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W E S T V I E W



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WESTVIEW

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Volume 23

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Editor Fred Alsberg
Managing Editor Joyce Stoffers
Copy Editor James Silver
Publications Manager Joel Kendall
Web Maintenance..... Beth Meszaros

Westview is published semiannually by the Language Arts Department of Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

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Stylesheet

1. Submissions should be typed on 8.5" x 11" white paper; prose should be double spaced. Include a SASE.
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 work may be submitted. Submitted artwork with a SASE will be returned.
3. We accept and enjoy formal verse, free verse, and prose poems.
4. Include a brief biographical sketch for our contributors' notes.
5. Submissions and correspondence may be sent to:
James Silver
Editor, *Westview*
100 Campus Drive
Southwestern Oklahoma State University
Weatherford, OK 73096
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Cover artwork by June Floren (Pritchard), "One Morning in Santorini"

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Cantaora

(for Angela Agujetas*)

by Anne Wilson

Agujetas.....when I heard your voice,
It was the *flamenco puro* of my childhood.
your riveting cry flew past the dancers,
I heard in your voice a ring of anvils,
crackle of fire, melting of iron.
Where have you come from?
How have you brought the notes of your songs
straight from the forge where my heart
was shaped? Do you know what it costs me
to listen to your pain and triumph?
Do you know that the wild bones of the llano
get up and dance when they hear you?
Tell me, Encantadora, where may I find you
when the gypsy band has de-camped,
when the scarlet music of evening
is a fringed shawl around your shoulders,
and the fire in your songs moves
—is moving—away?

*world-renowned flamenco vocalist



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall



Celebrating Cactus

by Fredrick Zydek

For reasons only the planet understands,
these plants live mostly in the Americas.
They are leafless things covered with spines
and bristles sharp and plentiful enough
to ward away even the hungriest grazers.
Needles have been their salvation from
Jurassic herbivores to the buffalo and long-
horned cattle that have wandered their way.

These are creatures that know more about
preserving water than any other living thing.
The barrel cactus contains enough sticky
juice to save a man from dying of thirst.
They come in all shapes and sizes. Some
are like vines with roots exposed to the air,
others round, some grow tall as trees and live
in forests of their own kind. They all have roots

close to the surface that stretch out like long
arms in all directions. The Organ-pipe cactus
and Saguaro provide dried woody ribs
the Indians once used for fuel or as frames
to build their houses. The fruit of these cacti
can be eaten fresh or boiled down into jams
and preserves. The joints of the flat-leafed
opuntia are still eaten boiled or fried, their

flowers used to make colorful gourmet salads.
The Night-blooming Cereus and the Bishop's-
Hat Cactus have the most beautiful blossoms
but it is the Old Man Cactus I love best. They
are covered with a dense mass of grayish hair
which shields them from the sun and whose strands
are so sharp not even insects dare climb them.
They look like miniature Yeti preparing for a hunt.



Bad Taste

by Carol Hamilton

Jerrybuilt and gimcrack prosperity,
as tacky as the makeshift Third World stalls
that litter drives to the clubs and balls,
we live with quick-built, write-off malls.

We drape our tragedies with t-shirts mournfully
hung with faded plastic flowers and teddy bears
on chain link fences to show that someone cares,
this litter heaped to hide the depth of our despairs.

We billboard, reel out calls of Aphrodite,
gloss parted lips and legs to hang above
our rides and walks and readings of
our phantasies and hopes for some great love.

And gated streets dress in such uniformity
of green and clipped and tidy lawns,
that those favored entrance must stifle yawns
while proclaiming this a paradise of man-made dawns.



Photograph by Patricia Cook



Oxygen

by Steven J. McDermott

The place I've picked is off Burrow's Island, along Rosario Strait. It's not the ocean, but I'm sure he'd understand. He used to pass by there on his way from Fisherman's Terminal in Seattle to La Push, Neah Bay, Alaska.

—There's a lighthouse there, I say to the skipper of the island ferry, a barge shuttling around the San Juan Islands.

—I know the place, he says.

He's only a few years older than me, blond and bearded like a viking. I'd expected someone older, someone who'd devoted a life to the sea, someone who would understand.

—Would it be possible for you to stop there, offshore, so I can—

—I get the idea.

—He was a fisherman, I say. My grandfather. His eyes linger on the urn clutched to my abdomen.

—I'll pay.

—No, forget it, he says. I'm heading past there anyway. You'll have to make the full trip though, out to Lopez and back. Three, four hours, depends on how long it takes to unload.

—That would be just fine, thanks.

II

We were miles out, my grandfather and me, several miles beyond the horizon seen from the beach. We were in his domain, riding the heaving slate of the Pacific Ocean. Sonar revealed a school of fish. We drifted, oozed up and down the combers rolling beneath the hull. I was thirteen, scared, and out fishing with him for the first time. I stayed out of his way and watched his sure and easy movements while he dropped the poles, baited the hooks, fed out the line. Soon the bells on the end of the poles were ringing. The winch ground, reeling the line in, salmon flopping every few hooks. He lifted them off without slowing the winch, clubbed their

heads, threw them into the cleaning tray. When all the lines were in we'd caught twenty fish. He gutted them with quick flicks of knife and gloved fingers, then stuffed them with ice down in the hold. When he was done he held up a small fish.

—Sea-going trout, he said. We're supposed to throw them back. But we'll have this one for lunch. He winked, waved towards the wheelhouse: Come on.

We went up the stairs into the wheelhouse, a tight curve of burnished teak. The spoked wheel was surrounded by the bank of electronic equipment he commanded: radar, sonar, loran, engine controls, UHF and VHP radios. Still holding the trout by the gills, he pushed a couple of buttons on a console and the engine started, then rose in pitch, vibrated the floorboards as he manipulated the throttle.

—We need the generator going to run the stove, he said. Come on, let's fix some lunch.

Down the stairs, down again on the vertical ladder into the galley below decks where the clatter of the churning pistons made thought difficult. Two bunks angled in a V to the bow: duffel bags on one, sleeping bag on the other. A four burner stove and a fold-down table beside the cupboards. He took a can of chili from the cupboard, a can opener from a drawer, and handed them to me.

—You do the chili, he said, I'll do the fish. He unclipped a pot and a pan from the hull above the stove and slapped the trout into the pan. He opened the door to the engine compartment and the churning pistons became deafening. He flipped a switch, closed the door, but not before the reek of diesel had filtered into the galley.

We cooked side by side. The heave of the hull seemed more pronounced in the dark confines of the galley, and with the roll and sway of the boat it was hard to stand in place at the stove. He lit a cigarette, began a wracking series of coughs.



—This damned sore throat!

He continued smoking, the bitter tobacco aroma mingling with the smell of chili, diesel fumes, seared fish flesh. We sat on the edge of the bunks and ate at the fold-down table. He poured himself a shot of vodka, downed it, poured another. I became queasy, found it difficult to breathe because of the pervasive odor of diesel.

—I think I'll eat on deck, I said, I need fresh air.

—Getting seasick?

—It's the fumes.

I pulled myself up the ladder with one hand and balanced my plate against the sway of the boat with the other. As soon as my head was above deck I sucked in a deep briny breath and clambered the rest of the way up the ladder. I sat on the hold, breathing deep until the nausea dissipated. The deck pitched with the flex of the ocean as the boat slid down a wall of water, then up, cresting for an instant and giving me a panorama of the limitless horizon, the spread and sweep of the ocean.

He joined me on deck.

—Better?

—Yeah.

—Sea air cures all ails, he said.

He inhaled deeply on his cigarette, only to give in to the wracking cough again. I ate while he smoked.

—Can't beat fishing, he said after a moment. It's a hard life, sure, but it's free, unconstrained. I've been doing it since the end of the war. Thirty years. If I couldn't fish, I don't know what I'd do. Best years of my life have been spent on this boat. You should come with me more often, spend the summer fishing with me. You're old enough now.

—I'd like that, I said.

—Okay, next summer you can be my deck hand.

A crescendo of coughs took control of him, bent him double, then he arched and hawked phlegm skyward, over the deck and into the rising water.

III

From where I sit in the chair beside my grandfather I can watch as my grandmother makes the drinks; only a splash of vodka in the water. She hands them to us, leaves the room. I see his frown as he tastes, then drinks half before handing me the glass, eyes pleading. I fill it to the brim with vodka, watch the wave of pleasure flush his face as he swallows. My grandmother returns. He and I share a conspiratorial smile, and for a flickering moment I see him as he was: a big John Wayne of a man whose eyes were always aglow with mischief. Then he's gone again, sunk back inside his emaciated Fred Astaire body. I wonder where a hundred pounds goes.

We don't talk, rarely do when I visit; it's enough that I'm there. So few come by anymore, and I can't blame them really. I've had to call the paramedics before. Now the respirator sits beside him just in case. The pale green canister and hoses looking like a floor vacuum—which is what his lungs are when he can't breathe, a vacuum. No, the oxygen tanks, the valves and switches, the black rubber mask, do not encourage visitors.

He reaches up with a pale bony hand and removes the ascot. My grandmother makes clucking noises and leaves the room. He takes the pack of cigarettes and lighter from his shirt pocket. I stare transfixed at the hole in his throat, the in-puckered reminder of the sore throat that wouldn't go away; like a cauterized bullet hole it doesn't bleed, yet never heals. He holds the filterless cigarette to the throat-hole, flicks flame from the lighter and inhales. Eyes closed, he exhales, smoke spewing from the throat-hole like a surfacing whale geysering water. He inhales again and I think this is perhaps why he has so few visitors. It's hard to take. He'd survived throat cancer, made it three years beyond the seven years the doctors said was evidence of a cure, only to keep doing this: smoking the most tar-laden filterless cigarettes through his throat.

The cough starts deep, twisting his frail body,





Photo by Kerri Bentley

and something wet hits my cheek before he gets the handkerchief to the throat-hole. He continues coughing as I feel for it on my cheek, grab it between thumb and forefinger, study it, the wet brown fleck of dried tobacco leaf. The cough subsides, but he's wheezing now, stabbing out the cigarette. As the plume of smoke rises from the ashtray he reaches towards the respirator, the only electronic equipment he commands anymore, and flicks the oxygen pump to life. The black mask goes to his throat as the respirator whirs and throbs like an engine—like a muffled diesel engine: all that's lacking is the fumes. I know that the sound is killing him ten times faster than the mutant cells devouring his lungs. I can tell by his eyes that he sees the realization in mine. He fumbles on the coffee table for the speaker. Lowering the mask, he places the speaker against his throat where his larynx used to be. He presses the button with his thumb, begins moving his lips, but the metallic vibrato voice is not human.

—Do you know why I drove the oil truck in

the winter?

—To keep the money coming in. He shakes his head.

—No, the speaker says as the oxygen pump keeps its pistoning cadence. I could have done anything.

The black mask goes over the throat-hole.

—It was the smell. The diesel smell reminded me of the boat, of fishing.

He closes his eyes, rests his head against the chair's cushion. The speaker lies dormant in his lap. Ten years of not being able to fish are deeply etched into his face, in the recessed eyes, the taut skin over cheekbones.

The mask lowers. The gasping growl of esophageal speech:

—You. Would. Have. Made. A. Good. Deck. Hand.

IV

The wake had been his idea: "I don't want a bunch of people standing around a goddamned hole



in the ground crying over me. And no goddamned funeral either. Have a wake, an Irish wake. Drink and laugh and remember the good times, for Christ's sake."

So we do. In the house he shared with my grandmother for forty years, the house with the wall of photographs of family, friends, his boats, and he and I in oilskins, tangible proof of that one time I went fishing with him.

A crush of people arrive, the friends his life has touched, the immediate family, other branches of the family tree, the root stalk. I am the designated greeter, lucid, emotionless, dispensing hugs, words of condolence, then encouragement: This is a wake, I say over and over, celebrate his life, what he gave us.

The rush of arrival ends, the small house is packed. I think he would be pleased as the mood turns festive. But I need fresh air, revitalization. As I head for the backyard I hear several people saying: "Remember the time..." and pass the bathroom, glimpse the tub and remember the time it was filled with clams: "We have to keep them alive

until we can steam them," he'd said.

I go down the stairs to the back door, and there, next to the garage door, sits the respirator, with its green canisters, with its hoses, with its switches, with its black rubber mask. I loosen my tie and step into the backyard. I take deep steaming breaths, sit at the picnic table on the patio, where seed husks litter the flagstones and the sparrows are busy at the feeder he built for them, twittering, beating wings, heaving seeds to and fro, splashing themselves in the tinfoil pan that is their bathtub. I hear the chicks squawking in the nest under the eaves. The parents appear content to frolic in the feeder atop the fence.

I study the fence he built, painted barn red, then surrealistically painted with sea images: an octopus, a mermaid, a tidal wave, a leaping salmon, a whale spewing water through its air hole. Fish nets hung with glass floats drape the top of the fence. Reminders all, but nothing I can taste, nothing I can smell.

I get up from the table, walk around the corner



of the house. Over the gate the roses on the arbor are coming into bloom: pink, orange, red; but not the fragrance I crave. The small circle in the lawn is freshly edged. I get down on my knees, grasp the gray spokes of the cap with both hands, apply force, spin it free. I remove the cap from the heating oil tank, bend closer, my nose in the end of the pipe, and let the diesel fumes flood over my face, into my mouth, into my nostrils.

V

We edge around the northwest end of Burrow's Island, stay inside of where the tankers and tugs buck the strait. The lighthouse beckons, a stark white sentinel against the verdant backdrop of fir, hemlock, cedar. Gulls glide in criss-cross patterns as we enter the cove where the abandoned Coast Guard station lingers. I sit on the engine compartment, the urn in my lap, the clattering throb of the engine in my ears. The salty air mingles with the diesel fumes, tastes like bilge water. I realize that my life has no such web of sensuality to miss. There

is nothing I love doing so much that not being able to do it would kill me. That is the essential emptiness of my life.

—The tide's running out fast now, the skipper yells to me. So I won't be able to hold her here too long.

The pitch of the pistons rises as he throttles against the pull of the tide. My grandfather's boat made the same sound when he shifted into reverse as we docked, our one fishing trip together ended. The diesel fumes rise in thick plumes from the engine compartment, heat waves shimmering like a hologram. Holding the urn out over the warm updrafts, I raise the lid an inch or so and let the acrid dreg-gases of diesel waft over the ashes. I close the lid and move over to the side of the ferry, lean against the hull's damp planks, upend the urn. The ashes plunge under water en masse. I watch until bubbles float to the surface, burst in a spray of oxygen as the water turns a soupy gray.



*Watercolors by
June Floren
Bartlesville, Oklahoma*

"Bougainvillea flourish in warm climates throughout the world. Their graceful branches were especially beautiful against the white walls in Fira, on the Island of Santorini, Greece."



