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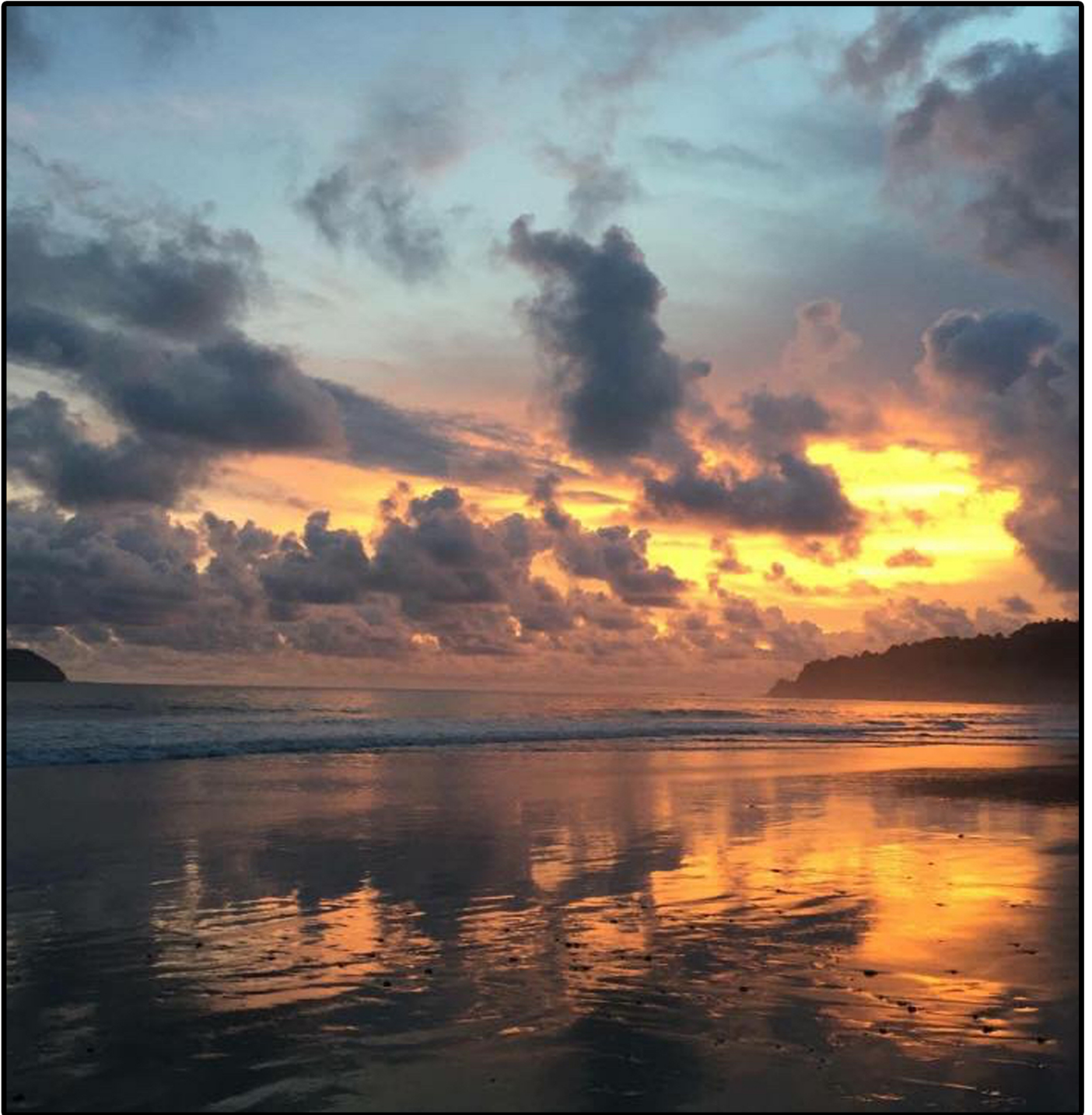
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A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

# WESTVIEW

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# WESTVIEW

Volume 32

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- 1. Electronic submissions are preferred.** To help facilitate the journal's blind review process, authors should exclude identification information from manuscripts.
- 2. Electronic submissions are also preferred for artwork.** Artwork submitted should be suitable for black and white reproduction. Work should be no larger than 8.5" x 14". However, photographs of larger works may be submitted.
3. Include a brief biographical sketch for our contributors' notes.
4. Submissions and correspondence may be sent to Amanda Smith at [westview@swosu.edu](mailto:westview@swosu.edu).  
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# Poem in Which She Finds Accidental Joy

by Anne Britting Oleson

In the wild tom, fanning  
in the middle of the road,  
his would-be harem breakfasting  
under a bird-table in a nearby yard.

In the sudden rise  
of French horn from beneath  
the chorus of a song on the radio,  
washing forward from the car speakers.

In the sporadic blue  
of a late April sky, patterned  
by green wombs of leaves  
expecting their own births.

In the brisk morning air  
not yet warmed by  
the sun, the glorious sun.

# Frivolous Reflections

by Alita Pirkopf

A dragonfly on iridescent wings,  
I could take life lightly,  
dropping by for earth's pleasures,  
departing at will. I would skim  
pond surfaces, swoop by for dinner,  
flirt face to face with swift minnows.  
I would kiss and flee and fly,  
not gaze, Narcissus-like, too long  
at myself.  
I might enjoy simpler reflections,  
the beauty of iridescence.





# Doorstep

by Laurie Patton

Before you ask me  
to come inside,  
let me show you  
this twilight color  
that paints our skin in silver,  
and makes us want  
to drink the sky,  
and gather the lights  
in the darkened trees,  
and run wild  
through the furrows  
of the wine-soaked earth,  
until we fall  
over your doorstep  
into the smoothness  
of sleep.



# The Other Lucian

by Kate McCorkle

Lucian stood before the child's painting—an image of swirled gold, fuchsia, lapis, cobalt, and midnight—that triggered something in his gut and made him think of the night when he was five, and the winds were fierce, and a massive oak branch fell on top of their car. The family was awakened in terror by a nighttime pounding at the door. A policeman patrolling the neighborhood was alerting them to the damage; his justice-strength headlights lit up the whole scene.

Lucian remembered not the spiderweb of damage to the car's windshield or his father's cursing (both of which he was sure must have occurred), but the red sun rising behind the silhouetted oak, which was now transformed into something foreign with one of its biggest branches at peace on the Pontiac. Lucian remembered the light, the snapping magenta and burning yellow, the thin line of cobalt—so like Aunt Marie's eyelids—and darkness retreating. It appeared as if the newly severed oak was percolating light from below ground, dispersing it through its remaining bronchial branches—the earth itself banishing night.

The kid's picture hung behind a simple glass plate in an ordinary hallway, flanked by standard drawings stretching in either direction. It was different. The light. It pulled Lucian in. It was his name. In the bottom right-hand corner, he incredulously made out his own name. Lucian. Except it wasn't him. This was Lucian Robinson of 8-A. He was Lucian Bellarmine of Overbrook. His right index finger moved to touch the name when he felt a tap on his shoulder.

"Sir? Sir? Please don't touch the children's art. They worked very hard on it. You'll be able to see it next week when the kids bring their work home."

The woman gave a hurried smile before clicking down the hall.

Lucian shoved his hands in his pants pockets. He probably should find Haley, but he couldn't leave the painting. Not yet. He compromised by stepping back, interrogating it from the other side of the hall. No one else was named Lucian. No one. There was movement in the painting too; the strokes evoked a cresting wave of light.

Too soon, Haley waved him into her classroom down the hall. It was her first year as a lead teacher, and she wanted to show off her sixth grade homeroom, dazzle him along with the real parents at the Open House. Married less than three years, they were nowhere near having kids at the school. Haley presented him a Dixie cup of lemonade when he ambled into the room. It was decorated with the flags of the world and an enormous periodic table.

"Did you know there's a kid named Lucian here?" he asked. "I've never met another Lucian before. Hey, maybe my name's going viral," he laughed, looking for Haley's response as she bustled among the desks. "Do you know this other Lucian? He's an eighth grader, and he made this—"

“That’s nice, hon,” Haley interrupted, handing him a stack of pastel papers. “Listen. I could really use your help getting these flyers onto all the desks. The last group was a bunch of savages. One dad rolled his eyes at my cups and poured lemonade into his own water bottle! And they took all the flyers about clubs, which I guess is good, but now I have to pass out more and there’s only five minutes before the next group and I couldn’t find you anywhere. What do you think of the flags? Too ethnic? I wanted to be inclusive, but...”



Lucian passed out the flyers as Haley continued. She was so enthusiastic about her class. He wanted to find out about this other Lucian, though, the one behind the glass, the double who had summoned his nearly forgotten flaming tree.

“It’s just that he painted this really cool picture. I mean, I think I could do better. I hope I could do better, if I had the same materials. The gold was kind of metallic and uh...”

Haley gave him a withering look. “Really? You’re getting competitive with an eighth grader?”

“No,” Lucian started, “It’s just—never mind.” The next wave of parents poured in, and he either couldn’t or wouldn’t explain to Haley about that glorious moment when the world revealed itself to him as a slippered five-year-old.

\* \* \*

Driving home from the Open House, Lucian listened as Haley unwound the evening: “...was clearly a parent, but the man with her was so much older, I didn’t know if he was the child’s father, or maybe a second marriage or...Who brings their kid to a parents-only open house?...took all Kathleen’s tape...too many donuts...”

He was happy she was content with her job and its little dramas and that she liked her colleagues, for the most part, and was engaged with her students. He didn’t know if teaching sixth grade was her forever job—*did people even have those anymore?*—but right now, she was happy. Lucian himself did not see his job as a systems analyst as a forever job, but he was respected, and it paid the bills. That was more than a lot of his friends had. He always figured he would do well, then move on to something else; he just wasn’t sure what that something else looked

like. Probably not bursts of magenta and cobalt. Probably not an electric fuchsia current running through his life.

He didn't pursue his conversation with Haley about this other Lucian. She was too caught up in the Open House. He was already thinking maybe this boy's parents wouldn't be as into the painting; maybe Haley could offer to buy it from them, if she could find the kid. If Lucian owned it and could always behold the echo of that morning, maybe it would reveal—what? Something important. Something good.

\*\*\*

They are almost home, and Lucian is grateful he has so much. His heart is swelling. Can't Haley see? She must be able to see it, if she knows him at all. *Please tell me you know me. You are so beautiful—even the dead tooth that embarrasses you. We get to go home. I get to make life good for you. Safe and warm and, no, not easy. But together. Together is better than alone. I'll make bacon in the morning so you know. Can I pause this now and hold it? In this moment everything is good; everything is well-met.*

Haley stabs the radio button. "I can't listen to this garbage." A moment later, "God, I'm tired."

Lucian looks at her, the shadow of longing banished by her words. She never saw the other look, the swelling heart that threatened to overflow. She saw him too slow at the radio, dull reflexes.

It's easier, sometimes, to love her when he's thinking about her. Easier than when he's confronted by the reality. Funny that he loves a dead tooth yet cringes at her words. Why can't he cherish both?

He recalls two halves, parallel slashes of fuchsia from the other Lucian's painting, the paint heavier and thicker on one stroke, lighter and faded on the other. If he had this painting, wonderful things would happen.

\* \* \*

Upstairs, the smell of coffee and bacon wakes Haley. If she knows Lucian, the pancakes are probably on the griddle. There are likely some scrambled eggs too. She groans, annoyed. Lucian knows she's trying to lose weight. She was talking about it last night. *He never listens. Or, if he does, maybe he just doesn't care. Pancakes and bacon. Really?* Resigned to the day, Haley gets in the shower.

Downstairs, as Lucian maneuvers through his morning, he can't shake the painting from his head. *Is it a sign? Of what?* Bubbles form in the cream-colored liquid; he flips the pancakes on the griddle. If the picture didn't have his name on it, would he still be thinking about it? *Yes*, he reasoned. He noticed his name after realizing it was an image of the tree and the light. The signature cemented it, though. He slides the pancakes onto a plate. Grease snaps in the pan. The bacon is nearly ready. He lets a few slices blacken; Haley prefers it almost burnt. *The colors—at what point does pink become red become purple become black?*

Haley's footsteps are on the stairs. Lucian pours her coffee and hands her the mug

as she enters the kitchen.

“Good morning,” he says and kisses her.

Haley mumbles her assent and sits at the table.

Lucian piles pancakes, eggs, and bacon onto a plate, and he slides it in front of Haley, who grunts in acknowledgement.

“You sleep okay?” he asks, setting his own plate down. “That was a lot last night. All those people. And then a full day today. I don’t know how you do it.”

Haley shrugs. “It’s my job.”

“Yeah, but it’s more like a calling or something. To be able to—to put yourself out there like that.” He lets Haley sip her coffee. He had wanted her to start eating, but she’s slow to lift her fork. She only has a few minutes before she has to leave.

“So, I was thinking,” he resumes. “You know that painting? I think you, I mean, I think it would be okay to make an offer on it. To buy it. I think a kid would think that selling a painting is pretty awesome.”

Haley lowers her mug. “What are you talking about?”

