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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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All Hallow's Eve

by Susan Thomas

When the sky pulls
layers of gray blankets
overhead and dead things
leave stalks in every field,
the moon rises white as ice
and slides across the sky.

We build fires to watch their sparks
take off through empty spaces
the living leave behind.
Trees shrug themselves
bare in the wind.

Only the tamarack stands
dressed in brooding gold,
an owl in its branches,
screaming into the night.



Wild Night Outside

by Eileen Berry

The moaning wind comes off the sea,
Keens over open sands and marsh, and
Howls and groans around our house.

It whines in chimneys, rattles doors,
Wails in windows, haunts the trees, as
The moaning wind comes off the sea.

Its sounds are those of loneliness, of
People drowned in winter storms, as it
Howls and groans around our house.

Its sounds are those of emptiness, of
Loss and losses yet to come, when
The moaning wind comes off the sea.

It blows from nowhere we can know, wind
From wildness with the sound of wolves, it
Howls and groans around our house.

It brings a certain kind of dread, of
Unnamed fears of the wild outside, when
The moaning wind comes off the sea, and
Howls and groans around our house.



Photograph by Joel Kendall



Poem Written by a Bear

by Kenneth Baron

Here come those men again.
As little guile as hair. They play
at the hunt like drowsy cats,
full and unhurried, stumbling
upon game hoping for the quick
end that men are so good at.

Quick. Painless. That is their way.
Yet, how I would like to see them
stalk with a need as real as breath.
The sun gone for months. The rock
their wife. The brush a slap and sting.
No name their own.

Loud as a river in spring, their language
is the language of those who have words
to spare. Their need for care, if there be need,
is minimal. A broken bone for them is a trophy,
a pause. For me it is the death prescribed
by bird and moss.

Yes, here come the men. I've smelled them
for miles. I've run for years. The one in front
will do. The hand seems steady. The eye keen.
I'll think him a leader and content myself with that.
There are worse gods than him. I am tired.
I am already gone.



Trails

by Marcy Campbell

We head down a steep pass on the trail. Allan is a few steps ahead, striding confidently, while I'm behind, picking my way around rocks and tree roots.

"Don't fall," he calls back. "The leaves are slippery."

He's right. They stick to the bottoms of my tennis shoes. I don't have any hiking boots and had decided it was silly to buy some for this one trip. Who was to say if we'd ever do this again?

Aside from some steep ascents, the hike isn't too strenuous, and the scenery is fabulous. Kentucky has hills that I didn't expect. The woods are lush and practically silent, disturbed only by the occasional chirp of a bird or the snapping of twigs under our feet.

We come to a creek with a shaky, wooden bridge, and Allan takes my hand as we walk across.

"How you doing?" he asks. "Tired? Thirsty?"

"No, I'm fine."

I bump his hip with mine, trying to show that I haven't lost my playfulness. I like the feel of his rough, calloused hand. It is only when his arm reaches around and brushes my stomach that I push it away. All that is left there is a tiny roll of fat hanging over the top of my jeans. Once, there had been a large, round swelling pushing out my skin, leading me down the street, into the kitchen, out of the car, always reaching the final destination inches before the rest of me.

We see a trail map tacked to a splintered post and examine our options. If we stay on the same path, it will be just a mile more until the end. If we cut off toward the pond, we can do a long loop and connect with the same trail farther down, adding about three miles to the hike.

As we consider, an old man walking a dog comes around the corner.

"You folks lost?" He laughs and curls up his mouth into an elfish grin. He has a shock of gray

hair and is surprisingly light on his feet although he looks to be about 80 or 85 years old.

"No, we're just deciding which trail to take," Allan answers.

The old man leans in closer to peer at the map. "Pretty warm weather to be out hiking," he says and wipes at his brow with a handkerchief.

"We are a little warm," I say. "Hiking's hard work for us city-slickers."

He smiles and leans down to give his dog a scratch. "You know, I was born just a couple miles from here." He points west toward a patch of forest. "Where you folks from?"

"Wisconsin," Allan says. He is leaning against the signpost and has that familiar slouch to him. He's in no hurry.

The old man nods, considers it a moment. "Wisconsin. Seems like I had a cousin who lived there for awhile. But, I've lived here all my life."

"I'll bet you know this area really well," I say.

"Now, that's the truth. Raised my whole family here. Four kids. My wife's buried at the cemetery about a mile from here." He presses his index finger against the map under a blue exclamation mark that indicates "Point of Interest!" Next to the exclamation mark, it reads "Sinking Springs Cemetery."

Allan and I had seen a sign pointing to the cemetery while we were hiking. Neither of us had given it a second glance. It isn't the type of place we're interested in touring right now.

The old man tells us about his church, which was right next to the cemetery until a couple years ago. It was tiny, and the roof leaked. Rather than make the costly repairs, they tore it down. All the younger families wanted to go to the new church building in town.

"It's only the old-timers like me," he says, "who care about the history of the place. Sad to see it go. But, we can still use the old cemetery. My baby



daughter just got buried there next to my wife.”

I shoot a sidelong glance at Allan. *Baby daughter?*

“She was 61, my daughter,” the old man continues. “Still my baby, though.”

“I’m so sorry.” I pat his arm.

“Thanks,” he says. He is staring at his shoes. “It just doesn’t get any easier, you know? I mean it’s bad enough losing my wife, but now this.”

I can feel Allan tense beside me. He is probably afraid that I’ll dredge up our story for this total stranger, binding all three of us together, a little triangle of misery.

I am not sure what to say, so I offer the only consolation I can think of, fresh in my mind from the many times I’d heard it in the past six months. “I’m sure you’ll get through it,” I say. “It just takes time.”

“Yeah. It’s a long road, that’s all. I’ll get through it.”

The dog, a terrier of some sort, starts to whine. “This here is my little friend,” the old man says. He leans down to pet her again. Allan and I had talked about getting a dog while I was pregnant and even drove to some shelters, but nothing ever came of it.

“My wife paid \$500 for her, and in just a week, she had chewed up my \$2,000 hearing aid.” He chuckles. “But, I wouldn’t take \$10,000 for her, Lord knows. She’s my buddy, all right.”

The old man turns to look at the map again, and I give a glance to Allan and then to my watch. Allan nods. We need to be back at our campsite before dark, and the sun will be setting soon.

“You folks going to do the trail out to the pond?” the old man asks. “Because it’s a really nice one. It’s a little longer than the others, but there’s a clearing along it that’s great for bird-watching, and you can usually catch sight of some herons on the water.”

“That sounds nice,” I say. “But, we need to get going so we can make it back to our campsite before dark.”

“Sure, that makes sense. Maybe you can hike it some other time. Well, I best be off, too.” He turns to go and gives us a little wave. “Nice talking to you folks.”

“You, too,” I say. “Take care.”

“Nice meeting you,” Allan adds.

With the man and his dog gone, Allan and I take a last look at the map and start down the shorter trail. Allan peers off through the trees.

“Even if we did have the time for the longer one,” he says, “we don’t want to overdo it.”

“Right.” I smirk. I know he is pretending to look out for me, but he’s the one slick with sweat.

We walk on, occasionally stopping to look at some flower or odd-shaped mushroom. Sometimes, Allan and I catch each other’s eyes. Then, I concentrate again on walking, one foot in front of the other. I keep thinking about the old man and his daughter, the unfairness of the whole thing.

“Do you think we should call your parents?” Allan asks. “Let them know how everything’s going?”

“We’re 35 years old,” I say. “We don’t need to check in with them.”

“I know, but you know they’ll be worried.”

“Yes, but let’s wait a few days. I can’t handle all of her questions right now.”

I know as soon as my mother gets on the phone, she will ask how I’m doing in that hushed, funeral-parlor voice. She will wonder if I am still taking the anti-depressants. She will wonder if Allan and I are trying for another child. All things a concerned mother would worry about.

When we return, I will tell her how I’m doing. I’ll tell her that I’ve gotten past the staying-in-bed-all-day phase and have started reading the paper every morning. I’ll tell her that my skin is no longer numb when I pinch it between my thumb and forefinger, and that the food I eat has regained its flavor instead of everything tasting like dry saltines. I consider all of these things to be milestones, short steps back to sanity.

But, if she asks how Allan is doing, I won’t



know what to say. It is hard to tell with him. There have been no short steps for Allan. He flew into a rage a couple days after it happened. I found him sitting on the floor in the office surrounded by smashed model airplanes. I remembered how long it had taken him to put them together, meticulously painting the little pilot's face and sticking the decals on the plane's tail. When I walked in that day, there were shards of plastic all around him. A broken propeller sat on its broken nose, the breeze from the open window making it spin slowly, crookedly. Later, he cleaned up the whole mess.

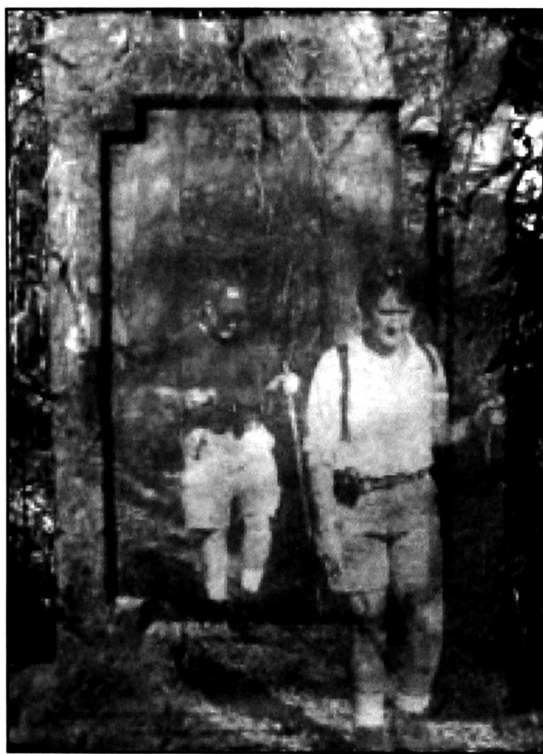
I envy his ability to get it all out so quickly. I want to be more like him, but instead my grief is a festering sore, just crusted over when something tears it open again and makes it ooze.

For example, I recently ran into Mary at the grocery store. Her two kids were beaming at me with their goofy grins, one helping to push the cart, the other seated in it between the Trix and frozen peas. We are not close friends, but know each other well enough that some small talk was obligatory.

"I forget, Christine," she had said. "Do you and Allan have any children?"

I froze for what seemed like minutes before meekly answering, "No," and then drove home racked with guilt. I felt like I had betrayed Emma. But, if I had told the truth, Mary would have felt terrible for asking. And what would that have proved? She struck me as someone from the push-it-under-the-rug camp.

There are two camps. The push-its think I should try and get on with my life and forget it ever happened. Give away all of the things I had



Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall

bought for Emma, make the nursery into an exercise room. The talk-it-out camp thinks I need to rehash all the details, over and over, tears and more tears, until I simply get it out of my system. I lean toward the talk-it-out side, but I just don't have much to say.

I like being here in the woods where I don't have to say much of anything. Allan and I come to a little bench along the trail, and I tug at his hand. We sit, and he throws an arm around my shoulders.

"You know what I think?" he asks.

"What?"

"I think everything happens for a reason. I really do. I know since it happened we've just been consumed with how to get on with our lives, but looking back on it now, I think there must have been some reason, something we don't know yet."

"Like one of God's great plans?" I say with a twinge of sarcasm.

"Well, maybe."

"No, no I can't accept that. Aren't there more deserving people for God to kill off? Why would he want a child who hadn't even been born? It's too cruel."

"I don't know. I don't know if we're meant to know." He is being philosophical now, and it doesn't help. It sounds like something he has picked up from the therapist, or "Dr. Do Little," as I call him. Allan had suggested we try a few sessions. He thought it would help both of us. Dr. Do Little had a way of leaning back in his chair with his hands folded over his ample belly and his eyes closed. We would be in the middle of a discussion and I'd think he was drifting off. Then, he'd make



a low *Hmmm* sound from the back of his throat and jerk upright, springing some psychobabble on us.

"What does that mean?" I'd ask.

"Well, what does it mean to you?" he'd answer.

Meanwhile, Allan would be nodding, *yes, yes*. So, I'd shrug and nod, too. If I nodded, I got to leave faster. And now, Allan is starting to sound like Dr. Do Little.

"I don't know how you can be so nonchalant about this," I say. "Maybe we're not meant to know'...What is that? I want to know, dammit! Somebody owes me an explanation."

Somebody owes me an explanation for why, eight months along, Emma's heart just stopped beating. I woke up that morning and told Allan, "I'm not in pain. It's the lack of pain that worries me." Emma usually woke me up at 4:00 a.m. with a sharp kick to the ribs, but that morning there was nothing.

We went to the doctor and held our breath while he examined me.

"I'm having a little trouble finding the heart-beat," he had said, brows furrowed. "No reason to panic yet, no reason."

I panicked. I started to cry. He didn't need to tell me that she was dead. I knew. Yet, because she was still a part of me, of my strong, live self, I thought I could bring her back.

My biggest fear up to that point was how painful the delivery was going to be. I had heard horror stories from my sister and girlfriends. But then, they got to bring their babies home. I would have gladly taken the pain, but my Emma was already

dead. *No need to worry about the baby getting brain damage.* The doctor drugged the hell out of me.

"We may as well make you comfortable," he had said.

I felt woozy, but no pain. The pain was all Allan's. I could see it in his twisted-up face. He had taken both of our shares. Once she was delivered and the doctor asked us for her name, Allan had looked at me expectantly.

"Emma! Emma!" I screamed. "What's gotten into you, Allan?"

"I didn't know if you'd want to use Emma," he said softly, backing away from my beached whale body on the delivery table, my splayed legs. "Or if you'd want to save it and use one of the other names."

The doctor and nurses took that as their cue. They left the room and left us clutching Emma to say our good-byes. Allan had tried to console me. He was sorry. Of course her name was Emma. It was Emma, just as we'd planned.

And then, there was the autopsy. My parents asked me, how could I have an autopsy? *How could I not?* I needed some answers. The doctor had nothing.

"Sometimes these things just happen for no apparent medical reason," he had said.

I wasn't buying it. I needed proof. Something like the cord getting tangled around her neck, a tiny noose, would have made sense. Something logical had to cause this. Most of all, I needed to know it wasn't my fault.

That was six months ago, but it still feels like yesterday. In some ways, it seems like I am frozen



in time. I want to thaw somewhere in the future and see how it all turns out.

Allan is beside me on the bench, his arm still around my shoulder.

"Allan, what are we doing out here?" I say softly.

"We're trying to relax and get on with our lives."

"But, not forget."

"No, of course not forget. We'll never do that."

"Good, because I can't." If I concentrate for a minute, I can still feel the itchiness on my stomach from the stretched skin and the pressure on my bladder from her body.

"I have to go to the bathroom," I say.

"Bad?"

"Really bad."

Allan looks around. "Well, here you go. Pick a spot."

I walk a little off the trail behind some bushes and struggle with my pants. This is so much more difficult for me than for him. A butterfly lands on my toe while I'm in mid-squat, and I stay very still and watch it. It is an iridescent blue with black stripes and two perfectly round orange circles at the bottom of the wings, as if someone had painted them on. It flies off, and I rejoin Allan on the trail where we start to walk in sync again. The parking lot comes into view around the corner. He leans over to give me a peck on the cheek, and I squeeze his hand.

At the edge of the woods, the packed, brown earth abruptly ends in asphalt. We notice the old man standing behind the popped-up hood of a beige Buick.

"Are you having car problems?" Allan asks, walking toward it.

"Oh!" The man jerks his head up. "No, no, I was just checking my fluids. Afraid she's maybe leaking oil. And only two years old at that." He shakes his head and pushes the dipstick back in.

I hear a little yelp come from inside the car and look in to see the dog's shiny, black eyes peering at me through a mass of fur. The man produces a Milk Bone from his pocket and gives it to her.

"How was the rest of your hike?" he asks.

"It was good," I say. "We'll probably be sore tomorrow, though. All this exercise!"

He leans against the car. "Yeah, well, keeps you young. Just look at me!" He winks. "It's a shame you folks didn't have more time to take the longer trail. It's a nice hike."

"How many times have you taken it?" I asked.

"Oh, boy, that's a tough one. I could never count that high! But, lately, not many." He taps his chest. "I've got a bum ticker now, so I have to take it easy."

Allan looks up at the sky. "Well, we probably should get back to our campsite so we can make dinner before it gets dark," he says.

The old man looks up. "Yes. I should be getting home, too. You folks have a good vacation now."

"We will," I say. "Take care of yourself."

Allan and I give him a wave as we hop into our car and pull out of the parking lot. I turn around and notice another 30-ish couple just coming off the trail and heading to their car. I can't hear them, but I can see them smiling at the old man and can see him gesturing back toward the cemetery and the site of the old church.



The Tick

by Stephen Geric

I.

The tick would like its muteness
personified in a form not jealous
of what we discover in its suck
and drool. We have found nothing
new, nor any scheme of organization.
Yet there are ways of understanding
the taut mind of a tick.

Satellites move endlessly in the
airy territory of ticks and with
the same determination and power
to irritate. The next one I find will
be given a name, after the most
beautiful woman in the world I met
that day. The tick will dream of my
radiant blood, and I of its angular
disk, its hard back, patterned to defy
whatever crawls through space.

II.

This one got under my skin.
Biting is a dream of life, a
cold coffee embrace that lasts
longer than you ever imagined
love could. We hold and falter.

If all the lakes I have ever fished
were to dry up, marking the world
with a great stink of all that refused
my lures, I would consider it an act
of absolute terror intending a double
erasure: effort and dream. I will
never fish that great Russian lake,
so deep, deep to blue, past green,
past the brilliance of waves over
deep water. But there is no drying.
We wet ourselves as we age. My
typical observation: sidewalks soaked
at dawn dry quickly. There has never
been enough blood to go around.



III.