Bougainvillea in Greece



"It was a wonderful day in May. As I sat to paint in this medieval fortress city in Yugoslavia, crowds walked by. People stopped to watch, some took pictures of the 'artist,' some spoke to me in various languages. I answered them in English and smiled. A dog came over and lapped at the water I was using to wash my brushes. I later learned that Richard the Lion Hearted had survived a shipwreck off the coast of Dubrovnik during the 3rd Crusade. Upon his safe return in 1190, he began construction of this cathedral in gratitude to the Virgin Mary."

Cathedral in Dubrovnik



"There are endless varieties of iris. They come in all sizes and colors: large, small, bright, dark, solid and variegated. Some seem to dance in frilly dresses."

Frilly Ones



Supermarket Sestina

by Jean Tupper

When we first went shopping, I carried my list and you
carried yours. We began filling our baskets—always
at the salad bar. You would study the price
of chicory, and I'd study you—but also check
for dead leaves and wilt. Pushing off down the aisle,
I suppose we both pictured the perfect salad. Who wouldn't pay

a good price for a glistening bowlful of greens? I'd pay
more for prime lentils and legumes, topped off with tomatoes for you
and sprouts for me. You once said you were *swept down the aisle*
by me, but now I find myself perplexed, wondering always
if it was just the perfume—my oleander? (I keep meaning to check.)
There was always a gal with freebies. And more . . . for a price.

We snacked on her crackers and cheese. You'd say *The price*
was right! like Uncle Windy, with a foxy grin. We didn't pay
for the brew in the daisy cups either. You'd just check
your wallet and walk on by with that smile and shrug you
do so well—the same one you always
reserve for salesmen and dilettantes who cross your aisle.

Later we'd press skin. Feel the pink-fleshed melons. I'll
never forget that musky smell, the test for ripeness. The price
had to be right in that department too. And you, the Great Dane, always
acting like a yappy Schnauzer, nipping at my heels and hell to pay
if you couldn't grab the slender tie of my wraparound skirt—you
liked to unwrap that swirl of magenta passion flowers and check

the goods, see what lay under, as if you were checking
the crabcakes for freshness. Then you'd trot down another aisle,
comparing the usual grades and choices, until you
knew you'd made the best deal for short ribs or rump. If the price
was outlandish, we'd settle for chili or hash. No "Buy now, pay
later" for you. You got the most for your money. Always.



We both liked potatoes, and there were always
great mounds of them, whipped and buttered. You'd check
for lumps. I liked them fresh from Green Mountains. You'd pay
more if they came from Aroostook County. In one aisle,
as I recall, we couldn't quite settle on the price
or brand of tea. I liked that Celestial brew, but you

always wanted Twinings. I'd be steaming. So you'd vanish,
then pop up in another aisle. But when I check out
(trust me!) it's a small price to pay for having been with you.



Watching Her Sway and Toss

by Walt McDonald

We leaned on the bar and watched
while Pattiann played darts. What hearts
cowboys hung on the wall, hoping she'd hit,
turn Mrs. She beat us all, kids and old men

watching her body sway and cock and toss.
She often missed, the saloon's bull's-eye
too small. She allowed herself a line
five feet from the wall, and why not.

little fists, pretty lips always puckered,
whispering somebody's name, but whose?
Take any bar, dust off the naked lady
lounging on canvas framed above bottles.

Pattiann was tiny but finer, pink and fresh
in a vest and leather fringe. No dungarees
for her, spoiled daughter of the boss.
Her daddy made the best man pay, and losers, too—

just look. From branding to roundup, old men
of forty and boys like me got up at dawn
and broke our backs by the hour, spines jammed,
beaten down by the pounding of iron hoofs.

One dawn, the boss drove the surrey himself
to the station, and Pattiann got out,
bags tagged for Italy and France. That night,
two cowboys quit, stuffed paychecks down

in their pants, rode off, not looking back.
Cook told us boys at noon over coffee,
beans bitter and grounds in the coffee,
his sourdough biscuits flat.



When You Were Gone

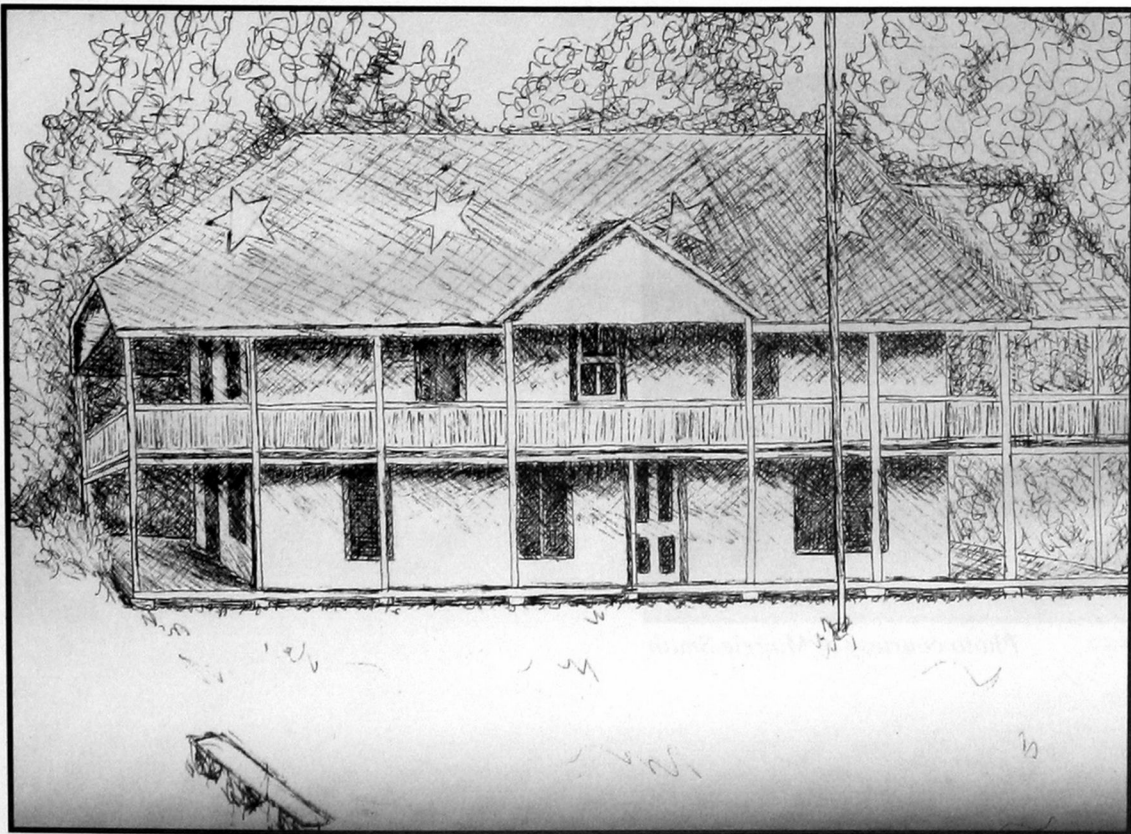
by Loren Graham

When you were gone, maples repented green
for scarlet, and dogwoods made a dusky
turn for crimson and sycamores for brown,
and even saplings in the understory,

remaining green, were silvered, shivered, blown.
I should compare you to Persephone
to make you laugh. Yet I have never known
an autumn like your absence is to me.

I should know better, I suppose, but I
could swear the colors are deeper this year,
sadder, that saffron willow leaves can fly
higher, that the barred owl who used to appear

odd evenings in the pines by our long driveway
makes cries more mournful now from far away.



Drawing by Kim Pankhurst



Farmer's Tan

by C.L. Bledsoe

My father's arms lie worse than his eyes;
the red of his perma-burned forearms stretches only
to the bottom of his shirt sleeves, from there
oaken muscles hardened by decades of rice farming,
covered by loose skin bleached the color of sun-faded paper,
take up the fight, if you ignore that sagging face,
chin slumped beneath the weight of lies told
and heard, skip over the neck, a motley cliché,
and go straight to the chest, you'll see that same fragile skin
falling down to his black toenails, mined by rice field water.

He offers me a stiff hug and I feel the halting muscles grip
and relax, stone slips into putty
unreliable as time. Life will throw its booted foot
before his feet but few times, now.
This man, this stone pillar who could break me
as easily as glass in a child's hands,
has been worn down by water over the years.



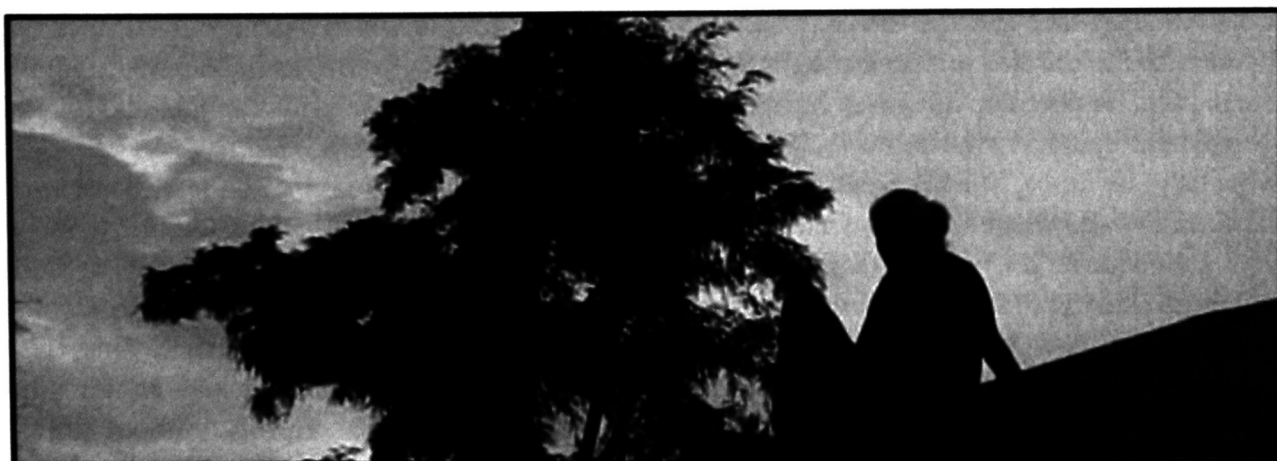
Photo courtesy of Maggie Smith



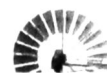
Walking at Dusk

by Alice Pettway

I confuse my shadow
with that of a lilac bush
and wrought iron gate
and don't realize
I've transposed myself
with leaf and metal.
Beneath my skin I am pastel,
soft and pliable, flowering
against the structure of my mind.



Photograph by Lexi Jones



Leaving Home, Coming Home

by Dorothy Howe Brooks

Louise carried her news like a burden, a wound as deep as childhood, and she wondered as she pulled up to the curb, turned off the engine, what primitive instinct had compelled her to drive the 500 miles from Atlanta to New Orleans when she could just as easily have telephoned. She opened the door and stepped into the damp heat, the air heavy with the sweet, pungent odor of summer afternoons, Kick the Can and Statues. The curbing beside her was crooked and broken, unable to resist the force of the live oak next to the sidewalk, its roots reaching like tendrils, holding fast. The worn knees of the old tree jutting through the dirt, its coarse bark, conjured up images of herself, only a little younger than Allison was now, climbing up to swing from its limbs. She slammed the car door with a certainty she wished she could feel.

The gate squeaked as she pushed it open, its wrought iron shiny with love, the yard barrel larger than Laney's old playpen, carefully planted with azaleas and budding camellias. How protective people were of their tiny spaces, each yard set off with its own white pickets, iron swirls, or wooden privacy fence. She climbed the front steps to the porch, traced the crystal prisms of glass in the door, their beveled edges carving rainbows out of the morning sunlight, and rang the bell.

Her father seemed smaller than she remembered from his last visit, his eyes deeper, shadowed, his back bent slightly in spite of his efforts, the cane taking more of the weight. Standing tall, she could see the top of his head, the scarce hairs combed across to mask the bare shiny center. She greeted him and kissed his cheek, her hands on his shoulders, the close-cut whiskers brushing her lips, the faint odor of English Leather lingering.

They sat in the parlor like guests having tea, and he moved about providing coffee and pieces of warmed-over cake, apologizing for the inept-ness of it, the lack of fine china, the absence of the silver

service. His eyes took in the whole room as he said this, as if to pin down a fleeting spirit he felt somewhere in the house. Louise could sense his apology was not to her but to this unseen presence. Only a year. Such a short time for him. One in 75.

The polished wood floor echoed each movement as she helped herself to sugar, to cream. The sound bounced off the walls, hovered close to the high ceilings. Lace curtains at the windows stirred in the hot breeze, but Louise knew the rule: no air-conditioning until the temperature reached 90. An old pedestal fan whirled gently in the open space before the dining room, its head moving rhythmically side to side, the same fan that had lulled her to sleep as a child on hot nights.

"And Bill?" he said as he leaned forward in his straight-backed chair. "You left him home with the girls?" He raised his cup to his lips to hide his expression, but Louise could read it without seeing, could sense the tension in the words, the unspoken reprimand. "Yes," she said. Nothing more.

She began to talk brightly, without stopping, chattering to fill the empty room. About the girls. Allison in junior high now. You wouldn't know her. Fixes her hair for hours each morning. Admires herself in windowpanes and the door of the microwave. She smiled, sure he must remember: *Louise, get out of that bathroom and come to breakfast.* And Laney. Such a tomboy. Grass stains on her jeans. The soccer team. Made two goals last week. You would have been proud. He glowed, and in the glow Louise saw the basketball gym, the hot afternoons, heard the shouts, the slap of Kedded feet on glossy wood, the damp smell of sweat and rubber. His hand on her shoulder, his disappointment. *They were a good team, Louise. Formidable. Too bad you didn't get to play more.* Yes, he would have been proud.

"Your bags," he said, rising. "Bern wants to see you." He stopped at the door. "Oh, and your



sister called. We're going for dinner." All the messages given, dutifully. The host. Louise watched him as he made his way to the car, one hand on the cane. His stiff frame, still solid, yet beginning to fold in on itself. He knew something was wrong. She could never fool him, not the day she and Beth threw pebbles at passing cars, not the morning she sneaked in at four a.m. There was always the knowing glance over breakfast, the eyes meeting hers, daring her, testing. The thing unspoken between them rising up and dancing on the table next to the cereal bowls. Her little sister, Marge, with her starched white blouse, hair curled into ringlets around her face, gloating. Their mother bustling in the background, her presence softening the moment like a faint brush of pale chalk over a pastel, blending the harsh tones, smoothing the rough edges. *How was your night, dear?* her mother would say, and Louise, subdued, would know she would never again sneak in so late, defy. *Pass the sugar,* was all he would say. No reproach. No forgiveness.

In the back bedroom, Louise hung her two clean shirts in the closet and unpacked the rest of her things. Years ago the twin beds had been rearranged to allow for her mother's sewing machine. Boxes of scraps filled the closet and brightly colored spools of thread adorned the bedside table. She sat on the bed, remembered the gas heater that used to stand in the corner by the door, her father bending to light it each morning as he awakened her, the whoosh the fire made as it caught. Remembered standing in front of it to dress, its heat warming her bare legs. And later. Sharing one of the beds with Bill for as long as they could stand it, Bill whispering remarks about the sleeping arrangements. *Don't they know we're married? Don't they approve of double beds?* And still later, the girls in cribs, or in sleeping bags on the floor between them. She had stayed away this past year to avoid such sights as these. She picked up the phone and called Beth.