“The painting. The one from last night.” Lucian wants to say the one of the tree and sky, but it wasn’t really of the tree and sky. If he told her the one with the tree and the sky, she would think he was crazy. “It was signed ‘Lucian,’ remember?”

“Oh, oh yeah.” Haley pushes her plate away. “You’re still on that? Lucian. It’s a kid’s art project. He probably did it with poster paint. What’s going to happen when we have kids? Are you going to want to frame every scribble and smear they make?”

Lucian looks away. How can he explain—

“I just don’t get it,” Haley says, picking up her fork. “I don’t get why you’re so hopped up that some kid who shares your name did an art assignment.”

She cuts her cold pancakes and begins to eat. Lucian pushes his plate of half-eaten food away. Maple syrup forms starry night swirls around spires of thin bacon strips; pancake pieces anchor the foreground. The only thing missing is the actual light—

“Anyway. Breakfast is good. I mean, I need to lose some weight, and this probably isn’t helping. But, it’s good. The bacon is real good.”

Lucian admires his cypress trees of bacon, his rocky landscape of pancake, his spiraling, animated cosmos of syrup, the perfect circular world of his plate, before scraping it into the trash can.

How can he ever explain things to Haley?

\* \* \*

The painting takes up residence in Lucian’s head. He closes his eyes and sees bursts of cobalt, streaks of turquoise and lapis seeping through pores. For a while, he could recall exactly how the painting appeared—he knew, for example, there was no silver anywhere. And, when silver first appeared in his mind, he banished it, commanding, *there is no silver here*. Eventually, though, silver penetrated. *Was that because the real morning had silver? Was it metal from the Pontiac? Once*

silver entered, Lucian couldn't dislodge it. The brushstrokes seemed to pulse and vibrate too. That was new. Lucian knew the movement couldn't possibly be real. Colors are fixed. Gold and lapis are on opposite sides of the rectangle. So how could they dance?

Lucian began to welcome the headaches created by pressing the heels of his hands against his eyes. At first, when he closed his eyes too long, there were hints of color: rings of amber, hurts of violet. Perhaps the ring was his iris, inverted somehow. Then other colors from the painting began to permeate. Golden butterscotch, a lurid green, more rings—once azure. He pressed on his eyes to block out the light, to intensify the colors. He gave himself little headaches. There had to be something more, something bigger. With these colors, with that oak branch, blood vessels and capillaries—what did it all mean? A bigger picture was moving into shape; Lucian had to discern his place. What was his beat in this pulsing thing?

\* \* \*

As weeks passed, Haley began to worry Lucian was under too much stress at work, or perhaps he was suffering from migraines; he was continually rubbing his eyes. She bought more organic food and cut processed snacks and anything with Red 40 from their diet. In the past, she could always fix whatever was unsettling him, but something had happened recently, like he was immune to her. He was there, yet not there. Haley hoped it wasn't a brain tumor and scheduled a checkup with his GP.

Lucian had been so attentive when they were dating, Haley recalled fondly as she pushed her eggs across her plate. He had made her breakfast again—eggs today, not the full lumberjack special—before leaving on some errand. It had become routine.

When she was Haley Woodstock, she casually mentioned that she'd never been to a drive-in movie, so that weekend Lucian surprised her with a trip deep into New Jersey to see *Ghostbusters* on a large outdoor screen. He wouldn't tell her where they were going, but presented her with wrapped clues every ten miles: popcorn, Jujubes, jet-puffed marshmallows. He listened when she talked about teaching. He seemed engrossed when she told him Aiden was illiterate or how Dom threatened to bring his stepdad's gun to school. He even brought her coffee when she was swamped with work.

Lately, though, he rarely asked about her kids. There were no more surprise trips, no little adventures. He was always off volunteering somewhere. It started slowly, Haley recalled, as she stabbed her eggs. An occasional Saturday morning, the rare weeknight. Recently, though, it had morphed into something more. Every weekend he was gone sorting clothes, making meatballs, or painting something. It's not like there wasn't stuff to do at home. She wondered if a baby would change things.

Haley cleaned and dried her plate, returned it to the cabinet. There was no evidence she ate. *Maybe this is just marriage*, Haley thought. *Maybe marriage*

*eventually becomes two people living together who don't necessarily want to kill each other.* She refilled her coffee and settled into her work.

Sitting in her regular chair, she cleared space for grading. Lucian's papers were on the table too. He never used to leave things spread all over. This was her space—her spiral-bound grade book open flat within arm's reach. Although Haley tracked grades on the school's computer system, she felt she couldn't be a real teacher without the actual book. She enjoyed using a red pen, noting the neat numbers rising in their orderly columns. Each entry added another soldier to the phalanx, another fortification against—against what, exactly? Haley wasn't sure, but she did relish keeping track, keeping score.

A surprising amount of paper fell to the floor when she shoved Lucian's things aside. Haley prodded the detritus with her foot: It looked like every nonprofit in the region was there. Most had photos of people enjoying fresh food or drinking milk. She stooped to reorganize the papers, her irritation mounting with every pamphlet.

What was going on? A terminal illness might explain Lucian's crazy behavior, but no, Dr. Gupta said he was physically healthy. Of course. His health was never an issue. Haley clutched the papers with the intention of tossing them, when a smiling child—a boy—with large brown eyes caught her attention. His pencil was poised on his paper; behind him, a classroom blurred into the background. Children's Relief was stamped in a crayon-like font over his head.

How ambiguous. Haley regarded the image. She taught kids. Wasn't she children's relief? What did that idea even mean coming from an organization? Did they use money to buy school supplies? Provide hot meals? New toys and winter coats? She was on her feet with two dozen thirteen-year-olds. She was on the front lines: educating, inspiring, deterring cell phone usage. These young minds had been entrusted to her—wasn't she children's relief? Why would Lucian want to help them?

Where was he anyway? He hadn't told her—out the door before she woke up. Probably off volunteering at one of these places. She chucked the pamphlets to the floor. Haley looked away from the brown-eyed boy. She missed Lucian.

\* \* \*

It wasn't until the following Saturday that Lucian and Haley had a spare moment together.

"So why exactly are you going into Camden?" she asked over coffee.

"Neighborhood cleanup," Lucian replied as he retrieved a bowl. "Clearing trash from abandoned lots, replacing broken light bulbs, that kind of thing. Want to come?"

"Why can't the people who live there do that? It doesn't cost money to pick up trash. Why do you have to do it?"

"Well," Lucian said, pouring milk into the bowl, "we hope to get the neighbors involved. That would be ideal. You don't want to just come in as an outsider and

do something and then leave. You hope that by—”

“But why are you going to clean their trash?” Haley interrupted. “Why are you spending your Saturday in some lot in Camden dealing with other peoples’ garbage and exposing yourself to God knows what—”

“Haley,” Lucian said, sitting at the table, “It’s fine. Camden is not exploding with violence at all hours. Why don’t you come?”

Haley rolled her eyes, then stared at the microwave.

“I thought you were going to fix the banister today,” she blurted. “I thought maybe you could come with me while I tried on jeans.”

“I can still fix the banister,” Lucian said, getting up and placing his bowl in the sink. “You really want me there while you try on jeans? I thought you hated that.”

Haley turned away, bottom lip protruding.

“Hey, I’ll fix the banister as soon as I get back, ‘kay?” Lucian located his keys. “You sure you don’t want to come? You don’t need to shower before.”

“I have things to do around the house. I have responsibilities,” Haley stated.

Lucian kissed her forehead and left through the front door, not bothering to close it. Her mug in hand, Haley walked through the living room and slammed the front door, spilling her coffee in the process. After returning to the kitchen for a towel, then back to the living room to mop the spill, she didn’t want to bother with the kitchen again. Lucian hadn’t made breakfast that morning.

\* \* \*

Their third wedding anniversary next week was a deadline. *Whatever this was with Lucian had to be resolved by then*, Haley decided. She was stewing, but if he never recognized it, she would have to do something drastic. She would have to show him how good and thoughtful and important she was. She would remind him that he needed her.

She didn’t think anything was planned for the day. Haley laughed. Lucian would probably volunteer them to work in some soup kitchen for their anniversary. Imagine—soup for your anniversary dinner. Haley wondered what Lucian would appreciate. A hairnet? A donation in his name to the Salvation Army? No, she would have to do something big, something really big. This was their marriage, after all. Haley would show him what that meant, even though he probably wanted them working in some abandoned lot in Camden.

Haley had no defined plan for a grand gesture. Grading worksheets, though, circling the top of a paper because of a forgotten name, she had a genius idea. Why hadn’t she thought of it sooner? *The painting. That damn Lucian painting.* The kids’ art was still in the hallway because it covered plaster holes. Haley stood, scattering stacks of grading. She hustled for the car keys before remembering it was Saturday. The school would be closed. Her disappointment was washed away by a giggle. *The painting would be perfect.*

Haley could barely contain herself the days leading up to their anniversary.

She talked with the art teacher on Monday before work and had the student's permission the following morning. She even gave him twenty dollars. Haley didn't actually give it to him; she put the bill in an envelope and gave it to his homeroom teacher in the lounge. She thought it was pricy for a kid's fingerpaint smears, but cheap compared to cufflinks or an engraved flask.

The school let her keep the frame too. It wasn't great, but at least she didn't need to add that to her list of errands. Blankets in the trunk of her car protected and hid the painting; she wrapped it gingerly in a down duvet cover and nestled it among knit afghans. Once home, Haley enveloped it in bubble wrap before slipping it into an oversized Christmas bag. She placed the bag on the couch and waited for Lucian to get home from work.

\* \* \*

Haley pounced as the door opened.

"Happy anniversary!" she kissed Lucian.

"What? This is nice," he smiled.

"I have something for you. Come here," she said as she pulled him the few steps toward the couch. Haley backed off and watched, eyes glowing. She saw Lucian see the large gift bag. He looked at the bag, then at her.

"For me?"

Haley nodded.

"I have something for you, too. Just let me go get it—"

"No," Haley nearly yelled. "Open this. I mean, I can wait. Just open this."

Lucian cocked his head, then reached toward the bag. "It's not a puppy, is it?"

"Just open it!"

He parted the tissue paper and extracted a large bubble-wrapped rectangle.

"Careful," Haley offered.

Lucian sat with the package, delicately undoing layers of packaging. Haley was hopping from foot to foot, clutching her camera. She hovered beside Lucian, then backed away. When he had finally unspooled the wrapping and held the painting aloft, she was beside him, no longer hopping, but gazing intently into his eyes.

As the final layer of bubble wrap fell away, Lucian sucked in his breath. He was holding the painting, his painting, the other Lucian's uncanny recollection of dawn breaking through a shattered tree. It was restored to him.

Funny, he hadn't noticed before how sloppy some of the brushstrokes really were. A stray bristle was trapped in an upward sweep of yellow. Yellow, not gold. The colors were more primary than he remembered. And the starbursts of silver—no, those had never been there. He turned the painting over, inspected the back.

He was not as grateful as Haley expected him to be.

"What? This is the painting, isn't it?" she asked. "That's your name on the bottom—"



your alias' name."

Haley couldn't read Lucian's face. He wasn't upset, but he wasn't awestruck either. The smallest bit of contempt bit into her when she realized he looked stupid.

"Don't you like it?" She sat beside him so she could see the painting too. She still didn't understand why these smudges were so important.

"It's—" Lucian began, "I can't believe you did this for me. Thank you, Haley." Holding the painting in front of him with two hands, he leaned over to kiss her. "No, this is really something. I'm surprised you remembered. Thank you."

"So, where should we hang it?" Haley stood. "I have the hammer and level and a picture hook," she said, reaching under the couch where she'd hidden the tools.

Holding the picture at arm's length, Lucian stood and pivoted around the room like a sprinkler, imagining it on each wall. "Maybe the kitchen?" he suggested. He did the same circle pivot in there before suggesting the upstairs hallway and heading for the steps. Haley was holding the hammer when he came down without the painting.

"Where is it?" she asked. "Where do you want it hung?"

"I'll think about that for a while," Lucian answered. "I want to make sure it's in the right spot. I don't want to just hammer holes in the wall wherever."

He noticed the look on Haley's face.

"I love it," he said. He kissed her forehead and embraced her. "It's wonderful. Thank you."

The hammer was pointless now, but she held it anyway. They stood in the kitchen like that for a moment until Lucian snapped to attention. "Your present!" he sang. "I almost forgot!"

He trotted to the closet and, reaching far behind winter coats, came out with a large rectangular cardboard box. "It's not wrapped," he explained as he shoved it in her hands. "Sorry."

The box was sturdy, with an embossed seal on top. She placed it on the kitchen counter, opened the hinged lid, and moved cream tissue paper aside. A strong-smelling leather tote was nestled inside. She removed the tan satchel gently from its tissue cocoon, ran her fingers over the leather, over the single gold buckle, then slung it over her shoulder.

"This is beautiful," she sighed.

"Leather's for the third anniversary," he explained. "I thought you might like it for work."

Haley inhaled deeply. "It smells new," she purred. "So, are we going out for dinner tonight or what?"

"Yeah, we can," Lucian answered. "If you want to."

Haley nodded. "Just let me grab my bag."