Ticks, so that there is something
to fear in the woods. I have
decided to limit the number of
times I scare myself. I will tally
according to the seasons. In
summer I will scare the least,
even though I sleep in a wide
blueberry patch thick with the
humid breath of bears. In winter
I will scare often, for then there
is much to fear living with the
wind, and the daily cracking of
flesh and trees. Though I
take some heart the oldest trees
do not sway and creak so much
(all shaken with the joy of storms),
they smooth themselves, sigh a bit,
protect their rotting innards from
the fearful incursion of weather.
The logic of wind, like that of
the tick, is to pull and pull.

IV.

Toward evening, we know
to see both sides of this
shortest night of the year.

There is a soft crossing, a
shallow rise and dip. Is it
blood I hear, ear pressed,
or a strong river far below
sand and rock? Or is it
my own heart's pounding?

Prey love always comes matched
by loss. The tick waits almost
lifeless, terrible, infectious, and
impossible to resist. There
are infections that dispel
infections, attendant to dreams that
survive the tenderness, still joy,
and endless deferrals of love.
Prey love always comes armed with loss.

The tick is only what it cannot resist:
the feeling of flesh,
the joy of blood,
the complex of love.



Scattered Reflections on the Dung Beetle

by George Staehle

Human scientists have discovered that the dung beetle can push its scavenged ball of antelope droppings to a secluded picnic area faster than a speeding dung sweepster. It's done by navigating with polarized light from the moon. That's light scattered off molecules of air, allowing the dung beetle's built-in, polarized Ray-Bans to differentiate between light that has to plow through tons of atmosphere and that emanating from airplanes and SUV high beams in the African savanna.

We always knew that this clumsy Mr. Magoo of the insect world navigated in the daytime from polarized *sunlight*. But from the million-times-fainter, reflected sunlight from the moon is welcome news.

Having advanced degrees in optical physics, the dung beetle knows this stuff like the back of its thorax and can detect the polarized light pattern from the moon, which it uses to wobble along the shortest, and therefore safest, path between two points. The beetles probably developed the polarized light trick at night when they were desperate for a unique navigating source and then used it during the day because it was higher-tech than using direct sunlight. Besides the techno-swagger, it also gave them a thick hide against snide ant calls like, "Hey, bowlegged sissy fuss," when they had to scurry backwards, pushing balls of slippery brown matter up a hill over and over.

Immediately after learning about the beetle's secret for going on the straight and narrow by means of polarized moonlight, and not to be out

dung, I rushed outside to see if the moon would help me walk in a straight line, especially if I had downed several beers—no more embarrassing confrontations with the law if I could remember to drive drunk only in moonlight.

But my writing support group said I needed nobler applications. So I wrote all my stories wearing polarized sunglasses in moonlight. This helped get my ideas straight without rewrites, but had the annoying side effect that I always told the truth. This ruined my writing for a while until someone reminded me that there is more real truth in fiction than in fact.

The news of my success spread around the neighborhood like gleaming white tails in a skunk race, and soon, people wanted all important events to be held in bright moonlight—state-of-the-union speeches, newscasts, and other people's court trials and wedding vows. But we live in a busy world. There are too many important things to do when Earth's single moon is hung over in Malaysia or wakes up in a fog.

Soon, a small group of people in our town, to whom truth really mattered, set sail for Saturn and Jupiter, which have at least 23 and 16 moons, respectively—a welcome plethora of moonshine and a haven for passing straight-line sobriety tests. And since all of us now loved every living being as we did ourselves, we packed our suitcases with jars of dung beetles, with lots of dung and plenty of holes in the lids.



The Weanling

by Gerald R. Wheeler

The weanling colt lay still in a stall, his tan coat thick as carpet, spike mane covered with flecks of dried mud, leaves & strings of yellow hay.

The weather-face man with bad eyes shivers from the cold humid air invading his bones. Bones old as the sagging barn. He kneels on frozen ground, slips on latex gloves, retrieves a scalpel from a box, deftly cuts a small incision in the weanling's throat, blood & poison gushing from lump like burst boil. He meticulously cleanses & dresses the wound, fills a syringe with a creamy liquid. Searches for a soft spot in the colt's shoulder, then plunges the needle, reflecting on the foal he buried a week before.

Two days pass.

The man scans angry sky stampeding dark clouds. He patiently waits for Badger, a 32-year-old, grayed-out roan gelding, the family's guardian of weanlings & injured horses. He's easy to recognize among his grazing herd: only horse that wears a winter horse blanket. Badger gives no quarter to rambunctious mares & younger geldings since blinded in left eye by a charging longhorn when he was a yearling.

The man shifts his tired eyes from the ailing weanling lying in the stall to the pale roan. He says in a raspy voice, "Dusty's contracted the damn strangles. Now he needs special medicine & attention only you can give."



Forbidden

by Kenneth Hada

Beside moss-covered rocks
pushing upward through a
decaying bed of oak
leaves and acorns shrouded
in effluent humus,
where only a pair of
cardinals flurrying
through irregular limbs
disrupts a creek trickling
into obscurity,
we lay under silent
— and twisted cedars.



The Trophy

by G. Hoffman

"I need a new rifle, Momma," Bob Wilkins said at breakfast one morning.

Jeanie Wilkins squinted over her coffee cup and studied the face across the table. "You need a new rifle or you want a new rifle? There is a difference, Bobby!"

"Dang it, Maw, I said I *need* a new rifle! Elk season is comin' up, and I wanta be ready."

"Bobby, don't call me 'Maw'! You know how I hate it. It makes me feel like a worn-out old woman."

"And, Maw, I hate the name 'Bobby'! I've told you that. It makes me feel like a snotty-nosed kid. Well, I'm not a snotty-nosed kid. I'm forty-six years old. An' I'll quit callin' you 'Maw' when you quit callin' me 'Bobby'."

His mother sniffed and sipped her coffee. "My goodness, aren't we testy this mornin'!" she said. "I've called you 'Bobby' for so long that it just seems natural. What you need is a wife. You could train her to call you what ever you like."

"An' you would still call me 'Bobby'!" her son complained. "Well, I don't need a wife. What I do need is a new rifle!"

"But you've got a good rifle. The thirty-thirty your daddy gave you for Christmas after you got out of the service is good as new. I just can't see why you think you need a new one."

"It's a good deer gun, Momma," he argued, "but this year I'm goin' with the Koenig boys up to the Bear Creek country to hunt for elk. In those wide-open spaces and canyons, I'll need a bigger gun than a thirty-thirty! I'll need a .270 or 30.06 to bring down a big bull elk."

"Money's tight, Bobby, uh—uh, I mean Bob. Where would we get that much money this time of year?"

Bob grinned at her discomfort and mimicked it, "Uh—uh, Momma, I think we should sell that big heifer that didn't breed this year. She's not

gonna have a calf an' isn't likely to have one next year. But she'll eat a ton of hay this winter. She's fat and beef prices are good right now."

"I thought we were gonna butcher her," Momma said. "You said as much last spring."

"That was when she was near 600 pounds. Now she's closer to 800 or 850. We could never use that much beef. Besides if I get an elk, we'll have all the meat we need. An' you like elk better, anyway. I've heard you say so."

"I do," Momma said, nodding. She thought a few moments and added, "How much will the heifer bring? There are some things I need, too."

"She should bring 50 cents a pounds or more according to the market reports. That 'ud be something like \$400 or so."

"And a rifle like you want would take how much of that?"

"About half, Momma." He used the name carefully.

"I've been wantin' a new mantel clock for a long time," she said. "The old one no longer runs, and the repairman says it isn't worth fixin'. It used to be that I could hear that old clock tickin' late at night, an' it was so comfortin' with your daddy there warm beside me. It 'ud chime in the half-hours and bong out the hours. Then things 'ud get quiet agin', an' I'd go back to sleep. I've missed that old clock, an' your daddy, too. I think I need a new clock."

Bob's attitude softened. He loved his mother even though she was often difficult to live with. When his father died, he had known her loss and her need to stay in her old home. After some hesitation, he had agreed to take over the 200 acre irrigated ranch on a half-and-half basis. He found that he liked the quiet independent life and its freedom. He had no intention of finding a wife who could easily disrupt the close relationship between him and his momma.



"How much will it cost, Momma?" he asked.

"I've seen 'em in the hardware store in Durango. The kind I would like to have was priced at near \$100. Some were cheaper but weren't as nice. I would want a real nice one."

"The heifer should buy my rifle and your clock and leave enough for you to go visit Aunt Junie in Colorado Springs," Bob said grinning. "You've been wantin' to go, an' it's time you went to see your twin sister. Before leavin' for the elk trip, I'll take you down to catch the bus."

Momma smiled through misty eyes and sighed. "Whose gonna tend to things while we're gone?"

"Now, don't you worry about that, Momma. Jim Cass, across the road, will take care of things. He never goes huntin' and he owes me. I took care of things for him when they were all gone to New Mexico last summer. So that won't be a problem."

"You'll take the heifer to the sale barn? Tomorrow?"

"I'll do that."

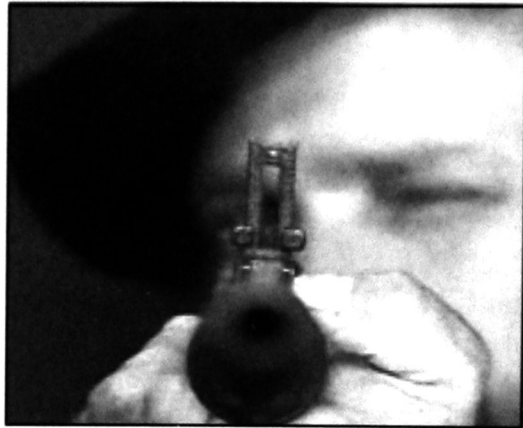
"And we can go to Durango the day after?"

"We'll do that."

"Uh-uh, Bob, you've got a good head on those shoulders."

"Yes, Momma."

The heifer brought \$468, and Bob and Momma went to Durango the following day. When they returned, he had his rifle with telescope sights, and Momma had her lovely mantel clock which chimed in the half-hours and bonged out the hours. The clock was displayed prominently in the middle of the mantel, and the rifle was stored away in Bob's room. The heifer had paid for both, with plenty left over for Momma's trip to see her sister. Three days before his planned camping expedition, Bob took her to the



Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall

bus station.

"You be careful up in those hills, Bob," she said.

Bob gave her a quick hug and replied, "I will, Momma."

But Bob's hunting venture turned sour. It began raining the day before he was to leave, and

heavy snows were predicted in the Bear Creek watershed. He did his work and fidgeted. That evening he cleaned and oiled his new rifle and tested its action. He loaded and unloaded the magazine innumerable times to be sure that when the time came he could load the rifle in the dark if necessary. He sighted it on various targets and imagined that they were huge antlered elk. One of his favorite targets was the new clock ticking happily on the mantle at the far end of the long room. Through the scope he could see every tiny detail on the clock's face, the minute and second markings, and the fine print at the base of the dial telling its serial number and manufacturer's name. And he smiled when his mind translated what his eye saw into the form of a magnificent bull elk. Finally, he unloaded the rifle magazine and sighed. It was bedtime, and there was nothing he could do about the weather. He went to the window and looked out. It was raining steadily.

He returned to the rifle and was about to replace it in its case. Reluctant to give up his hunting fantasy, he again sighted it on the clock's face and pulled the trigger. A deafening roar shook him and the whole house. Momma's clock bounced into the air and disintegrated into a shower of rubble. Dust billowed around it. Only the tangled mainspring, waving back and forth in its twisted frame, remained to tell that a once-vibrant living mechanism had been instantaneously converted into useless junk.

neously converted into useless junk.

"My Gawd," Bob said. He lifted up the bolt and pulled it back. The empty casing of a forgotten cartridge clattered on the floor. "My Gawd," he said again. "Momma's new clock!"

The next morning he drove through the rain to Durango and exchanged the new rifle for another clock identical to the one whose mangled works he had safely interred behind the big hay barn. He returned home, and after eliminating all signs of the bullet hole and checking carefully for telling remnants of the demolished clock, he installed the new one on the mantelpiece. It was busily ticking away when his mother returned ten days later.

"Have you taken good care of my clock," she asked.

Bobby put on his best poker face. "Yes, Momma," he said.

"Have you kept it wound regular like the hardware man said?"

"Yes, Momma."

"I heard the weather reports. I'm sorry you had to cancel the hunting trip."

"Me too, Momma."

"So what have you been doing all alone these past ten days, Bobby?"

"Just killin' time, Maw," Bobby said. "Just killin' time."



The Generation Gap

by G. Hoffman

Granddad Lewis Grimes was a crochety old Oklahoma pioneer who, in his seventy-ninth year, tolerated his grandchildren as the inevitable results of nature and not as objects to be doted on and cherished. He valued them according to their usefulness, and affection had no part in the relationship. It was not an unusual attitude for his kind and his time.

But Anna, my grandmother, was different. She cherished her many grandchildren.

Her life was hard, for the times were hard, and they were made harder by a husband who was often selfish and inconsiderate. In their later years, Anna was forced to do the chores formerly done by her growing children. The cow had to be milked, the chickens tended, the garden hoed. In her seventies and suffering from hernias and arthritis, Anna was the one who had to drive in the cow for milking each morning and evening while Lewis spent much of his time lying on the old-fashioned couch smoking his pipe. Though creaky with age, he seemed to be reasonably spry and capable of doing those things he liked to do. He could fetch in the buggy mare, harness her, and hitch her to the buggy. He could drive her the five or six miles to the home of my parents, which he did on numerous occasions.

One of those occasions was in 1930 when I was 13. The wheat harvest was in full swing, and my family was busy. Grandmother Anna was ailing, and Lewis wanted help. He had come for a sturdy Hoffman son. But the two older boys were working in the harvest, and the two youngest were too small to be useful. I, the middle son, was picked to go.

I remember the ride in the buggy, with its top raised against the June sun, and the rattle and grind of the wheels in the dry sandy ruts. And I remember the steady clip-clop of Old Gail's hooves as she stolidly maintained her measured pace under the threat of the buggy whip held aloft by the whiskered old gentleman at my side.

He spoke little. I never knew if he considered me incapable of intelligent conversation or if he had long before lost the art of talking to the very young. But the ride was pleasant enough, and Old Gail's steady trot soon had us at the Grimes' homestead. My three-week stay at my grandparents' house was about to begin.

I was eager to be of help. I felt needed. And, too, the amount of work required of me promised to be somewhat less than what I would have had to do at home. I looked forward to some work, some leisure, and my grandmother's cooking.

That evening, when I went down the pasture lane and crossed the creek to bring in the cow, I anticipated no trouble. What could be more problem-free than driving in a docile old cow? But the cow was neither old nor docile. She was, in fact, so young as never to have known a caretaker other than my grandmother. I was an energetic alien creature and, to the young cow, capable of much mischief.

The moment she spied me, she broke and ran. She paused briefly to take a second look, and then lifted her tail and stampeded to the far corner of the pasture. She seemed as bent on escaping my presence as the fabled cow which had jumped over the moon, and I saw quickly that a direct approach was impossible. I circled far to the north and came up along the west fence of the pasture. With nothing between her and the safety of her home corral, she raised her tail and fled in a panic to disappear into the crossing of the creek channel. In minutes, I saw her racing up the hill, her udder swinging wildly, as she sought the safety of the fenced enclosure where she customarily received her ration of grain before being milked by an old woman in woman's clothing.

When I went to the house later for the milk pail, I expressed my befuddlement. I described the cow's behavior. Grandmother could not explain it



either. She went with me to the corral, and we approached the frightened animal. The lure of grain in the old bucket carried by Grannie was not enough to ease the cow's fears. Her entire attention continued to be on the strange alien which had so threatened her in the far pasture. Needless to say, Grandma milked the cow again that evening.

Later at our supper when we discussed the problem of the cow, we concluded that her fear was not directed at me personally but at the strange creature she perceived me to be. It became apparent that I must change my image, and for the next three weeks I never went to fetch her in for milking unless I was dressed in one of Grannie's old cloaks or dresses. Strangely enough, she seemed to develop a genuine affection for that other old woman who twice daily brought her the ration of grain and relieved her swollen udder of its milk.

Other problems also developed that were both hilarious and a bit sad. It was a daily challenge for the three of us to adapt my thirteen-year-old's world to that of two people in their dotage. But I cheerfully did the chores assigned to me and when done, I was permitted to be a boy again. My ramblings along the creek sparked Granddad's interest. He wanted to go fishing.

But it was midsummer, and the earthworms had long since retreated deep underground. The fishing venture did not look promising.

"If you can find worms, well go," the old man said lazily as he lay on the couch smoking his pipe. From the tone of his voice I could tell that he was already losing interest. It was midday and warm. The windows and doors were all opened to catch the breeze, and the house was cool. The creek was a quarter mile away, and the long walk under the hot sun for catfish sulking in the muddy waters was not too inviting. I understood the old man's problem. I was determined to find worms.

I dug in the rotted straw next to the old barn. I spaded a portion of the drought-stricken garden. I tested moist areas near the well and horse tank. The earthworms had deserted their usual haunts to escape the heat.

But one place I had neglected to try. An early

vintage automobile lay wheelless in a corner of the horse corral. Its rusty hulk, held off the ground by ancient axles, had kept shaded an area which appeared favorable. There it was cool and damp. I worked with a broken shovel beneath the old running boards and in the deep recesses under the old chassis. The worms came out big, fat, and lively.

I took the can of worms into Granddad. He was surprised. He studied them carefully and grunted. Without a word he swung his creaky legs off the old couch, and we went fishing.

Besides the two primitive poles and the can of worms, I carried my ever-present slingshot and a pocket-full of small round pebbles. Granddad watched me plinking at fenceposts and an occasional bird. He sniffed and smirked. It was old age regarding sourly the foolishness of youth. I said nothing, for I had learned long ago to respect my elders.