* * * *

Louise left her car parked at the curb and walked the six blocks to Beth's house, the same one Beth had lived in as a girl. Shrubs lined the walk, taller, thicker than before, but the same almost invisible thorns, the same pale berries. She avoided cracks in the pavement, hurried past the dark mansion on the corner, careful not to peer in the gate. Only a year. But she had never before returned without the baggage of husband and children, the noise and distraction they carried in their wake. She felt naked in the hot September sunlight, and chilled in spite of the heat. She turned up the walk to Beth's house.

Beth answered the bell with the same broad smile her mother had years ago. Her cheeks, rosy in the sunlight, touched Louise's as they hugged, a long embrace. Louise felt the full flesh of her friend's shoulders, smelled the just-washed freshness of her hair, noticed the way she patted Louise's back then stood apart, holding Louise at arm's length to inspect her. A mother, as surely is if she had toddlers clinging to her legs and a baby in her arms. Her children may be almost grown, but they had left their mark on Beth.

They sat at the kitchen counter as Beth fixed them decorative plates of tuna salad, curled carrot pieces, bright tomato, and deviled eggs. Louise stirred her tea, ice clinking against the glass. The white tile was new. The openness to the den, to the back porch. The skylight. Even the counter with the stools pulled up to it was a recent addition. But there was a familiar feel that Louise couldn't quite place, that she supposed this house would always hold: the fig tree in the backyard, larger, but still looming over the garage; the two neat lanes of concrete leading to the rear.

"So what's wrong?"

Louise, startled, put down her glass and turned aside. Beth knew. Suddenly Louise felt an aching tiredness come over her, all the efforts of the past weeks and months peeling away.

"It's Bill, isn't it?" Beth's voice was gentle, and when Louise nodded, she added, "I knew it. I



knew it was something for you to come alone."

Louise could feel the tears start. The house, the round face of her friend, the shared secret, secret no longer. . . . But she caught herself, laughed. "Would you look at me. I guess I haven't had time to let it sink in. I haven't told anyone here. Haven't even said it out loud: Bill and I are getting a divorce. There. I've said it. Bill and I are getting a divorce. That wasn't so hard." She searched her friend's face for encouragement.

"I'm sorry," Beth said, but she was looking away, over Louise's shoulder, like she was afraid to acknowledge this news. Just a quick moment, then she turned her eyes back to her friend, that characteristic gentleness in her face. "You want to talk about it?"

All of a sudden it seemed there was too much to say, and nothing to say.

"I'm not sure where to begin. It's all so hard to believe, especially down here for some reason." Louise could feel Beth's eyes on her, waiting.

"It was his drinking," she said, finally. "He ruined it all with his drinking and then he refused to even talk about it. Said he wasn't an alcoholic. That he was in control. Bullshit." She took a deep breath and studied the food on her plate, her appetite now gone.

"You think Bill's an alcoholic?" The way Beth said the word, *alcoholic*, with distaste as well as disbelief, surprised Louise, and she answered quickly, an edge to her voice.

"Who knows? I know he drinks too much. I know he's impossible to be with when he's drunk. Who cares what you call it."

Beth said nothing, looked away.

Louise watched her, waiting. Finally she said, "You don't have any idea what I'm talking about, do you?"

Beth moved uneasily in her chair. "I know Bill's always liked to drink. But he loves you, loves the girls. . . ." Her voice went up at the end, like a question.

"Not enough, apparently." Louise could taste

the bitterness in her voice. "I just wanted him to get help. I even gave him the name of someone. Actually that's what did it. That's when he exploded and I finally said he had to get help or get out. That I couldn't take it anymore. I was firm for once. I thought if he saw I meant it he'd do it for me, for us. But he just packed his things." She remembered Bill that day, the way he left the room, the sound of his footsteps on the stairs, the dresser drawers being slammed shut, coming down with the suitcase packed, silent, not a word as he got his keys and walked out the back door. "I never dreamed he'd really leave." She felt like she was talking to herself, caught up in the image of Bill walking out the door, the sound of the car starting, the growing awareness she had had then that this was different, this time there was no going back. "I thought he loved us more than that."

Louise could feel the stinging tears begin again. "God." She slammed her fist on the counter. "How could he just throw it all away? All we had. It makes me so angry."

She stood up and went to the bathroom to find a Kleenex. She blew her nose and wiped her face. "Anyway. It's done. Easy as that. Fifteen years down the drain." She laughed, a quick, sarcastic laugh. "So what's new with you?"

She sat back down across from Beth, stirred her tea, took a big swallow.

"What about the girls?" Beth said. "I mean. Bill was always a good father."

Of course Beth would think of the girls. She really didn't understand. Louise looked at her friend and spoke quietly but firmly. "The three weeks since he's been gone are the first peaceful weeks they've had in years. They can actually get their homework done and get to bed without having to listen to their parents yelling at each other downstairs."

Outside, a car pulled into the drive next door and two teenaged boys got out, slamming doors and calling to each other. In the distance, a lawn mower hummed. Louise softened. "You're right.



Bill was, *is*, a good father. He'll still be their father, maybe even better without me around."

She picked up a piece of French bread, buttered it, then studied it, put it back on her plate. "I feel like such a failure," she said. "I don't know what I'm doing here. I don't know what to tell Dad." She played with a curled carrot piece, moving it around on her plate, feeling its smooth edges. "I thought I should break the news in person. You know how much Bill meant to Dad."

Beth nodded. "I remember how your dad was always asking Bill's advice on the stock market."

"Yes, and getting him to help with the leaky faucets. I think Dad plans to leave all his tools to Bill. Today he said, 'The girls home with Bill?'—fishing, I know. Waiting for me to say. And I couldn't. Had a speech all prepared. Practiced it all the way down in the car. Out loud."

Louise laughed, suddenly fifteen again, in the back seat of Beth's car, making up a speech for a contest at school that morning. "Remember?" she said, and the memory, whole and intact, lit up in her friend's eyes. Beth giggled, then laughed out loud, as each of them contributed details the other had forgotten.

Louise found it impossible to believe so many years had passed. "How old were we?" she said. "Ninth grade? Tenth?"

"It was before I started dating Terry, and that was tenth grade."

"You and Terry. Has it been that long?"

"Twenty-seven years last May." Beth smiled. "All my life."

Louise looked away. She felt remote, distant, as if she didn't belong here. As if she never belonged here.

"Twenty-seven years. That's a long time."

* * * *

"Thanks," Louise said later, as they embraced. She held Beth's hands in hers. "For everything."

"You know if you ever need anything, I'm here."

Louise waved good-bye and walked down the

front steps, past the concrete stoops on either side. She kept her eyes straight ahead, ignoring the presence of two little-girl ghosts side by side on the stoop, knees raised to their chins, arms around their legs, dreaming little-girl dreams. Mocking her.

She couldn't go home yet. She wasn't ready. She began walking in the other direction and soon found herself around the corner from her sister's house. She decided to stop in and say hello.

Marge greeted her from the kitchen where she was putting the finishing touches on a casserole for their dinner. Perky, Louise thought. All-American. Marge would always be young, though only three years separated them. And successful. As a child, Marge always managed to excel, and now: her kids, clean-cut, honor roll students, good kids. Henry, taking over his dad's business and doing better than anyone predicted. And Marge, selling houses to put the kids through college. Louise shrank into a chair at the kitchen table.

"There." Marge poured them each a cup of coffee and settled in across from Louise. "How've you been? What's the occasion?"

Louise carefully spooned some sugar into her coffee. She stirred, slowly, thoughtfully. Finally, she raised her head.

"It's Bill" she said. "We're splitting up."

A change came over Marge. Her shoulders sagged, her face lost some of its brightness. It was a look their mother used to give as she opened her arms to a crying child. A look that showed more pity than understanding, almost a frown. Louise had never seen her sister resemble their mother so, and she found it disconcerting.

"I'm sorry," Marge said. "I had no idea."

"I guess I hid things better than I thought." She repeated the story she had told Beth. The words came easier this time. She was practicing, she thought. "I haven't told Dad yet. I can't seem to get it out."

Marge shook her head. "He won't be happy." She sounded like a mother scolding her child. Like their mother, saying to Louise, *Wait till your fa-*



ther sees this, or What will your father say ? Louise stiffened, but said nothing.

Marge studied the coffee in her cup. "Poor Dad. And after Mother." She looked at her sister. "Do you know he still won't talk about her. Goes about his business as if she had gone away on a trip or something. I don't think he's even cried."

"I'd believe that. I've never seen him cry at all. Even at the funeral. Don't you remember? How everyone said how well he was taking it? I was torn up inside watching him."

"He sticks to his routine. Still walks a mile each morning, even with the cane. Says the cane is just for show, but he needs it more and more. Has lunch with the men from the office on Tuesdays. Naps every afternoon."

"He still won't turn on the air conditioner, I noticed."

Marge laughed. "And only one light at a time. Wait till you see the house at night. It's spooky."

"And I bet he still showers 'Navy style.' Remember?"

"Of course. Making us turn the water off while we washed. How could I forget?"

Louise rested her chin in her hands, her eyes bright. "When I had my first apartment, I used to run hot baths up to the rim of the tub and leave every light in the place on all day. But I think I was doing it for spite. I still felt guilty."

Marge put her cup in the saucer and smiled at Louise, that same gloating smile she had as a child. "You always did."

"Well, you were always Miss Perfect. Never needed to feel guilty." Louise was surprised at the sudden anger in her voice.

"You know that's not fair." Marge's tone was harsh, maybe even a little hurt.

Louise was sorry she had spoken. She stared at the tray of flowers in the center of the table, fresh camellias from the garden, lush pinks and reds, a perfect accent to the forest green tablecloth. "Sometimes I think marrying Bill was the only right thing I ever did," she said at last. "In his eyes,

at least. It kind of made up for all the rest."

"That's crazy," said Marge, too quickly.

But Louise wasn't convinced. She had never said it out loud, never admitted it even to herself, but the thought had existed below the surface for a long time, a vague uneasy feeling. She felt a sense of relief in the silence that followed.

"I'd better be off," she said, and rose to go.

* * * *

Back at home, she found her father in the parlor, fixing his evening cocktail.

"Come join me," he called to her.

Louise went in, poured herself a plain tonic and sat across from him. The silence filled the room. All her life, her father was a figure at the edges of the conversation. Her mother supplied the words, the constant stream of topics, and her father sat on the sidelines, interested, but saying little. Now, without her mother, Louise found herself searching for words to fill the space.

And besides. Bill was there between them.

She chatted about Bern, Marge, her day, as best she could. Then the silence took over again, only the hum of the fan in the corner, a mockingbird outside the window.

"How's Bill?" he said, knowing, or not knowing, Louise couldn't be sure.

So this was it. This was the time to talk.

"Dad," Louise began, searching his face for clues. "Bill and I are getting a divorce." There. It was out.

Her father said nothing. Kept his eyes on her face, a stoic expression on his. He stirred his drink, took a sip.

"Bill left you?" he said finally, in disbelief.

"Not exactly. I made him leave." Still no response, no frown, no smile, nothing. "I had to. It was his drinking." Louise fidgeted, smoothed the arm of the sofa, examined a pillow. "It had really gotten out of hand." She felt compelled to continue, to convince him. "Some nights he wouldn't come home at all. I'd sit by the phone, worried sick. The kids knew. I couldn't let them grow up



in a house like that. Not any more."

Still he said nothing. Sipped his drink. Watched her.

"I tried everything." Louise's voice was getting higher. She was talking fast. "Finally I told him he had to get help or leave." Then, feeling his judgment, "I had no choice. You have no idea how bad it was."

He shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "Man's got to have his drink now and then. You can't take that away from him. Bill's a salesman. He needs to make contacts. Keep friendly. What's a drink now and then among friends?"

Louise paused. "This was different. Dad," she said, emphasizing each word, trying to get back in control. In her mind she heard Bill saying almost the same words, but loud, shouting them. *You don't understand*, he would say. *I've got to meet people. You like the money but you won't let me do what it takes.* And worse: *You think it's so easy? You should try and support us sometime. See how it is.* And even worse: *If you didn't nag at me all the time I wouldn't drink so much.*

The silence in the room was bearing down on her. She was hot. The fan in the corner was the only sound, a low hum, as it brought its saving breeze, then turned away. "It was awful for the girls," she said quietly. "He'd get so angry around the house, yelling at them. Once he threw a glass at the wall."

Her father uncrossed his legs, placed both feet on the floor in front of him and stared at them. "Your mother would never have left," he said firmly. "She would have found a way."

Louise could feel the anger rise up inside her. Her hands gripped the arm of the sofa. She faced him, eyes glaring. "Well, Mother's gone," she said, her voice loud and suddenly strong. "I had to do it my way."

She stood up, marched down the hall and into the bathroom. She shouldn't have come. They would never understand, not her father, not Marge. Not even Beth. There was nothing here for her,

not any more. She turned on the light, ran some cold water over her hands and splashed it onto her face, then reached for the linen hand towel hanging beside the sink. It was pale yellow, spotted with age, a single flower in the center outlined in tiny, uneven stitches. Chain-stitching, or was it feather-stitching? She never could get the names straight. There in the corner were her initials in faded blue. A long-ago Christmas gift to her mother, one that she herself had hand-embroidered. She hadn't seen it in years. She ran her hands over the worn, child-sized stitches. Her father must have found it in among her mother's things and laid it out in honor of her visit.

She could hear her father now moving about in the kitchen. She carefully patted her face dry then refolded the towel, hung it up and went to find him. He was rinsing glasses, carefully leaning to load them in the dishwasher. He moved slowly, inspecting each glass before placing it on the rack.

"We'd better hurry," he said as he heard her enter, his back to her. "We're due at Marge's in ten minutes." She walked over and stood beside him at the sink. Beyond their kitchen was a narrow alley and the shuttered windows of the house next door.

"I'm sorry. Dad. I know how much you loved Bill."

He rinsed another glass, then turned off the water.

"I guess I wanted you to understand," she said.

He turned to her, holding the damp glass in one hand. "Thank you for coming." He put the glass on the counter and stared at it. "Sometimes I think I've lived too long," he said, more to himself than to Louise. "Your mother . . ." His voice cracked and he drew in a breath, finishing almost in a whisper. "Your mother would have known what to say."

Louise put her arm around his back, felt the bony shoulders through his thin shirt. "You miss her, I know."

He faced the sink again and shut his eyes. "Ev-



ery day," he said softly, like a sigh.

She held him loosely, tentatively at first, then his body shook with a thinly concealed sob and she pressed him close, felt her own tears begin. He reached up, took her hand and squeezed it gently. Then he cleared his throat, placed the last glass on the rack in the dishwasher and turned to her, his

face now composed. "Is there anything you need? Money? A place to stay?"

She wiped her eyes with the back other hand and smiled. "I'm fine, Dad."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure. Yes, I'm sure."