\* \* \*

Lucian thought Haley was beautiful, even though she made disgruntled noises during the drive about not doing her hair. They were hungry and left the house quickly. They went to the closest place—the shopping center pizzeria. Haley sat across from him, and as she talked and sipped her drink, Lucian admired her unruly brown hair, her smile, the way her bracelets jingled on her wrist as she spoke.

Haley probably would have preferred a restaurant that required reservations for their anniversary. He had the suspicion she was settling, but no, the smiles seemed genuine. There was the dead tooth peeking at him. Haley seemed okay with a drink that had a lid and a straw and gloppy pizza on paper plates. She was laughing and talking about some girl in class who gave an awful presentation on crop circles. Lucian reached past the jar of peppers to touch her hand.

The painting had been nice. He had underestimated her—he should give her more credit. He would have to hang it somewhere. He didn't want to now, though. A few months ago, when he first saw it, that might have been different.

When Haley was in the bathroom, Lucian pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes, trying to conjure the magical rings of light. Nothing came. Maybe the pizzeria was too bright. *She gave me what I wanted*, Lucian thought, noting the irony. *I need something else, though, and it's not the picture. It was never the painting. I've been trying to recreate this connection all over the city, but it's not there either. The earth itself created light—and I serve corn, sort jackets, and replace broken light bulbs. What I do is less than a shadow. But it's here, over these greasy paper plates.*

Lucian looked at their plates, wadded napkins, and empty cups. He collected the trash on one tray. The plate on top was splotted with grease and tomato. A lone pepperoni sun was presiding—ah, but here was Haley from the bathroom. Check paid, trash gone, time to go.

As they took the bend on Overbrook two blocks from home, Lucian applied his foot to the brake. The road dipped down from a hill, and as they descended the other side, a lone oak appeared. It was black against a changing sky. Muted indigo, a velvety periwinkle, and a pale, blushing memory of pink pressed down on a rim of gold just barely visible on the horizon: the colors of sleepy dreams cloaking the light.

Lucian saw not the oak's innumerable branches and leaves. In the twilight, he saw the tree inverted, its roots upended—hairy roots sucking water and nutrients from the heavens. There is a symmetry above and below the landline that divides far-reaching branches and roots, splitting, growing, crackling like nerve endings,

snapping with secret messages, firing at will. Past and future stretch away from the center, the sturdy present trunk, like an axon tethering runaway forces, its only purpose to transmit the hopscotching code. How little we truly see. Lucian reached his right hand to cup Haley's left. He was filled with love for her in this moment, this radical axon of a here, now.

She glanced at their hands, then at him, questioning, "Hmm?"

"Did you notice that tree we just passed?" He jerked his head to the side. "The way the sun was setting behind it was amazing. I can loop around so you can see it..."

"Sure. That would be nice," Haley smiled and straightened in her seat slightly. "I think you have a better view than me."



# Upon Saving a Household Insect

by Jonathan Greenhouse

I've developed the habit of saving stray insects  
found in my bathroom sink or on the bedroom floor  
or wandering from one corner to another.  
So I see a spider hopping across the kitchen's wooden planks  
or a beetle crawling by a shower drain  
& I grab an empty glass or a magazine subscription

& use these makeshift vehicles of escape  
to set their impending freedom into motion,  
these captives never knowing  
how I took these uncommon steps to ensure their survival,  
since, though they're not endangered species,  
these wayward specimens' individual lives would be numbered;

yet at times, erring in my rush to liberate these tiny creatures,  
I occasionally penetrate a wing or rip off a leg,  
sealing their fates in this world governed by natural selection,  
my excitement & impatience turned into deadly weapons  
when maximum dexterity's required; & sometimes,  
too busy to be bothered, I forget their souls might join

the ranks of human beings after successive reincarnations,  
& consigning them to oblivion, I quickly stamp my shoe  
to focus upon the concerns of my singular existence.

# Nocturnal Stroll through Iquitos

by Jonathan Greenhouse

Shrieks of joy & pattering engines, a clanking of silverware,  
& cattle-calls from men long past their prime  
reverberate in Iquitos' Plaza de Armas, a city square  
lost in the Peruvian jungle & far from being merely awake  
would likely awake anyone sleeping.  
In its illuminated fountains, prehistoric beetles  
perform backstrokes as if slightly inebriated,  
& dizzied gringos dine on veal cutlets covered in sunny-side-up eggs,  
all this happening in the jungle's concrete jungle  
as families amble arm-in-arm,  
peopling this beating urban heart tucked within the Amazon.  
Motorcycles-turned-taxis circulate in infinite hordes,  
an elaborate choreography of auto rickshaws carrying precious cargo,  
dodging both jaywalkers & beggars pleading with outstretched palms;  
from inside one, an old woman suffering from rheumatism  
sits with a cross-eyed boy with no arms,  
& from another, a man sells his wares from enormous burlap sacks,  
while in the fast-food joints ringing the square,  
flies stake their claim to empty beer bottles  
& shirts blow hypnotically in overhead-fans' intermittent drafts,  
all this noise set in the surge of a deafening, amorous symphony,  
a constant ruckus accompanied by the interior monologue  
of the perennially broken-hearted  
in this foreign place only foreign to some,  
where breathless adolescents ceremoniously lose themselves  
in the familiar shadows of a palm tree's draped canopy.

# The Promised Land

by Desirée Jung

**Above, in a fat tree,** jumping from branch to branch, the parrots have luminous blue wings, chirping until they stop to rest. In South America, the heat muffles all the sounds except the pinching of the cicadas rubbing against the wood, highlighting the green of the ferns, and fading the memory of emerald stones. Hidden under the sun, the land was a treasure of the pirates once. But, this was a long time ago, before the amusement park was built into the village, and the natives began to wear human clothes. Now, the trail is full of tourists, who take a break in their walk to scrub their shirts in the waters, cooling out. The river's current, long and smooth, steals the shadows of the sun and the land curves, like a snake.



# This May Only Happen Once

by Donna Emerson

We swam in the sea at Maui's North Shore.  
You, my mid-life child, now a distant  
sixteen to my seventy years.  
We walked a jungle trail to Honolua Cove.

Lime-streaked lizards surprised us,  
yellow and red hibiscus. The canopy rang  
with myna bird chirps and screeches,  
the scent of plumeria.

Our fumbling, putting on floppy fins,  
face-covering masks, the fit  
of that giant mouthpiece  
prompted laughing and bouncing  
as we struggled over rocks.  
Our sudden drop into deep salt water.

Being your first time,  
you reached out your hand  
and clasped mine.  
Held on.  
Like you did at four.

I pointed to the clown fish,  
you saw the Moorish Idol,  
we nodded our free hands, sign language  
for yes, at the rolling sea turtles.

We dipped down to striped snakes  
tucked in the reef near the white coral,  
saluted the Picasso Triggerfish.  
We were both young, swimming.

# Waiting on Good Vibrations

by Victor Wolf

## LIVING ROOM

Mary picks up a bottle of J&B off the table, refills her drink, then sits back down on the sofa. The leather couch sticks to her skin like the dead cow is trying to hold on to her.

A staccato buzz startles Mary. She jumps, that stinking leather sticking to her skin for a split second, her scotch spilling onto Scotchgarded cowhide.

New message from Sandra: "Any word yet?"

"No. Surgery should've been over half hour ago."

Mary puts the phone down next to her scotch on the slab of glass that her husband called a coffee table. Pierre didn't want the quilted maple or mahogany. He said they would stain. Meanwhile, this glass piece of shit is scratched to hell, but, by the grace of God, stain-free. Mary laments that the warranty expired fifteen years ago and wonders if her husband's chest cavity is still cracked open.

The expression "rack of ribs" keeps popping into her head.

A long buzz from an unknown number.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Mary Lewis?"

"Yes? What? What is it?" says Mary

"Th-this is Ted, with Caribbean Cruise. Uh, When's the last time you took a good vacation?"

"When's the last time I took a good vacation?"

"Yes, ma'am," says Ted.

"When was that, anyway? I guess a couple years ago Pierre and I went down to Corpus Christi, but it was only because his brother has a time-share."

"Uh, ok. Have you ever been on a cruise before?"

"Actually, I'm getting another call." She hangs up. She slouches back into the couch and sighs. "Son of a--"

bbzzzzzzzzzzzzzz - bbzzzzzzzzzzzzzz

This time Sandra's calling.

"Hey, did everything go well?"

"I don't know. Still, haven't heard anything. You get my text?"

"Yeah, but that was almost fifteen minutes ago."

"You'll be the first person I call when I hear anything," says Mary.



“Well, hang in there. You’ve got nerves of steel to handle this all by yourself in that big house.”

“My nerves aren’t steel; they’re just soaked in ethanol.” She takes another sip of J&B.

“Are you drinking? At nine in the morning?”

“Wouldn’t you be?” Mary says, chuckling. “My husband’ll be pronounced dead at any moment. Won’t even know I bought the scotch.”

“Don’t say that! I think you’ve had too much already.”

Mary looks at the bottle. A third of the liquor is gone.

“Not quite enough.”

Sandra sighs. “Mom won’t like that you’re drinking again, Mary.”

“Good for her. You gonna rat?”

“Jesus Christ. I wish y’all hadn’t moved out there. I could be by your side—”

“I don’t need an accountabillibuddy. I’ll call you when the doctor calls me. I need to keep this line clear.”

“Oh? Your cell phone doesn’t have call waiting?”

“Who knows?” Mary hangs up.

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The call comes after another hour and a few more drinks. Everything’s fine. Pierre’s stable as hell, and the best part? She can visit as soon as a few hours from now!

Dr. Stork sounds happy to have not killed his patient. Mary is trying not to be short with him; it’s his job to be happy about not killing patients.

“Surgery over. Everything ok,” she texts Sandra.

The phone is a different machine now. Mary no longer cares what might come through the network.

She begins to pace around the house.

#### KITCHEN

Cold linoleum and formica all the way around with an island counter with bar stools that no one sits in, not even Pierre, kept spic and span every day for twenty years. Damn, that’s five years past the mortgage! Smells great, like Pinesol. Fresh. The stove is some stainless steel block where a lot of dead turkeys and hams have gone to get juiced up for Pierre’s delicate palate.

#### HALLWAY

White carpet stretches out toward the bedroom door. There is a cabinet with drawers underneath it with towels and quilts, all matching red and soft and tucked into neat rows like pages of a cigarette-smelling romance novel.

BEDROOM

Mary has slept on the couch since Pierre's hospitalization. The air in here is stale and dusty. There's the bed, maroon sheets and blanket undisturbed. There are twin bedside tables with twin lamps—white porcelain cubes with no shades and silhouettes of naked women cut into the pottery let the light through. Mary imagined (not for the first time) what Pierre's reaction would be if she replaced them with nearly identical lamps that let light shine through big phalluses instead of busty babes.

The closet door is open a crack, letting some darkness in to combat the lamplight. Mary opens it. Beneath the neatly pressed hanging shirts are six pairs of shoes and a gun safe.

On the bed, Mary strokes the barrel of Pierre's favorite pistol, a Colt .45, while lying on her back. She looks at her reflection in the barrel. It's obscene how carefully the gun has been polished. Mary's lips leave a smudge, teeth clack against the cold steel and thumb pulls back the hammer. She smiles.

\*\*\*

The pistol, glossy and recently rubbed down with microfiber cloth (same kind Pierre uses for his glasses but marked up 500%), rests easy in the safe. The safe is in a closet next to a bed with maroon sheets. White carpet from the bedroom spills out into the hallway and bears the marks of a recent vacuuming.

Downstairs, a glass tips up, ice clinks. Scotch drains into Mary's throat. There is that old warm sensation in her chest. She is pleasantly drunk as she serves her recovering husband dinner. There is a flash in her mind, a weird fusion of emotion and cold clarity, which she lets flow over her. She washes the remnants of that feeling away.

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# 21 Leslie Street, Newark

by Laurel Kallen

**Three floors including** the attic, wallpapered with maps where the college-aged brothers stayed when they visited home. The neighbors threw garbage into their yard, and an old man named Guy sat on his stoop every day. We passed

him and said, “Hi, Guy,” over and over, stuck in the rhyme. The wine-colored velvet couch and the blue velvet armchair lived in the living room, a locked room, just for company and the reel-to-reel

tape recorder. We moved in and out of the other rooms, the pantry with its shelves of canned spaghetti and canned Chinese food, the dining room with the fishtank where my sister cut the blind cave fish in

half. The blue carpeted playroom where we watched the Shirley Temple hour and where I had to practice piano while Saree, my school friend, waited for me in the basement. I was supposed to perfect the

minuet. The kitchen table piled high with papers instead of food. Mail, opened and

unopened, newspapers waiting with months of patience for my father to take his

clippings.