I do not recall the extent of our success at the fishing hole. I just remember the dark still water under the huge elm tree in the bend of the creek and the small green frog that emerged on the opposite side. After a short appraisal of the strange silent forms across its home waters, it hopped a short ways up the mud-bank and sat resting. Granddad grinned and made a snide remark about foolish boys who carry slingshots. It was plain that he did not believe that a thirteen-year-old boy could send a small pebble across twenty feet of water to demolish a green frog the size of a fifty-cent piece.

I selected a smooth round pebble and loaded it into the leather pouch. With great care I aimed and let fly. The frog exploded under the impact. I shall never forget that moment. Nor can I ever forget the loud whoop from my grandfather. He shouted and rocked with his laughter. I had never seen him so animated and so lively. Nor did I ever again!

From that day on he seemed a little warmer and friendlier to me. But I doubt that I was ever an object of affection in his eyes. And yet, I cherish his memory and the memory of my grandmother that long ago summer when I was thirteen.



Farmers' Market, Weatherford, Oklahoma

by Joyce Stoffers

They usually leave before I even get up,
so I wander the parking lot
disappointed and alone,
studying the blacktop:
a dark collage
punctuated with tomatoes,
flattened and drying wrinkled
beside a pod or two of okra,
seeds strewn futilely.

If the wind is strong, and it usually is,
corn shucks and silk
escape the cartons
stacked to the side,
whirling,
until thrown against the chainlinks
they join plastic lids and straws,
beer cans and burger wraps.

But today I'd set the alarm
and walk as the sun rises,
backpack limp against my spine,
passing a man cradling butternut squash,
and knowing where he'd been,
I go there.

Surveying the pickups
mounded with melons,
striped and speckled with green,
I continue walking,
until tomatoes sprawling on card tables,
splitting at their stems and
barely able to contain their juice,
entice me.
I place two on a scale made for babies,
figuring they'll come in close to a pound,
but a tanned hand adds another,
and with a broad smile,
its owner watches the needle dip beyond the "one"
and asserts with a wink, "Now that's a *good* pound,"
leaning against the tailgate,
stuffing my dollar into his pocket.



"Nope. Don't wax my vegetables,"
the aproned woman proclaims louder than necessary
in response to my question,
then lowering her voice, she adds,
"not like them over there,"
nodding her head to the side and with squinting disapproval
at the Dodge Ram loaded with shiny cucumbers
I now eye suspiciously.
"I sell these by the piece, not the pound,
so take what you need, four for a dollar,
mix the cukes with the zucchini if you want,"
she suggests encouragingly,
and I do.

"How many do I need for a pie?"
a grandmotherly woman asks while fingering the peaches.
"Deep dish or regular?" the farmer replies,
but she's already loaded five pounds on the scale,
unable to resist, and explaining she might also make a cobbler.
I too fill up the scale,
thinking of mornings made more civil
by rosy slivers peeking through oatmeal,
and the promise of peaches with cream
at twilight.

Across the lot
three butternut squash sit in a dusty wagon.
"How much for one?" I ask the brushcut boy on a lawn chair.
"Just fifty cents," he answers with a scratch to his ear.
He sees me glance at the scale and adds,
"I'm not weighing them today. They're all about the same anyways."
I claim one and the boy remarks,
"Like squash, huh?"
"Especially with butter and nutmeg," I reply with enthusiasm
and as he smacks his lips and "mmms,"
we smile almost conspiratorially
as quarters and squash exchange hands.

I thought I'd escape without a cantaloupe
but the red-faced man in yardstick-patterned suspenders
looks up at me and declares,
"They're mighty sweet this year,"
so I pull out a dollar
and try to coax space
between cucumbers and squash.
The tomatoes and peaches
give no argument
as they're lifted to the top
for the bumpy ride home,
massaging my back
with their warmth.



Photograph by Joel Kendall



Traveler

by Robert Ferrier

I found her e-mail trapped and dying
in the spam filter of AOL.
The editor had sent word she'd lost
my poem in the cleanup after a flood.
Could I resend a copy today?
(Too late for this issue of course,
she'd use the poem in May.)

Later my wounded muse
worried about the traveler...

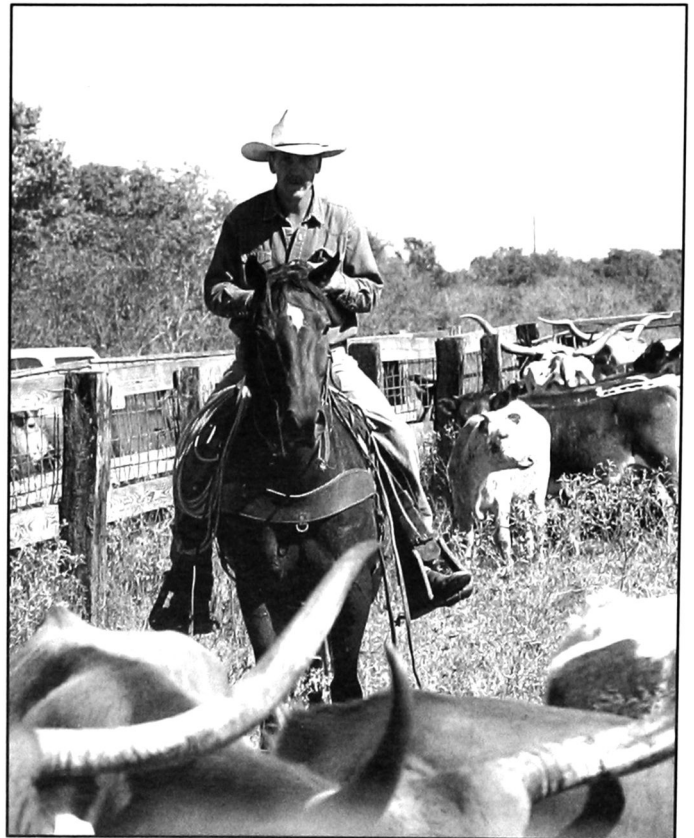
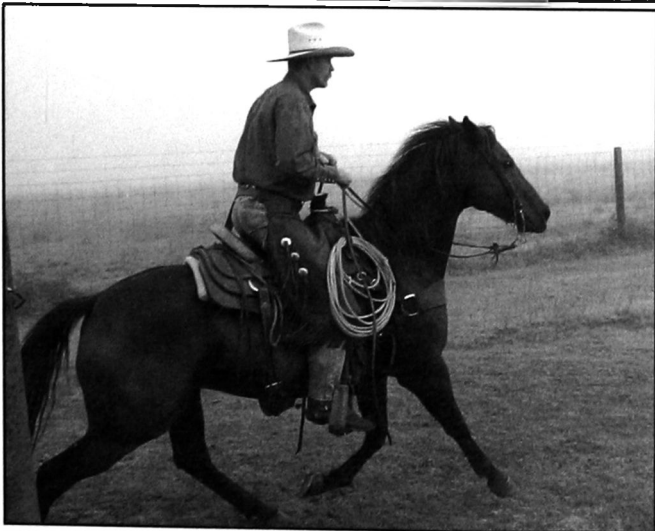
Where does a flooded poem live?
Reciting "A Prayer for Poetry Judges"
to an audience of veggie cheese wrappers
and low-carb heels
as the garbage guys
dumped it into the truck
along with our neighbor's
spent tuna tins,
creased toffee bar wrappers,
stained by bleeding ink
from Dagwood and diapers,
crosswords
from last week's daily rags,
iambes and dactyls falling
on silked ears,
verses and stanzas seasoned
by wet coffee grinds
revised by dull Mach III blades....

Then entombed in a layer of trash,
selling the epiphany
through phosphors and vapors,
a forever of 3 a.m.s
in blind spasm
of the time it was born.



Longhorn Drive

Photos by **Gerald Wheeler**



Line

by Nicole Zuckerman

A line
invisible
twisting through rooms,
around corners
between cobwebs, and cupboards

Yours

Mine

A line
thick and dark
winding around shadows
like an overgrown thicket
of barb wire roses

your words leave such dark shadows

I told you
“I could sail to China
in a tea cup”

“dishes are for washing” you said

“Wouldn’t it be beautiful
to drive across the skyline
some summer night?”

*“I don’t make plans
that far in advance”* you told me

You were the girl
that never learned to count
your chickens *before*
they hatched

they told you not to
and you have walked on
egg shells, ever since



Proverbs are for those
with clean hands
mine are stained fuchsia
caked in poetry
Have you never rolled
in the mire like
mud of life
simply because
you like the way it feels on your skin?

Some nights
I lay awake wondering
if you have ever wept,
after breaking a fast
or if you have ever known hunger at all

A line
A single solitary truth:

Facts are like
whalebone corsets
iron cage hoopskirts
top hats
falling in and out of fashion

they are the easy way out
the shortcut to the lion's den
what you recited as gospel
and plagiarize as your own free will

A line, invisible
that you touch
and wrench
and yank
but never
cross



Groan Apart

by Orlando Cartaya

Once upon a time there was a man who wanted to remove parts of his body and donate them to science but changed his mind after it was too late. All the papers were signed, and he was just drifting off from the effect of the anesthesia when it hit him like a ton of bricks. Just like that. Hey, this isn't what I want to do at all, thought the man. He was trying to call the whole thing off, but he couldn't get out the words. He heard a chair swivel, and now the anesthesiologist had his back to him and was saying something to the nurse, a slim brunette who seemed sensibly attractive except for a lazy right eye. The out-of-kilter eye made her look a little sketchy as she peered out from above her surgical mask. Then the doctor was saying something about his wife's car problems, and the man couldn't talk because of the gas he'd been sniffing. He was nearly asleep when the doctor turned back to him and told him to count backwards from a hundred and that he was doing fine. But the man wasn't fine because he had a really bad feeling about what was about to happen. And it occurred to him that it was just like the story about the paddle and creek, and he was really dying to blurt out a word or two so he could make his point, but he just fell asleep instead. He just floated away and was gone. It's just the way things happen sometimes.

After they were done cleaning up, the anesthesiologist turned to the lazy-eyed nurse and said that his wife was set on getting a new car but that he was not going to go for it. He was putting his fist down and that was just the way it was going to be. The nurse said that she thought the wife would

adjust to the idea of not having a new car, and that the wife was starting to sound like a spoiled so-and-so just like the doctor's last ex-wife did toward the end. Then the doctor decided to change the subject and asked the nurse if she wanted to go out for a drink. The nurse said no, because of the last time they went out for a drink and what happened after that, and the doctor said she was right to not want to go there. The nurse felt a little sad in her gut when she heard him agree that it wasn't a good idea to go out for a drink, even if his wife was turning into a spoiled so-and-so. They both drove away from the leftover man and his refrigerated donations.

A little after that the nurse passed out while she sat on her Naugahyde couch feeling crummy. The TV was playing a late night comedy show and some leftover sherbert was melting in a carton between the nurse's legs as she dozed. Meanwhile the doctor was home at his place drinking a glass of port and playing chess online. He told his wife she could get a new car after all, and the wife was celebrating by ordering a set of commemorative coins that were being advertised on TV. She didn't want the coins for herself, but planned to send them to her brother, the restaurant owner, who liked commemorative collectibles.

The brother was a nice man, although he never called his sister no matter how many presents she bought him. He'd had a lot of therapy, and one day after having a breakthrough during a primal-scream session, he just decided he wasn't ever going to call anybody he was directly related to. His sister called him and left a message a month



later to ask him why he didn't call her after getting the coins. She'd checked and knew he had signed his name to the delivery papers—and it was one more time he was being ungrateful and why wouldn't he call to see how she was for Christ's sake? The brother erased the message and poured himself a bowl of clam chowder he'd brought home from the restaurant. He didn't say anything to anyone about his sister's call, but he thought to himself that it was an "Oh well, that's the way it goes" kind of a night. And it was.

The donating man had been dead for three months now, but a few of the body parts were still getting around. Most of the donated organs had pretty boring stories after being given to science, except for the liver, and so we'll stick with him for now.

The liver got transplanted into a rock musician who had gotten his first break singing songs about America being fed up from being bullied around by renegade no-goodniks. He sang a ballad that told about how these countries were going to get what they had coming. His most famous song had a part about his mother knowing "right from right" and bringing him up to be a "son of a gun." The chorus was always a sing-along at arena shows. All the verses ended with words that rhymed with USA, such as "pay day," or "mamma say'd."

The rock star had a very large collection of hats, and always wore one particular fedora on stage. Once, before an encore, he changed hats and came out wearing a snakeskin beret. The fans were against it though, and he was booed off stage in protest. Since then, he stuck with his fedora, and it had all gone pretty smoothly.

The rock star was also fond of livers. He had been through three in the last few years as a matter of fact. He and his most recent liver didn't see

things eye to eye for very long. In fact the doctors had called it an early warning rejection. For this next liver, the rock star did some research and changed his diet. He hoped to have it go differently this time around, and he really tried to psyche himself up to try to make it work. He had some anger management counseling, and he even did some primal screaming work where he happened to have met the doctor's wife's brother one evening at alumni reunion night. One thing led to another, and the rock star got the very liver that was donated by the man we were speaking about at the beginning of this story.

The rock star was upbeat about having a good run with his new liver. "I've licked it," he thought. But then after a week, things started to not work out. The liver had a real problem with the rock star, and said "get me out of here or I'll kill us both." The transplant surgeon who had done the switcheroo with the man's donated liver said it was a pickle because the liver was beside itself, and so they poured a lot of chemicals into the rock star to try to simmer the liver down, but the liver wasn't about to back down because it was a "no means no" kind of situation, and so the rock star got sick and both he and the liver died.

The rock star's fans were sad, and the hats were auctioned off a few years later. The restaurant owner brother, who had met the rock star one screaming alumni night, bought one of the lesser hats for 300 dollars after getting outbid on two nicer ones, a beret and a baseball cap that was the very same baseball cap that the rock star wore as he was wheeled into the hospital for the last time. At first the brother felt that was settling for something he didn't really want so much, but by the next day, he'd gotten used to the idea.



Recent Observations — A Lecture

by Richard N. Bentley

It is better to be wrong
Than to be vague.
What counts is coherence

From Newton and Galileo,
Superstring theory proposes
A new answer.

What are the smallest
Indivisible constituents of matter?

I'm glad you asked. Why,
Electrons and quarks, of course,
Particles with no size or structure.

Particles which combine to produce
protons
neutrons
atoms
molecules
All we've ever encountered in time or space.

Superstring theory tells
A different story. Every particle
Contains a tiny filament of energy

Like a string. Just as a violin string
Can vibrate to produce sounds,
Our strings vibrate to produce
quarks, neutrinos, gravitons
and other particles.

Are you following me so far?
Good, this is fun.



String theory, then, explains
The beginnings of the universe.
Can it be tested as a theory of everything?

Only if we concede that
A unified theory
Need not have any physical meaning.

For the world of stars and planets
For the world of atoms and electrons
We might ask,

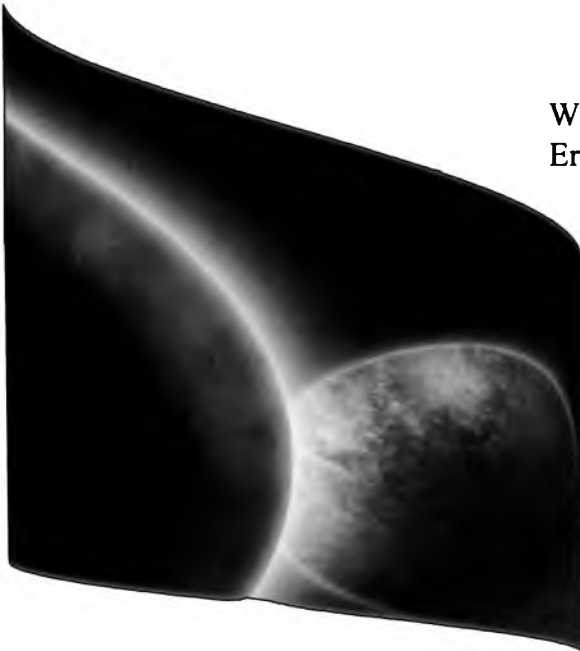
“If the results of the vibrating
Strings cannot be observed in any
Conceivable experiment

Do they have a physical reality?”
Might you call them nonexistent even?
Walk through a tunnel

Of time, and emerge in your own
Past, but you’ll have to walk
Longer than the age of the

Universe. Ah, I see you’re ready
To leave.
Good-bye.

What counts is coherence
Error is acceptable.



Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall



Democritus' Onion

by Billy Williams



The story goes that Democritus sliced
an onion and nailed his atoms to the great
chopping board of truth, proving with a geometry
of inside turned out that all's matter
and void. A simple culinary chore defined
the course of Western government and science.

The question, though, remains—why did Democritus
slice his onion in the first place?

Perhaps, some beauty
of Abdera twisted elder braids as her philosopher
stirred the slices golden in olive oil
and wore his linen chiton loose, belted with a buckle
of ram's horn.

Perhaps he softened her with strains
of his aulos, then revealed her Pythagorean beauty
as he drew a tetractys of the decad
across the soft arc of her dark belly.

“Your navel,”
he whispered, “is the lead goose of this little delta,
mirrors this other one with its firm
uncuttable perfection.”

But more likely, he ate the onion raw
alone with his equations for converging
lines along a simple planar surface,
then turned in early, dreaming of atoms,
the wrestling invisibilities of his body,
and the tiny, iron souls of magnets.



Another One

by Jonathan Wells

“There is only each one of us like a cave.” *F. Pessoa*

In each one of us there is another one
who cups a votive candle who praises the ocean
who lives inside her paintings who rests
who plots against the government who hums
the national anthem who fingers the trigger
who never laughed who laughs . . .
who retreats who joins in who separates himself
who hides who is released and hides again
who stands outside the window and watches
his family eat dinner who smokes a cigarette
who sits on the split rail fence in winter
who flees danger despite his strength who liberates
his love and subjugates his son who grieves for
all his mothers and shows no sign of it . . .
and there is another one who writes it down
who erases who buries the seed of all his feeling
and says it is not his who weeps who longs
who adds one plus one plus one
to make another one.