Sundog

by Barry Ballard

Some gleaming whisper, a daylight Aurora
(no larger than the ten degree width of my
clenched fist), tangled along with my moralized
certainty of death and uncertainty of
worth, detached and redefining the atmosphere.
It could be the silvering of at least
one side of my body without its headpiece
and armor (the human convergence of fear

and last hope at all my interior streets),
shining up the self-conscious question
of why I'm here like a glass building
with a stranger inside, hands cupped in deep
shadows against the glass, straining for one
clear moment from the fog and the Unwilling.



Photography by Joy Lierle



Consecration

by Kymberli G. Ward

Now I must tell you what I did not need
to say before;
our flesh so close
as if to confirm patience and prayer.

I have felt no pain, made no promises.
My past has been prodigal enough with promise and vow.
This is different.

As close as breath, as close as death
you are in me,
as the shadows of the past
are pressed into the future.

Let them open my body when I am dead:
they will find in me a spaciousness
I have called your presence.
Etched more deeply than any mark of mother or father,
in me they will find you and know
that all my days you followed me;
that all the long nights I was faithful.

To you I came as the wild hart thirsting.
“Let us go forth into the desert,” it is written.
“There I will give you my love.”



Charles Wright at the MLA

by Constantine Contogenis

A scholar of porn discovered travel
writing had been used to write about sex.
Another speaker showed us sexy slides:
one of a clothed woman exposing her breasts
provoked a squeak from a watching woman—
a good imitation of Betty Boop.

Right off the lobby, Victoria's Secret
advertised how well their bras advertised.
I felt the urge to buy but with feminist theory
behind me, I read between the signs: a male,
I must stand aside, wait until the buyers
are suited and contend for my arm.

But the true yearly passion is for jobs.
The career and would-be career haters
of clichés say, "meat market MLA"
with daring. My one interview over,
I became my own interviewer deciding
whether to let me back into my life.

I watched for the prosody of clothes
in counterpoint with bodies. I looked
into the lobby's available eyes.
The return looks stung slightly like fresh bullet
wounds that would hurt more as adrenaline
drained and I retreated from the line of fire.

At Wright's reading, I felt that at least
for a few days I was saved. I don't know
how he helped by just writing desire against
desire—and not even desire for flesh
but for things—matching his backyard against
the being of no thing. Well, show me the way.



It Is Not

by Marjorie Roberts

It is not the time of day
to remember you are gone.

Jonquils in the window, larkspur at the door
relish sun on their cheeks, not turning its back.

Last night when the wind wept, I was the chorus,
a raspy scratch of leaf.

I understand your leaving,
that I cannot follow.

We agreed to this long ago.

No amount of logic
eases the position I find myself.

I am not lonely. I am not without love.
I am faith and hope bent.

It is not your brilliant mind I'll miss, your
irreverent wit or sensual lips. Although they count.

It is not your quiet strength, loquaciousness,
or bunches of marguerites you bring, one
dangling from your lapel like a white sail.

It is that I'll miss our rendezvous.
every Tuesday at 5.

It is your closing the door so gently,
the barely audible click of the latch,
the sound of a wet tongue.

It spares me nothing.



The Pine Siskin

by Barbi Schulick

When he was a small boy, my son Jeremy loved small creatures. He'd take joy in catching a cricket in his cupped hands, then make a show of letting it go, hopping when it hopped, following it into the tall grass until he lost sight of it. He traveled our yard with his head down, his big dark eyes hunting for anything moving at ground level. I was forever piercing holes in jar tops to supply airflow for his spiders and their prey. Soon he moved on to toads, and he had an eye for them—locating one hunched and brown among autumn leaves, scooping another out from the dirt behind the front steps. He kept two as pets: "Toader" and "Toaderette." When they peed in his palm, he'd yelp and toss them to the kitchen floor. I constructed a chicken wire cage for them in the backyard, digging it two feet under so they could hibernate for the winter.

When Jeremy was eight or nine, he discovered birds. I didn't fully witness his love for them emerging, didn't notice the first moment he marveled at a chickadee cracking a seed against a branch or caught sight of the flash of red inside a blackbird's wing. But more often, it seemed, his gaze focused upwards and out came the binoculars, field guides, birding journals.

Jeremy was a thin, slight boy with a shy sweetness that placed him barely on the edge of his grade school's in-crowd. His lack of competitive spirit confined him to the bench in Little League. He was one to do puzzles, to painstakingly sort and categorize his baseball cards, to read the Nintendo guideline booklet cover to cover, and to watch birds—for hours—outside the kitchen window, keeping track in his journal of how many goldfinch came at what time, whether they were male or female, whether there were babies, and describing how they scattered with the arrival of a blue jay.

I remember a spring when a flock of pine siskins frequented the feeders. Jeremy loved how

miniature they were, even smaller than juncos and chipping sparrows. The thin, brown-speckled wisps of their bodies balanced on legs sligher than toothpicks. He longed to know them better, and so after school each day, he stood on the deck in front of the feeders, holding black oil sunflower seeds in his outstretched hand. At first his arrival sent dozens of birds away from the feeders and nearby bushes, flapping their tiny wings in alarmed retreat. But gradually the group swooped back, in what seemed a corporate decision to ignore the small human holding out seeds. Jeremy stayed put, applying his trademark patience, moving only to wave off a mosquito now and then. And I'd watch, wishing with a mother's fervor that a bird would come to him but never surprised that one didn't. Eventually I'd announce dinner, and he'd plod in, dragging his feet, vowing not to give up.

The afternoon the pine siskin perched on his hand, I was cooking something demanding: a sauce that mustn't boil, a stir-fry to constantly stir, food that should be eaten right away, and so, as I turned off the stove burners, I yelled: "Jeremy, come in now, it's dinner!"

Then setting the table in a flurry, I yelled again: "Jeremy. Dinner!"

And while pouring drinks: "Jeremy!"

"Quiet!" came an urgent whisper from behind me. I turned to find my husband staring out the glass swing set door at Jeremy on the deck. There, our little bird of a son was standing straight as a soldier, one thin arm shooting out at a perfect right angle. As if in salute, his palm was upturned, the long fingers flattened together to form a platform for a tiny, brown pine siskin that stood equally erect and looked back at him.

I studied Jeremy from the kitchen for those three, four, maybe five seconds, and although he appeared so still that even his breath was halted, I could detect a gentle tilt in his stance, his head and



torso reaching delicately towards the bird at the edge of his unmoving arm. It was a yielding that spoke of reverence, recognition, of the sort of hospitality a flower might offer a butterfly. He had become a place for a pine siskin to rest.

When the bird finally flew, Jeremy's breath shuddered through him, returning in a grateful rush. He turned to look at us. Sweat had formed on his upper lip, his cheeks were flaming, and I saw wisdom in his young eyes. Through the coming weeks,

he would describe over and over how it felt to be so close to the bird, to feel it buoyant, almost weightless, on his fingers. And though he'd try again to woo one, he'd never be successful, so that those few seconds with a pine siskin, his siskin, would be held in memory and heart, the way one remembers words from God issuing through a breeze.



Faith in a Seed

by John Leax

And now, late summer, the young
robins marching about
displaying speckled breasts
and fierce dispositions,
the starlings spaced evenly
along the power lines anticipating
the rush of arctic winds,
the goldfinch males, brilliant
in their patience, mount the purple
sumac and call their olive mates
to love, for now is seedtime.
The flowers, spent, spend all
their wealth to buy another season
from the cold, and the finches,
nesting late and well, find
in the wild dispersion
the satisfaction of every want
they neither know nor question.



Photograph by Ryan Patterson



Picasso's Women

by Daniel R. Schwarz

I

Curvicular Marie Therese, earth mother:
passionate sensuous images
evoking children blowing bubbles,
romping on the sand,
gently swaying to Antibes breezes—
blissful memories set to gentle music.
Take Girl before a Mirror:
fantastic double image,
insistent wedding of opposites,
her head a marvel of compression,
half hidden frontal view becomes
a cosmetic mask of sexual lure,
evocation of astronomical rhythms.

II

But it is otherwise with Dora Maar:
Grimacing and swollen face,
convulsive postures.
weeping woman, cadaver,
disfigured, monstrous;
the macabre 1940 *Head of a Woman*;
a skull grits its teeth in rage.

III.

Seated Woman: Francoise's inquiring visage,
fecund body, staring eyes, forcefully seated.
Woman-Flower: blossoming form
sheds its mass; her slim, oval
body like the stalk and bloom of a sunflower.
Her blue tonality injects a lunar coolness,
counterpointing the woman as flower.
reminding us of Picasso's conversation—and ours—
with visible and invisible worlds.



What We Have Lost

by Ken Hada

What we have lost
lives only in memory,
in longings for
the wilder days before greed
overran us,
before time became madness,
before living
became a sales job, before
our vain scrambling
devoured us, before we
paraded our
chicanery for the world
to bear witness
to our suicidal march.

What we have lost
is not recoverable
despite naive
optimism that proclaims
a virtual
reality based on new
technologies
that build illusionary
economies
spurred by willful ignorance
of nature's truth,
our hubris that promises
us new frontiers
and endless resources just
around the bend.

What we have lost
is a shirtless sun-tanned boy
standing knee-deep
midstream holding a cane pole
with swaying line
reaching into a swirling
maroon eddy
as sundown descends over
graying green hills
secluded in transient air.

What we have lost
is the possibility
that something else
other than human frailty
motivates us.



Curley Joe

by Gerald R. Wheeler

A ranger tracking renegade Apaches that burned settlers
alive near the Mimbres River found him
wrapped in blanket in gamma grass. He figured kin
hid him there when they heard thundering hoofs,
fiendish cries, saw flashes of lances, Winchesters,
blood-streaked painted faces & bodies of charging heathens.
Ranger gave him to widow running a boardinghouse
at Deming. She eyed infant's wiry hair, tiny fingers,
named him Curly Joe. Wrote in her Bible,
"Curly Joe, born day he arrived—April 21, 1885."

The boy learned to scrub floors before he could stand,
scrapped pots & pans sitting in high chair. Cut firewood,
washed sheets with lye soap until hands blistered & raw.
Foot-hoed, planted seeds, picked vegetables
in caretaker's garden. Choked dust, beating rugs
hanging on clothesline in hot sun. Listened to cowboys'
& miners' tales, dreaming of escape between chores.
Ran away to Animas at age ten. Adopted by a cowboss
who taught him how to break & ride broncs, corral mounts,
survive long roundups for \$30 a month. Track & rope strays,
shod horses, repair saddle gear, recognize an unsound steed,
brand, castrate & butcher steers. Sleep on hard ground
under tarp in sleet & rain, hunker behind frozen feed sacks
in blizzard. Live by cowpuncher's rules: "Always use
same caliber ammo for sidearm & long gun. Look out
for snakes, mountain lions, charging longhorns
& two-legged varmints (Hanged first rustler at 16).
Workin' on horseback always better than feet. Know your mount's
name, change horses often. Use coal oil liniment for sprains.
Most dangerous jobs—chopping horns off longhorns
for loading chutes, prodding cattle fallen down in rail cars
& dodging flying shit. Most important: remember,
more cowboys die from fistfights than gunfights or stampedes."
Curley Joe's fate— Beaten to death in Silver City saloon
for stealing drover's whore. Buried with his saddle under rocks
near the Mimbres by his Diamond A crew. Carved Cedar plank
marker: "Curley Joe, Cowpuncher, died here, May 3, 1910."



Meanwhile, Back at the Farm

by William Jolliff

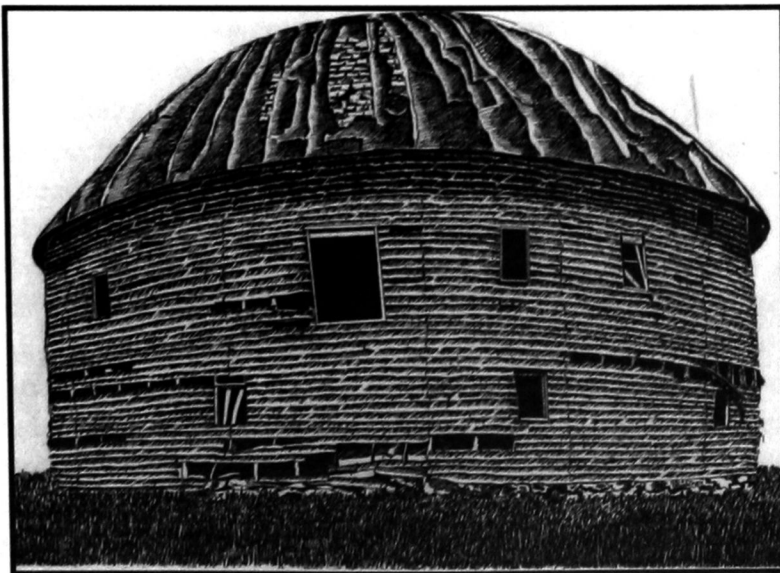
The sound and color of cornstalks,
two coyotes crossed the road this morning.
They paid no attention to my truck or rifle rack.
I suppose that makes them domestic.

When I was a boy here, you never saw a critter
larger than a ground hog. The smaller farms
were all sold by then, and the farmers
who stayed were quickly tearing out

every fence row and draining every wetland
as fast as you could run a dozer and spray
2,4,5 T . . . then lamenting, on the odd afternoon,
whatever happened to all the game?

Hell, huntin' ain't even worth the walk!
A farmer's child on a thousand acres,
I never saw a deer. But they've returned
to this uneasy Midwestern truce

and with them, the coyote. He shows
us how things come in twos: deer and coyote,
egg factories and flies, chemicals and corn ground,
ripe wheat and hard wind, anger and debt.



Drawing by Kristy Dewberry



The Plague of Simple Loss

by Robert Parham

A plague of many colors,
a kind of iridescent soot,
descended on the land.
Its damage seemed little
to those who could not miss
what it had killed: just
simple manners, what seemed
rules of prickly consort
to uninitiates were in fact
what eased the passing place
to place, person to person.

Good manners are but kindness,
all with sense would know.
It is not a prison of forks,
which one first, or where,
but forks instead of fingers
greasy with half raw duck,
clean folded napkins
in the place of snot-filled rags,
a pause to let the jest of one
precede the gentle spar of next.



Time Expired

by Joseph Riley

He was always a practical joker. And it wasn't that he was ever so well-loved as much as he was never so well-hated. He was loved by some and he was hated by others. That is the truth of it. But whether he was loved or hated, he always could bring a smile to the most intractable face. Whether they loved him or whether they hated him, they laughed—and somehow, through their laughter, he found a sense of legitimacy that eluded him his whole life.

It was a shock when he died so young, so unexpectedly, like an audit done in crayon, like a bird that is afraid of heights. It was so unlike death.

Some of those who said they loved him and some of those who hated him, but who said they tried to love him on more than one occasion, assembled at the appointed hour to hear the reading of the will. And though they were surprised by the news of his untimely death, no one was surprised to find that he had embedded within it one last practical joke; though to be fair, it wasn't very good and nobody laughed.

