacy Poritzky is a freelance writer of fiction living in suburban Boston. As a child, she moved from the suburbs of New York to Rio de Janeiro. She returned to the United States to attend Brandeis University, majoring in Economics. Later, she received an MBA from Northeastern University. She is working on a collection of short stories and a novel. Her work has appeared in *Compass Rose*.

Dennis Ross is a retired physics professor from Iowa State University. His work has been published in *Visions*, *Ruah*, *Westword Quarterly*, *Pegasus*, *Poetry Motel*, and *Offerings*.

Daniel R. Schwarz is the Stephen H. Weiss Presidential Fellow at Cornell University. His major field is the British novel with a strong focus on works from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He has published numerous scholarly articles and several books. Recent books include *Reading the Modern British and Irish Novel 1890-1930* (Blackwell 2005), *Broadway Boogie Woogie: Damon Runyon and the Making of New York City Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan 2003), and *Reading Conrad* (Univer-

sity of Missouri Press 2001). His poems have appeared in *Ithaca Times*, *Westview*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Rattle*, and the *Hawaii Pacific Review*, among others.

Judson Simmons resides just outside New York City, where he works as the coordinator of student employment at a small college library. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Pebble Lake Review*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *Concho River Review*, and others.

Arnold Skalsky has had his work appear in numerous small press publications, most recently in *Southern Review* and *River Gauche*. He has also published poems in Canada, England, and Ireland. In 2005 he received a poetry award from the Maryland State Arts Council.

Charles R. (Rick) Taylor Jr. is a graduate of Denison University and the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. He has written some 70 short stories, more than 200 poems — including one featured in *Eureka*, one that appeared in *California Quarterly*, and one that won third prize in the Pennwriters' Poetry Contest — and he is currently working on a novel.

Suzanne Walsh lives in Quebec and was raised west of Montreal. She had an early career in entertainment and television, and she has worked as an educator in a variety of subjects and grade levels in the public school system of Canada. While raising her two children, she devotes herself to painting and writing. Her work is forthcoming in *Boom Magazine*, *Phantasmagoria*, and *Willard & Maple*.

Illustrations

- 3 Photograph by Kevin Collins
- 4 Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall
- 6 Photograph by Susan Argus
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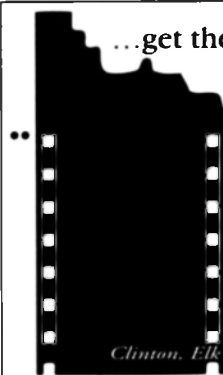


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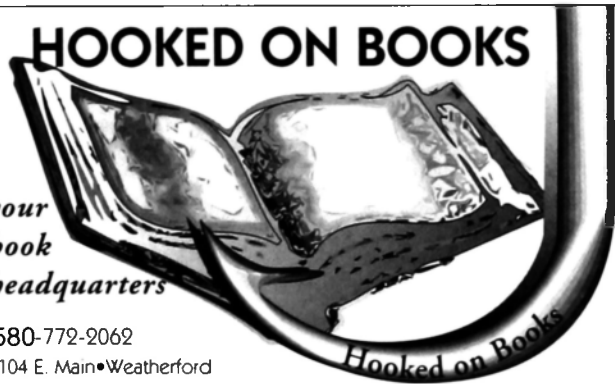
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