Simple Escape

by Rosalyn Orr

I wouldn't be surprised if you already know how my story ends. It was in all the papers, even on Fox News and CNN. First they showed my picture and asked for any information about my disappearance or whereabouts. When the whole story was revealed, news analysts said my quest for a simple life represented a popular trend carried to extremes, a naïve vision gone awry.

Once upon a time, I wished for a simple life. Is there such a thing? My life is complex; the world is a staggering complexity. Maybe I've done the best I could. I don't know. Now I'm here, where a measure of simplicity is imposed, but this isn't what I hoped for.

I was very good at living my old life. Cocktail parties were a breeze. I didn't always have something new to wear, but otherwise, I was flawless. Old men laughed at my jokes, gave me compliments. I delved into discussions and easily transitioned from group to group. Those who didn't know me had known my parents and sang their praises, some claiming responsibility for getting them together on their first blind date. In no time, I got high from the physical closeness of the attendees and from the gushing flattery I received and returned. Two glasses of red wine would last an hour and a half, at which point the crowd would thin, I'd hug the hostess good night, breathing in her perfume, feeling her powdery cheek brush against mine. Mark stood waiting. My arms would slide into the slick lining of the coat he held for me; it felt cold on my shoulders. Our dress shoes click-clacked as we walked arm in arm down the street toward our car, waving at the headlights of a departing Lexus.

Once, on the way home from such an event, Mark said, "Nancy, thank you for being such a good wife. I watched you tonight from across the room, saw you laugh and smile. Everyone loved you tonight. You make me proud."

I should have known what I was getting into from the beginning. When I was 24, seeing Mark but not yet engaged, I even had a vision of my future. I was driving down Glenwood Avenue one late afternoon, on my way home from the school where I taught. In the vision, black men dressed in white jumpsuits carried two golf bags apiece through the blue-green shadows of a late summer afternoon. They stopped, swung the bags from their shoulders, and placed them at the lip of a bunker. I heard the clink of metal as the clubs resettled in the bag, and I could smell fresh-cut grass. A golf cart whined, and the driver punched his foot on the brake and approached a caddy who held a club in his outstretched hand.

The vision seemed a preview of the inevitable, and it made me deeply sad. I didn't want the only people of color in my life to be working at the country club. Tears ran down my face as I tried to maneuver my Honda Civic into the right lane. The car behind me reemerged from a blind spot in my rearview mirror just as the driver laid on his horn. I jumped and swerved. At the next exit, I pulled in the parking lot of a strip mall, wiped tears from my face and glasses, and waited to regain my composure.

I loved feeling connected to Mark. I knew we'd marry, and I could stop staying home alone or going out to crowded, smoky bars where people ordered Sex on the Beach or Long Island Iced Tea. We'd have children, and he'd take good care of me. But I hated feeling connected to Mark. I would enter marriage as I'd entered school, social clubs, relationships. I appeared to embrace my position, but a silent part of me held back. I would accept all that came with my marriage: parties, gifts of cachepots and crystal, the new neighbors, the country club. I'd accept it with charm and grace. But all the while, one arm would flail blindly about on the outside, looking for something to cling to.

Once when Mark came to visit me in Raleigh,





Photograph by Erin Nagel

he picked me up at my apartment, and we drove across town to see one of my students play soccer. My knobby knees sticking out of shorts looked out of place against the black leather of his car's interior. The car still had the new smell. We sat in the grass next to the field. We'd just had our first few warm days, and already the grass was getting thicker and greener. It tickled my legs. I looked up at Mark. His dark hair shone in relief against the clear sky, and his blue eyes were so big. I thought I'd never seen anything so perfect. I wanted to hold his face in my hands.

Mark said things to me I couldn't believe. I thought he could see the small tomboy with thick glasses sitting askew on her face, wearing her brother's hand-me-down jeans. But I wasn't that person anymore, or at least to him I didn't appear

to be. When we were driving around town on a Sunday, looking for a good place to get a turkey sandwich, he steered with one hand and folded the long fingers of the other hand around mine. His hand was strong, soft, and warm. If he needed to, he could even steer with his knee so he wouldn't have to let go of me. He kept holding my hand as we ate our sandwiches at a picnic table outside the crowded restaurant full of college kids. His was turkey on white toast with brown mustard. "Nancy, you are beautiful," he said.

Funniest of all, Mark seemed attracted by the very things that I feared would turn him away. He liked to point out the things that made me different from other girls he knew. "You don't talk about the things girls talk about," he'd say. "You don't wear any makeup! Your ears aren't pierced. You



don't care how you look!" He smiled as he noted these things and shook his head incredulously.

Of course, Mark and I did marry. I saw the cad-dies from my vision when I looked out of the kitchen window of our new home onto the Donald Ross-designed golf course.

We had three children right away—bam, bam, bam. Markie, Tommy, and Robert. There were some lovely simple things about newborns. I could contentedly do nothing all day but hold my baby. At night, I slept with each new child and scooped him up the moment he cried. If the baby didn't go right back to sleep after nursing, we wandered through the dark, shadowy house. I sang to the babies the same songs my mother used to sing to me.

Robert was born in the winter of record-setting snow and ice storms. While the rest of the house slept, we stood at the window and watched the snow accumulate and grow into a tall cylinder on a patio table. We watched snow thicken on the cedar tree, bending its branches into a mournful shape, until it fell in clumps, leaving holes that looked like the footprints of a mysterious creature.

My family and acquaintances will tell you my trouble began in the summer of 2004. That was the first time there were any outward indications of the plan in my mind. The plan to return to simplicity. Truly, the problem started in the beginning, when I came to be in my mother's womb, when my heart and soul and disposition were in their primordial state. It started when my brain was wired to think too much and notice the wrong details and send disturbing images straight to my heart—it started then and carried forward until I finally acted with purpose, instead of letting my life go as others thought it should. Instead of allowing things to happen to me, I made something happen.

When I stopped nursing the boys, and they all went off to school every day, I began to look around. How did this stuff accumulate so quickly,

I wondered: a house with four bedrooms, four baths, six sofas, two TVs, needlepoint rugs, secretaries, sideboards, and sconces? Cars, big expensive gas-guzzlers. I didn't want the stuff. I didn't want to be with someone who did. When I realized that my boys had come to believe that this was the only way to live, I felt heavy, stuck, paralyzed. All I did each day for weeks was sit in one spot from the time Mark and the boys left until the first returned. Sometimes I sat on the uneven brick steps leading from the patio to the yard. The print of the brickwork stayed smashed into the backs of my thighs for hours. Most often I was on my bed. I started upright, propped on pillows, until I eventually slid down and curled into a sleeping position. Before I slept, I studied the muted light seeping through the closed blinds.

The days passed with remarkable speed as I thought about my possessions. I tried to imagine a change, envisioning the days of living alone in a two-room basement apartment when I was just out of college. I spent my days teaching severely disabled children and returned home exhausted but happy. My few pieces of furniture came from yard sales. If it couldn't fit in the hatchback of my Honda, it didn't come home. I spent my free time reading and walking. I trekked across miles and miles of shady, hilly neighborhood streets. It was enough for me.

I tried to explain to Mark my need to think about the less fortunate, my desire to simplify our lifestyle. But Mark worked so hard and needed tangible measures of his success. On an April Friday night, we sat on the terrace at the Club watching the sun set over the golf course. It was more than pleasant: the air was warm and soft, not stifling; the scotch tasted just right. It was just the kind of moment that tugged at me, pressing all the melancholy of the world into me. I had Mark's undivided attention. I didn't say, "It's beautiful. I love you. Thank you for being with me tonight."

Instead I said, "Remember the woman who slept on the street outside our hotel the last time we were in New York?" It was a six-month-old



memory. "I'm worried about her now."

We had nearly tripped over her as she curled her thin body over the subway vent where she had settled for the night.

Mark placed his drink down on the wrought-iron table. He said, "Please don't, Nancy. You're a good person. You deserve to be happy."

Eventually, the terrace filled up with acquaintances who would laugh and not worry about fixing the world. So Mark joined in the merriment, but he saw the sorrow on my face when he dared to check on me, and he worried even if he didn't understand.

Now, again, I sit still for most of the day. Even though I sleep more, 12 hours a day at least, the time awake seems longer than it did when I was making my plans. I have my books again. In fact, the library here, a one-room affair, is named for its benefactor, Ginger Godfrey, whom I once knew well. We were in bridge club together when I still excelled at acting out my part in the country club life. She was sharp, a good player, and I always hoped to be her partner when we met in the Club parlor. I was amazed at her ability to relate detailed stories about neighbors spouse-swapping or multi-couple hot tub escapades, sucking us right into her drama while she deftly won the bidding. Godfrey Library has some good titles. The problem is, I can rarely stay awake when I start reading. I've tried skipping a dose of my meds to help me get through a book, but if the story contains a hint of melancholy, I begin to cry. Just a few tears at first, but it grows to uncontrollable wails. I can never manage to stop before Joyce, the regular day nurse, comes in to check on me.

"Nancy, have you been reading those upsetting novels again?" she'll say. "You know it's not good for you."

On one spring morning, when the boys were at school and the house was quiet, I sat outside on the brick steps, elbows on bent knees and my chin resting in the palms of my hands. From that spot, I

saw ivy curl and twist its greedy tendrils around the branches of the blooming azaleas—evidence of my negligence, of the deterioration my sitting around had caused. I stood and made one lap around the yard, feeling the sun on my back. The air was fresh and clear; I felt it pushing me along and whispering to me, "Do it. Do it." Was it the spring air getting into my lungs and then my blood? Or had the thoughts just had time to germinate while I silently waited for weeks?

Minutes later, in the kitchen, I phoned the church to arrange a pickup for the following day of all our sofas, some chairs, and tables. The next call: the Salvation Army to schedule a clothes pickup. When I was on hold for customer service with the cable company—I had planned to cancel service—I heard the squeak of the back screen door. I hung up. The clock on the microwave showed nearly noon. No one was expected. Mark entered. He had a meeting downtown and had just enough time to make a sandwich. The excitement of the calls had left me flushed.

"Everything okay?" Mark asked as he leaned in for a kiss. His silky tie brushed against my arm.

In ten minutes, he was on his way back out. "Remember, I have dinner out tonight. Golf is at nine on Saturday."

"Tommy has soccer tryouts this afternoon. If you think about it, call and tell him good luck," I said.

When Mark returned from work the following evening and saw the newly empty sunroom, I told him I'd sent the furniture out to be recovered. I'd even gone to a design shop and brought home a swatch of busy chintz to show him. "I like it," he said. "Have you thought about having curtains made, too?"

The next day, some rugs were gone as well, "to be cleaned," I lied.

I woke each day that spring with incredible vigor, fresh from dreams that made vivid the next steps of the plan. I no longer wanted to sit; I wanted to act, and it was as though an instruction manual



materialized, telling me what to do. On weekday mornings, I urged the boys to eat more breakfast and checked their bags for homework folders. They were noisy on their way out, Markie teasing Tommy because his hair stuck up, Robert complaining that he didn't need a sweatshirt. I could barely wait for them to clear out before I started work on my own backpack. I started in on peanut butter sandwiches, making ten and wrapping each individually in Saran Wrap. I laid out other things: apples, bananas, single servings of applesauce. Then I arranged the food in a small day pack that I had for occasional mountain hikes.

South Oak, one street away from the house, led downtown. It was a 40-minute walk that took me first by grand historic houses, past the funeral home, by Phil's Diner, where someone was usually taking coffee at the sidewalk table, past parking decks, then through the corridor of tall buildings in the gleaming business district. They created welcome shade as the days grew warmer. Then the shadows grew short as the buildings became squat and sparse and tumbledown at the very edge of town. I learned which street corners, side streets, and alleys were frequented by the homeless. On the first outing, three men accepted sandwiches. Then I walked home, sat on the front stoop, and waited for the boys' bus.

On subsequent trips, the needy people who showed up in larger numbers began to call me by name. Most of them gave me skeptical sideways glances and spoke little. One man, Reggie, was eager to talk. He was about 55 with a scruffy gray beard and big, round, watery eyes and thick eyelashes that were moistly clumped together. He wore many layers of grimy clothes. His faded navy work pants didn't reach the top of his boots. The boots had no laces so they slid on and off of Reggie's ankles as he walked. He told me about construction jobs he'd had in that very part of town, how sad it was for him to watch it crumble. In his shirt pocket, he carried a worn deck of cards. We started playing gin rummy most of the times I saw him. I didn't dare complain to Reggie. I told him only

good things: how well Robert reads, how Markie looks just like his father, some of the lessons I learned from my mother before she died. Wasn't it all true, the good things I described? I didn't tell him how I wanted my life to change. Often he told me about his grown son, who had a beautiful family of his own and who would eventually come for him when he had established himself.

In the meantime, he said, "Nancy, you are a blessing from the Almighty Lord. On Judgment Day, he will remember how you fed Reggie and kept Reggie company."

When Mark got the call from his friend saying I'd been spotted "with the crack addicts on the Southside," he left a meeting, claiming an emergency, drove the 20 miles from his office to town, and cruised the streets until he found me and picked me up. The deteriorated part of town I frequented had become a hot spot for investors who grabbed up cheap property to refurbish as upscale, trendy boutiques, restaurants, and town homes. A few brightly-colored, gaudy awnings of the newest establishments stood out amid the bleakness. The call was from a friend of Mark, interested in buying some real estate, who had spotted me. I'm sure Mark's first concern was for my physical safety. Even when we were just dating, Mark called me at night to make sure I'd locked my apartment. Often, I felt like an overprotected child. At times, it was wonderfully reassuring to know that he would take care of me, that he cared so much for my well-being, but it also caused me to lie about my actions to keep him from interfering.

We were on the corner of Oakview and Pine when I climbed into his cool, cavernous sedan. Mark immediately pushed the automatic lock button. He didn't get angry. His eyes glistened with a hint of tears, something I'd only seen twice before, when his father died and when Little Mark was born.

"Nancy, you don't know what these people could do to you. You could be hurt or killed. Then what would I do? What would the boys do? I know



there are better ways for you to help.”

Mark had seen me desperately upset before. He didn't understand why I cried, why I felt so helpless. He blamed my behavior on depression and tried to get me help. I had seen a doctor and taken anti-depressants for a time. But I never stopped believing that being upset over real problems was not mental illness.

After my trips downtown abruptly ended, I stayed home for a while. Mark took some days off work, surely to keep an eye on me. Again, I looked around at the house, the cars, the surrounding houses. It made me physically ill to consider the money circulating around amongst the people, myself included. I stopped answering the phone or returning phone calls. I spent some days curled in a ball on the bathroom floor, grasping at my tangled intestines, unable to ease the pain. I could smell Pine-Sol. The bath mat left tiny craters imprinted across my forehead, making it look like the surface of a child's playground ball. A few blocks away and all around the world were huge, aching craters of human misery and need. We floated about mindlessly, sated. How could it be justified?

There were brief pockets of time when I forgot how much we'd paid for the house or how many people could be housed sufficiently for the same amount. Or at least I was able to push those thoughts back and let them become slightly hazy. Then I played with the boys for hours in the backyard on those spring and summer evenings. Football, baseball, ghost-in-the-graveyard, anything they wanted. The play always came to a climax as the sun sank behind the horizon, the grass began to feel slightly cool under bare feet, and the first lightning bugs appeared at the darkest edge of the yard, hovering low, near the hedge. We'd abandon the game and catch the glowing bugs. Robert was amazed he could do it. If Tommy exaggerated about how many he caught, Markie was generous and let him get away with it.

Then we would lie back in the grass and watch the first stars appear. After I finally got the boys to

bed, while Mark stepped into their rooms to say good night, I would go back out to check the stars, hoping to find the same reassurance I remember my mother claiming that the predictable constellations gave her.

The sofas didn't return. More furniture disappeared. My stories about cleaning and redecorating would soon become transparent, I feared. I assured Mark that during our vacation to the beach, new, improved furniture would be installed, and the house would be returned to order.

The first week of August was traditionally our beach week. We'd been going to Pawley's Island since Little Mark was a baby. This year, the trip presented an opportunity for me. The new furniture would be arriving on the morning of our departure, I told Mark. He and the boys should start on without me. I'd supervise the decorators.

The week before we were to leave, I went to the Southside, desperately wanting to locate Reggie. I went to the usual spots downtown, where I was told he'd moved on; I might find him under the bridge at Westover and Meadowbrook, a completely different part of town. I took the car. Westover Avenue was my least favorite place to go. It was lined with car dealerships, strip malls, and giant discount stores. The bits of property that weren't developed had been bulldozed to fields of red clay that eventually would be covered with asphalt.

Even in my often-drugged state, I doubt the image of Reggie's home under the bridge will fade in my mind. I took the Meadowbrook exit, parked at a gas station, and shuffled down part of the steep embankment. Traffic was whizzing by 12 feet below. I got onto all fours to steady myself and peered under the bridge. I climbed toward what appeared to be a pile of wooden planks and called for Reggie. The earth was noticeably cooler under the bridge.

“Who's there?”

“It's me. Nancy.”

“Well, the Lord does work in mysterious ways. I didn't think I'd see you again. Come right in.”



Plywood had been fitted together to form three walls that reached to the bottom of the bridge, which worked as the ceiling of the shelter. The walls were built step-wise, forming triangles that fit snugly into the slope of the embankment. A roughly rectangular hole was left for a crawl-through door. A dirty, ragged yellow blanket hung over the opening. The final wall was a rusted steel beam, a support for the bridge that reached almost to the ground. Large pieces of cardboard of varying sizes covered the dirt floor. The cardboard slid under me as I crawled.

"The floor still needs some work," Reggie acknowledged. "You're gonna get pretty muddy." He spoke over the constant roar of traffic.