The will contained the standard array of clauses and such-and-suches left to so-and-sos. It was filled with scattered wherefores and plenty of in-the-event-ofs, all of which were read with neither passion nor variation of tone. It was a slow moving parade of monotone syllables, viewed by expressionless spectators who occasionally offered a nod of the head, a shuffle in a chair, the odd adjustment of a leg, a random cough. It was a slow motion Zapruder film of an event, complete with its own bangs and exploding heads.

The dreamlike meandering trek through legal stipulations suddenly halted with the reading of the final clause, regarding the details of the burial and containing the joke. He cared nothing about the whys and wherefores, the particulars, rituals, and even the location of the burial, all he cared about was that wherever and however he was in-

terred, he wanted a parking meter rising from his tombstone so that all who ventured near his grave would read the meter's existential pronouncement of his death: "time expired."

II

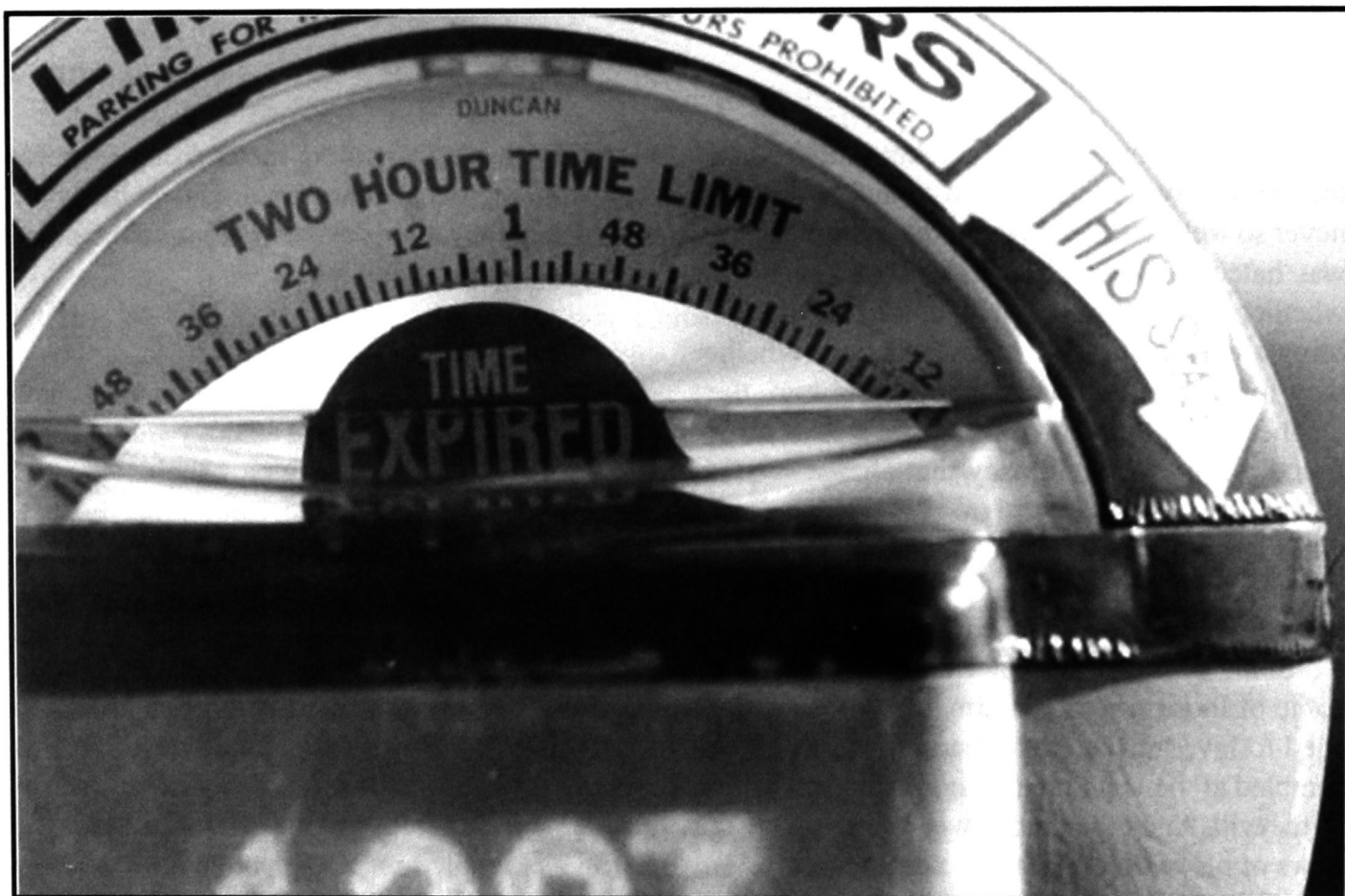
She missed him long before he died. And when he did, she was lost. A fitting analogy would make sense here, but she was long past analogies—she needed something concrete, something honest. When she heard the news of his death, the only honest thing she could do was faint.

She was one of those who loved him; and upon occasion, she was someone who found it easier to hate him. But now there was nothing to love or to hate, except memories and a cold body. She was asthma. She was a dry-heave. She was beyond repair. He was dead. It was true. That was that.

She assembled on the appointed day to hear the reading of the will. She alone smiled when the final clause was read. Their meeting was a practical joke. Their marriage was hilarious. No one expected it. Fewer expected it to last. And to be fair, it didn't. He died unexpectedly, without warning, without pain. He was strong, chopping wood—he was dead, feeding worms. And she learned to deal with it.

Among the scoffs and murmurs hanging in the air, she alone was determined to see that his final wish was carried out. Others would gladly divide the trinkets of his life, but she alone would honor his wishes. It proved to be a hard wish to honor. No one, it seemed, wanted a parking meter planted on their grounds amidst the solemnity of religious icons and civic monuments. After a myriad of aborted attempts, she found her way into a Baptist church, speaking to a man behind a large wooden desk, wearing a dark blue suit, with neatly trimmed hair and a hoax of a smile. She sat in a small chair set before his large desk and began her well-re-





Photograph by Joel Kendall

heard request.

"Uh, ma'am?" he interrupted after a few sentences. "let's cut to the chase. Was this man a Christian?"

"Not exactly," she hesitantly answered.

"Not exactly?" he asked condescendingly, "and could you explain to me how he was 'not exactly' a Christian? Because you're either a Christian or not. There's no 'not exactly' about it. That's like saying someone is 'not exactly' pregnant. But you and I both know that a woman is either pregnant or she isn't. So tell me, which is it?"

"He was not not a Christian," she tossed out before him.

"I see . . ." the minister snickered, his eyes rolled up into his head as if he were spying on his own thoughts, "so the answer would be 'no,' wouldn't it?"

"Not exactly," she rebutted.

"What do you mean 'not exactly'?"

"He was not not a Christian. I seem to remember some place in the Bible where Jesus says that anyone who isn't against him is for him. So according to Jesus, if he was not not a Christian, then he was a Christian."

"Well," the minister said, resuming his condescension, "I appreciate your use of Scripture to make your case, I really do, but it appears as if we are at an impasse. Jesus also said that anyone who was not for him was against him. So let me put it this way, was your husband born again?"

She knew that the correct answer to the question was a resounding "yes." She also knew that that answer would be a lie. "No," she finally admitted after a moment of squirming in her tiny chair, "he wasn't born again, at least not in the way you mean. In fact, he often said that being born once was more than enough."

"So he wasn't saved, was he?"

She was silent for a long time, scrutinizing the man with neatly trimmed hair sitting behind the large wooden desk in the dark blue suit, wondering what kind of satisfaction he was getting by making a woman in grief squirm before him, wondering what kind of a man coerces a woman to declare her recently departed husband unsaved. She refused to give him the satisfaction he seemed to be so desperately seeking. "I don't know," she simply stated, "that's between him and god."

"Well according to God," he said, raising his eyes and his palms toward the ceiling, "those who are not Christian are not saved."

"You didn't know him," she said sternly, almost whispering, almost growling, "he was a good man. He was a loving husband and a good father. He provided for us. He sacrificed. He never hurt anyone. He was faithful and compassionate. And because of the person he was in life, he certainly deserves more in death than to be denigrated by you or anyone else, even your god. If the only fault that god finds in him is that he was not a Christian . . . if being the good man that he was is not good enough . . ." she tried to continue, but her emotions overtook her and she was forced to pause.

"With all due respect, ma'am," the minister said in a tone that suggested that she deserved no respect at all, "good people don't go to heaven, Christians do."

In her mind she was beating him to death with her chair. In her mind she was hurling curses at him that would make a drunk sailor blush. In her mind she was telling him in no uncertain terms what a hypocritical-minded, petty, puny, narrow-minded, used-car-salesman of a person he really was. Outwardly, however, she forced a smile. "Look, I'm not asking you to condone anything about him. I'm just asking you to allow me to honor a dead man's last request. You're my last hope. I'm just asking you to show a little compassion. Please!" Her voice cracked, tears leaked from her green eyes, rolling down her cheeks.

"I'm sorry," the minister said as she fondled for a tissue in her purse, "I am truly sorry for your loss. And I am deeply sorry for your troubles, but the fact is that our cemetery is for church members and their families. Neither you nor your husband have ever been members of this church. You aren't even Christian. I'm afraid I'm going to have to follow the advice of Jesus and let the dead find a way to bury their own dead."

"Thank you for your time," she said, rising from her seat. As her hand touched the doorknob to leave, an epiphany sparked within her mind. "What if I were to join your church?"

The words expanded in the room, crowding out everything else. "I just don't think that's a good idea."

"Why?"

"You'd only be joining the church so that your husband can be buried in our cemetery. That just wouldn't be honest, now would it?"

"How do you know that god isn't using this situation to lead me back to church? How do you know that god isn't using this situation so that my children will be saved? Regardless of what my motivations may appear to be right now, perhaps god is saving me through this experience."

The minister quietly mulled over her words. "Hmmn . . ." he occasionally inserted in the silence. Finally he declared, "I'm sorry but I'm just not convinced."

"And because of what god will do for me through this church, I'm certain that my gratitude will motivate me to make some kind of donation to the church."

A slow smile imperialistically stretched across the minister's face. "Donation? What sort of donation would your gratitude," he paused, searching for the proper word, "induce?"

"Oh," she said coolly, "I'm certain that my gratitude would induce a large financial donation in whatever amount is deemed appropriate, if, of course, I were to find myself welcomed into this church family, and if my husband were permitted



to be buried, according to his wishes, in the church's cemetery."

"If you were to join this church, a donation would be welcomed, of course. But more would be expected of you. After all, you can't buy salvation. You can't bribe God," he said, once more raising his eyes and palms toward the ceiling.

"What do you have in mind?" she queried.

"You would have to be baptized."

"I've been baptized," she said.

"Into this church? No? Then you would have to be baptized. You will be expected to attend worship. You will be expected to tithe ten percent of your income, that's before taxes. I'd also expect you to attend my weekly Bible study on Wednesday evenings. The church also expects that you refrain from drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, and engaging in any kind of extramarital sexual relations. The church would also frown upon any advocacy of liberal ideas, which all truly saved men know are contrary to the will of God." He paused after each requirement as he presented it to her in order to appraise her response. She simply dropped her eyes to the floor, nodded her head, demonstrating her acceptance and her submission, which only seemed to invite another requirement for membership. "Well," he finally said, "this sheds a whole new light on the situation. Praise Jesus, another lost sheep has found its way to the fold!"

"Amen," she dryly whispered.

"By the way, how many children do you have?"

"Two sons, five and three."

"Based on what we discussed here today, I believe that I can convince the church board that one body is worth three souls. I see no problem with giving your husband a decent Christian burial, for your sake of course, during which time you can come forward and declare your intention to accept Jesus into your heart and live a Christian life."

They discussed the details of the funeral. He was interred in the church's cemetery under a shady tree near the road. The minister almost had a seizure the first day he saw the parking meter rising

from the tombstone. He called her up, demanding that the meter be removed immediately. She simply told him that that is what he had agreed to and if he wasn't prepared to honor his part in the agreement, then she would not feel compelled to honor hers. The minister relented.

It took a while but her life slowly took on trappings of normalcy. Not all at once, an inch here, a foot there, but over time she began to feel much as she had when he was still alive. There were those times when the crushing awareness of his absence made her life seem excruciatingly unbearable, but those times became more and more infrequent as the months and years passed, though they never disappeared completely. Before she knew it, seven years had passed. And she, true to her word, attended services every Sunday morning and Bible study every Wednesday evening. She never took a drink or smoked a cigarette. And as far as anyone knew, she never had sex or even voted for a democrat.

III

The one thing that makes this world interesting is that everyone has theories. And when it happened everybody had theories. He suddenly appeared one day, standing in the middle of the one intersection that comprised the town square, confused, wandering out in front of moving cars, like a sleepwalker. Horns blared but he didn't seem to notice. He was like a senile old man who suddenly had forgotten how to cross the street. Somebody finally grabbed him, pulling him to the sidewalk, explaining to him how he should be careful in the future, but he simply looked at her like a ghost, like someone who had been dead for years, who had not heard language in such a long time that each and every word had to be translated in his mind.

He stumbled upon the crooked sidewalk, passing shops, meandering into the five-and-dime, finding himself chased out, acquiring the epithet of "bum," sniffing the scents of the pizzeria. He even-



tually blundered his way into one of his old haunts, finding a seat at the bar. "What can I get you?" asked the young bartender who approached him, who never once noticed the absurdity of a dead man sitting at his bar.

"What?" is all he could find to say.

"What can I get you to drink?"

"Drink?" he responded.

"Uh," the bartender looked around ironically at the assembly scattered around the barroom, which inspired the assembled patrons to laugh scornfully, "yeah, what can I get you to drink?"

"I like drinking," he said matter-of-factly, as if he was reminding himself of something he should have already known. "I like to drink . . ." he seemed to be struggling with a memory, "bourbon. I like to drink bourbon." The crowd displayed the exact opposite of graciousness by the manner of their laughter, but he felt neither their derision nor their mocking. He simply looked like someone who had recently emerged from a fever, who had vivid dreams, only to awake to find that they were dreams after all.

"So, you'd like a bourbon?" the bartender asked.

"I think so," he said.

"Any particular kind?"

"Brown."

The bar erupted with laughter. He looked around at the jeering faces with a confused expression. The bartender finally felt the need to explain. "All bourbon is brown," he said, bursting into laughter as the words escaped his lips.

"I would like a glass of brown bourbon," he said as if he hadn't noticed anything that had transpired.

"One glass of brown bourbon coming up," the bartender said with a chuckle. He grabbed a bottle and a small glass. "You want that neat?" the bartender asked. He simply looked at him expressionlessly. "Neat it is," the bartender concluded, tilting the bottle. "That'll be three seventy-five," the bartender said, sliding the bourbon-filled glass to-

ward him. He looked at the bartender as if he had spoken Chinese. "Ahem," the bartender asserted, "that'll be three seventy-five." The bartender slipped the bourbon-filled glass away from him. "You do have money, don't you?"