# at the greengrocer I stole a grape

by Gladys Justin Carr

to test its sweetness  
the produce police didn't come  
so I went to the next aisle  
to plunder the red cherries  
@ 5.99 a pound wondered  
about the baby carrots they don't cry all night  
like my first child mysterious plantains  
if you cook them right you get marvelous  
crispy tostones avocados eat them before  
you turn yellow for lack of the good  
stuff inside their pebbly green olives won't  
save Greece but maybe your life I hold  
a melon in my hands large as my breasts  
filled with milk asparagus will make  
you pee desire will make you crazy  
for dark chocolate iceberg lettuce gets  
in your teeth that bite into passion  
fruit try the granny apples for fun  
and the mangoes to get closer to heaven  
these raspberries look moldy over there's a flame  
of flowers to quiet the heart I'll  
take a bunch for the one who stole  
mine it's another evening in New York  
another lover's quarrel don't smoke  
don't walk in the bikers lane  
you'll pay for your crimes soon enough  
it comes with the territory there's blood

in the streets & shots heard on the avenue of Americas  
you have a right to seedless watermelons  
but not to hustle the guy outside  
selling bananas and shish kebab on a stick  
sabrett dogs sauerkraut here's mustard  
in your eye drink up the air is filled  
with diesel & fartsmells of stalled traffic  
the gods of licorice & hard liquor  
are dancing tonight while the devil's  
bringing down the curtain  
don't forget to taste the sunset  
it's ripe to the touch



# Walton's Belshazzar Feast

*first concert with my husband since his deafness*

by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

When the harpist plays, do you call upon a memory  
of harp song? Do you sense the tremulous tones  
of the violins and cellos

by the movement of the rosined bows?

You must hear the drum thud, the cymbal clash.

But what about the buzz of the trumpet?

The throaty slide of the trombone?

Does the flute's vibrato

go through the root of you?

Do you depend on the puff of the musicians'

cheeks to know when the woodwinds play,

intuit grace notes by the flautist's quick fingers?

When the tenor sings, are his words obscured

like ancient texts unearthed in deserts?

Do you hear the chorus' held note—the long O

of "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem."

You, here, beside me in your short-sleeved shirt,

leaning forward, face taut.

I touch the flesh beneath your arm,

roll my thumb over your bicep.

O, if I could hear for you.

# Old Cars, Old Memories

by Tom Pescatore

America keeps all  
Her old cars on the paved  
Crumbling roads of its  
Dead highway misery,

You can catch them in  
Bard, San Jon, on the corner  
Of ghost town  
Bond St. half past the  
School house in Cuervo  
Frozen time,

A Route 66 National Museum  
In everytown business loop  
(isn't the road enough?)  
Dark bars, dark store fronts,  
Boarded up motels where they're  
Parked outside and waiting to  
Die of rusted ignorance,  
Forgotten like the Mother Road,  
Lost among the poor, poor  
Countryside  
Deteriorating like the stretches  
They used to so proudly ride.

# The Golden One

by Donald Mace Williams

**Neighbors, fellow church members,** and former co-workers kept dropping by the house to wish them a happy fiftieth. They left casseroles, salads, pecan pies, cookies, or dry orange-and-yellow bouquets from the only florist in Croft. Four of the five children had come, too, plus seven unrestrained grandchildren, whom Howard, risking the resentment of their parents, set down firmly a time or two.

“Those are energetic kids,” he said when he and Suzanne shut their bedroom door for final touches on their packing.

“They do make the house seem fuller,” she said. “Even.” She had reopened her suitcase, and now she knelt beside it on the floor with a sheer, black nightgown held full-length above it. She nodded. It would fit in like that.

“Hey, babe,” Howard said. “What you got there?” His voice, usually hollow and loud, had dropped. He knelt beside her, put an arm around her waist, and half-kissed, half-nuzzled the soft dent beneath her ear. “Seems to me I’ve seen that before.”

“Not for ten or fifteen years, I’m afraid.”

“Still fits, I bet.”

“Maybe. Here and there.”

He got up, steadying himself with a hand on the footboard of their bed and feeling the reflux surge upward from his diaphragm like a rogue hiccup. He was thicker in the middle than he would ever have imagined as a bridegroom of twenty-two, though Suzanne’s orange roughy pestos and skinned chicken breasts had helped him hold his own there for a dozen years or so. He had a red face and a prominent nose, and his thick hands seemed like the spread-out deltas of his arms rather than evolved grasping mechanisms until he did something with them, such as rewiring a fitful lamp or picking silk out of a newly shucked ear of corn, when they moved as deftly as a fly tier’s.

Suzanne was still on her knees, her dark eyes looking up at him—their usual perspective, no matter in what company, because she was so small. She laid the nightgown on top of the neat stacks of clothes in the suitcase and buckled it in. Then, she stood up and reached into her purse on the dressing table. She took something out of a small black box with a snapping lid.

“A beautiful little thing,” she said, holding it up to catch the light from the window.

“Yeah. Genevieve’s doing.” She shook her head, but really, when Howard had told Genevieve, the second youngest daughter, he wanted to get something nice, something gold of course, as an anniversary present for Suzanne, it was she who



had come up with the specifics. Genevieve had phoned him back that same day, full of energy and decisiveness: they would have a golden pin made in the form of a miniature goblet with double handles, to suggest the one in the aria from *Faust* about the king of Thule. (Suzanne, as a senior voice student at Hardin-Simmons, had sung the aria at an audition and won the soprano lead in an amateur production of the opera in Abilene. Her innocent presence, together with her clear, steady little voice, made for a delightful Marguerite, as even Howard, who by then had started dating her, was able to observe from his unprecedented position as operagoer.) And, they would get Travis, the older son, to find the right jewelry maker in Austin, where he lived and had connections among artisans, being, among other things, an artisan himself. Travis had brought the goblet with him when he drove up for the party. "It's really just a, like, goblette," he said.

Howard took it from Suzanne to feel its heft again. "Twenty-four karat," he said. "The jewelry guy told Travis it would be too soft; it could get bent. He wanted to use fourteen-karat, to keep it hard. Alloy. I said the hell with that, you'd be careful with it." He handed it back to her.

"I will," she said. "It's perfect. It's beautiful."

"Well, when you throw it at me, don't miss and hit the wall."

"I'll aim. Have you packed your toothbrush?" She held the little cup against her jacket, looked in the mirror, moved it to the left, nodded, and pinned it there.

Howard wished they could sneak out to the car, the way they had done after the wedding reception. They went back into the living room and spent a half-hour saying hello and goodbye to two or three friends who had come by late. After that, they hugged the children and whichever grandchildren they could grab as they ran through the room. Then, Howard picked up the suitcases and they started for the garage, using the covered passage that Howard, as soon as he retired, had built so Suzanne wouldn't have to dart across part of the front yard in sandstorms and blizzards to get into the garage.

"Help! Help! Help!" The youngest, Kelli, seven years old, being chased by a cousin, pounded through the tunnel, launched herself with pretend-fear at her grandmother, and hugged her so hard for protection that Suzanne gave a little cry.

"Don't break her, hon," Howard said. He put down the suitcases, accepted his own hug, allowed his nose to be pulled, and said, "You come to see us again, hear?" He took the suitcases to the trunk and packed them, pushing his tool kit to one side to make room. As he backed the Subaru out of the garage and the door started lowering, he raised his hand to the knot of progeny on the front porch, who would clear up the kitchen and leave the house locked. Only then did he realize that ever since they got into the car, Suzanne had been uttering dismayed, "Oh! Oh! Oh!" like one of the hand-wringing, big-city Eastern women on the situation comedies. He stopped the car.

"What is it, sweetheart?"

She was tugging at the upper left side of her jacket. In a moment, stretching

across, she held her palm open near the steering wheel so he could see. One of the handles of the goblet was bent toward the back and crumpled inward—a small trauma but instantly disfiguring, the asymmetry arousing repugnance and pity in Howard as if it were a canary with a broken leg.

“For Christ’s sake, how did that...?”

“Kelli. When she hugged me.”

“Oh, damn. Why can’t those kids...We’ll get it fixed, honey. I’m sorry.”

She nodded and gave a hiccuping sob. “It wasn’t her fault. But...”

*But, it damn near ruins everything,* Howard thought. He hit the steering wheel with an open hand.

Three silent blocks to I-20, and they were on the way. He straightened and shook off the gloom. No matter what happened, now it was just the two of them, the way it had been on that day in 1956. He reached across and put his hand on her thigh. Damn these bucket seats, these tyrannical seat belts. Back then, he had pulled her across the smooth seat of the old Chevrolet as soon as they were out of Abilene, where the wedding had been. What a drive that was: 150 miles of quick, hard kissing with one eye on the road, fumbling at her blouse buttons, fighting against going so far that the night would be almost a letdown. He moved his hand now, softly upward, wrinkling the thin dress over her thigh, then down again, and up again, this time lifting the skirt enough to bare a knee and cup his hand over it, then higher yet with the skirt. Disappointment. He remembered how white her skin had been in contrast to the black tops of the stockings and how the black garter button, when lifted, left a rosebud in the soft flesh. That was where delight started, where the flesh puffed up a little in the valley between hosetop



and garter. Panty hose felt about as sexy as shellac. Underneath, though, where his hand moved now, the softness came through: gravity's work. He lifted her leg a little, let it down, lifted it again. She laid her hand on his arm, her fingers stroking him through the slit above the cuff button of his dress shirt.

"Look out, honey!"

He snapped his head around and tapped the brakes to disengage the cruise control. A truck ahead of them had slowed down for a hill. "Got a little close, didn't I?" He was chagrined, he whom, in the past, nothing could distract from attentive driving. They drove a few miles before he put his hand back where it had been. Not as sweet after the interruption. Better watch the road anyway. He put both hands on the wheel.

"Those kids," he said.

"I think they were picking on you."

"I guess. But, you know, they don't mind. I told them at least three times to quit yelling at each other and running through the house. When I finally grabbed a couple of them—Jamie and Rodney—and told them I wasn't kidding, I wanted them to stop that, they said, "Okay, sorry," and it wasn't half a minute before they were at it again. And, Robert sat right there the whole time."

"I know. It's just the way they do now. It's not just him."

"Imagine what would happen if you or I had done that when we were that age."

"We wouldn't have done it twice, would we? But, they'll grow up just fine. Wait and see if they don't."

"I'll try." Howard thought his chances were good. His parents had lived into their nineties. And, after all, he only felt about forty, only looked that old to himself in the mirror. True, the ticket girl at the movies in Abilene gave him the senior discount without asking. And, when he and Suzanne were on vacation to Taos a couple of years ago and he sat holding her white, finely wrinkled little hand across the table at Doc Martin's, the young waiter felt free to ask them with an indulgent smile, "And, just how long have you two been married?"

Howard slapped the steering wheel again, remembering. *Long enough, Buster.* Long enough that sex came along less often. After enough days, watching the Cowboy cheerleaders on TV, whenever the station thought it could show those lithe bellies as just part of the atmosphere and not as anything, God forbid, sexy, made him draw in the bottom of his abdomen in front and wiggle the foot that was crossed over a knee. Sex was still sex, different in degree, all right, and frequency, but not in kind, and, thank God, he had never failed to be ready and able—he couldn't imagine that, not yet. If it came along when he was, say, eighty-five, he would just have to accept it. He had accepted the other effects of age pretty well, he thought: not combing his hair over the bald patch in front, not pulling the smaller grandkids around the yard in the old sled last winter when it snowed during their Christmas

visit but leaving the job to one of his sons, not hanging onto the Oldsmobile that he loved when it started leaking oil and developing underneath rattles, not insisting on climbing the locust tree to get onto the house and clean the gutters. At his last checkup, when his doctor asked him how his sex life was, he said, “No problem. Not like when I was thirty, though.” And the doctor, who was new in town and looked about thirty, nodded as if to say, *well, of course not*.

*How about like when he was twenty-two? It was going to be, by God. This once.*

They had skirted several towns. An Acme van had passed them and been passed by them four times on the downgrades and upgrades as if they were in an evenly matched checker game. The sun behind them wasn’t low enough to make him switch the mirror to anti-reflect. They would hit Fort Worth at rush hour, but the going-in traffic should be light enough to manage. He looked at Suzanne. She was asleep, her gray head rolling a little on the back of the seat. Too bad—she would mess up her hairdo. Thank God she didn’t sleep like the poor old women in the nursing home in Croft, with their mouths wide open as if they had died and flies would be buzzing in and out. He glanced at her again. The skin in front of her ear looked as if she had been lying on a spider web. She was three years younger than he. Think how he must look. With allowances, though, she was still a woman, still desirable under the clothes. He considered slipping a hand beneath her thigh again. No. That would wake her up. Besides, thinking about their ages had got him out of the notion. Tonight would be different. She was going to wear the nightgown. So, she had thought ahead, too.

“Why, we’re pretty near there.” Suzanne had woken up and instantly spotted the skyline of Fort Worth in the distance. Her eyes never needed to adjust to being awake. She was either sound asleep or wide awake. “We’re eating at Cross Keys, I presume?”

He touched her cheek with the back of his hand. “Don’t we wish.” It was long out of business, the restaurant where they had had their first meal as a married couple.

“It’s too cold for you, I suppose,” he said. Her thermostat had baffled him for fifty years.

“No, no. Well, a little cool on my knees.”

He slid the temperature control farther toward the red zone. “Now?” Damn it, he could hear irony in the one word.

“Perfect, thank you.” She was looking ahead, sitting straight, her hands clasped in her lap, the politeness of her smile a shade exaggerated.