Several crumpled blankets were strewn across the tiny living space, as were Styrofoam cups, fast-food wrappers, bottles, shopping bags, clothes, and a small radio. The combination of damp earth and dirty clothes made the place smell of wet dog, like the collie mix I had smelled as a child after he'd been rolling in the mud puddles on a summer day, then lazed in the sun while the dirty clumps of fur dried.

Reggie gave me a searching look. I told him I hadn't brought anything, but I had what I hoped he would think was good news. I told of the beach vacation, that I planned to leave the back door of the house unlocked, that I hoped he'd stay there while we were away, to come and go at night so as not to alarm the neighbors.

"There are six people staying in this hut. They'd appreciate the extra space."

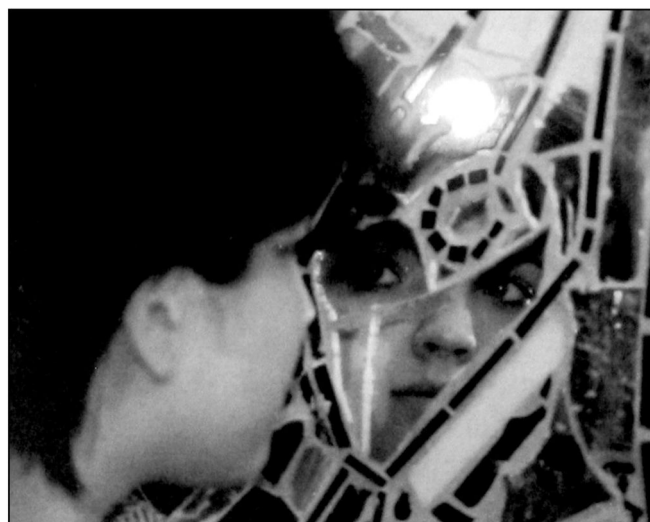
It didn't look to me like six people could fit at one time.

From my pocket, I pulled a small, creased piece of paper on which I'd drawn a map to my house for Reggie.

"Reggie!" A shrill cry came from outside the enclosure. "Who's in there? Who you talking to?" There was cold, clear anger in the woman's voice.

"It's a friend, Clarice," Reggie answered.

Clarice was a young dark-skinned woman with a tightly drawn face and uneven eyes. Even though



Photograph by Erin Nagel

she'd clearly been living on the streets, her complexion was remarkably smooth. Over the richly colored skin of one cheekbone, a raised, black shiny scar crossed and stretched toward her lips. She pulled back the fabric door and spoke to Reggie as she looked at me.

"We don't have any friends who don't live on the street. Don't you know that by now, Reggie? She better get her ass out."

I looked to Reggie once, then scrambled out as Clarice moved to give me space. My face was burning. I looked down. Clarice coughed hard, deep in her chest, and spit a big greenish wad of phlegm at my feet.

"Bitch," she hissed to my back.

My remaining chore was to go to the bank. After requesting to see my balance, I withdrew 5,000 dollars for myself. Then I wrote a check to the city's biggest homeless shelter for an amount large enough to deplete my account and mailed it off.

Again I readied my small pack, this time putting in toiletries and a change of clothes: long khaki pants, white T-shirt, sandals, one sweater, underclothes, and socks. I wore shorts and running shoes. There was nothing left to do but get started. Certainly, part of me thought the journey ahead was impossible. Even if I departed the town and the



state anonymously, which was my intention, I could not envision where and how I would end up: in a house, a tent, alone, with new friends? Would I survive at all? I only knew I was doing no good at home. I was able to do no good for the people around me. If I stayed, I would only dwell on my unworthiness. If I had been a gutsier person, maybe I would have ended it completely that day.

Passing through the neighborhood on the walk out to the highway, I greeted acquaintances. Peggy Brooks was out strolling her new baby. Alice Mitchell pulled her Suburban over to ask which of the second-grade teachers I would recommend. I answered as my heart pounded, then my feet carried me on somehow, as if by a shaky but determined will of their own.

On the highway, I tried to stay as far from the traffic as possible by walking in the stiff, stubbly grass of the shoulder. Even so, each passing truck blew a hot, dusty gust in my face. Diesel fumes poisoned the air. After an hour hitchhiking, I was picked up by a trucker headed south. The driver introduced himself as Glenn. He looked too skinny and frail to handle an 18-wheeler. This was my first test. If Glenn could accept me as a genuine hitchhiker without too many questions, I'd be off to a good start at bluffing my way through the rest of the trip. He'd take me as far as Atlanta, which seemed fine. I just wanted a city with an airport.

It was while I was bumping along with Glenn, chewing the sunflower seeds he offered, that I realized my first mistake. I couldn't get on an airplane. I'd have to show ID; then my trail could be traced. I considered telling Glenn I was a runaway and asking him where he could take me to disappear. Maybe he knew of a tiny settlement that he passed through on his trips; maybe he even lived in some deserted area where I could hide. But I didn't say anything. We were mostly quiet as I watched the roadside landscape slip past the high window of the cab. Occasionally, during the five-hour drive, Glenn pulled out and offered another snack.

When we reached the outskirts of Atlanta, the

sky was showing the first peachy colors of twilight. Glenn took the exit nearest the center of town. From there, I got directions to the bus station, where I pored over a map of all routes from Atlanta and possible connections. The eventual route took me 100 miles over 12 hours. North from Atlanta to Gainesville, Cleveland, Blairsville, back across the state line to Murphy, Andrews, and finally Tipton. I chose Tipton because it was on the Nantahala River and adjacent to the Appalachian Trail; that seemed appealing. Despite rafting the Nantahala several times, I'd never heard of Tipton, so I knew it had to be small.

The bus left the Atlanta station at 10:00 p.m. That was the only true station I saw. In other towns, the bus stopped at seemingly random convenience stores. I arrived in Tipton at 10:15 in the morning.

The town proper was aligned on one street that curved along the edge of the river. It looked like a tourist town minus the tourists. One and a half blocks had storefronts side by side, most with benches or rockers out front, most with bold signs: BBQ Here, Hot Dogs Cold Beer, River Rides, Visit Whistling Falls, Street Dance Sat Nite. There was one inn, perched above the shops on the hillside, and one motel. I went straight for Stone's Motel, which sat on the river side of the street. The door was open, and a counter looked to serve as a reception desk, but it was dark and quiet except for the blue glow of a muted TV mounted on the wall behind the counter. I rang a bell and waited. A wide, strong woman with straight black hair flowing well past her shoulders came out holding a steaming mug.

"Help ya?" Her voice was deep and gravelly. She didn't smile. Her complexion was olive. It was weathered and dark. A photograph on the counter showed her standing on rocks wearing rubber boots and displaying five trout on a line.

"I'm hoping for a room," I said.

"Well, then. I'm Stella Stone. Welcome to Stone's. Got no TV and no AC in the rooms, but the view makes up for it. If you need to catch up with your shows, you can watch them in here."



A special single had a mini-refrigerator and a hot plate for \$39.50 per night or \$240 for a week. After she showed me the room, I said I'd keep it for the week. The room was actually part of a log cabin that sat 20 feet from the river. A cluster of small buildings made up the rest of the motel. In the room were two single beds, a nightstand with the hot plate in the spot where a lamp might go, and a narrow dresser. One window with nearly transparent white curtains was beside the door. The light in the bathroom was a single bulb with a pull-string. An old tub stood on claw feet and was the first thing I used. There was plenty of hot water. I made it so hot I had to ease myself in, and my skin immediately turned pink. Resting my head on the cool porcelain, I stayed still and concentrated on the steam rising and the feel of my body being buoyed up.

After I put on my clean set of clothes, I washed the other set in the sink and added them to what appeared to be a communal clothesline. I ordered pizza and milk from the restaurant next door and sat by the river on a broad rock bathed in afternoon sun to eat. The water was loud as it splashed and rushed over and around rocks. I watched dead leaves gently float over unbroken water, then get caught in the churning shoots between rocks where they were sucked under and dispelled at the bottom of miniature falls. At the coast, the roar of the water was louder. The same afternoon sun shone there at a slightly lower angle. I imagined my family there at the beach, but of course they had already left to go in search of me.

Before I went back to my room, I bought some food at a small grocery on the main drag less than a block away. Then I settled in for the afternoon and night. I was completely taken with my half of the cabin and loved the fact that it was mine for a week. With the door and window open, I could hear the calls of children and fishermen as they tried to be heard above the noise of the current. The place would have been my type of paradise if I could have stopped thinking.

Next morning, I was up early and walked along

the shoulder of the narrow road winding in and out of Topton in search of a trailhead. After a mile on the road, I found a trail and was immediately enclosed in a thicket of cool rhododendron, its deep red, gnarled branches twisting around me. The trail was peaty, and thick carpets of moss grew along the edge. Switchbacks cut across the steeply rising hill. Where the rhododendron ended, a stand of hemlock began, and then the trail became temporarily unmarked as it crossed a large outcropping of rock. Then into a hardwood forest, the grade became more gradual, with slight rises and falls in the overall ascent. At the summit, a posted wooden sign identified the spot as Loblolly Lookout. Arrowed signs underneath named each direction of the now dividing trail: Mooney Gap Trail and Muskrat Creek Trail. I chose Muskrat Creek and hiked further in for another hour. Had I brought food, I would have gone further, but the hiking made me hungry, and I turned around.

I had no trouble retracing my route. I returned to the cabin and ate two tuna sandwiches. For awhile, I rested inside, then went to the office to see if Stella had any trail maps. When I approached the office, only the screen door was closed, so I could hear excited talking coming from inside. I stepped in to find a small group gathered: Stella, the waitress from the pizza place, and some others whom I didn't recognize. When they saw me enter, they immediately fell silent and looked down or away from me and dispersed.

"What can I do for ya?" Stella asked.

"I'm hoping you have some trail maps."

"I'm glad you stopped in. I want to talk with you. Let's sit."

She motioned for me to come around the counter and turned two chairs so they were facing. She glanced around the room, then we sat.

"I had the TV on this afternoon. You were on the news. I saw your picture plain as day. A lot of people are looking for you. They think you've been kidnapped or worse. Now," she sighed heavily, "I'm not going to mention your being here if I'm not asked, but most everyone will recognize you



soon, so I'd advise you to move on if you want to stay hidden."

I hadn't spoken. My eyes filled with tears from her sternness and the shame of being found out. I didn't make any noise, but the tears seeped out and kept flowing, gathering in the nape of my neck. I wasn't trying to make her feel sorry for me, but I guess I did.

Stella's tone became authoritative. "Go to your room. I'll gather some provisions for you."

I sat at the end of my bed, not able to envision what would come next, and waited for Stella. An hour later, she brought a tent, a large pack, food, and a water bottle. In the pack, I also found a pocketknife, a parka, matches, a road map, and a trail map. She accepted 100 dollars for the supplies.

I decided to go to a place that was already a little familiar: back along the same trail I'd hiked that morning. Just before complete dark, I set up my tent in a level wooded area next to Muskrat Creek, which I saw from my map was a tributary of the Nantahala.

I stayed four days at my outpost by the creek. Mostly, I stayed near the tent. I took short walks right by the creek's edge or sat by the water tossing rocks. Sometimes I made myself count each rock as I threw it in to keep my thoughts on something simple and monotonous. One morning, I sat crouched in a sandy, pebbly spot, not moving even after my back and knees ached. I held onto a large root growing out of the side of the creek bed for balance and counted 600 stones as I threw them in.

Stella had given me plenty of food: oranges, bananas, dried fruit, and nuts. I snacked throughout the days and nights.

By pushing the thick layer of leaves on the forest floor away from the edges of my tent, I made a small clearing. Gradually, over the days, I made a boundary of sorts with fallen branches and rocks in a rough circle enclosing the tent. There was no reason for this barrier except that it gave me a constructive task and imposed a little order on my site.

Some individuals and groups passed by on the

trail, which was 40 feet from the tent. If they saw me, I acknowledged them with a wave, but I tried to get in the tent and remain still until their voices faded. One hiker was accompanied by a yellow lab that came right over and sniffed me out and tried to enter the tent. He was whining and pawing at the zippered entrance when the owner summoned him back. For several days, I encountered little wildlife, mostly ants and mosquitoes, salamanders, and tiny darting fish. Rain came once, a gentle summer shower that lasted most of a day.

On the third day, I was lifting the end of a broad oak branch to pull to my makeshift wall, when I was startled by a small, coiled snake raising its head. It was harmless, but the curling shape and slithering tongue signaled danger nonetheless. I reminded myself that it was a tiny creature, not to fear, when I heard the unmistakable rattle. A bigger snake, the mother I assumed, appeared from under the log I still held, taking a serpentine path past the baby and toward me. Thin strips of skin were bare above my socks, exposed at the perfect height for deadly, striking fangs. The snake stopped moving forward but lifted its head and kept the rattle shaking. We both stared and didn't move, my muscles now coiled as tightly as the snake's. I imagined being bitten, tying a tourniquet around my leg, and crawling out of the wilderness.

"I'm not going to hurt you, snake, or your baby." My voice sounded strange here among the quiet trees. "I'll move right out of your way." Is a snake like a dog, I wondered; can it sense my terror?

I lowered the wood, noticing the vulnerable soft flesh on the inside of my arms, then backed up slowly. The snake didn't follow me.

Water was the first provision to be used up. Using my road map, I saw that there was another small settlement about six or eight miles northwest of Topton. I left everything but my day pack, went back to the road, and turned away from Topton, thinking I'd find someplace for water between the towns or walk to the next town at worst. Two miles



up, I found a small grocery that also appeared to be a tourist stop, as roadside tables held Indian headgear, T-shirts, caps, and the like.

The middle-aged man behind the register said, "Sure, hon. Fill up your bottles in the ladies' room."

I wondered what picture of me had been used on TV and how closely it resembled my current appearance.

In the bathroom, I washed my hands and arms with hot, soapy water and splashed water on my face, then filled my bottles. I bought some more food, including a Hershey's bar, which I stopped to open just outside the slamming screen door. A green minivan had pulled into the small gravel lot. A girl and a boy poured out of the vehicle and ran toward me as I stood at the entrance.

A woman rolled down the passenger-side window and called to them, "Just one thing!" They paused and looked back. Their eyes were bright with attention. "And go fast. We have ten minutes until baseball practice."

The boy, about nine, wore cleats, baseball pants, and an orange T-shirt with "Howie's Tigers" printed in black. The girl was younger, maybe seven, and wore cutoff jeans and sneakers with tube socks pulled high. When they re-emerged with soft drinks, the man from inside followed them out.

"Hey Carol, hey Scott," he called to the car. The children climbed back in. He leaned toward the window. "Now, you practice hard. I'll be coming out to see you on Saturday."

"Bye, Howie!" The van pulled out.

I didn't realize I was staring until the man turned back to his store. I turned my gaze down. He strolled back and told me to come again.

I stumbled back a few steps. I put my things down and eased myself to the ground because, suddenly, I was woozy. There was scraggly grass growing up to the edge of the store, with bits of glistening broken glass sprinkled through it. Pieces of glass stuck to the palms of my hands. The sun had just broken through the haze, and

light struck me in the face. I brushed glass from my hands and shaded my eyes.

I had one thought. The weight of it filled me. I felt it in my knees, which I couldn't bend. I felt it in my hipbones. The weight of my shoulders pulled me forward and down. The thought was even in my mouth, and I wanted to spit it out. My heavy shoulders began to heave and shudder. My body worked on its own, without my consent, as it shook and poured out tears and mucus. I heard myself making strange noises.

I observed my body's behavior, wondering what it would do next. I wanted to grab on to the thought. It was so clear, it must be tangible and solid.

Mark was right. Truly, I had a major mental problem. How else to explain? What I wanted and needed had just walked past me and then driven off in a green van. Who was that person who wanted to escape? I could barely recognize her in myself.

The image of the coiled snake came to mind. What if it had bitten me and I'd never seen my family again, if I had died without holding the boys again or seeing all their permanent teeth come in or singing more songs to them? What if I had never been able to tell Mark I love him again?

As quickly as my body had beaten itself down, it began to build up. My fingers were icy cold, but I felt something akin to warmth in my stomach. Little Mark's last baseball game of the season would be this weekend. Even if we'd been at the beach, we would have come home in time. If I left now, surely I could be home in time. Yes, I would be there. I'd stand with Mark right by the left field fence. Markie would be at short-stop. His white pants would be red from sliding into second or home. He'd pull his cap low, and curls of brown hair would fringe the edge. "Be ready, Markie!" Mark would call. Robert would sit on Mark's shoulders. Tommy would wander around, searching for good rocks for his collec-



tion. Mark would rub the back of my neck and smile at me.

I stood, ran in the store, and asked, "Howie, where can I catch a bus?"

"Top of the hill. By the post office."

Two hours later, I was heading northeast, toward home. I didn't go back for anything left at the campsite. I stared out the window with my nose touching the glass, but I don't remember seeing a thing. I was elated that my heart could feel this way after all.

At the first stop, I called home. No answer. Then Mark's cell phone, on which I left a message. "Mark. I'm coming home. I'll be at the bus station in five hours. I'm sorry." My body deflated as I said those words. "Oh, Mark, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. So sorry. I'm sorry, Mark."

Regret and fear consumed me. He couldn't forgive me. He couldn't understand. How could anyone understand my absurd actions?

The trip was long. I shifted about furiously in my seat, unable to contain my agitation. At each stop, I tried to call but only got recordings.

When the bus came to a stop in Salisbury, the engine idling loudly, the driver announced we would depart in ten minutes, next stop Greensboro—home. Enclosed in my sweaty fist was a stack of quarters for the phone. I only made it a few steps before I inadvertently glimpsed the day's edition of the newspaper displayed in a coin-operated machine. Something familiar. I looked again, closer. Reggie was pictured, looking tired and frightened in a mug shot. Already backing away, I read the headline: "Homeless Man Held for Questioning." I tried to steady myself enough to deposit the coins. I thought of Clarice, Reggie's roommate under the bridge, and how I had proved her right. I was no friend. All I had done was make him appear guilty of a heinous crime. When I was connected to the Greensboro police station, my voice sounded strange, croaky, and it hurt my throat to speak.