"Money?" he responded. "I don't seem to have any . . . money?"

"Then you'll get no bourbon."

It was about this time that he heard a name. A name that he recognized, but hadn't heard in a long time. He turned to the source of the name and saw a surprised man creeping into the barroom.

"I know you," he said to the man, confusedly.

"Holy Jesus, is it really you?" the man asked. "How the hell could you be here? You died years ago!"

"Oh yeah," he said, remembering an important piece of information, "that's right—chopping wood . . ."

"What the hell?" the man asked. "Is this real?" He lunged toward him, feeling his arm and his head. "It's you! You're here! What the hell? How can this be possible?"

"I . . . I am dead . . ." he said. Then he disappeared.

The theories multiplied like ravenous bacteria. Some simply said, "Well, what do you expect from a group of drunks in the middle of the afternoon?" Others assigned it to some kind of repressed grief that suddenly found a release. And still others developed even wilder theories. But what no one suspected was that the cause of this particular incident was an 11-year-old boy in a red jacket, who walked home from school every day, passing by the cemetery, every day reading the pronouncement of the meter, "time expired," never getting the joke, every day wondering one thing and one thing only: "I wonder if that parking meter works?" This particular autumn day, as he was walking home from school, he decided to find out. He put a quarter in the meter and turned the dial, and seeing that the arrow within the meter spun to "2 hours," he continued to venture home, never noticing that a man



suddenly appeared from behind the tree, who seemed to be trying to get the boy's attention, but who also seemed to be mute.

IV

Most rumors are like viruses. There are those rare virulent strains that destroy their hosts, tearing communities apart. Most, however, sneak in, multiply, mutate, make life uncomfortable for a while, run their courses, and expire. The rumors of his rising at first appeared to follow the typical common cold variety of rumor.

The initial carriers were those who were present in the bar that afternoon. As sources of information go, some were perceived to be more reliable than others. The testimonies offered by the general crowd that assembled that day were generally regarded as questionable at best. These were after all those who had nothing better to do with their time than to slowly decompose, a bit at a time, day after day. Few believed their story. Even the other drunks who were absent suspected that rubbing alcohol had found its way into a whiskey bottle. Nevertheless, those who littered the barroom that day asserted that they saw a strange man sitting at the bar and then vanish right before their eyes.

The friend who knew him was a little harder to dismiss. Although most who heard his tale were incredulous, there always seemed to be the nagging questions of "Well, why would he lie about seeing him?" and "What does he have to gain by telling such a story?" which granted it a minute sense of veracity.

"Christ, man, what the hell were you drinking?" the people who heard the tale would ask.

"I only had two Manhattans," he would answer, "honestly, I wasn't even drunk. I sure as hell got drunk after I saw him disappear in front of me, but I swear to god, I was more or less sober at the time."

"Sure you were," they would always rebut, "I've seen you 'more or less sober' on more than one occasion when I had to drive you home or call you a cab."

"I know what I saw," he would always conclude, "I may be a lot of things, but I'm not a liar," to which the listener would have to concede. He may upon occasion drink too much, but he was as honest as a minor-league drunk could be. Even if the audience hearing the story did not readily believe it, they believed that he believed it, eagerly passing the story on to the next person.

The bartender was the hardest to ignore. He was no drunkard murdering time until his own extinction. Although he was known to sneak a shot upon occasion, he was never tipsy behind the bar. The fact that he claimed to serve a confused individual who another patron claimed had died years ago, and then who vanished before him, furnished the story with much needed credence.

Fortunately, there are always newer rumors in circulation. As the weeks passed, the population lost interest in the tale. The tale, of course, found its way to her, always from somebody who knew somebody, who knew a guy who was there. At first she was startled, then angry. "If he really did come back from the dead," she often rebutted, "why would he waste his time with a bunch of no-account drunks that he didn't even know? Don't you think that he would have shown up at home instead?" Eventually she became resigned to let the rumors run their courses because her protests only seemed to add new life to a dying story.

Then one day another sighting occurred. Then another. Then still another. The appearances seemed random and the accounts were vague, but the more they seemed to happen, the more detailed they became. A strange man was seen sitting on a fence, with the exact expression of someone who was attempting to figure out why air isn't a liquid. Others claimed to see a strange man lurking around the Baptist cemetery, apparently reading the information on tombstones, or at least one tombstone in particular—his. Hundreds of people claimed that a man interfered with a play during a high school football game by walking onto the field and getting in the way of the receiver, who ran into him



and fell on top of him, only to find that no one was there when the boy got up. The description of the man was always the same and those who knew him in life swore that this phantomlike figure was at the very least his twin.

Then one late afternoon the local police picked up a befuddled man in his early forties, who was aimlessly wandering around town, periodically shouting things to no one in particular. "What am I doing here?" and "How did I get here?" and "Why do I keep coming back?" he inquired loudly to passersby, some of whom claimed to recognize him. The police took him to the station for public drunkenness and disturbing the peace. They asked him the standard questions for their report, questions that he seemed unable to answer.

After some time they managed to get a name and an address, but he didn't appear to be very certain about either of them. The only thing that he did seem to be certain about was the name he offered as his spouse. The police locked him in the drunk tank while they attempted to contact the woman he identified as his wife.

"Um, ma'am, this is Sergeant Andersen, we picked up a man who claims to be your husband. Could you come pick him up?"

"I don't know what this is about. Sergeant," she said sternly, "but my husband died seven years ago." The officer was silent for a long time. When he finally did speak again he described the person in custody. Her heart seemed to stop beating as the policeman narrated the list of physical features and a chill crawled into the room, pouncing upon her. She dropped the receiver.

"Is this some kind of sick joke?" she asked when she had picked up the phone from the floor. She was assured that it was not and that it was necessary for her to come down and see if she could identify the person in question. When she arrived at the station she was greeted by the embarrassed apologies of Sergeant Andersen. The man in custody had escaped.

"Escaped?" she asked doubtfully.

"Yes, ma'am," he confirmed, "right after we spoke on the phone I went back to tell him that you were on your way . . . but he was gone. I don't understand it. The cell was locked. I am at a complete loss as to how this happened."

She ventured home unamused. She fixed dinner for her children, discovering that she had no appetite. Her hands trembled when she attempted to sip her tea. She spent that night wriggling among her sheets in discomfort, tormented by dreams of him, accosted by the desolation of a barren bed.

About a week later she arrived home and was greeted by her next-door neighbor. "I don't want to alarm you," he said, "but there was a strange-looking man standing in your front yard, staring at your house today. I tried to ask him who he was but he seemed disoriented—probably hopped up on drugs. I called the cops, but by the time they arrived he was gone. They said his description matched someone who escaped from the station a week or so ago. If you want, I'll go into the house with you so you'll feel safe."

She thanked him and together they walked through her house, looking in every closet and under every bed. They searched through the basement. There was no sign of anyone in the house. The kids came home during the search and demanded to be told what was happening but their curiosity was never satisfied.

"I'd make sure all the windows and doors are locked tonight if I were you," he advised. "If you need anything just give me a holler." She thanked him and followed his advice. That night she slept with the lights on.

V

The wind blew angrily that day, like a cantankerous old man ensnared in a tedious argument. The leaves shivered from fear and fell like kamikaze pilots purchasing eternal life as they crashed upon the dark concrete of the road that ran adjacent the cemetery. No one paid the slightest attention to the 11-year-old boy in the red



jacket and his friends as they walked together down the inconspicuous street, swishing their feet through the leaves that gathered along the curb. The boy in the red jacket began to separate himself from the others.

"Hey, what are you doing?" asked his friends.

"Putting some change in the parking meter," he answered matter-of-factly.

"Why?" they asked.

"I don't know," he replied, "I just do it every once in a while."

"Isn't it bad luck or something to walk in a cemetery?"

"Don't know." He sounded confident. "Is it?"

"Dude," they counseled, "you're asking for trouble."

"Whatever." He stood before the grave, carefully slipping the quarter into the rusted slot, turning the dial. The arrow within the meter spun to "2 hours." He turned to his audience. "See," he said.

A hand slapped down upon the boy's shoulder, turning the boy around. The boy looked up into the face of a confused man. "You!" he said. "It's always you! You bring me back! Why do you bring me back?"

The boy later admitted that he was embarrassed by the fact that he shrieked like a little girl. He shook off the grip, and after catching up to the others, they decided that they would never speak of the incident ever again. But speak of it they did—often. As a matter of fact, they spoke of it a mere seconds after they had vowed that they would not. They spoke of it throughout the evening. They spoke of it with their parents around the dinner table, who simply assumed that their children had become infected by the emerging town legend about a mysterious ghost-man who was rumored to be lingering around the borough. They spoke of it years later, whenever they met together during college. And even long after they had families of their own, whenever they found time to sneak out for

a drink, they would speak of it. One of them would say after a few drinks, "Hey, you remember that time you put money in that parking meter on that grave, and that weird guy suddenly appeared and grabbed you? Man, that was some wild shit, wasn't it?"

What they never spoke of, however, were the events that transpired in the following days. Even when they were grown up and the events had slipped away, safely becoming part of the remote past, sleeping peacefully with other moments of lifeless history. The boy in the red jacket never once told his friends of his return to the grave and his encounter with the strange wraith who materialized with the deposit of a coin and a turning of a knob.

VI

Buried somewhere between the fourth and fifth pages of the six pages that comprise "Section A" of the local newspaper ran the curious headline: "A GRAVE MESSAGE: VANDALISM OR VOICE FROM BEYOND?" The article that followed recounted how a plot in the Baptist cemetery had been disturbed. A particular gravesite had been marred by someone of seemingly insidious intent, who employed a sharp stick or some type of gardening utensil to carve into the grass a message: "BOY BRING ME BACK AGAIN." It went on to detail how the minister of the church had no clue as to the meaning of such a message, though he was certain that it was somehow satanic or the product of trespassing teenagers, who had been raised by ungodly parents and who were victims of their own seething hormones. The report also recounted somewhere in the second paragraph that it was his grave, which had of late been the subject of various rumors and strange tales, causing many citizens within the small burg to speculate as to the source of these stories, ranging from an angry spirit haunting the municipality to anecdotes of how he and his wife must have faked his death in an attempt at insurance fraud.



Nevertheless, even though the story was hidden somewhere near the back of the paper, it became the topic of discussion. She arrived at work one morning to find one of her office confidants clutching the paper, pointing to the headline asking, "Did you see this?" She carefully probed the article, asking in exasperation of no one in particular, "Why is this town so obsessed with him? Why can't they just let him rest in peace? Most of them seemed eager enough to ignore him while he was alive, why do they suddenly need to talk about him in death?"

As the town speculated about the meaning of the inscription carved into the ground, one person knew exactly what it meant, the boy in the red jacket; he had slowly come to realize that the specter's appearances coincided with those days that he slipped change into the meter. The man who grabbed him that day was the man that everyone about town had seen. And he knew that he was somehow responsible.

VII

The thing about life is that it is remorseless. It neither gives a damn about the weather, nor does it give a damn about the amount of money found under the pillow of a child who lost her tooth, nor does it give a damn about milk that has passed its prime. Life is the mean drunk who chats up your sister while punching you in the nose.

And yet, it is somewhere within the forum of this remorseless life, which witnesses the rise of Stalins and Hitlers, and the advent of Lincolns and Washingtons, no more distinguishing between them any more than the slime upon a lake distinguishes itself from the mud—it is within this not-so-likely world that a boy in a red jacket distinguished himself from all the others who play at history, from all others who went through the motions of populating this sad excuse of a town.

The boy in the red jacket stood at the grave, alternating his gaze between the message and the meter, jingling the random pieces of change in his

pocket, periodically choosing a coin, extracting it from his pocket, moving it slowly toward the slot, yanking it away at the last moment, concealing it once more within his pocket.

It had been days since he had even walked anywhere near the cemetery, let alone ventured into it. He always found alternate routes to and from school. When his friends asked where he was going, he always had a clever excuse to be some other place, leading him to some other part of town, whether he actually had to be there or not.

The story in the paper only reinforced his resolve never to venture anywhere near the cemetery ever again. But the message torn into the dirt gnawed at him whenever he was alone.

And one day he found himself standing at the grave, vacillating between two reasonable choices: following the directions carved into the gravesite, or just going home, forgetting everything that had transpired since he stumbled upon the dingy, mildly-rusted parking meter.

A car occasionally ventured by and he felt naked. The autumn air was chilled by the death of the afternoon. He stood. Time passed. He stood some more. Change jingled. He moved. He recoiled. He stood. History yawned. He read the message. He reached into his pocket. He snagged a coin. He slid it into the slot. He turned the knob. It rattled and spun, clicking upon "1 hour."

He was not alone. With the boy a man now stood, shocked, smiling, impaled by the moment, exhaling like a bass yanked into a boat. "You," he finally said, after catching what must have been his breath, "you brought me back. Thank you."

VIII

There are clichés that mention the silence of tombs or graveyards or other serious, silent places—but clichés were reduced to just that at that moment when the boy saw him.

Time stopped, hiccupped, and started again with a sudden jerk. The boy in the red jacket looked at him, wanting to run away, forcing himself to





stand his ground. The man slowly held out his hand in the way that someone does when he is trying to convince someone not to run away. "Thank you," he said again.

"Why . . . what do you want . . . why did you want me to bring you back?" the boy said, searching for words. "You're not gonna eat my brains or

anything, are you?"

He was confused. The genre of flesh-eating zombies had long been forgotten in his seemingly infinite death. "I want you to find my wife," is all he said.

The boy looked at him with the same lack of trust as someone being offered a once-in-a-lifetime

opportunity, or a get-rich-quick scheme, or an eat-all-you-want-and-lose-weight-anyway diet. "All I want is to find my wife," he said with determination. "Please, help me find my wife."

"I don't know your wife. I don't know who you are, other than a name on a tombstone."

He couldn't help laughing. "Isn't that all any of us are, a name carved upon marble? Something for future generations to satisfy their curiosity as they randomly wander among the monuments of the dead?"

The boy was silent. "I don't know," is all he could say, embarrassed by the fact that he did not understand the question.

"I don't know either," he said, attempting to sound much less frightening than he apparently sounded a few moments before, "I'm only guessing at all this. I'm no longer comfortable with being alive." He looked deeply into the boy's face. The boy seemed confused, yet understanding. "Are you comfortable being alive?" he asked the boy.

The boy snickered, then looked seriously at the figure before him, then collapsed in confusion. "Is anybody?" the boy finally responded as honestly as he could.

"Huh," he commented at the child's response, "again, I don't know." The autumn wind seemed to blow in a way that made the clouds run for cover. "Will you help me find my wife?"

"I don't know who your wife is," he disclosed. "Isn't she dead too?"

"I don't know." Time seemed to cry at the confession offered in the cemetery.

"Why are you here?" asked the boy poignantly. "Why do you need my help?"