With a couple of exceptions, stirrings of affectionate exasperation on his part and prim suggestions of righteousness on hers were as near as they had ever come to the incivilities that city people in movies and TV series seemed to exchange on the hour. Even Robert and his wife, Austin residents like Travis, were sure to snap at each other at least once during a visit, even in public. As for Travis, he had never come home with either a female or male friend—he seemed to have about as many of one as the other, and he spoke of all of them in the same carefully offhand

tones. A sweet kid, unwilling to grieve his parents except just by being....But, that was all right. They said guys like that couldn't help it; times had changed. Lord, think of what the kid can do: making scenery for the opera, arranging music for the symphony, figuring out moves for the ballet dancers, painting bear grass and mesquite bushes on fancy cups and plates, never holding a regular job but always getting by and sometimes doing well. Not a one of Howard's kids had asked for help from home since college, though he and Suzanne had sent them small equal amounts now and then when his pension as a retired football coach and algebra teacher the December check from his part of the family cotton farm permitted.

They had three kids in college at once for a while, and one of them, Madeleine, at Stanford, no less. She was a mathematician, on a three-month assignment in Norway, figuring out probabilities for an oil exploration company, so she couldn't come to the party. Howard always felt sorry for her husband, Mike. He was down in San Antonio, taking care of their four kids with the help of a sitter when she went off. He put up with abstinence for so long, no better off in that respect than a convict or a priest. Even at his age, Howard felt like a penned stallion when Suzanne went off to see her sister in Missouri for a week or ten days. He reached over and smoothed the skin over the white knobs of her pulleybone. She took his fingers in hers and brought them up to her lips.

Their hotel had changed hands three times since their wedding night and had recently been restored to look as Victorian as king-size beds and push-button phones permitted. The room rate would have slimmed the billfold of an 1890s cattle baron. Hell, even a tip, now, would have been a night's room rent back then, and every car-parker, door-opener, and luggage-cart-loader had a hand out—not like in Croft, where people did things for you to be friendly or as a matter of good business. Warned by Genevieve, Howard had put two five-dollar bills into a shirt pocket before leaving Croft, but he had to get another from Suzanne on the way upstairs after the bellhop had seized their bags to bring up on an emptier elevator. Howard hated these bought welcomes. It was more pleasant to stay in a motel where you parked outside your door and carried your own luggage. For this, though, he wanted Suzanne to feel nostalgic and spoiled. When the bellhop's smile had dissolved out the door, Howard took her around the waist from behind. She turned her head and tilted her face upward. Surely they had done exactly the same before at exactly the same juncture, and this kiss was unaffected by a half-century of sex inflation. Howard turned her loose lingeringly. They would go to dinner first. They had done that before, when he knew she was scared.

Howard called a cab. That was what they had done back then, expense be damned.

"Nice night to be steppin' out," the driver said over his shoulder.

"We're looking forward to it," Howard said.

He saw the driver's bloodshot eyes glance at them in the mirror. "You guys been married a few years, huh?"

There it was again. "A few," Howard said.

The restaurant: hushed guidance to their table, then the menu. “I don’t see shrimp scampi,” Howard said. She laughed. That was what he had ordered on that first night, but Suzanne cleared her throat and shook her head. “Have this,” she had said, pointing. The beef Stroganoff. Mystified, he had changed, and it was only when the waiter had left that she explained, almost whispering: “Garlic.”

“They’d probably make it special for you,” she said now.

“Oh, I guess not.” He took her hand, rubbed the top of it softly, and felt a stirring between his legs. Amazing that this part of a hand could contain so much womanhood.

Their waiter, a tall young fellow with an acne-scarred face, practically clicked his heels and bowed as he asked if they had questions about the menu.

“Yeah,” Howard said, jovially. “How did you make it all look handwritten?”

“I wouldn’t know, sir,” the waiter said to the air beneath his nose.

“You wouldn’t, huh? What would ...?” He caught the stop sign in Suzanne’s eyes. “Never mind.” He would have loved to grab the kid and shake him.

When the food came, it was as pretty as it could be: the guinea hen cutlets laid out like daisy petals with a molded yellow center which, since Howard could account for nearly everything else on his plate, must be the polenta.

A sheaflet of snow peas suggested an eccentric calyx, and three little mounds of lingonberries, caramelized baby onions, and what Suzanne identified as a tapenade could have been taken as companion blossoms. Or buds. “Must have been cooked by a sculptor,” Howard said.

“A minimalist sculptor,” Suzanne said sympathetically. It did taste good, such as there was of it, but Howard was almost afraid to chew; everything was so fancy.

On the way back to the hotel, he undid his seat belt and slid across, relieved to be alone with her and out of that oppressive restaurant. He pulled her to him, gently at first and then, remembering that the pin was gone now, hard enough that she gasped. He kissed her. Nothing. The day’s experiences swaddled him darkly, suffocatingly—the fake smiles, the contemptuous waiter, the prissy food, and, most of all, the damaged goblet. He kissed her again and twice more: lips of chamois skin, lips of some old aunt from his childhood. *It’s not her*, he thought, *it’s me*. He moved away but kept a hand between her shoulder blades. That was the way: companionability. Hell, that was all that was left.

In their room, he stepped to her side and held out a hand. “Oh...” she said, as if it didn’t matter, yet, it struck him, knowing instantly what he wanted. She took the goblet out of her purse. Holding it so as to catch the dim overhead light, he assessed the damage.

“Damn,” he said, turning away, his eyes damp. “I should have told them fourteen karat. Should have been a damn realist.” He held the goblet out behind him. As she took it, she touched his hand lightly to show sympathy but not make a big deal of it.

“We’ll take it to a jeweler first thing tomorrow,” he said.

Bed. He had anticipated anticipation. None. Shaving in the shower, he had been able to think of bed only as rest. That, he did anticipate. Weariness and defeat dragged at his cells, billions of micrograms of cooperative gravity. In bed, waiting, he almost dropped off, but then Suzanne came out of the bathroom wearing the black nightgown. He had forgotten, and he felt a stir—of gratitude, cool appreciation, and love. He pulled her to him as soon as she was in bed, and one hand smoothed the gentle topography at the back of her gown. “Hey, doll,” he said. “You’re something else, did you know?” But, their kisses were boy-and-aunt again, and when he slipped the thin strap of the nightgown down one shoulder and then the other and followed the contours of her breasts with a big palm, then worked the gown downward and stroked her bared middle to the navel and below, all was rote and nonproductive of the needed response in him. After a few minutes, he patted her cheek, shook his head, muttered, “I love you,” and, too tired even for despair, feeling only a glum disappointment, turned over and fell asleep.

Ten forty-five, the luminous dial of his watch said. The hour of sleep had helped. He heard Suzanne exhaling in free-fall. Good. He slipped the sheet back and rolled gradually out of bed. He took his robe off the back of a chair and started to put it on. No, that wouldn’t do. Stepping across the room barefooted, he pushed the knob of the closet door slowly inward to avoid metal-on-metal noises, then jerked the door toward him, too fast for it to squeak. He found his pants by feeling for the belt and his shoes by reaching down blindly to where he remembered leaving them. To hell with socks—zipping open the suitcase would be too noisy. But, he fished yesterday’s shirt out of the laundry bag and put it on.

The key. Where would he have left it? Oh, yes, one of those plastic things. He fumbled slowly among pocket-emptyings on the night stand, found it, remembered he had to have the car keys, found them, lifted them like a mouse cheating a trap, and stood for a moment, breathing through his mouth for silence as he pondered. Yes. He would get the other when he came back; no sense in carrying it and maybe getting mugged here in the city. He stepped to the door, undid the chain, slipped out, and shut the door behind him.

It took three minutes of riding the elevator up and down before he found an exit to the garage. It put him on the second floor. No telling where his car was. He started walking and swinging his head from side to side as he searched. Three levels later—or was it four?—he stopped to rest, panting. Where the hell had that smirking kid hidden it? Two more levels and it turned up, a small blue Subaru, almost lost between a Cadillac and a BMW 700. He beeped open the trunk and bent to reach inside.

“Anything I can help you with, sir?” More challenge than helpfulness in the voice. A security cop, plump and sixtyish, flashlight in hand.

Howard straightened up. “No, thanks. Just need something out of my toolbox.”

“Sir, we prefer that you have our valet service bring your car down to you.”

“Well, I prefer to save the tip.” Howard laughed, sourly. The officer smiled for a second but asked for his ID, was grudgingly satisfied with the room key, and stood about, undecided, before saying good night and clumping off into the gloom.

Howard fished two small pairs of pliers and some extra-fine sandpaper out of the box, closed the trunk, walked thankfully to the exit, took the elevator back to the fourth floor, and stole into the room. Good. She was still sleep-breathing. He took her purse into the bathroom, and under the light, after considerable digging, found the box with the pin in it. Padding the delicate jaws of the pliers with his handkerchief, he used only enough strength to feel the soft metal faintly give once, twice, and again. Then, gently, almost erotically, he sanded the handle, squinting at it first under and then against the light until he could not find a trace of a golden scratch.

Back in their room, he put the purse on Suzanne’s bedside table with the pin in it. She had turned onto her back and thrown off the cover, and by the brown light coming through the curtain he saw that her breasts were flattened against her chest, one nipple sweetly exposed where a strap of the black gown had slipped. He caught his breath, impelled to bend and kiss her there.

Instead, he turned his wrist and looked at the luminous dial of his watch. Twelve-ten. Too late for anything to be official. They’d both be rested in the morning, anyway. “That which we are, we are”—when he had learned the line in high school, it was the determination in it, and not the resignation, that had impressed him. Now resignation, acceptance, seemed like the whole thing. In the morning, after love, after breakfast, he would buy some jeweler’s rouge and put the last restorative touch on the little handle. It would look like new. Still, he would never get twenty-four karat again. It wasn’t the fifties anymore.





# Russet Eggs

by Betsy Martin

Minnie Odoroff would lift the lid  
of the little leather box,  
Minnie with cat-eye glasses  
and raven-black hair,  
and tuck the bills that my mother,  
with anemone fingertips, had slipped her,  
into the box.

She'd shut it with a soft hush,  
and hand my mother a carton.

And my mother'd open the gauze-gray lid  
and gaze at the russet eggs,  
which she had to have, for only these  
made her blue-green eyes  
glow like opals.  
White would not.

That's why we went to the shack  
where Minnie sold eggs,  
farm fresh, and I,  
as high as the desk,  
would watch in awe  
the solemn rite.

# Buying Jewelry at the Reservation

by Betsy Martin

The artists sit impassive  
under the gold disk of the sun  
while their wares glitter on tables.  
I wish we were in the heart  
of the reservation, not here  
in the parking lot of a gas station.  
They watch me with narrowed eyes  
as I walk stiffly from array to array.  
I imagine them in city clothes  
crossing the street in Manhattan,  
hailing a cab, handsome,  
black hair flowing.

Her face brightens as I pick up a necklace.  
Abalone. These beads are her best-seller,  
she says, and her name's Linda Bird.  
She hands me her card.  
We talk turquoise,  
how the finest is from the Sleeping Beauty  
mine. I think, as I buy the necklace,  
how much money  
she could make  
if she had a website.

Next year, different souls sit  
watching with narrowed eyes.  
In the amber heat, all is still,  
save the coming and going  
of pickup trucks raising and settling the dust.

One man smiles as I pass,  
holds up his blue-green loop of gems.  
The work is exquisite.  
We discuss shades of stone.  
Mountains circle the very old land  
in purple crenelations.



# History

by William Jolliff

When it comes, it may strut like a second heart  
attack, the awful pressing from the spine  
through the ribs, tightening, exploding, imploding.

History is like that, a great white bear stalking you  
for years, smelling your waste with hungry licks.  
Other times, it's nothing more than a coarse file

that reams the cavity of the chest, down and up,  
down and up, rectum to throat, empty and bleeding.  
Or maybe it's just a book of little stories, short tales

like small stones stacked on your belly and chest  
as your body lies staked, a fallen Jesus, and each  
rock means next to nothing, really, until the crush

begins and ends. When you think you've never met  
such a devil, History smiles, offers a clammy hand,  
and opens the door to another inquisitor: Future.

# Santa Maria of the Head

by Wendy Fox



In fire times, life is different. Under a cloud of smoke without sunlight and clouds of dust without water, even the least devoted will pray, participate in a novena in honor of St. Isidore (patron of farmers and gardeners) or carry a replica of the skull of St. Maria (Isidore's wife) in procession for the relief of drought. The dirt as dry as bone rises among the shuffling feet.

Grant us rain, in due abundance, that, being sufficiently helped with temporal, we may the more confidently seek after eternal gifts.

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The woman, Maria Torribia, was not popular, but she was strong. One day on his way back from the fields, Isidore jogged to catch up to her to help her carry her load of water, but, when he saw she had control and then some, he slowed his pace. She had a reputation as a strict woman and a hard worker. Her hair was coiled at a stern braid at her neck.

She had lived with her parents in Guadalajara. She was their oldest and only surviving child. Once on a hot day, she and her parents went to the river. Her mother had packed a modest picnic of cheese, tomatoes, and bread. None of them could swim, but they liked to sit along the bank and let the water cool their feet. When the mother's scarf was loosed by the wind and dropped just beyond her toes, she leaned forward to retrieve it and fell—the water was swift and deeper than it looked. In an instant, she was carried from them, her body swirling and helpless. The father plunged in, reaching for his wife, who was bobbing and gasping.