"You are holding an innocent man in the

Nancy Lawrence case."

"Who's speaking?" a woman responded.

Silence.

"Ma'am, please identify yourself. Who is calling?"

She probably heard my raspy breathing as I gulped air and panicked.

"This is Nancy Lawrence." I hung up the phone.

That call tipped the police and the media to join Mark at the station for my arrival. To tell the truth, I don't remember much about the moments after I disembarked from the bus in Greensboro. I just remember I was barely able to walk, for fear was affecting me so, and the light in the station seemed blinding. I didn't know what I was stepping out into. The depot was crowded. People seemed to be pulsing toward the bus. I searched the sea of faces for Mark. I lost feeling in my fingers. Black spots appeared and expanded until they all ran together, blocking out images of men in uniform, flashing cameras, and finally, just before complete unconsciousness, Mark's anxious face. Some part of the formidable group gathered for my homecoming scooped me up and whisked me off to this hospital, where a room was being prepared for me.

The jury is still out on whether or not the treatment is working. Doctors say I'm severely depressed, to the point of psychosis. Of course I am. Now that I know where I need to be, I can't be with my family. I've been here for four months. We've had our first snow. Christmas is coming. Today, for the first time since the bus ride, I remembered, for a moment only, a bit of the light happiness and excitement I felt so strongly then, just at the beginning of the trip home, when all things still seemed possible. Mark, Markie, Tommy, and Robert are coming to visit today.



Searching for a New Word

by Bobbi Lurie

Dear ones, how ominous it is to be sitting here with you
on this imploded Thursday, our destiny bent to the new conditions,
our destiny folded into fourths, stored in the pocket of the man,
his breath hot upon our necks.

The program has gone awry, we can't savor our selections any longer,
the slaves are getting restless,
there are citizens on the hill
who have traveled all night to escape the tyranny.

There are strangers on the grass with their jackets torn
who notice the grass is fake, man-made, created by the worried of suburbia
whose ideas of beauty vanished
in one of the last past wars.

Isn't it strange that my arms are a pale shade of "flesh,"
that once-Crayola color.
Isn't it strange that I am covered with my mother's body
like a worn-out coat, the fabric tattered in places.

Look beyond my finger, press the word "freedom" to your lips,
emboss it in the sepia-stained book stored on the top shelf.
Last night I dreamt of bankers and lawyers surrounding me
in a clean white room. I have terrible dreams.

I make plans to survive my hatreds
but this room is so cold,
this room is so large,
there are indelible marks on my mind.

There are clay spaces pressed into my palm.
I feel them when I point my finger,
transfigured by the steeples in the distance
and that terrible word, "History."



The Cinnamon Incident

by Valerie A. Reimers

A kinder, gentler Martha emerged
From the cocoon of prison
A slender ponchoed butterfly
Ready to test her wings
On her 40,000 acre estate.

Her fellow inmates
Had become her friends
Guided her through five months
Of laundry and scrubbed toilets.
She won their hearts with microwaved
Crab apple pies.
She won ours when her cell block
Did not win the decorating contest
At Christmas with all the
Construction paper, glitter, and ribbon
Fifteen dollars could buy.



***Photograph (detail)
by Joel Kendall***

But it was the cinnamon incident
That brought her perfection
To a truly human level.
Unable to help herself,
True to her nature,
Insisting on tasty homemade treats,
(After all,
she can make her own
marshmallows)
She somehow, no one knows quite how,
Since she remained loyal to her supplier,
Had managed to conceal two ounces
Of cinnamon in her locker.
Possession of the forbidden substance
Led to a severe reprimand
And the threat
 of forty extra days
 at her 40,000 acre estate.



From the Cookbook of Unwritten Recipes

by Nina Corwin

With her Old World wisdom in her apron
pocket, Grandma Bucca tells us

the best Romanian soup
is only as good as it is ugly.

Measuring out ingredients
with a well-practiced eye, she adds,

the secret is in the simmering
the hours spent on the back burner

when the broth gets lumpy and glutinous
from dumplings that grow thick with time—

As you and I absorb
the flavors of our days.

Steeping in each other,
we become more and less our selves.

Our separate textures lose their crunch.
Potatoes gets pulpy, onions melt. It isn't

pretty. The very aroma of chicken fat
makes us thick around the middle.

We simmer
until we get it right.



Nothing Short of a Miracle

by Victoria Costello

Under the guise of my helping with her morning braids, Nana lets me stand on the toilet in her bathroom, close enough to reach the gray and white clumps of hair that hang long and loose over her bosom and back. My seven-year-old hands gently graze her side as I pull one section down to her waist, divide it into three rows, and begin to plait. Nana looks at me and smiles.

"Prettiest eyes," she says, boring hers into mine.

With Nana, there was always some kind of benign competition going on among her grandchildren. She could be counted on to congratulate my brother Neil for having the handsomest nose, then remind us how he looks just like her Allessio. It was a likeness we could readily see in the portrait of Nana and Grandpa that hung over Nana's bed. Dressed for an engagement photo, theirs was storybook elegance; posed in fine-tailored clothes, their studio backdrop suggests a renaissance villa. In the foreground, they stare royally at the lens. It's as if Nana were born for the red carpet. But in her wise way, there was plenty of fame to go around for all of us. To that end, she would always say my baby sister Rita had the cutest little face of all her grandchildren but then, with a requisite sigh, add that Rita's loveliness came in spite of her cheeks and nose being covered with those oh-so-Irish freckles.

Even then, I knew Nana's standoff with Dad wasn't personal. It was just the weakness of his kind. Since the time Dad drank away our mortgage, and Nana paid it, he never came with us on our regular visits to her apartment; in fact, his name was rarely mentioned in her presence. Which is why, the week before this idyllic morning, Mom told us before we got there why she was bringing us to stay with Nana in the Bronx. She explained that Daddy was dying in the Veterans Hospital in Westchester, and she needed to stay close by for

when *it* happened. Maybe it was because of the unemotional way she said it, but by the time we got to Nana's, and I saw her waiting for us on her front steps, I was bursting with excitement and had pretty much forgotten why we were there.

Although I adored my father, he was to me already gone. It had been a month since he'd come straight from the hospital to my First Communion. From where I sat with my class, I watched him walk into church and thought he looked like a ghost. Afterwards, I ran up to him and hugged his legs as tight as I could. When he kissed me goodbye, he looked down with a sad face and said, "Pray for me." Then they just walked away: Father Anthony in his long black robe, Dad in his dark, baggy suit. To tell the truth, I thought they were leaving for Heaven right then and there. I tried to pray, but, well, somehow I knew there was nothing I could do to keep Daddy on this earth.

But none of this is on my mind as my hands ride down Nana's half-finished braid. Loose hairs fall into my palm, and I mold them just the way she taught me, one row upon the other. In my eyes, this transformation is nothing short of a miracle.

"Nana, how long since you cut it?" I ask.

"Too long," she sighs, "for an old woman."

I feel a moment of panic at the idea she might do what Mom kept bugging her to do. Then she'd look like everybody else's grandma, like Mom and her friends, with their boring little bobs of dyed and sprayed-in-place hair.

"Why bother with it anymore, Ma?" my mother would say, as if Nana's braids took something from her. Nana was always the first one up, the last to bed, so it couldn't have anything to do with how long it took. It reminded me of Mom complaining about Nana talking to her in Italian—which she did most of the time. Mom once told us that kids at school had teased her about only speaking Italian. Still, it seemed odd to me that she could have



forgotten it completely. Nana didn't seem to believe it either, since she kept talking to Mom in Italian, waiting for an answer, which she usually got—in Italian—after pretending not to hear otherwise.

Being part of Nana's morning ritual, I feel like I'm part of a secret society where only we special few get to witness her without the crown that completes her public persona. Later, I recognize Nana in Medusa, her head ringed with serpents. But it's different being alone with her in the morning bath. There, I'm closer to a younger, less formidable part of my grandmother. It's Nana as the brave girl in the story I beg her to tell me again and again, until she says, "*Basta, go play.*"

At 16, Nana, born Carmela, the youngest of 13 siblings, traveled alone by train from Atessa, a poor mountain village facing the Adriatic Sea, to Naples. There she got onto a steamship called the *Kaiser Wilhelm II* and set off for New York City. It was 1898. I can picture her on that ship, seasick and afraid, but certain something better waits for her in America. To me, it's as good as Wendy and the boys flying off to Neverland. I especially love the end, where Nana falls into the arms of her five elder sisters waiting anxiously for her in the Bronx. Nana and her sisters all married and raised their families in the same neighborhood. It was where she met Allessio, who was handsome and showed great prospects, since he was already apprenticed with a Jewish furrier in lower Manhattan. The story goes that Allessio learned Yiddish before mastering English and, as a tailor in the salons of Fifth Avenue, managed to carry everybody in the family through the Great Depression. I had sketchy memories of Nana and my great aunts, always in the kitchen, chattering in Italian, a symphony of industry, while my sister, brother, and I, with our cousins, played—always in shouting distance.

Five days after Mom drops us off at her apartment, Nana surprises us with the news that Daddy died that morning. She says it tenderly, but she doesn't cry, so I don't either. She explains that she

won't be going to Daddy's wake or funeral so that she can stay and take care of us until it's all over. All I know is that I don't want her to leave. Then she gets up and walks out of the room. My brother Neil takes his baseball mitt and runs outside. Through the screen window, I hear him angrily smacking the ball into his mitt over and over again.

But then Nana calls my sister and me into the kitchen where she announces we're going to make pasta for dinner. It is, by design, a daylong project: Nana standing over her tomato sauce, stirring, tasting, adding spices, whispering in Italian — coaxing it into some higher state. Compared to Mom, whose current enchantment is with Swanson's frozen dinners, Nana is Merlin. I'm thrilled when she lets me use her rolling pin to flatten dough on the yellow Formica table. After a few false starts, when I smash the dough to smithereens, Nana looks over with a smile and says, "Ay, too heavy." I lighten my touch and successfully produce several wide strips of pasta.

On we go to Nana's metal pasta maker, which is in its customary spot atop her red tile counter. Rita and I take turns with its rotating handle, and, as the first strands come surging out of its other end, we squeal with delight. The process goes on until a large pot of linguini is ready to be topped with Nana's beautiful red sauce. Then she directs us to wash our hands and set the table with her fine china and silver. When we're all seated, Nana pours red wine into our tiny juice glasses, and with a silent toast, we repeat after her, "*Mangia.*"

Later, I'm mopping the kitchen floor when I suddenly feel exhausted and dizzy. The mop makes a nasty snap on the tile as it slips from my hands. At the kitchen table, Nana puts down her crocheting and motions me to her. I sink lifelessly into her lap, not wanting there to be any other world than this. I barely notice as she pulls a comb from her pocket and puts it to my mass of tangled hair. Although I normally run and hide in the corner when anyone tries to get at my hair, now I have no energy or desire to move. My last memory that night



is of Nana's gentle hands and her whispered words: "Daddy's pretty curls."

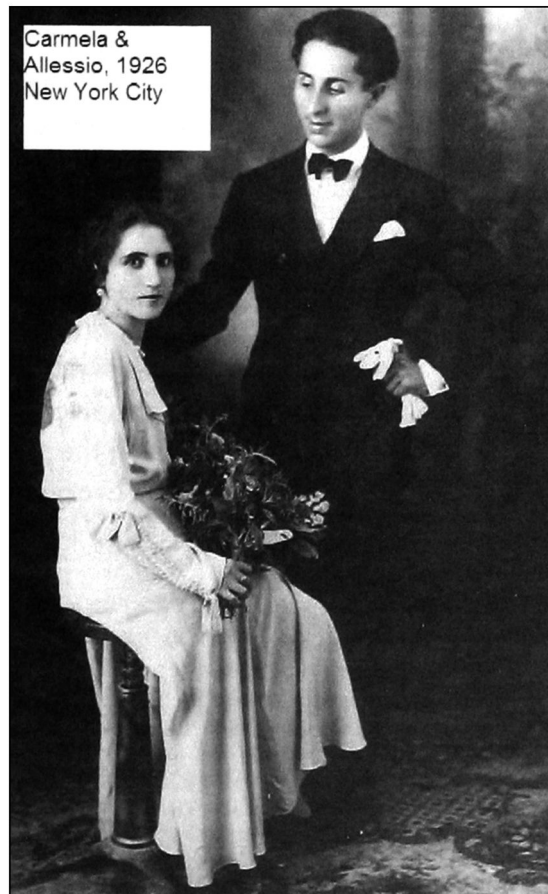
It's two years later; I'm nine. In all that time, Mom has never mentioned Daddy, not once. She's gone back to work, as a school bus driver—pretty good for someone who just got her driver's license the year before. Actually, I'd never seen her so happy. A few times, the man who fixed our car called to ask her out on a date. When I whispered to Mom who it was on the phone, she made me say she wasn't there. Right then, I knew I'd never hate men like Mom did—I missed Daddy too much for that.

That summer, we're at Nana's apartment again. But this time, Nana is the one in the hospital. She had her second heart attack the day before, and the doctor told Mom that she won't make it to tomorrow morning. When Mom repeats this news to us, I run out of the room, refusing to talk to anyone. When she calls me for dinner, I'm not hungry. I

want to go to bed and insist on sleeping in Nana's four-poster with her snow-white, crocheted bedspread, not on my usual cot next to Rita and Neil in the spare room. Curled up in her bed, I can still smell Nana's scent on the pillowcase, and I hold it very tightly against my chest. Mom comes in to tell me she is going back to the hospital and, after another unsuccessful attempt to get me into my own bed, leaves me there with a resigned sigh.

Once the apartment quiets down, I start. For many hours, or so it seems, I talk to God and explain to Him why I need Nana to live: how with Dad gone and Mom the way she is, Nana simply can't leave me. Not yet.

And, as I knew He would this time, God agrees. Nana gets a miraculous reprieve; actually, she stays on this earth another five years, long enough to get me to 16—the same age Nana was when she crossed the Atlantic.



Carmela &
Alessio, 1926
New York City

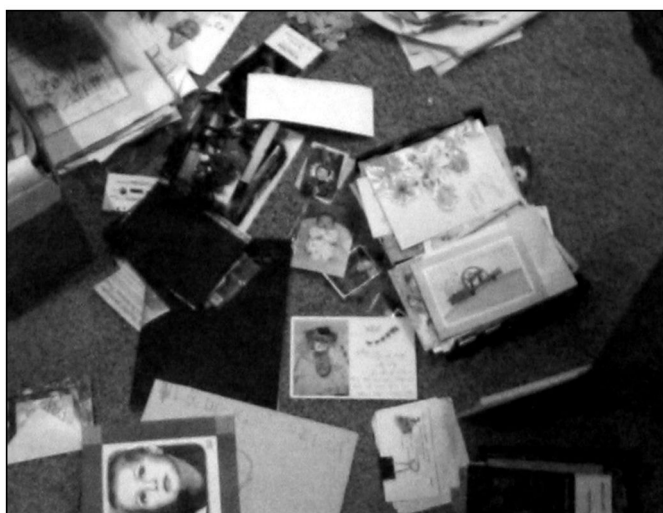
Photograph provided by Victoria Costello



Assemblage

by Peter Desy

Some toss all their family photographs
in a drawer, I arrange mine in
chronological order, from two years old
to sixty-five. There is row after row of
inactivity; some have more or lesser
light. In the older ones a consciousness
of a peering camera; in later ones
a consciousness of avoidance.
In a few, a contemporaneous look,
the subject caught off guard. But even
then, the photographer is the theme.
I scan the stilted images of myself,
try to take several in by fast panning
with my eyes to see if some
continuity can be detected.
But each frame is a concluded act—
no coherence, no maturation, no
blurring of the edges. I pick one up at
random and ask, What was he thinking then?
Here's a boy about fifteen with his *Detroit
Times* paper bag around his neck. He's so dead
I can't even remember him, or want to.
Here's one in which I'm about fifty-five;
but he's only paper thin, another lie
if lies are instantaneous moments
that promise to be restored. The spaces
between the pictures are dark square holes
almost everything has fallen into.



Photograph by Joel Kendall

Her Day

by Janet Carr Hull

Grandma told me about her day
She went down to the church picnic
Aunt Doris wore her flowered shawl
Grandma thought she looked so nice

There were pickles, corn, platters of chicken
Macaroni and cheese, peas, and pear salad
Pitchers of tea, you know in the South
We always drink it cold and sweet

There were children running all about
They played freeze tag in churchyard sun
She hugged me because I was sad I was smallest
Could not run as fast and was always It

The piano was brought to the camellia garden
Grandma played from the Baptist Hymnal
I told her I knew she could play them all
She smiled her smile and said that she did

I kissed her forehead before I left
As she napped in the sun in her chair
Today I was only six years old
Sometimes her disease is so beautiful



Cartwheel

by Janet Carr Hull

He completed a circle inside my heart
Sitting still on a green bank one day
He caught a fish, it squirmed, he giggled
Turned it back and it swam away
His eyes were greener than any grass
Let him catch many more, I pray

Clocks are noiseless when you watch
A small hand, a cane pole with no reel
Fishing beneath rays of innocent sun
As your heart sings along with the feel
Of gazing inside those green, green eyes
As his smile captures soul in cartwheel



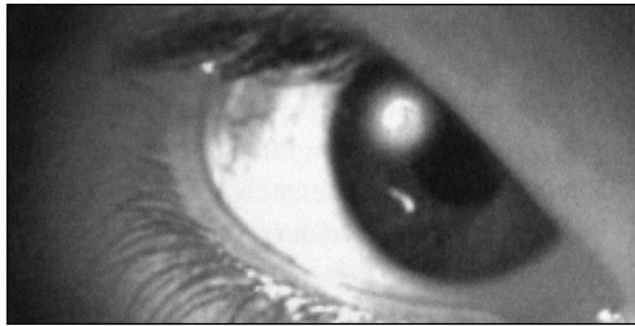
Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall



To My Only Brother: A Letter

by Daniel R. Schwarz

A montage of images of comity, conflict,
haunts my troubled dreams.
We have retreated to fortresses
of mutual suspicion, unyielding pride
built stone by stubborn stone;
It is not that you are Cain, and I Abel.
Yet our boyhood ties
dissolved by an act of betrayal:
the acid of a misdirected letter—
motiveless malignity or green jealousy?—
leaving in my flesh
a still quivering arrow,
a festering wound
twisting memory
into misbegotten shapes.



Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall



Blue Heron

by Daniel R. Schwarz

Canoeing around a swampy lake at dusk,
while visiting my aging parents,
brooding, too, of unmarried sons,
unborn grandchildren,
my wife and I gasped at a blue heron
majestically presiding over the marshes,
regally balanced
on delicate greygreen
razor-thin legs on a tiny branch
jutting into the water.
Whenever we quietly approached
admiring gentle arch of purple
“S” shaped neck, turn of curved beak,
it spread stately wings,
flying ten yards in front of us
as if protecting its nest, or searching for mate.
This became a pattern: our pursuits,
its abbreviated low flight to another spot,
always in front until we turned towards the dock—
when it finally flew in back of us, and
we backpaddled to catch a final glance.
We recalled Thoreau on
Walden Pond trying to find a loon.
When we later saw our heron
(or another larger grey blue one?)
soar on enormous wing,
heard its honking, perhaps mating, sound,
I was reminded how we fear
the incomprehensible as we
seek narrative patterns
amidst the marshes of our generations.



A Family Man

by Henry G. Miller

Uncle Jack was always writing in his notebooks. That's what I remember most about him. He wrote in those small notebooks with spirals on the top that stenographers used to use. There were dozens of them all around Grandma's place on the second floor where he lived. No one knew what he wrote in those notebooks. Once I looked at one, and it was too deep for me, but that was when I still was in grade school. Another time, I saw something about sex, but I couldn't figure that out either.

Sometimes we heard Grandma and Uncle Jack shouting at each other. Usually, that happened when she went into one of his drawers with his notebooks and writings. She made it plain it was her house, and he best not forget it, and she'd look where she wanted to look. But in later years, they didn't fight anymore. I think Uncle Jack just mellowed.

But before then, he did one thing that made us nervous. He'd argue with himself when he was alone. We lived on the first floor in what was called, in those days, railroad flats because they were narrow and ran through the whole floor. My mother and I didn't mind that he argued with himself, but we worried that the tenants on the third floor would hear him. Also, my father didn't like it. "It's not normal for a man to argue with himself out loud like that. Your brother has always been a little off." Also, Pop thought Jack showed off sometimes. No doubt Uncle Jack had read a lot. He always had a book in his hand. My mother always tried to protect Jack. So did her two sisters. "But they don't have to live under him like we do," my father would say.

I always liked Uncle Jack, and he liked me, and I was always careful not to say too much in front of my father. My father only had a few weeks of high school when he had to go to work. I think he was a little jealous of Jack. Once, he forbade

Uncle Jack from coming down to our flat. They had some argument about Roosevelt that turned loud and nasty. This was hard on my mother and grandmother because almost every night, Grandma and Uncle Jack would come down around 8:30 to have snacks and a beer with my mother and father. Sometimes the other aunts and uncles would stop over. They'd have a few beers and talk over the day's events and sometimes listen to the radio. When Uncle Jack wasn't allowed to come down, it upset my mother. She always played the peacemaker.

But that time, I smoothed it over. I asked Uncle Jack to help me with some homework. I really didn't need his help, but I was looking for an excuse to make him come downstairs when my father was there. It worked. He helped me, and my father had to admit that that was very nice. Uncle Jack hesitated in the hall before coming into our place. "I'm not sure I should come in, Little Jim." He always called me "Little Jim."

"Pop, can Uncle Jack come in? He's showing me how to do this diagram. It was too big to take upstairs."

My father hesitated. But he knew we all wanted him to relent. Then he said, "Sure. Nice of him to help you."

Uncle Jack moved in hesitantly. It was a little awkward.

Then my father came through. "You ought to come down tonight. I got that new cheese from the delicatessen. It goes good with beer."

Then Jack said, like nothing had happened, "Good. I've been wanting to try that cheese."

I always had a soft spot for Uncle Jack. Smart as he was, he was lonely. Now, you may think my father was hard in not letting him come down. But Jack was always fighting with people. He just couldn't help himself. He had a terrible temper.

My mother told me about that awful time when



Jack was a teenager. "He would always tell us, 'How did I get born in this family?' He was always so smart, and the rest of us were just average. He didn't think we measured up. The only one who really understood him was Grandma. She called him 'one of life's unfortunates,' which brings me to that awful time when he was only fifteen. Grandma wanted him to go to church, and he wouldn't. It got hot. Then he did it. He raised his hand as if he'd hit Mom. I don't think he would have, but he did raise his hand. At that minute, my father came in. Grandpa was always very strict. At first, he favored Jack. But when Timmy came along, he started to favor the younger brother. You shouldn't play favorites, but Grandpa did. That's around the time when Jack started with his temper. But he never meant any harm. We used to say he was a lamb in wolf's clothing. Anyway, Grandpa came in just as Jack raised his hand. 'You raise your hand to your mother. I've had enough of you. You don't see your brother Timmy acting that way. You need a lesson.' My father called the local precinct. He knew the policeman who patrolled the neighborhood. They took Jack away. My mother pleaded with my father not to do it, but he said, 'No, he needs a lesson. He's been getting out of hand.' It was terrible. The rest of us all cried. They locked him up for the night. When Jack came home the next morning, he was a pitiful figure. My sisters were all upset. Things were never the same after that. He kept more to himself."

I would sometimes ask my mother to tell me that story again. It surprised me because, of all the people in the world, the one Uncle Jack cared most about was his mother. Grandma didn't have his book learning. She only got to the fifth grade before she had to help out at home and do the neighbor's wash. But she knew her son, Jack. When he returned from his trips, he always went right upstairs and stayed in his old room. Uncle Jack was her only unmarried child. And she'd always say how Jack loved home cooking. When he came home from the Merchant Marines, where he served

during the war, he didn't eat out for months. He even would bring wine for the Sunday dinners that Grandma always made for the whole family. I can still hear him saying, "We got pot roast tonight, and I got Nina." Nina was a sherry. He'd always bring home some sherry whether it went with the food or not.

I remember how excited we all were when Uncle Jack brought home Jessie. It was the first time he ever brought anybody home. She wasn't Catholic, but Grandma didn't care. "He's never had anybody. Let's hope she's nice."

We all had dinner upstairs at Grandma's. She made leg of lamb, Jack's favorite.

Jessie was a waitress at a restaurant where Jack worked in the kitchen for a couple of weeks. Everybody was polite, and Uncle Jack was happy but a little nervous. He laughed a lot. I could tell he was hoping she'd make a good impression. He wouldn't have brought her home unless he was serious.

Jessie then went to Chicago for a few weeks to visit her sister. Jack thought he'd surprise her by going out to see her. He had a ring with him. When he came back, alone, he was a beaten man. I heard him crying one night. As the story came out, he found Jessie at some wild party. Plenty of men, lots of drink. She was making out with two men at the same time when he came in. It broke his heart. He came home and said to his mother, "That's it for me."

Never again did he bring anybody home. I guess some people are destined to be alone. One good thing was that he and Grandma kept getting closer. They always were close, but now he was the prodigal son come home. He would always ask whether he could help her in any way.

He never had much of a job that amounted to anything. But he kept writing in those notebooks. Uncle Tim knew I liked to read, too, and we'd often wonder what his brother Jack was writing and why he didn't make an effort to get something published. We couldn't figure it out.



Recently, I did some research, and with the help of some of my cousins, we made a big discovery. The family story about his being published as a young man and called a genius was true. When he was 19, he had a story published. It was more like a playlet because it had a lot of dialogue in it. *Vanity Fair* published it. Some people write stories for years and never have a short story published, let alone in *Vanity Fair*, one of the most prestigious magazines there ever was. To make it even more extraordinary, the editor wrote an introduction saying this young writer had better skill at dialogue than Eugene O'Neill. My aunts said it turned his head. He never published anything again. But he kept writing in his notebooks.

In later years, as Grandma grew older, Jack stayed home more. We didn't hear any arguing, either. He was going to the store for her all the time, and he never used to do that. When the family got together, we'd meet more downstairs in our place on the first floor rather than upstairs. Jack seemed to be smiling more. Instead of fighting with his sisters and telling them how little they knew, he'd smile and laugh about it. "How did a genius like me get in this family?" Then he'd laugh as if he were making fun of himself.

As time went on, Grandma started to get for-

getful. She couldn't find anything at first. Jack would make a joke of it. "Hey, Gracie, can't you remember where you put your money?" Gracie Allen was the dumb-like-a-fox radio partner of George Burns in those days. But toward the end, Grandma deteriorated. She started to wander in the streets barefoot, looking for her mother. There was a family conference. It was agreed she had to go to a nursing home. Jack was against it. He said he could take care of her. But he was outvoted. The family found a nice place in Queens with the help



Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall

of the church. It was a bit of a trip from where Grandma's house was in Brooklyn, but still under an hour.

By then, Jack himself was in his 60s, but he went every day to visit her. He always brought her some treat, mostly coffeecake with crumbs on it. Toward the end, she barely knew any of us. I asked Jack if I could go with him one day. I must admit,



I was curious how he spent all this time with her day after day.

Grandma didn't know me, although she was like a second mother to me. But she was very pleasant. Uncle Jack was sitting alongside of her in her room, which was dimly lit. I excused myself, saying I wanted to check to see if her account was up to date. But when I came back, I let them have their privacy. I stood near enough to hear them, although they didn't see me. I was very curious as to what they talked about.

Grandma was asking Uncle Jack, "What's the name of this place?"

"You know. St. Theresa's. Don't you remember Father Harvey helped get you in here?"

"Do I know Father Harvey?"

"Sure you do. Now, Mom, let me ask you this: Who am I?"

Grandma hesitated, stared deeply in her son's face, and said, "Why, you're a very good friend of mine."

"Do you like it here, Mom?"

"It's a very nice place. They do some business here. The restaurant's always full."

"Hey, you my girl, Mom?"

"Oh, it's you, Jackie. You know you should settle down, find a nice girl, and get married."

"How can I do that, Mom? You're my best girl."

"How come I'm here?"

"Mom, you were getting up in the middle of the night, looking for your mother."

"Is my mother here?"

"She sees you every day. Hey, Mom, you remember the time you took Tim and me to hear Christmas music in New York at the cathedral?"

"And Timmy ran away. He was such a devil and so good-looking, just like his father."

"Dad really loved Tim, didn't he?"

"Looked just like him. I told your father, no favorites. But sometimes we can't help ourselves."

"I always had you, Mom."

"I have to go. My mother's looking for me. I didn't finish my homework."

"It's okay, Mom. There's no school tomorrow."

"No school?"

"No. It's Saturday."

"You should settle down, Jackie. Your sisters may not always be there to take care of you."

"I can't settle down, Mom. You're my girl."

"Some people are meant to be alone. They just don't get along with other people. My son Jackie is like that. He's one of life's unfortunates. I told the girls, when I'm gone they've got to keep an eye on Jackie. He needs a place and people he can count on. That's why, no matter what he did, he could always come home. Do you know my son Jackie?"

"I do."

"He's very smart."

"Very, very smart."

That's the way their daily meetings went. No one cried harder when she died than Uncle Jack. But all of this was many years ago.

I don't know why I'm going on like this. Well, today was a hard day. We buried Jack alongside his mother and father. I guess that brought it all back.

I said a few words at the church. There were a few cousins there and only one aunt, Aunt Joan, Jack's last surviving sister. The rest are all gone. Aunt Joan would bring him a good meal once or twice a week right up to the end. How Jack loved home cooking. I guess down deep, he was always a family man.

I don't know what happened to me today. I could barely get through the eulogy. I broke up a few times, almost inconsolable. I said some words when my mother and father died. Sad as that was, I didn't break up like I did today. Some lives are just very sad.



Report from a Small Room

by Kenneth Baron

It was your turn for the morning shift
but you looked parched for sleep,
so I set about the heavy-lidded job
of setting our daughter on her day.

I fed her and changed her and held her
and found myself too tired to remember
to think that this is one of those moments
“that goes by so quick.”

I put out her toys. I rebuilt her farm. I played
Beethoven’s Ninth on her electric keyboard.
It was the first time she’d heard it.
She seemed unimpressed.

I watched her pull down her books and throw
them with an anarchist’s joy. I held a stuffed
yellow sun in the air, then tucked it in my shirt.
I did it “again”—a favorite word she can’t say.

It was a 6 a.m. of simple cravings (coffee, more sleep),
not a sober one of reflection (misgivings, more
misgivings). You woke. I headed to my
day, a dewy thought already burning away:

She thinks I’m Beethoven.
She thinks the sun lives under my shirt.



Photograph by Joel Kendall



I Could Have Been a Lady

by Martina Nicholson

I move so quickly and cautiously now,
I put my armor on.

I had to leave the room of butterflies,
The indolent ladies in pastels;
Leaning over the tea cups and silver plate,
I was called away by an urgent voice in the hall
“There is so much blood—come now!”

I could have been a lady,
Wearing the lemon chiffon dress,
Drinking tea from china cups.

I made bandages of all the petticoats,
I made myself into an army;
All my arms and legs are paramedics.

Still, I gaze out the window
Over the heads of the wounded,
And remember the birdsong and lilacs,
I remember twirling like a girl
In the lemon chiffon dress.



Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall



On Florida Time

by Helen Rafferty

It's four a.m. in Ft. Lauderdale. All but one of the air conditioners at the Sea Haven purr white noise into the darkness. The hold-out is wedged into a bedroom window in a corner of the sprawling, one-story complex. The apartment's remaining windows are open, an invitation to any passing breeze to wander in and cool off the three rooms and their lone occupant. But the welcome is ignored; the curtains never stir.

Breezy or not, the apartment is a haven for Joan Egan, not long off the late shift at the Red Parrot. Joan works the dance floor of the multi-level night club, expertly handling a tray full of drinks and a club full of vacationing college kids. One hand balances glasses and tips, the other fends off men who drink away whatever manners they possess as they pinch, grab, even pull hair to express their admiration for whichever waitress comes within range. The hour before closing is the worst, although the tips escalate as the behavior of the remaining revelers deteriorates under the onslaught of drinks, drugs, and mind-numbing music.

Joan knows how to collect maximum tips with minimum bruising. She has worked at the club for four years, a record among the female staff.

Earlier on this particular night, Joan had taken time out to comfort a new waitress. Carly had come to her in tears after unsuccessfully running a gauntlet of rugby players from some mid-Atlantic Catholic college. Just turned 21, Carly was barely old enough to even *be* at the club. Joan poured the nearly hysterical girl a ginger ale, blotting her tears with a cocktail napkin from the bar.

"Look at this," Joan said, holding Carly's overflowing tip jar close to the crying girl's face. "Twenties—probably all the money they had. Tomorrow morning, you're going to wake up, and you're going to be fine. They're going to wake up and be hungover and broke and miserable."

This was enough to stop Carly's crying.

"Tomorrow, they'll have to crawl home, crying to their mommies. Step right over them when you head out to spend their cash."

Carly was smiling again as she picked up her tray. She carefully tucked her tips into her shirt pocket, ready to do a round for last call. Before heading off, she wrapped her free arm around Joan's neck, shouting in her ear, "Oh Joannie, I want to grow up and be just like you!"

Joan watched Carly disappear into the darkness of the club. She rubbed her left shoulder, feeling aches in just about every inch of her 36-year-old body. "Yeah," she says softly to herself, "just stick around."

The next morning, the phone rings. It is far too early to be anyone who is familiar with Joan's schedule. She takes a deep breath and exhales a shaky "Hello?" into the receiver.

"Hi, Joan, it's Kate—Kate Morrison. Am I calling too early? God, I'm sorry!"

"S'okay, I'm working nights."

"You're still at the nightclub? God! You're amazing!"

Joan rubs her eyes with her free hand and tries to read the time on her bedside clock.

"...so, I just thought you'd definitely want to know; I mean, maybe you could call her or..."

Joan sits up, shakes her head. "Sorry, Kate—who's sick?"

Kate misses a beat. "Sick? No, no, it's Maureen. Mo's finally pregnant—she's going to have a baby!"

Joan still has the feeling that she's woken up to bad news as Kate plows on.

"Well, I just thought you'd want to know. She'd want you to know. I mean, if it was me, I'd be telling everyone..."

"You are telling everyone."

Joan is awake now. She glances at her bedside clock—almost ten. Through her bedroom window



she can see a slice of blue sky. Someone's grandchildren are already playing and yelling in the community pool. She wonders how cold it is in New York.

"We're having a shower next weekend. The whole gang is coming. No one expects you to come all this way, of course."

"Next weekend? I could be there, I think."

"What?"

"I said I'll be there, I'll fly up, what the hell."

No response for perhaps a minute too long, then, "Oh, Joannie, that would be great! You can stay with Martin and me. Come stay for a real visit. It will be fabulous!"

"Where's the party?"

"The shower? At a place near Mo's house in Port Jefferson called Swizzles. It's really swank."

Joan thinks that a place called Swizzles couldn't be all that swank—it sounds like the kind of place the Red Parrot crowd graduates to when they're too old for spring break.

"Swizzles—great."

"But Joan, come to our house. We'll organize..."

"I'll call you. And Kate? Thanks for letting me know."