"You bring me back," he said, matter-of-factly. "I don't know how, but you bring me back. You've got to help me," he implored, then seeing that the boy appeared to be outwardly unmoved, he raised his voice like a starving man pleading for bread. "Please! I was snatched from life, without so much as a hint or warning. Then I was snatched from death, and I know that you have something to do

with it—all I want . . . all I need . . . is to say 'goodbye.' I don't know how I'm here, but when I'm here, I just want to say 'goodbye.'"

The boy could not hear an admission such as this and remain unmoved. "What can I do?" he asked.

"Help me find her."

"Where would she be?"

"I don't know," he admitted, "but I remember an address—perhaps it is still her address."

"What's the address? If I'm able. I'll find her."

For a brief second, he laughed, in the way that a condemned criminal laughs after finally confessing a grievous crime. He told the boy the address, which the boy recognized. The boy ran off. She lived about a mile from the cemetery. He arrived at her front door, knocking feverishly. She wasn't home. The boy sat upon the front steps and waited.

She arrived home about 45-minutes later, surprised to find the boy waiting at her front door. "Can I help you?" she asked the boy.

"You've got to come with me!" the boy said plainly.

"Go where?" she laughed.

"To the cemetery . . . your husband . . . he sent me for you." She didn't know whether to be annoyed or patient with the boy. She had had enough with rumors of her undead husband.

"That's not funny," she said in a way that would make Hitler squirm.

"I know it's not," he rebutted, "but it's true. Your husband sent me for you. He wants to say 'goodbye.'"

"He wants to say . . .?" She had to pause to compose herself. "Then why doesn't he come here and say it to me?"

"Don't know. He said that he needed my help, gave me your address, and sent me to get you." The boy looked at her imploringly, but she seemed unmoved. "Look, somehow I brought him back—something with that damned parking meter. I brought him back, do you understand? It was an accident, but I brought him back. He wants to see



you. Please, go see him. He looks like he's in pain, and I did it to him. For the love of god, please go to the cemetery!" By this point the boy was clutching at her arm and beginning to physically drag her with him as he moved back toward the route that led to the grave.

She didn't trust the boy for a second, but yet she inwardly applauded the performance. "Okay, I'll go with you to the cemetery, but if this is some kind of joke" She didn't have to finish the threat to make it menacing. The boy was still clutching at her, attempting to drag her down the road. "Hold on, hold-on," she shouted, "no sense walking when we can drive." With that they leapt into her car and she drove to the Baptist church.

She parked the car on the street that ran along the cemetery, opposite his grave. She and the boy walked to the plot. There was no one there. Together they traced the plot; she looked at the boy suspiciously. "Well?" is all she said. The boy twitched, inspecting the landscape nervously.

"I knew it!" she blurted at the boy. "I knew it was some kind of joke!" She lurched upon the boy menacingly with both her words and her body. "What kind of sick pleasure do you get out of tormenting me like this?"

As she was moving toward him, the boy saw that the meter read "time expired."

"Oh," the boy said calmly, "this happens sometimes. Watch." the boy reached into his pocket and produced a quarter, slipped it into the meter and turned the knob.

She remembers feeling that at that moment gravity was a practical joke. Her legs would have been more solid if they were made of sticks of butter on a hot August afternoon, and she would have been more sure of step if she were tap-dancing in tapioca pudding. It must have been some kind of dream.

But yet it wasn't.

IX

He walked out from behind the tree. She ex-

amined the figure. It was his build. It was his height. It was his . . . "Who the hell are you?" she demanded.

The figure said nothing. It walked out further from behind the shade of the tree, moving toward her. It looked like him. But how could it be him? He died seven years ago, myth and legend aside, he had died seven years ago. Everyone knew it, especially her.

He said her name in a way that made it sound as if it had not been spoken in years.

"Stop!" she said.

"What?" he asked surprisedly.

"I don't buy this for a second." She examined him purposefully. "You're dead. I buried you myself."

"I'm just as surprised as you," he said in a manner that was, yet was not, humorous.

She moved toward him cautiously. He took a couple of clumsy steps toward her. "If it is really you," she said like someone who had just cracked a secret code, "tell me what you said to me when we first met." He stopped in mid-step, struck by the request. "Ah," she boasted, "can't do it, can you?"

He hiccupped something like a laugh. "You were with your sister at the bar. She always made you feel insecure because you always thought that she was more attractive than you, and you always thought that every guy in the bar was looking at her and never at you. Maybe you were right. I don't know. All I know is that the moment I saw you there was no one else. My first words to you were, 'You're beautiful.' You laughed in my face and said something like, 'You have me confused with my sister.' And I said something like, 'I think you have *me* confused with somebody else. I don't know your sister. I just know that you're beautiful.' You laughed in my face again. I remember thinking that I should walk away, but I stayed next to you. And I said something like, 'I've lived all over this country, and I've been all over this world, and it's been a



long time since I've seen anything as beautiful as you . . . but I can see that you're nowhere ready to believe that, so I'll just go away now. I just figured one of two things: either you know how beautiful you are, in which case I apologize for wasting your time by telling you the obvious, or you have no idea, in which case I thought that you should probably be informed."

She heard his retelling of the past, her face softening with every sentence. "And I laughed in your face again," she said pensively.

"Yeah," he admitted. "And I stayed with you anyway," he said, tear leaking from his eye, stepping toward her.

"It's you," she declared. "How? . . . What? . . . I can't believe it . . ." By now they were only a foot or so apart. She examined him. He stood, withstanding examination. "You look exactly the same . . . as when you . . ."

"You've changed," he said matter-of-factly.

"I've stayed alive," she retorted. "It tends to age one a bit." She continued to inspect him. Suddenly she threw her arms around him, exploding with tears. "I've missed you!" Then just as suddenly she pulled away from him, banging her fists into his chest. "You son of a bitch! You left me, you son of a bitch! You left me with two sons . . . and a pile of debt . . . and nothing else!" She collapsed into his arms, wailing. "I hate you, you son of a bitch," she said, sobbing into his chest. He held her, keeping her from becoming a slave to gravity. She moaned, sometimes pausing to punch at him. And he absorbed her curses and her punches and her tears and her sobs and her wailing—almost like a hero.

"I'm sorry," is all he could say in response, which simultaneously said everything and nothing.

After a long while she pulled away from him. "How? . . . How are you here?"

"The boy," he said, pointing to the trespasser who had been standing among them, "he brought me back—I don't know how, but he brought me

back."

"How?" she asked the boy, suddenly reminded that he was there. "Why did you bring him back?"

"It was an accident," the boy announced. "I didn't know what would happen. I just put a quarter into the meter. I didn't know anything would happen, honestly!"

"You put a quarter in the meter?" she responded incredulously. "That's ridiculous!"

"Life is ridiculous," he said, patting the boy on the back. "Haven't you learned that by now?"

"Now that you mention it," she said with a laugh, "I've always suspected it, I just never knew that the universe had gotten this out of hand."

"You have no idea," he sighed. "It's out of hand." He laughed a full-belly laugh. "It's really out of hand."

X

She gave the boy some money that she found in her purse, thanking him, sending him back to her house to wait for her kids, who would be getting home soon, wondering where she was. "Tell them I'll be there shortly," she instructed him. The boy ran off, apparently relieved to be dismissed.

They sat together on his plot, holding each other, leaning against his tombstone.

"How long have I . . . ?" he stammered.

"Been dead?" She finished his question. "Seven years."

"Feels longer," he responded.

"The meter," she said after a long silence. "I should have known that it would bite me in the ass somehow. You have no idea of the shit you put me through with that damned thing."

"I seem to recall," he said.

"You do?" she said, surprised. "You were conscious?"

"It's not so much being conscious as it is not being unconscious." She pretended to understand, but she had no clue what he meant.



"What's it like to be dead?" she finally asked.

"I don't know," he said after much reflection.

"What do you mean you don't know? You're the one who died."

"I don't remember much about being dead when I'm alive. And I don't seem to remember much about being alive when I'm dead." She was obviously disappointed by his answer. She was disappointed because she wanted insight into the next life if such a thing existed, but she was also disappointed because his dead self did not seem to be concerned with the life that he left behind. She challenged him on this point.

"It's not that I don't care," he said after some thought, "I just don't feel the need to care. I know that everything takes care of everything else. You just kind of trust it." He could see that she did not appear to be convinced. "Trust me," he finally concluded, "when you're dead, the last thing you'll do is dwell on life."

"Is there a god?" she ventured.

"Yeah," he said plainly.

"What's god like?" she asked.

"When I'm dead, I am god," he answered. After seeing the doubt that paraded upon her face, he elaborated, "Well, obviously I'm not god, but at the same time, there's no distinction between me and god. It's just hard to explain."

"What's it like to be alive?" he asked after a long pause. She looked at him like he was the biggest asshole in the world.

"I'm serious," he said, gauging her expression, "I don't rightly remember."

"It's hard," she commented, probing deep into his eyes. "You really don't remember?"

"I remember being alive like you remember dreaming last night."

"Well," she said in a manner that betrayed a sense of exasperation, "I'm only forty-three, and most of the people I know are people 'I used to know.' It hurts! Being alive hurts more than dreaming about it. You want to know what it's like to be alive?" She stopped to fully examine the facts that

could plead her case. "It just hurts! There's a billion words I could affix to how it feels, but when it comes down to it, 'it hurts' is all that captures it. It hurts a lot. And when it doesn't, I sit back and wait for it to hurt again. That's what life feels like."

He seemed to contemplate his next words carefully. "It hurts for me to come back."

Her body flung away from him like she had been shot by a bullet, then she slowly moved back toward him.

"I don't know what you mean," she eventually whispered.

"It hurts to be here."

"That's life," she consoled.

"It's not my life," he rebutted.

"What are you saying?" she finally asked, after another long silence.

"I can't come back," he said plainly, as if he had diagnosed cancer.

"What do you mean you can't come back?" She tossed away from him.

"I . . ." He looked deep into her eyes, hoping to find some kind of anchor. "I just don't belong here anymore." He finally found the truth.

"Are you saying that you don't want to be with me?" she asked defensively.

"Oh god!" he countered. "There's nothing more that I want. I want to be with you like I want my next breath . . ." he paused uncomfortably, "assuming that I breathe . . ."

She was not convinced. "Then why can't you come back? I know how to do it now. You can be here as long as you want. We can grow old together. You can watch your children grow up. You can be at their graduation. You can be at their weddings. You can . . ." She trailed off, finding only futility in her words, examining his face for a reason, for logic, for something to explain the present.

"I don't belong," is all he said.

"You bastard!" She sealed the moment with her brand. "You're leaving me again!"

He spoke her name in a way that calmed her. "I'm dead. I don't belong here. We both know it. I



can't live '2 hours' at a time."

She observed the earnestness crawling across his face. "You know," she blurted, "when you died, I would have given anything to have you back. I made bargains with god that I never thought a sane person could ever make. When I heard you were dead—before I saw you of course, I didn't believe you were actually dead. And all I remember, as I was walking toward your body, was the thought that maybe it wasn't you, and that it was some kind of misunderstanding . . . then I began imagining who I would rather see dead than you . . . people that I loved . . . members of my family . . . friends that I've known for years . . . our children . . . I would have bargained away the world to have you with me . . . and I hate that moment! I hate that you brought me to that moment! I hate that there are so many people that I would so willingly barter away. And I hate that it was you!"

A long silence crept into the cemetery, broken only by the odd fluttering of the occasional bird and the vapid cricket who had not realized that its time had passed. "You're right," she eventually admitted, "even I've moved on." After a brief pause, she laughed, "You know I've become a Baptist."

He laughed in a way that allowed for the passage of mucous to seep through his nose. He wiped at his face with his sleeve. "You?"

"Yeah," she admitted, "me . . ."

"Good."

There seemed to be little else to say. She grasped him tighter. He let her. Periodically they looked up at the meter, measuring the amount of time that they had together. It slowly wound

down—"1 hour" . . . "30 minutes" . . . "10 minutes" . . . "5 minutes" . . .

And when the pressure seemed unbearable he cracked.

"Everything!" he blurted out.

"Everything?" she asked.

"Everything that I never said . . . everything that I should have said . . . everything that I take back that I should never have said . . . just . . . everything."

She clasped his hand even tighter than she had up to that moment, looked deeply into his eyes, and with all of the truth she could muster she found her words. "Me too," she croaked. "Me too."

Click!

XI

The next day there was no parking meter stretching up above his grave. She sawed it off herself.

She never told anyone of their time together. The boy in the red jacket never spoke of the events. The boy never even spoke to her again, except for the time that she asked for his picture, which the boy gave her with a certain amount of apprehension.

The boy matured, grew to middle age, suffered the hardening of arteries and an expansion around his middle. He never once realized that the meter, along with his childhood portrait, affixed next to his, leaned in the corner of her bedroom.

Every night she kissed both pictures as she turned the knob of the meter like a sacrament.



In Her Father's House

by John Schmidt

Expect me not to show cause why I seek or why I exclude company.

Emerson, *Self-Reliance*

Much is made of Emily Dickinson.
Few dislike her prancing poetry,
but moderns, given to prattling,
reject her lifestyle. Too solitary,
which is not very sexy. Aloof
today is antisocial, a high crime,
not to mention unhealthy; just
ask any pop psychologist worth
his or her newspaper column.
Unmarried, she accepted aegis
of a male patriarch, remaining
a romantic nun, transcendental,
true to Wordsworth, fretting not
her convent's narrow room, nor
the lack of recognition, either
of her work or womanhood.
Now high priestess of a modern
cult of curious femmes fatales,
Whitman's woman at the blinds,
sexually repressed yet blessed,
martyred saint for modern times.



The Cleaning Lady

by Yvonne Higgins Leach

Once every two weeks I pretend
like a child with a dollhouse.

My house consumes a huge lot on Madison Street—
oak floors, oriental rugs, cathedral ceilings,

bay windows, a solarium with hundreds of wild plants,
and more. The statues, masks, the crosses

I dust take me to places I'll never go.
In the three-way mirror, I wrap my hair

in a pearl pin, drape my neck with rubies,
wear high heels, and dance the hallways

singing and dusting the paintings as I go.
And when the phone rings, I sing louder

and louder so I can't hear the machine
call me by the wrong name.



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall



Carpe Dulcem: An Old Wester's Advice

by Michael L. Johnson

Take your time
the way you eat
chocolate—

often and with
a lot of slow
savoring—

so even if
you're caught off
guard and taken

by surprise
down some tunnel
toward a light

that may or may
not be God's
heavenly spread,

you've still got
the thick sweet
aftertaste.



Photograph by Dawn Walker



Silver Hands Muldoon Plays Piano at the Funeral of the Reverend Burden

by Robert Cooperman

Congregation was scandalized
to sit in Miss Jezzy's brothel,
us with the town's one piano.
She charged them for my playing,
parishioners taking a collection,
less at the bank than expected,
but not polite to accuse
a dead preacher of theft,
though I knew him for a rascal
under his black Jesus-suit.

They wept while I played;
then Sprockett recited Scripture
and some fitting poems.
Mary took it harder than his widow,
who had to know of
his "Redemption Sessions,"
even if the rest of his flock
was innocent as sheared lambs.