Maria thought for just a second before deciding to follow. She was screaming from the riverbank, but there was no help in sight, no barge ready to pluck them to safety. She took a running, headlong jump, aiming for a spot where the current foamed.

It was silent and submerged when she floated to the surface. Breath was impulse, but she pushed the air from her lungs and dipped her head again, yet the river righted her. No matter how she heaved and twisted, she was buoyed by the water

and her head stayed above, face pointed to the sun.

Then, she didn't think of having a gift. Then, she made her way back to the shore, packed up her mother's basket, and turned dripping toward home.

She tried to feel grateful.

When their bodies washed up a few days later, she buried them by her three younger brothers. Soon, the family home was sold at auction to pay her father's debts, and she slept on the scullery floor where she had found work as a daily girl.

She left word at the markets, and a message came back of a distant cousin whose father had disappeared in the wars but whose mother remained, and who was offering a pallet on the floor and honest work. Maria packed her modest belongings. It was a two-day journey on foot, not so far. When she arrived, she found them easily—it seemed all the men in Madrid knew her pretty cousin.

There, even in the thickest heat, when Maria pumped the well, she could easily fill both her buckets. When Maria watered the herb garden, the can was never emptied until she was finished. Her aunt began to request that only Maria bring the drinking jar because the water was always so cool and clear.

Maria worked in the same landowner's kitchen with her aunt and her cousin whose fields Isidore tilled. She took the hardest jobs in deference to her family, and they thanked her for this. Her cousin, Magda, had a slim figure and tender skin that bruised easily. She was younger and still had time to marry well. They washed her in milk and glossed her hair with olive oil and hoped she would find a husband who would take all three of them, but Maria promised to stay with her aunt no matter what happened.

She dreamed every night of the Virgin's cloak skimming water.

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Sometimes Isidore's master would wonder why he was not at his labor; Isidore was not ashamed to say he had been at mass. He dared the landowner to compare him against the other hands; there was no fault. Isidore had come to work on the outskirts of Madrid province, fleeing the Iberian caliphate and taking his communion when and where he could. His hands were strong and calloused, and the muscles at his neck were like a chain. He went down with the other workers in their shared hut, and he prayed by candlelight. The other men joined him. Farming was hard; the land was overworked and had been trampled by armies—who were they to ignore a plea to God? Isidore was not greedy. Some rain, some sun, and some protection from the winds that sometimes carried their topsoil to Andalusia and beyond were all that was needed. When Isidore snuffed the candle and the bunkhouse went dark, some of the men went on in their prayers, prostrate on their stacked beds, until sleep took them or the morning began to push through the stars.

In his litany, from lightning and tempest, deliver us.

Then, Isidore worried more for the dust choking the ox and the parched fields hostile to seed. If lightning came, it could strike anywhere. There was nothing to burn.

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A flame licks its way up the hillside, and Maria diverts the river. Smoke like lace weaves through the treetops, but wet clouds follow her and open on command. Embers, like hail fall on the thatched-roof villages, but she brings fog so thick the coals turn to ash pure enough to mark the foreheads of the faithful.

Maria, always in front, wielding a trident.

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Isidore surprised them all when he asked for Maria's hand. He worked up all his courage to consult a father, a grizzled uncle, or a wall of brothers, but there was only the old stooping aunt, who answered his knock with her modest, covered hair and her ragged smile. He blushed at the ladies' mending laid out over the back of a chair.

He didn't know of Maria's holy dreams. He had spoken only a few words to her.

"Your load looks heavy."

"There are heavier."

"The sun is strong today."

"I pray for the crops."

He didn't know that his candle, wedged into the dirt floor of the men's sleeping space, was a beacon that led the devout to the devout.

The marriage of Maria and Isidore was simple, and the evening of their troth they stayed at the local inn. They were expected at their posts by first light, but they had a whole, delicious night without the clamor of the men at the bunkhouse or Maria's aunt and cousin. It was the first time they had been alone together. He

worried about where they would live. The family home had been sold; he wanted to find a place they could work, that, even if not their own, afforded them some privacy. Maria thought his expectations high. For now, they could go on living apart. Isidore reluctantly agreed; then silence fell on their room, and he reached for Maria. Her skin was so clean. She had flowers woven into her braids, and her hands were nearly as rough as his. His bride.

At dawn, Maria rose before her husband and dressed then woke him. She sent him to the bunkhouse to change into his work clothes and went to the central well. He had said that the innkeeper would not care if the sheet had been marked with the sign of virginity, and she knew this to be true, but the help would, so Maria scrubbed at the spot until it rinsed clean in the dim morning light.

When she hung the sheet out the windowsill to dry, she saw Isidore, in the distance, the ox on his plow and the shine of sweat already dappling his skin. She felt changed. Consummating the marriage had been more like a fumble, and she realized she had sent her husband away with no breakfast. She had a piece of dry bread in her apron but had forgotten it.

Through the open shutter, there was also smoke, just a thread, but Maria grabbed her wash bucket and ran. Her aunt was standing outside, crying, and shouting that she didn't know how it had happened; she was always so careful with the cooking fire. Maria flung the dirty wash water toward the flames, and when the water hit, steam sizzled from the thatch. Then there was Isidore, handing her another bucket and the men from the fields making a line from the creek, a human aqueduct, until the little house was drenched and cold.

The fire burned part the roof so that it swayed at an angle, but Isidore believed it could be repaired, and he kissed his wife in full view of everyone. The hands followed him back to their perches on the plows. He kept them late so they would not be behind for their workday—he was worried the women might be punished in the kitchen.

That night, Maria and her cousin worked at scrubbing the house. The fire had run directly up the wall, so it did less damage than they feared. There were bits of streaked soot in everything. The old aunt followed them around hollering apologies until they were able to put her to bed. When Maria finally tried to get a few hours of rest, the dawn came through the hole above her, and she watched the stars dissolve into the blue light of morning. She was tired, but sleep would not come. Then, she felt the smallest catch in her belly. It was far too soon for the quickening, but she was sure of it. Her aunt would be happy, and Maria hoped some good news would calm her. Isidore had promised to bring his pack of men at the first chance, and the skies were clear of rain. She lay on her back and looked to the sky, opening to heaven.

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The pregnancy was an easy one. Her back was strong from sleeping on her pallet, and her body was broad and muscled from her work. In the kitchen, the women



slipped her mugs of milk thick with cream and ladles of soup heavy with meat, just enough that no one would notice, and they prayed over her. After Isidore covered the hole in the roof, the aunt insisted that he come to live with them. It was a blessing for the old woman to have a man in the home again and a child coming. Cousin Magda had fallen in love with one of the other hands, and the aunt purred over them both: her daughter, glowing from love; her niece, hair glossy and eyes shining. Sometimes at night, she cried over her good fortune. She lit candles for the Virgin and gave thanks.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

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The night of the fire, the aunt's husband had come to her in a dream. He had died chopping wood in the forest. His axe bit the tree trunk, then in one awful moment of miscalculation, the timber fell toward him and crashed in a clutter of birds and hornets' nests across his middle. The last time she saw him, his body was bisected, and his face was not the face of the man she had married; he was swollen and his lips were pinched. Then, she had wanted to go with him, but their daughter was so young. She was glad she stayed, glad to be breathing for these moments with Isidore and Maria, and her own daughter, a great beauty—neither the aunt nor her husband had been handsome—who, it seemed, would marry for love, choosing the same hard life with too many people in a few rickety rooms. Though the aunt had hoped her daughter's looks could carry her to a higher class that would spare her lousy bedclothes and the constant reek of half-spoiled food and wood smoke, she also wanted her only child to know the joy of waking up to the face she had picked, to know the feeling of being sure. She had enjoyed this with her husband, and even with so many years gone, when he appeared to her on the night of the fire, whole and strong, she lived the day when they had been new and snuck to the stables together, stripping down on the hay with the heat of the horses around them, where they had made their daughter from simple desire. Then, she was already old and thought she would always be alone.

He was a gift to her, and this was how she knew God—when her patience was answered.

Sometimes, she still expected him to walk through the doorway, which he had built, to take off his shoes and come to her.

In the dream, the horses stamped and snorted, and their commotion covered any suspicious sounds. She didn't know if it had really been like that. She only remembered him, his skin sun-browned and his hands hot. In the dream, she saw herself from a long way off as if she were looking over a valley from a high place.

Her life had been harder without him. She remembered their every day—the way he smelled of clover and wax and the way their two lives were ordinary toil until they were joined.

So long ago, so close.



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Isidore was a good husband. He complimented Maria, and he spoke to her gently. He chopped her firewood, splintering the quarters into different-sized pieces so she had both timbers for kindling and cooking. In the mornings, Isidore leaned into her, her buttocks hot against his sex, the front of his legs against the back of hers.

When Maria asked if she could keep a bee box, he nodded and came home to her with planks knitted into stacked squares.

She knew where a hive nested and watched it. She waited for a swarm, when part of the colony would light out with a new queen, and scouts would be sent to find a home. She put the boxes in the garden, flanked by the most pollen-heavy plants, and waited until the bees came. It was a few at first, then in billows. They filled the boxes to the brim with bees, their number so many that the stalks of her surrounding flowers were bent and their stamens dry.

As Maria grew, Isidore wanted her out of the kitchen. He had been many nights with Magda's young man and a bottle of wine, and they had made a plan. Adrian had come to Madrid province as a traveler, and he stopped for some work when he needed it. Perhaps, he was fated to Magda, he said. His godfather always had a place for him, and he would go home, taking Magda and the aunt. Isidore did not doubt the young man loved his wife's cousin, and he did not doubt he would take care of the aunt, but he insisted they were married properly before they left.

The wedding was delayed when Adrian's family sent word that they would come to Madrid as witnesses. Their caravan took almost two weeks to arrive, and they filled

the same tiny chapel where Isidore and Maria had said their vows to the ceilings. The old aunt was beside herself. So many women in colorful clothes and bangles counted the beads with her and sang. They spent the night, their wagons parked ramshackle around the house and fires blazing. They had brought with them wine and cooking pots and a few chickens, and they praised the aunt's hospitality when she volunteered to kill and pluck the birds they offered for the wedding meal.

That afternoon, when she had seen the crowd of Adrian's family, Maria had picked the garden nearly clean in a cloud of bees. By nightfall, there were already new buds. She wrapped a rack of honeycomb in cloth and presented it to Magda's mother-in-law as a gift, and the woman thanked her and took a piece immediately to chew for a sore in her mouth.

The celebration went on through the night, but in the morning, they packed and set out again for the coast. The aunt had never seen the sea. She had not known that when she left Madrid her final home would be with travelers. She had not known they would carry her on a makeshift litter, the first few miles, an elder, a temporary queen; she missed her husband then, with the curls that framed his face and now cascaded down Magda's back.

Maria and Isidore would take her home and raise their child. She turned back to them, and Maria waved to her and the bridal party; Maria's face shone with tears. Her other daughter, almost. The aunt could not cry then. She felt her husband's hand at her neck. She knew she had only a few years left and that the time would go fast. The hours with sadness are long; with joy, they are like a flame on dry tinder. When the caravan was outside of Madrid, they broke the procession down some to economize and offered the aunt a place in the back of a donkey cart with soft pillows and a gourd of wine.

She rode in the cart until night began to fall. As the dark deepened, she could see Magda by torchlight, and she motioned for one of the men to help her down. The dry foliage of the road was brittle on her sandals. Such a journey was coming late in her life, like everything else, and she wanted to walk and feel the earth and the scrub brush at her feet. The wheels of the many carts made a clattering sound that cut through the air like a rhythmic incantation. Though the ground was rough, she quickened her pace. When she caught up, her heart was pounding, and she reached for her daughter's hand. The new husband dismounted and lifted the old woman to the rump of the horse, and she rode there, cradling her daughter until the first light broke across the horizon, just as she had done when Magda was a child.

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In the house at Madrid, there were two rooms, plus the open space that circled the chimney like a half moon.

Maria's pregnancy progressed, and when she became very large, she quit her work at the kitchen as Isidore requested. She didn't mind. She rose in the morning to make his breakfast and feed her aunt's chickens, which were her chickens now.

On the day of the child's birth, Maria woke to sunlight; she had overslept, not

even waking when Isidore did. She felt her belly move. It was a beautiful day to be born, so she did not blame the child, but she did not want to be alone. There was a midwife, but Maria was not sure if she could walk so far to her. She took long, deep breaths. She lit a fire and heated water. At the noon hour, the pot was at a raging boil, and she was streaked with her own sweat.

She prayed.

The sun began to slink down, which meant Isidore would return soon. She remembered the births of her brothers. She thought of water, the way even the tiniest creeks find their paths, the way rivers cut a course to the sea. The fire was growing hotter. She missed her aunt and her mother, who would know what to do. She missed the ladies from the kitchen.

When Isidore opened the door, their child was crowning. He knelt in front of Maria, dirty from the fields but exhaustion melting. Then, it wasn't long.

The child of Isidore and Maria was a son.

She was relieved to be done with it, relieved nothing had gone wrong.

Isidore cut the baby from her and washed his wife, then helped her to bed with the nuzzling infant. He felt proud of Maria and proud to be a father, and if this pride was a sin, he accepted it.