Five minutes later, Joan is in the shower, contemplating the consequences of her grand gesture. Taking a week off from work—Carl will flip. The airfare will be huge this time of year. And she'll have to scrounge through her closet for something warm enough to wear to damn New York in March. The hot water courses down her body as she works the soap over her aching shoulders, her slim, strong arms. Joan's hands move down to her flat stom-

ach, her soap-slick fingers running over the bands of muscle built by sit-ups and runs along the beach. She thinks of Maureen, imagines her already substantial curves expanding in the coming months: months of a baby growing inside her. Joan finds it impossible to imagine her body, any body, making that kind of room.

It's high noon in the Sunshine State, but the lounge of the windowless club is defiantly dark. Joan finds her boss behind the bar, trying to fix a clogged beer tap. With the crowd gone and the music off, Joan can hear the wheeze in Carl's breathing—too many cubanos, too many nights losing sleep in clubs like this one. She listens patiently as Carl tries to talk her out of going to New York.

"Gorgeous girl, don't leave me now. It's crazy here, and these kids are clueless. And do you *remember* wintertime in the Bad Apple?"

"The old college gang is going to be there, Carl—I want to see them, I think. Call in an extra girl or two 'til I get back."

"And when will that be, can I at least ask?"

"Don't know—I have to see how good a time I'm having. I haven't been up north in a few years."

It's been almost three years. Joan flew up to New York for Maureen's wedding. Maureen was the last of Joan's college crowd to get married (besides Joan, that is), and her parents had sprung for a lavish, three-day extravaganza of dinners, golf, and spa visits. The reception was an elegant affair for three hundred. Joan's fellow bridesmaids had been expecting her Bo Derek braids, her tube-tops, and her tattoos. The groom and his family had not. Joan had a good time, anyway, flirting with the



waiters and sipping premium-grade tequila at the open bar. The bride looked beautiful, and the groom looked down the bridesmaids' dresses. No one asked Joan when *she'd* be heading down the aisle.

Carl is at a loss. "Don't leave me hanging, Joan." He edges closer to her and rests a huge, battle-scarred hand on her bare arm. "Or take me with you—add a little class to your act."

Joan looks at Carl's shaved head and tattooed knuckles and laughs. "Oh, you'd be just what my act needed." Carl lets go of her arm. Joan grabs his hand back, cups it in both of hers. "I'll just stay long enough to catch up with everybody. I'll be very happy to get back. And to get back to work."

Carl breaks into a grin, flashing a mouthful of gold teeth. "You'll freeze your ass off up there." Joan smiles and gives his hand one more squeeze, then heads home to pack.

Saturday afternoon and the shower is almost over. Joan picks at her dessert, watches Maureen open presents. There are so many pink, blue, and green gifts that four of the guests have to help the mother-to-be haul them to her car in the parking lot. The women squeeze past tables, saying good-bye as they make their awkward way through the restaurant; Maureen's walk is already more of a waddle. Joan sits there, watches them leave, tries to conjure up a memory from years ago: Maureen, riding on the back of some boy's motorcycle down Ocean Drive, laughing and yelling at cars. Joan can't remember that boy; she can't even remember that Maureen.

Exactly twenty-seven hours after she'd left, Joan walks back into the Red Parrot. It's Sunday

night and just as crowded and crazy as she expected. She is wearing her work uniform—white short-shorts and a tank top. Joan rocks back and forth to the music as she waits for Carl to open his office door and set her up with a tray and petty cash.

"Hey, gorgeous! What are you doing back so soon?" Carl looks her up and down, noticing that she has gotten just a little paler up in the Bad Apple.

"You said to come back before I froze my ass off—I got out just in time." Joan reaches around and gives her rear end a loud slap. Carl laughs and hands her down her drinks tray.

"We missed you, Joannie baby. You are the queen around here, ya know."

Joan just smiles, holds out her hands for the tray.

"So—is it gonna be a boy or a girl?"

"What?"

"The baby—your friends' baby. I hope they have a girl. I love little girls, ya know."

Joan takes the tray from Carl. She grabs her pen out of the tip jar and raps him gently on the nose with it.

"You've got to love them all, Carl—all the boys, all the girls."

Joan turns and heads toward the dance floor. Carl watches her walk away. Her white shorts and shirt seem to glow in the dark, reflecting blue, then green, then purple as the strobe lights travel over her body. She moves slowly, her tray held high and her back straight, and to Carl she really does look like a queen; she is cool and strong and beautiful, and even the drunkest dancers make way for her as she disappears into the crowd.



Time and Again

by Gerald Zipper

She married the first time
wanting to lie in bed Sundays in the streaming sun
make casual love in the afternoon
but she came to despise him
he was stingy selfish and thoughtless
she was caring and dreamy
next she married a man of brilliance
a much admired man
but small flaws grow to crevasses
next she married a dull and detached man
easy to loathe
needing to escape
she married again
in a cold sweat
less from lust and more from hope
from the despair of loneliness
waiting for the cold phone to ring on an empty Sunday
waiting in desperation on her empty sun-covered bed.



Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall



Scavenger

by Robert Ferrier

Love the poet at your risk.
He ferrets open old scabs,
exhumes embarrassments,
like the fox who grins with hunger,
grinds carrion
in the jaws of his need,
strips the hide of privacy
pride, kinship,
conjures alchemies,
then swaddles the birth
in a scent of hope
and abandons the cradle
to a fair.



Gradual Song

by Margaret B. Ingraham

*I think it would be better
If the death of things,
Of almost everything—
Of man and animal,
Of tree and dream and memory,
Of friendship and of love—
Were furious and sudden
And not gradual as fall.*

Beautiful, astonishingly
Beautiful as the doe
And soft as she
Barely past dawn slips in
Quietly beside the willow;
Silent as the secret thrush
And brown as its full shadow;
Promising as the chestnut foal
Leaping and lively
Yet not innocent;
Whether tender I do not remember,
But intense as the nighthawk.
Your eyes were.
And deep as darkness
Over a western canyon
Though not as still.
Brown and rich as simple bark
Of southern pines;
Guileless, I thought, as dove's
Long mourning call;
But quick, then they were
Quick as the small silver fox
Disappearing subtly across
Slow evening's transomed watch
Behind the dappled wall
Sleek white-tipped tail trailing
All the soft autumnal light.



Mary LaFrance Speculates on the Father of Her Unborn Child

by Robert Cooperman

I never told Preacher
it might not be his: no sense
stepping on a sunning rattler.
Sure, the Reverend set me up
in a cottage; but waiting
for his visits was long
as a moaning blizzard winter,
and Patience cards never turned up
my way, even when I cheated.
So I entertained, gifts handy,
had Preacher gone back on his word:
no telling how a white man'll act
when a baby bears him less
likeness than a papoose.

One man not in the contest,
One-eyed John Sprockett;
his grizzly-slashed face shudders me
like every ghost killed in the War.
Only other gent who can't join the list,
the breed tracker, Eagle Feather.
I only do white men, though I'd bet
Widow Burden wouldn't mind
a buggy ride to Heaven with him,
the way she stared at the funeral,
then shifted her eyes quick
as the flutter of a butterfly's wings.

Come to think of it,
I might make an exception for him,
his face more handsome
than the one of Jesus
I cut out of a book once,
to stare at on my wall.



Sheriff Dennehy, After the Coroner's Inquest

by Robert Cooperman

If it'd been a gold rat
gunned down over a claim,
or a whore beaten to death
for not giving fair trade,
we could just shrug.
But this was Preacher Burden,
so we had to do something.

Doc O'Rourke testified
there wasn't no struggle;
the breed tracker swore
to no incriminating prints.

I wouldn't rule him out,
with folks feisty as weasels
in a small cage: a hanging
distracting as Miz Lucrezia
who's more talented
in her dressing room
than when she's screeching
about princes and slaves,
what we fought two wars over.

But she's a welcome change
from the China doll I bought,
who cries whenever I poke her.

"Natural causes," we declared,
but what was Reverend doing
at that abandoned shaft
except to meet Mary LaFrance,
who maybe didn't fancy sharing
the church funds he sipped at,
like a thieving hummingbird?

But I couldn't bring that up,
not with Widow Burden up front,
her veil grieving her face
I've admired from the moment
she stepped off the Salida stage.



Dr. O'Rourke Ponders the Badman John Sprockett and the Late Reverend Burden

by Robert Cooperman

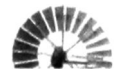
Sprockett's an enigma,
able to quote more lines
of verse than I can,
but a temper deadly
as a cornered wolverine.
I'd known men like him
back in Galway,
who looted and burned
in the name of Sacred Ireland.

As for Preacher Burden,
he never saw me in the street,
but stopped me—his forefinger
harder than all the cannons
at the Boyne—and warned
I was a damned Papist.

I'd quote Scripture verse,
but he'd fire back
with a chapter of his own;
then I'd spout Gaelic poetry,
to convince him
I spoke in demon-tongues.

I examined his corpse,
smashed up from its fall,
stuck to one fingernail,
a thread of a bandanna:
Sprockett's,
though I don't know why.

My duty's to the living.



The Widow Burden, the Night After Her Husband's Funeral

by Robert Cooperman

If only I could make Mr. Sprockett
confess what transpired between him
and my husband at the abandoned shaft.
But why should I care how or why
my husband left this world,
when he had taken up with a saloon girl?

Because I must solve the evil riddle
Aunt prophesied for my marriage
to a man of unbending Scripture;
Father and I dazzled by the sermons
Thomas spun like an impromptu spider:
Aunt the only one immune to his weaving.

A whisper warns, "You know why he died."
But I want to hear it from Mr. Sprockett,
whom I surprised leaving me a gold pouch
the night my husband disappeared.

That night I clutched the gold, sobbing.
"Is this what love meant to you, Thomas?"
Now, I shudder to think of speaking
to Mr. Sprockett's bear-troweled face,
his scars the least of what I fear
from our interview.

If only I possessed the courage
to ask Mr. Eagle Feather
to accompany me, but no doubt
he considers me only a white woman
who runs in terror
from his beautiful half-breed face.



The Widow Burden, Three Nights After Her Husband's Funeral

by Robert Cooperman

My husband's dead,
yet all I can think of
is William Eagle Feather
and our one encounter
in mountain air
crisp as autumn apples.

Skinning a rabbit,
he smiled politely
at a harmless stranger:
his face, lovely sandstone;
hair black as a racing stallion
in repose; his eyes,
my aunt's rich morning coffee.

I doubt he even saw me
as a woman; he needs a squaw
who can ride bareback,
fire an arrow, thrust a dagger,
and drop child after child.

My dry womb nudged Thomas
toward Mary LaFrance.
I'd have lavished on an infant
the love my husband never
required of me,
once he realized
I couldn't give him a son.

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.



Moving Still Life

by Mark Blaeuer

Atop beveled clarity
at my left, one ladybug clings.
The good grey pickup
bumps along.



Contributors

Kenneth Baron has had his poetry appear in *Crab Creek Review* and *The New Delta Review*.

Richard N. Bentley's short story collection, *Post-Freudian Dreaming*, is available from amazon.com. He won the Paris Review / Paris Writers Workshop International Fiction Award in 1994.

Eileen Berry is a geographer who has lived many years in Africa. Having grown up in England, she returns there every summer, and her particular interest lies in the role of place in human ideas and actions. She has poetry appearing in or forthcoming from *Notre Dame Review*, *Primavera*, *Tar River Poetry*, *International Poetry Review*, *The Literary Review*, *Rattle*, *Bayou*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, *Lynx Eye*, *Fox Cry Review*, *The Chrysalis Reader*, and other journals.

Mark Blaeuer's work has appeared in numerous magazines, including *The Edge City Review*, *Pivot*, *The Dark Horse*, and *RE:AL*. Coming from Illinois, he received his M.A. in anthropology from the University of Arkansas. He works now as a ranger at Hot Springs National Park.

Marcy Campbell has published poetry and fiction in numerous literary journals, most recently *The Pedastal* and *Unbound*. She has received awards from *Ohio Writer* magazine and from the Vermont Studio Center. She serves as Fiction Editor of *Artful Dodge* and teaches creative writing at the College of Wooster.

Poetry by **Orlando Cartaya** has appeared in the *Southern California Psychiatry Journal*, and new work is forthcoming in the *Santa Monica Review*.

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*.

Victoria Costello is a San Francisco-based freelance writer with a background in writing for film and public interest issue campaigns. She received a national Emmy Award as writer of the documentary, "This Island Earth." She has also worked as a writer and film maker for the United Nations Population Program in Africa and Central America.

Peter Desy has work appearing in *Green Mountains Review*, *Shenandoah*, *The Texas Review*, *Pearl*, and the *Virginia*

Quarterly Review. His full-length poetry collection is called *Driving from Columbus*.

Robert L. Ferrier is a Hugo native who retired from a research administration position at the University of Oklahoma in 1999 to devote more time to writing. His poetry has appeared in or been accepted by *Mobius*, *Oklahoma Monthly*, *The Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Crosstimbers*, and *Blood and Thunder*.

Stephen Germic is the author of *American Green* (Lexington Books) and *The Uses of Nature*. He has written on a wide variety of American cultural and literary topics and has taught at several universities, including Michigan State, Wayne State, and James Madison. Having recently escaped the academy, he lives with his wife and daughter in Virginia and Michigan.

Kenneth Hada has poetry appearing or forthcoming in *RE:AL*, *Red River Review*, *Westview*, *Oklahoma Today*, *Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, *Mused Squared*, *Homestead Review*, *The Mid-America Poetry Review*, and *Pudding House Publications*.

G. Hoffman is a retired teacher living in Clackamas, Oregon. He was born on a farm near Custer City, Oklahoma. He earned his B.A. degree from the old Southwestern State Teacher's College. After a thirty-six year teaching career spanning four states, he has devoted his time to writing and traveling.

Janet Carr Hull lives on the Atlantic coast just outside Beaufort, South Carolina. Her first book of poetry, *The World: Poetic Connections*, was released in July 2004 and has been well received. Coastal Villages Press will publish her second book, *Gravity*, in 2006.

A native southerner, **Margaret B. Ingraham** earned a B.A. from Vanderbilt University and an M.A. in English from Georgia State University, and she has pursued doctoral study at UNC, Chapel Hill. She has received an Academy of American Poets Award and a Fellowship from the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Her poems have appeared in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Plainsongs*, *Lumina*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, *Snowy Egret*, and *The Windflower Almanac of Poetry*. A portion of one of her poems is engraved on the marble Wall of History in Nashville, Tennessee.

Bobbi Lurie's work has been published or is forthcoming in numerous journals and anthologies, including *American Poetry Review*, *Confrontation*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Nimrod*, and *Gulf Coast*. Her book, *The Book I Never Read*, was published by CustomWords in 2003. Her autobiographical essay, "4 O'Clock," was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Henry G. Miller has had stories accepted for publication in *The Chrysalis Reader*, *Karamu*, *The Owen Wister Review*, *Riversedge*, and *Eureka Literary Magazine*. His play, *Lawyers*,



was performed at the Emelin Theater and Westport Country Playhouse, and his play, *Alger—A Story*, had a reading in New York with Fritz Weaver and Kevin Conway.

Martina Nicholson works as an OB/GYN in Santa Cruz, California, where she lives with her husband and two sons. As a woman and a physician, she takes an interest in the spiritual and emotional landscapes of women. She is also deeply interested in healing, medicine, collegiality, and how women contribute to professional life. She is fluent in Spanish and has served as a health educator in the Peace Corps in Paraguay, where she learned Guarani, a Paraguayan language.

Rosalyn Orr received a B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an M.Ed. from North Carolina State University. She has worked in public and private schools as a teacher for children with learning differences. Her creative endeavors include drawing, painting, and writing.

Helen Rafferty was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She graduated from Brooklyn College with a degree in Media and Communications and worked in television production for public television. She writes a column called "Domestic Disturbances," which features humorous memoir pieces for the webzine www.ducts.org. She is currently a student in the Sarah Lawrence College writing program, and she has work forthcoming in *Sanskrit*.

Valerie A. Reimers is entering her eleventh year in the English Department at SWOSU where she teaches composition and literature. As director of the Writing Center, she also trains the peer tutors who staff the center. She has published poems in *Cooweescoowee*, *Thema*, *Westview*, and *Barefoot Grass Journal*. Her work has also appeared in *Cercles*, *Oklahoma English Journal*, and *The Sun*.

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

George Staehle has been writing poetry for several years after a career in physics research. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous journals, including *Aura Literary Arts Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Confluence*, *The Louisville Review*, *Phantasmagoria*, and *Porcupine*, among others.

Joyce Stoffers begins her 12th year teaching English in SWOSU's Language Arts Department. Previously she taught at SUNY-Binghamton and Broome Community College. For ten years she served as Managing Editor of *Westview*. She is currently the Non-fiction Editor.

Susan Thomas has new and forthcoming work in *The New York Quarterly*, *River Styx*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Marlboro Review*. She has won the Editors' Prize from the *Spoon River Poetry Review*, the *New York Stories* Annual Short Fiction Contest, and the *Tennessee Writers' Alliance* Award for Creative Non-fiction. Last year she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in poetry. *Main Street Rag* has published her chapbook, *The Hand Waves Goodbye* (2002). Her poetry collection, *State of Blessed Gluttony*, forthcoming from *Red Hen Press*, is the winner of the Benjamin Saltman Prize.

Jonathan Wells lives with his family in Colorado. While living in New York, he worked as an editor and publisher for Rolling Stone Press. His work has been published or is forthcoming in *Hayden's Ferry*, *Nimrod International Journal*, and *The South Carolina Review*.

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

Billy Williams grew up in western Arkansas and took degrees at Fayetteville. For the last ten years he has lived in California, where he teaches literature and composition at a college preparatory school in Pasadena. His work has appeared in *Amelia* and *Rattle*.

Gerald Zipper is a prolific poet from Palisades Park, New Jersey.

Nicole Zuckerman works as an ESL teacher in Pennsylvania. Her work has appeared in *Abundance*, *Blind Man's Rainbow*, *Conceptions Southwest*, *Ship of Fools*, and *North Coast Times Eagle*.

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