Still, he had an angel side:
rescued Manion's party winter of '68.
Preacher never grabbed the credit,
a man to crow up his own holiness.

Like most, he was part angel, part devil.
Damn if I know which half won in the end.



Francis Delacey, Publisher of the Gold Creek *Optimist*, Eulogizes the Late Reverend Burden

by Robert Cooperman

"Dear friends,
we have gathered
to remember a saint
who made us richer
with the generosity
of his spirit,

"who'd want us
to rise
from the ashes
of our grief
and live wealthy
in his remembrance.

"Before he came to us,
we were swine rooting
for the yellow toadstools
we mistook for sustenance.

"He threw ropes
of redemption
to us all,
teaching God's gold
is the true treasure.
He lifted fallen women
from their fleshly wallows,
and gave the currency
of Heaven to men
who stretched out hands
in direst need.

"Oh, we shall miss
this marvelous man
of God. Amen!"



John Sprockett, After the Funeral of Reverend Burden

by Robert Cooperman

When Undertaker Stone asked me
to preside—no one but me left
within a hundred miles to spout
Scripture and Shakespeare by heart—
I almost confessed I killed that snake.
Any hesitation'd set Stone sniffing
like a slave-catcher's hound,
and I'd have to kill him too.

At graveside, I quoted Psalms 23
and 91, stamped into the Bard's
"Fear No More the Heat O' the Sun,"
with its "Renowned be thy grave."
If his sobbing congregation knew
about his murdering fornicating ways,
they'd have kicked his dirty carcass
back down the same gold chute
where I'd flung that puffed-up spider.

I ended with one of my own poems.
It took two Chinese and me
all morning to dig his grave,
so I figured I was owed that vanity.
Afterwards, his widow clasped my paws,
like she knew what I'd done for her.



Lawrence van Gelder, President of the Gold Creek Bank, After the Funeral

by Robert Cooperman

I'm the bearer of bad tidings
for his widow, their account not
nearly as flush as she might hope.
Preacher sipped at it
like a hip flask of brandy,
to satisfy Mary's expensive tastes.

I was besotted with the dove, too,
possessing a grace of form and face,
a generosity to laugh at bad jokes,
a cunning of fingers brushing
against trousers almost by accident.
She knows nothing moves a man
to gratitude like the advance,
retreat, advance of his pleasure.

When I tell Widow Burden,
she won't pitch a fantod,
as would Judge Sam's wife,
were she to learn His Honor moves funds
like a man cheating at checkers.
Miz Lavinia will stand sentry-smart,
and angular, only the set of her shoulders
hinting she could blow up the town
with her rage at Preacher's betrayal.

Maybe, heavy with sin, he plunged
down that played-out shaft.
Or someone envied his exclusive
enjoyment of Mary's talents:
Judge Delaney, for instance, a coward
who'd pay for his dirty business
to be taken care of by a third party.



In the Wake of the Suspicious Death of Reverend Burden, Sheriff Dennehy Calls in an Expert

by Robert Cooperman

I had a deputy fetch
that William Eagle Feather,
a better tracker than hounds
spooking a runaway slave from cover.
If anyone could find sign,
it was that half-blood,
his face giving nothing away,
like the time I complimented him,
“For a breed, you’re a decent man.”

After he scouted the mine entrance
Preacher fell, or was pushed, into—
sniffing, flicking through shrubs,
running eyes and hands over rocks
like they were bolts of fabric—
he slapped palms and muttered,
“Nothing.”

Then he strode off to wherever
he camps when he don’t fancy work.
I was hoping he’d point the finger
at John Sprockett, a murderer
who never rides into my town without
another cross going up in Boot Hill.

Maybe Undertaker Stone
appreciates Sprockett’s handiwork,
but I shudder to think if him
and Eagle Feather ever partnered,
the one blasting half the Territory,
the other covering their tracks
like an evil magician.

To be continued in future issues

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Contributors

Barry Ballard's poetry has most recently appeared in *The Evansville Review*, *Blue Mesa*, *Louisiana Literature*, and *The Florida Review*. His most recent published collections are *First Probe to Antarctica* (Bright Hills Press Award for 2001) and *Plowing to The End of The Road* (Finishing Line Press Award for 2002 and nominated for the Pushcart Prize). He writes from Burleson, Texas.

C.L. Bledsoe is an MFA playwright candidate at the University of Arkansas. He studied with Miller Williams as an undergraduate, which inspired him to move away from the current trends in literature, and more toward traditional forms and narrative poetry. He has poems published or forthcoming in *Nimrod*, *Story South*, *2 River View*, *The Arkansas Literary Forum*, *Shampoo Poetry*, *Velvet Illusion*, and *Appalachee Quarterly*, among others. Bledsoe was born and raised on a catfish farm in eastern Arkansas and presently lives in Fayetteville.

Dorothy Howe Brooks has work which has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous literary journals, including *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Chrysalis Reader*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Eclipse*, *Slant*, *The Georgia Journal*, *The Hubersham Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Nassau Review*, and *Rio Grande Review*. Her work has appeared in the anthology, *If I Had My Life to Live Over, I Would Pick More Daisies* (Papier-Mache Press, 1992), and her chapbook, *Simple Fracture*, was published in 1995. In 1996 she received a grant from the Georgia Council for the Arts in support of her poetry. She taught fiction writing in the Continuing Education Division of Kennesaw State University for over five years. She now divides her time between Atlanta and Southwest Florida where she and her husband enjoying sailing. She is currently working on a novel.

Constantine Contogenis was the poet-in-residence at SUNY Purchase (2000-01). He is the co-translator of *Songs of the Kisaeng: Courtesan Poetry from the Last Korean Dynasty* (BOA Editions, 1997). His work has been published or is forthcoming in numerous journals, such as *The Paris Review*, *Pequod*, *TriQuarterly*, *Chicago Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Asian Pacific American Journal*, *The MacGuffin*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Poetry East*, *New Orleans Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Nimrod*, *South Carolina Review*, *Whiskey Island*, and *Grand Street*.

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.

Loren Graham was born in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, and grew up in the Tulsa area. Graham teaches creative writing at Carroll College in Helena, Montana, and has had work appear in *Ploughshares*, *Boston Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, and other publications. Graham's first book, *Mose*, was published by Wesleyan in 1995, and he is currently working on a manuscript, *The Ring Scar*. "When You Were Gone" is a sonnet from that book-length sequence told in the voices of a divorcing couple.

Ken Hada is an assistant professor in the Department of English and Languages at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma. He has publications appearing in *RE:AL*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Red River Review*, *Meridian Anthology*, *Papers on Language and Literature*, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, *Explicator*, *Journal of the West*, and others.

Carol Hamilton's most recent publications have appeared in *New Orleans Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Shades of December*, *Leapings*, *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Potpourri*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, *Cape Rock*, *International Poetry Review* and *River King*. She has four new books coming out soon: *Breaking Bread*, *Breaking Silence*; *Gold: Greatest Hits*; *I, People of the Llano*; and a children's novel, *I'm Not from Neptune*.

Michael L. Johnson is a professor of English at the University of Kansas. He has published six books of poetry, including *Violence and Grace: Poems about the American West* (Cottonwood Press, 1993) and *From Hell to Jackson Hole: A Poetic History of the American West* (Bridge House Books, 2001). His *New Westers: The West in Contemporary American Culture* (University Press of Kansas, 1996), a work of nonfiction prose, won a Spur Award.

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



Yvonne Higgins Leach has been published in literary magazines and anthologies in the Northwest. She lives near Seattle with her husband and two daughters, working as a director of communications for The Boeing Company. Her work is forthcoming in *Pearl* and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

John Leax is poet-in-residence at Houghton College in New York, where he has taught since 1968. He is currently teaching in a program called Studies in Environment and Nature that is taught at the campus in the Adirondack Park. He has published several volumes of nature essays, a novel, and three books of poetry, including one titled *Country Labors*. "Faith in a Seed" is from a series of poems about birds, some of which have appeared in *The Mars Hill Review*, *Radix*, *Avocet*, *Christianity and Literature*, and *Coryledon*. He has recently published poetry in *ISLE*, *The Cresset*, *Cold Mountain Review*, and *Image*.

Steven J. McDermott received his MFA in Creative writing from Antioch University in Los Angeles. His stories have appeared in *Aethlon*, *Carve*, *Cenotaph*, and *The Rockford Review*. He currently resides in Seattle.

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

Robert Parham's work has appeared in the *Georgia Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *First Things*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *America*, and many other magazines. He heads the Languages, Literature, and Philosophy Department at Armstrong Atlantic University in Savannah, where he also edits *The Southern Poetry Review*.

Alice Pettway is a fourth year MFA student at the University of Arkansas who also owns a costume design business. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Bitter Oleander*, *Lullwater Review*, *The Mid-America Poetry Review*, and others.

Joseph Crow Riley has spent most of his life in school, earning a Master of Divinity, a Master of Theology, and a Doctor of Divinity. Although coming from a Christian background, he has been highly influenced by Taoism and stoicism. He teaches Western Civilization at a local community college in New Jersey. His work is forthcoming in *Bitter Oleander*.

Marjorie Roberts is a psychotherapist in Los Angeles, specializing in counseling cancer and AIDS patients, as well as victims of domestic violence. She received Honorable Mention in the Montalvo Biennial Poetry Competition, sponsored by the California Estate for the Promotion of the Arts in Sarasota, California. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Cape Rock*, *Confluence*, *Licking River Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Pikeville Review*, *RE:AL*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Sulphur River Literary Review*, and *Whetstone*.

John Schmidt, of Safford, Arizona, has work that has appeared or is forthcoming in *Nassau Review*, *Potpourri*, *Slant*, *Troubadour*, *Portland Review*, *Prairie Winds*, *Mangrove*, *Pikeville Review*, and *RiverSedge*.

Barbi Schulick's essays have aired on National Public Radio affiliate, WFCR in Amherst, Massachusetts, and have appeared or are forthcoming in *Yoga Journal*, *Spirituality and Health*, *A Real Life*, *Inside*, and *Chrysalis Journal*. Married with two children, she tutors high school students in writing and time management skills, and is co-founder of an herbal business, New Chapter, Inc. She lives and works in the same hillside in southeastern Vermont as Rudyard Kipling did over a hundred years ago.

Daniel R. Schwarz has been a professor at Cornell since 1968 and is now also Steven. H. Weiss Presidential Fellow. He is the author of a number of books on a wide range of subjects, from James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, and Wallace Stevens to the relationship between modern art and modern literature. His recently published book is *Broadway Boogie Woogie: Damon Runyon and the Making of New York City Culture*.

Jean Tupper has worked as a writer, editor, workshop facilitator, and mentor to developing writers. She completed her MA in English at Central Connecticut State University with a thesis on the Irish poet Seamus Heaney's use of metaphor. Her work has been published or will appear in *Carquinez Review*, *The Larcom Review*, *The Madison Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *The*



Nebraska Review, Oregon East, The Paterson Literary Review, RE:AL, Rio Grande Review, Thema, Blue Unicorn, The Distillery, Eclipse, Slipstream, Southern Poetry Review, West Wind Review, Wisconsin Review, Worcester Review, Piedmont Literary Review, Plainsongs, et al.

Kymerli Ward is a non-traditional, returning student at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, who really does not know where she is from. The word "home" has no real meaning to her; she says it is part of her Gypsy heritage. Returning to school at 49 was one of the hardest—and—best decisions she has made. She has been writing for as long as she can remember, and her poetry was recently published in *In Other Words: An American Anthology* (2003). She intends to pursue further studies and eventually teach.

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.

Anne Wilson was nominated for a Pushcart in 2000, and her book of flamenco-inspired poetry, *SOLEA*, will be published by Finishing Line Press this year. She has published widely in literary journals including *The Bitter Oleander, Weber Studies, New Millennium Writings, Rattle, South Dakota Review, Whiskey Island Review, Oxford Magazine, Comstock review, Rio Grande Review, Cedar Hill Review*, and others. Her poetry has appeared in several anthologies, including *We Used to be Wives* (ed. Jane Butkin Roth), *E.R.* (ed. Parker Towle), and *She is the Song, I am the Music* (ed. June Cotner). She has had two one-act plays produced (one on television) and a full-length play that became a semifinalist in the Chesterfield Screenwriting Awards (1991). She has published personal narrative essays, short fiction, creative nonfiction, art history articles, and interviews.

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



Illustrations

- 4 Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall
- 6 Photograph by Patricia Cook. Photo is of the Oklahoma City bombing Memorial Fence
- 9 Photograph by Kerri Bentley
- 12-13 Artwork by June Floren (Pritchard). Examples of her original watercolor artwork can be viewed at www.junefloren-art.com/gallery.htm. June Floren (Pritchard) was born in Bristow, Oklahoma and studied art education at the University of Oklahoma. She has been painting since her childhood but started her serious painting career in 1981, after the loss of her husband. Watercolor is her favorite medium, and she loves the challenge of painting many different subjects: florals, landscapes, portraits, and a variety of animals. Her well-known paintings in the series "real and fanciful chickens" exemplify her work. She has studied extensively in other countries, such as Italy and Yugoslavia with Milford Zornes; France and Mexico with Sheila Parsons; and Greece with George Kountoupis. She has also studied with Robert E. Wood, Eric Michaels, Charles Sovek and Delbert Gish. Currently, she is one of eight artists asked to participate in a fund-raising project for the OK Mozart Festival in Bartlesville. Each artist received a 3/4-size violin on which to paint an original design; Floren painted the back and front of the violin with brilliantly colored butterflies and iris with realistic dewdrops on the petals.
- 17 Drawing by Kim Pankhurst
- 18 Photograph courtesy of Maggie Smith
- 19 Photograph by Lexi Jones
- 27 Photograph by Joy Lierle
- 33 Photograph by Ryan Patterson
- 37 Drawing by Kristy Dewberry. The artist has always lived in Oklahoma. She enjoys sketching landmark and nostalgic buildings of Oklahoma using her favorite medium, pen and ink. This is a pen and ink of the Round Barn of Arcadia before its restoration. This uniquely constructed barn is found along Route 66 in Arcadia, Oklahoma. It was built in 1898 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In June of 1988 the decayed roof fell in. A grant from the Oklahoma City Community Foundation in 1991 provided structural materials that enabled renovation activities to begin. The restored Round Barn was dedicated in 1992 and celebrated its 100th birthday in 1998.
- 40 Photograph by Joel Kendall
- 48 Photograph courtesy of *Solitude in Stone*, a quarterly newsletter published by Clyde Chamberlin. According to Chamberlin, Archie was a plumber by trade, and a practical joker at heart. He was also dying from a liver disease due to excessive drinking. While he was in Hixville, Ohio, he backed over two parking meters, for which he received a citation from the police. He made the remark, "Well, since I've paid for them, can I take them home?" to which the sheriff replied, "Sure, they're no good to us now." He took them home and modified his will. He stated that upon his death, one was to be placed on each end of his monument and they were to read "EXPIRED."
- 55 Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall
- 56 Photograph by Dawn Walker



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