\*\*\*

When Isidore was at the fields, with the baby swaddled at her back, Maria cleared more and more land around their home. Their son was a worker like his father. He liked the motion of her axe at the small trees and her sickle at the tall grass and rarely fussed. She did not know where the boundaries of her aunt's property were, nor did she know if her aunt had any legitimate claim to the house. Maria had never seen a deed, but she had already decided that if anyone asked, she would say it had burned in the fire.

The installation of the bees only helped her garden, and Maria walked the ever-extending line of arable dirt barefoot, the outline of her toes crumbling into mud. She collected rocks and piled them in a border around her herbs and flowers. The child on her back got heavier, and she grew even stronger with his weight. They baptized him at home.

On the day the child fell into an old, unused well, Isidore asked to be released from his master. The space Maria had cleared was claimed by the landowner, but in a moment of benevolence and thanks for Isidore's service, he agreed that they could work it, under his watch.

By this time, the child toddled.

In the dusty hole, he screamed, and with nothing left to do but appeal to God, they prostrated themselves.

The well rose; he was lifted on a spout like the spray from a whale.

\*\*\*

With the spirits guiding his plow, Isidore could do the work of three, and where the feet of his wife touched, the land was damp and irrigated, and new shoots broke against the heat-cracked dirt. Where their heads lay, dry creek stream became lush rivers. Once, when Maria stopped behind a scragged tree to pee, the limbs fractured and bloomed.

\*\*\*

Life was easier for them, at first. Maria kept the boy strapped to her back, and they worked their plot as a family. They grew crops for themselves and some that they could sell at the markets, and some they paid in tax to the landowner.

At night, they prayed and gave thanks they had enough.

She left word for her cousin and her aunt at the stalls, and she heard they were happy and prosperous. Her cousin was with child and growing fat. Then news came that Magda had given birth to twin girls, and Maria hoped they would be true sisters, like she and Magda would have been if they had more time together.

\*\*\*

When the fever came, Maria made a compress of yarrow and elderberry, but the heat did not stop. She called for a priest, and she kneeled in front of him while he said his words. She took the boy to the creek that had saved the house, stripped him, and held his body where the chill water crashed through the rocks, but the fever would not break.

She had envied Magda before for having her mother, and now she envied her again for having two children at once.

When they buried him, Isidore's face was like ash.

They worked hard at procreation, but she never again felt the catch in her abdomen, the pressure at her belly and the tender breast. She came to forget it. She did not regret the child, but when the girls from town came to her, firm-bellied and shamed, she led them to the herb plot, which was, even in winter, flush with cures.

The garden went on; the harvest came and came again and again. They built a bunkhouse and hired a few hands of their own. Isidore was with them some evenings when the work was done and lead them in prayer. Maria fed them from her cooking pot, which never seemed to empty, and she mended their clothes. When one or the other was occasionally sick, she held them back with the request for help in the garden and then returned them to bed. When they married, she said good-bye with a jug of honey and a packet of seeds.

The boy who came to her, face flushed and shirt torn, was a child the age her own might be.

Isidore had tried to catch a startled ox and got caught underneath.

Their life had been simple. And, for a time, lucky.

They had lived with the child, at first, and then without him.

They had come from nothing and made a place for themselves.

When they buried Isidore, Maria thought of her parents, next to her brothers. And now her husband, next to her son. She envied them, together always.

She felt foolish to have believed she could have kept them.

\*\*\*

Maria gave the men a few days, then paid them their final wage. A few argued they should bring the autumn harvest in, but Maria sent them away and tore the bunkhouse down herself, board by board. She hitched up the ox that had trampled her husband and dragged the lumber to the chapel. It took several trips and most of a day, and when she was finished, she left the beast, his plow, and the boards there by the stone steps.

She was tired when she got back to the fields, but she walked them carefully until the water came up and the earth was ankle-deep mud.

She split the bee boxes and cut down the garden.

It had been years since she had heard news of her cousin. The aunt had probably passed.

She still dreamed of the Virgin, and sometimes she dreamed of Isidore and his endless tilling. Each day, she retraced her path in the fields until they were swamp. A tree sprung from the place of Isidore and her son's rest, polished with moss.

The house grew tufts of green from every corner, leaked, and moaned. She was cold frequently and damp. Her hair would not dry; the braid was like iron, gray and heavy. Her cooking pot creaked with rust, and her skin was clammy.

A visitor came once and when he knocked at the door, it crumbled under his fist. Through the soggy hole, Maria saw her cousin's face in his features, but she slipped out of sight like an eel.

\*\*\*

Deign, we pray, to instill into our hearts a horror of sin and a love of prayer, so that working the soil in the sweat of our brow, we may enjoy eternal happiness.

\*\*\*

She visited the gravesite often, picking her way along a path of boulders that barely peeked above the murk. The tree had grown tall and strong, and its roots coiled around what might be left of the simple boxes. When her bare feet touched the water, tiny fish darted around her toes.

Sometimes she saw peasants through the drape of witches hair, filling their buckets at the pool that had formed where the creek used to run.

She knew that when it was her time to die, she would come to this same spot and let the water finally take her like she had wanted that day at the river, and without her constant circling, the land would dry again, the creek returning to a trickle except for in spring. When the mist cleared and she was found, she would be beneath the tree, peaceful, her body gone except for her head, glinting silver and scaled.

\*\*\*

# I Was a Lamp

by Laurel Kallen

when I was born  
full of light, and they tried to ignite me further  
and, at the same time, snuff out my flame  
photograph me naked butt on a rug  
wearing a little hat  
so I would be cuter than if I'd just been  
gurgling in my crib.

If only they'd seen me there,  
but they had to stock the fridge  
and replace the fuses  
arrange piano lessons and teach me to wear  
the school face, the restaurant face,  
the be-on-your-best-behavior and the  
there-will-be-consequences faces.

All day, I resisted and pulled the barrettes out  
of my hair. I whined.  
When I grew up, I discovered dry wine.  
I learned to bring something other than pound cake  
to the homes of hosts.  
Serve French cheeses.  
It made sense to travel abroad.

It made sense to hithchhike.  
To forget the sideboard in the dining room  
and the blue lineoleum floor.  
The front porch  
and the cherry tree in the backyard.  
There were blueberries and strawberries somewhere, and  
I had to find them, ride the horses to find them.

# The Company of Women Today

by Pat Sturm

...differs from the days of Jane Austen, who wrote of ladies in ruffled bonnets and fringed shawls leaving calling cards on silver trays, drinking tea from bone china cups, and giggling over the handsome new landowner checking his fences on a willful white steed.

...differs from Willa Cather's descriptions of strong prairie women setting up tables in the yard, wiping their rough hands on cotton aprons, fretting over grass fires, and serving their men platters of heavy, roasted meat, potatoes, and whatever vegetables they picked from the garden.

...differs with each self-authored story. We work inside and outside the home, with or without husbands. In designer dresses or t-shirts and jeans, we sip wine or throw back a beer, argue over Big Ideas and form nests for new babies, dying parents, troubled families. Now, as then, we need and enjoy  
the company of women.





# Farewell

by Pat Sturm

The Big C has encircled  
one more woman, stamping  
her chart terminal. A wife,  
a mother, the first called  
from her family.

She will also depart a sisterhood,  
related only by a passion for  
the soil. My family.

On learning her fate, she  
knelt in her tiny garden and  
stroked the petals of a rose. Her  
tears fell for the flowers she  
loves, the flowers she'll leave.

I weep for us all.



# She Finds Her Body Again

by Jan Ball

She finds her body again  
along the beach in pieces  
as she bends to retrieve  
purple moon shell curvings  
and broken scalloped edges,  
a swirled conical augur  
ridged as stairs on a circular  
staircase, whelks round  
as pomander but still fishy  
with decaying parts rather  
than attar fragrant, and oval,  
jointed clam halves lying  
vulnerable in the sand,  
hinged like an open door;  
she feels the water lick her  
feet like a pet might lick  
her toenails and subtle  
morning seep into her sponge  
soles as the sturdy pelicans hunt  
purposefully for their breakfast,  
expanding predator wings  
in the sky above her.

# Rule No. 8

by Caroline Bruckner

**Rule No. 1: Never cry** where Father can see it.

There were eight candles on the cake. I blew them out in one breath. Mother ran her hand through my hair, but I pulled away. I was counting the hours. "When is he coming home?" I whined. It didn't matter so much that he wasn't here now, if he would just come home today. Just this one day.

"Later, darling," answered my mother dutifully, but she looked away when she said it.

"A doctor needs to be at the hospital," my mother continued as she offered me a second piece of cake. "They need him at the hospital."

\* \* \*

**Rule No. 2: Be a big girl.**

I forced my hands to be still. I forced my hands to not reach out to touch him, the miracle of him. He had come home late that night. I had not slept. I had been waiting for his steps at the door, for his key to turn in the lock. For the air to change the way it did when he was inside the house. I stood at my door watching him undress and brush his teeth. He did not see me. I could tell he was tired, so I didn't will him to look at me. Poor Father.

\* \* \*

**Rule No. 3: Be strong.**

He was gone again when I woke up. It was like that sometimes. We didn't see him for days. I couldn't bear to think of how tired he must be. Of what he sacrificed for us, for all the sick people at the hospital. I felt my mother watching me, but I only looked down at my new blue shoes. I pretended sometimes that he was sitting in his chair, newspaper in his lap. Sometimes it felt so real I turned to tell Jonas off for making so much noise, to tell him to stop crashing the tin cans together when Father was trying to get some rest.

\* \* \*

**Rule No. 4: Put things back where they belong.**

I was allowed to take down the encyclopedia in Father's study if I put it back in the exact same place before I went to bed. My mother irritated me by never being careful enough when she dusted and aired the room. I went behind her as she wiped the desk with a damp rag, and I made sure the heavy marble pencil holder and deer-bone letter knife were never off place by more than a fraction of a millimeter. He liked to have his things in order. There was a pride in that. I would not beg to sit in his lap. His well-ironed trousers could crease, and that had to be avoided. I could not endure his having wrinkled trousers, even if he would have

invited me to sit on his knee. I sneered at other children who climbed into their father's lap, behaving like little babies.

\* \* \*

Rule No. 5: Do as you are told.

I could be quiet for a long time. He read the newspaper while lying on the sofa, but I knew he was secretly snoozing. I pretended to read a book. I liked being close to him, to hear him breathing. I willed him to look up and see me, to see how good I was, reading the book.

"What are you reading, my dove?"

"I am learning about all the blood vessels in the body."

"Clever girl," he said and got back to his newspaper. My heart swelled then, and happiness was everywhere, in my legs and in the chair I was sitting on and in the dust in the carpet.

\* \* \*

Rule No. 6: Don't walk too close to the river.

I could walk the path by the river and be home in ten minutes flat. But, since that kid Einar slipped and fell into the ice-cold water last winter and drowned, Father wants me to go through the village. I am not as stupid and clumsy as Einar. I would not slip and die even if I ran down the path, but I didn't want Father to worry. He had enough to worry about at the hospital. I wondered sometimes how it felt to be dead. Mother said Einar looked down at us from Heaven. But, Father told me not to listen to her stories about people living in the sky. When you were dead, you were dead. He should know: he was the doctor. When you were dead, everything was black. Just black.

\* \* \*

Rule No. 7: Don't ask too many questions.

It was when I saw the dead bird that I knew something was not right. I unlocked the gate and locked it behind me and walked up the gravel path to our front door. The bird must have tried to fly through the window, fooled by the reflection of the tree in the glass. It was a chaffinch. Lying in the snow with its neck broken, it looked sad. I had to think of all the skeletons of the other birds I had buried. Behind the cherry tree at the back of the house, there was an animal cemetery. I prayed for the animals I buried, even though I don't believe in God. I had to bury the chaffinch, but first I needed to tell Mother I was home, and I needed to get my bad gloves. The door was locked. In my entire life, the front door to our house had never been locked.

"Klara!" came a voice behind me.

I didn't have to turn to know it was Aunt Margaret at the gate. Aunt Margaret was our neighbor. She had a wart above her lip with a hair growing out of it, like one solitary whisker. She was not my aunt at all.

“The baby is coming; she has gone to help with the baby!”

Aunt Margaret was nice. She smelled of cookies. I liked going over to her house; there would always be something or other baking in the oven.

“I need to bury the bird!” I shouted back. “A chaffinch.”

She came through the gate, huffing and puffing. “I don’t understand why you don’t put something up to scare the poor birds away,” she scolded.

“I’ll come over when I’m done,” I called. I would have to bury the bird with my nice gloves. Or, maybe, I’d take them off.

“My Hans has a terrible flu. Your mother told me to drive you to your father.”

I remember three years ago when my mother lost her tooth, and we drove to the city. That was the only time I had ever been to the hospital. I had to wait in the car outside. I remember staring at the three-story building with the many windows, imagining my father in his white coat helping the poor sick people. I imagined the grateful faces as they thanked him for saving their lives.

\* \* \*

Rule No. 8: Don’t turn back.

Oscar, Aunt Margaret’s bald husband, didn’t talk much as we drove the motorway to the city. I wanted to button up my coat, it was cold in the truck, but I didn’t dare move. I liked sitting high up above everyone else, looking into the cars driving next to us. The people looked small, and that felt good. I didn’t like that Oscar coughed every few minutes and clicked his teeth as if thinking over something he had planned earlier. I had heard about men kidnapping children, but Aunt Margaret wouldn’t allow that, I thought. A red car passed, and a boy sitting in the backseat looked up at me and stretched his tongue out. *I am going to see my father at the hospital*, I thought, and I wasn’t angry at all with the rude boy. I let my hair swing in front of my face. *I don’t see you, boy*.

“I’ll help you,” Oscar finally said as he stopped the car in front of the hospital. He came around and opened the door for me and held my hand as I jumped down.

“Thank you,” I said, looking at a dirty spot on his rough blue workers’ shirt. My father would never have worn a shirt with a stain on it. He was, of course, not a farmer.

There was quite a crowd in front of the entrance doors. A man with a broken leg came hobbling down the stairs. A woman with a tube in her neck. A boy with a bandage round his head. I thought, *I am going to see my father. He saves people’s lives*. I smiled at them. It almost felt as if I had saved them.

“Are you the doctor’s girl?” The nurse had nice curly brown hair, and I liked the way she said “doctor’s.” “Come with me,” she said and turned on her heel.

We walked down a bright corridor with many doors and then turned a corner. There were no windows here. There were framed drawings, obviously done by kids, in a neat row on the bright wall. On the fifth drawing, there was a girl with big wings.

“You are lucky to have a dad like the doctor.” The nurse turned and smiled at me, and I smiled back, feeling my backbone go all warm. “He is so good with the children,” she added then. I wondered how many children this woman had, and why my father had met them.

“Don’t go near the doors. Wait here. I’ll get him for you.” She pointed at a red plastic chair in a corner, then turned to talk a minute to another nurse passing.

I sat down. If I sat on the edge of the chair, my feet almost touched the floor. There was a candy wrapping stuck under the leg of the chair. I looked at my woolen stockings and saw how they were all wrinkled up at my ankles. Anxiously, I pulled them up at the knee and made them look all smooth and orderly. I wanted to be clean and cute. I tore my hat from my head and combed my hair back with my fingers. I didn’t like when my hair was in a frizz around my face. I sat with my hands still in my lap and waited. *He’ll take me around to see his patients, I thought. An old biddy with shaking hands will give me a sweet. Then, we might drink hot chocolate in the café by the entrance. Maybe he will hold my hand as we cross the street to where the car is parked.*

I looked over to the nurse, willing her to hurry before I had counted to three. She, at once, turned and opened the big doors. For a second, a wave of shrieking and laughter swept out at me from the other side.

The clock on the opposite wall showed two minutes after two.

I felt so dizzy and weak I could hardly turn my head to read the sign above the big doors. I looked down at my hands tearing at my hat. I willed them to stop. There must be a mistake. The nurse must have taken me to the wrong ward. I got up from the chair and slowly started walking back the way I had come. I thought I’d better go back to the entrance hall and wait there. Father would, of course, be waiting by the doors for me, glancing outside, wondering why I had not yet shown up. I liked that I would surprise him by coming from the other direction. I would wave at him. We would visit the sick old people and have hot chocolate. I walked steadily down the hall and almost turned the corner.

It was a strange thing my feet did. I was not allowed to turn the corner. I willed my feet to move along, but they did not want to move. I thought of grass and running joyfully over it, and still they did not hear me. I stood there for a minute watching a piece of chewing gum stuck to the floor. I knew then I had to go through the doors. “At the count of three,” I said loudly and turned on my heels.

When I was small, I used to lie in my bedroom in the front of the house and listen to the cars passing at night, feeling deep inside myself for the right number. *The fifth car passing will be his, I said to myself, starting to count. One. Two. Three. Four.* Sometimes, an hour could pass. *Five.* My heart stopped a beat waiting for the car to slow down and turn into the driveway. I knew it would be him.

When his car finally parked under the big tree, I ran to the window, leaning against the glass, feeling the cold on my forehead, knowing how close he was. Then, I would count the steps up to the front door. There were twelve steps, always twelve. I was

waiting to see him. At step ten, I could see his face briefly in the light from the front door. Mother always kept it burning; we kept the light on for him. I used to imagine him coming straight up the stairs to my bed to kiss me good-night. He would stand for a moment leaning over me, taking in the wonder of me, his little girl sleeping. He would look close to see if I had been crying, then stroke my cheek gently, once only, to not wake me up. "My dove," he would whisper. "Sweet dreams."

He never did come into my room. Not once. Every night I was awake, waiting for him. *He is too tired, poor Father*, I used to tell myself over and over, lying in the dark room. *I am a big girl, and Father is too tired.*

I saw him as soon as the doors opened.

A girl with a dirty ponytail was sitting in his lap. She was laughing and pulling at the stethoscope he wore around his neck. He ruffled her hair and tilted his head back as he smiled.

There is a moment of utter incredulity before the mind can accept something it had thought impossible. I was chilled. I could not breathe. I wanted to run. I wanted to run all the way back home again. Back to the dead bird. No, way back before the dead bird, even. I wanted to run all the way back to school, where I would have lingered in the yard for half an hour making snowballs instead of hurrying home the way I had.

The doctor turned, smiling, and then the smile disappeared. He looked at me in the doorway. He did not see the pieces of my broken heart on the floor.

\* \* \*

Rule No. 9: There is danger everywhere.

A sharp stone and a slippery patch of ice. A frozen mushroom buried under the snow. A dark staircase in the middle of the night.

The day I had decided to be the day was a Saturday. I woke up and heard them turning in their beds in the next room. I had slept well, and I felt strong. I did not dress. I went down the hall, quiet as a mouse. I carried the box in my left hand. I did not look around, even though I could feel my mother stirring as I locked the door to the bathroom. I willed her back to sleep before I undressed. I folded my nightgown neatly and then stood naked in front of the mirror. It was important to be naked. The item in the box had been chosen carefully. I opened the lid of the old cigar box. The chaffinch was lying on a bed of straw. It didn't stink so very badly. "My dear," I whispered to the dead bird in my magic voice. "Today is the day, my dear."

I placed the box on the lid of the toilet and then knelt down in front of it. The tiles were cold and hard. I watched the bird for a moment. I watched its deadness. The round eyes looked as if crying. The little beak was half open. "We won't sing anymore, little bird. Little dead birds don't sing."

I never doubted I would succeed. One after the other, I plucked the feathers and stuck them into the skin of my arms. A thought came to my mind, a thought of

putting my nightgown on again and going back to my room. A thought of Mother frying pancakes and running her fingers through my hair. But the ache in me was too strong. There was no avoiding it: there was no way for me to go on.

The clouds were moving quickly across the sky. A sharp wind hit at my naked skin. As I stepped up on the windowsill, the sun shone straight into my eyes. It was a good sign. I held the chaffinch in my right hand, showing it the world one last time. I smiled out over the garden. I smiled at the old cherry tree and the gate and the meadow beyond. I smiled at Aunt Margaret's house and at the river, and I smiled into all the hearts sleeping. A cold smile it was. I thought about Einar, that silly kid, who had accidentally fallen into the river and died. If you are going to die, don't be so sloppy as to do it accidentally. I thought about Father and how he would be really happy. I thought about how he had looked with them, his back straight and his movements easy and his face bright and caring. Then, I thought about how tired he seemed at home, at home where I was. I looked at the trees in the distance moving and then at my feet, half inside and half outside.

I felt safe. I pressed the bird into my heart until my fingers felt sticky. And then I sang. I sang as I let myself fall.

Would I have not done it if I had known?

I would never again dress and walk around by myself. I would never again know how it felt to live without pain. To run down the gravel path. To jump into the ice-cold river and swim to the other side.

I had fallen, and my life had fallen with me. My body was destroyed, but something was also healed. He cared for me then, at the hospital. He saw me, finally, because he knew why I had done it, why I had jumped out the window. My mother cried. But Father, he smiled.

\* \* \*

Rule No. 10: Love conquers all.

They were slow, our days. Some days we had lunch in the garden. He carried me



out then, even as I got older. I would fall asleep in the sun, listening to the insects buzzing and the birds chirping while he read one of his large books, sitting on the bench next to me.

“We’ll always be together, Father, won’t we?” I whispered just as I was about to nod off.

“We will, my dove. We will.”



# The Blue

by Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

When you're a kid riding a wave, facedown,  
limbs straight out, palms touching,  
jellyfish nipping at your thighs,  
you never think of how the wave was breathed  
into existence by wind, the pull of the moon,

or that waves move in circular motion,  
or that they are predictable  
and can form narrow channels  
when varying intensities slap to shore,  
making lifeguards leap  
from their white stilt chairs and dive  
into the ocean to try to save you,

you only know those breathless moments  
of the wave taking you, making you fly like  
you do in your dreams when you look down over  
the rooftop and know that your sisters  
can't pull your hair or call you baby.

It doesn't matter that the top of your two-piece  
gets dragged off or, toward shore, your belly  
gets scraped by broken shells or that chunks  
of wet sand end up stuck in your private parts.

You can't pet the German Shepherd tied up  
behind your neighbor's tall fence or go on  
the Cyclone because the top of your head  
doesn't reach the cutoff line and you can't  
climb up a ladder to peek inside the holes  
in the nest to see how wide-winged wasps sleep.  
But, small as you are, you can take the wave.

When you struggle to your feet, sink on the swathe  
of wet sand, making foot-shaped pools,  
water streaming from your nose, mouth, and hair,  
you are already planning the arguments  
you'll pose when your mother insists  
your lips are blue and it's time to come out.



# Family Ties

by Maureen DuRant

Refused to sit down,  
Miss High and Mighty.  
My Oklahoma aunts  
told the story again and again.  
Jack's girl don't know her people.

Twisting on my new white  
summer Keds, my cotton  
sundress wilting in the heat,  
I crossed my arms against  
the smell of grease, a heavy  
weight like red earth that refuses  
to scrub away or a clinging tick  
on a coon hound filling to bursting  
with blood siphoned away sip by sip.

The peeling wallpaper,  
faded magnolias past  
their prime, exposed layers  
of stained plywood, wadded  
pages of magazines stuffed  
in cracks, trying to keep  
vermin and dust at bay.

A fan stuttered at the end  
of each turn, stirring old  
catalogs stacked  
on an enamel table, weighted  
by bottles and sticky glasses.

I mumbled, nice to meet  
you. Ruth cackled, her empty  
gums opening a soft cave,  
her watery gray eyes,  
shriveled beads in swollen  
sockets, repaid my gaze,  
recognizing their kin.

Lurching from her kitchen  
chair, she pressed her face  
close to mine, and I smelled  
her familiar breath.  
She reached out and pinched  
my arm, twisting  
my tanned skin, digging  
yellow nails into my flesh.

I ran, the screen door slammed;  
tired red dogs in the hard dirt  
yard raised their big jowled heads.  
I waited in my daddy's  
Buick, borrowed for the road  
trip into the Quachita Mountains.  
The sweat trickled down  
my face. A welt raised, my heart  
beating to its throbbing pulse.

My aunts were wrong. I knew  
my people. I knew the glove  
box hid a flask of Southern Comfort,  
Daddy winking, swigging a long  
draw, then coaxing just a taste,  
baby girl. The bitter taste of poteen,  
the fleeting warmth of rotgut,  
and the lingering spirits left marks:  
eyes the color of Bigfork chert, soft  
teeth, a loose laugh, and a whiskey want.

# The Old House

by Andrew Jarvis

At the beach of the great fires, Father  
is burning our house into nails.

He deconstructed it, chopped it  
with his long-handled axe, hacked it.

This is his frame of mind, unframed  
while everything singes on sand.

His boards, his beams, his roof, his work,  
he watches Grandfather burning.

All of him lost in an hour,  
he died building this house for us.

But Father has a better build  
with skylights and stairways in sun.

He paints us a picture with ash,  
while Grandfather peers through his smoke.

# *Places I Was Dreaming*

## Book Review

by Corrie Williamson

A novel I dearly love was once praised by *The New York Times Book Review* as teaching us how to read it. This has always seemed to me a rare and precious gift indeed, and Loren Graham's latest book of poems, *Places I Was Dreaming* (released in February from CavanKerry Press) offers just that uncommon pleasure.

The book, Graham's third, follows a single speaker as did his first, *Mose*, a long narrative piece whose speaker is incarcerated in a Texas prison, but the speaker in *Places I Was Dreaming* is a young boy growing up in poverty in rural Oklahoma. Graham has described the book as loosely autobiographical, drawing on memories of his own childhood in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, and the authenticity of detail and depth of feeling in these poems is undeniable. The collection begins with a description of the house that many of the poems take place in and around:

House of clapboard warped and gapping,  
house with bees inside its walls,  
house rats frequented.

Piles of loosening plaster and lath,  
eyesore clucked at and pitied,  
object of dread and erosion:

Yes. Yes. That house.  
The one I called my house,  
our house, home.

This opening poem, with its lines diminishing slowly toward that single word, highlights many of the book's central concerns: how we perceive poverty, how we grow away from a place or lifestyle, and how names and language can powerfully shape our understanding of what we use them to describe. The poems are a kind of taphonomy, a study in the way memory, language, and those we love can decay or take on the hardness of fossilized bone.

While the imagery and narrative in Graham's poems evoke a hardscrabble kind of life—the mother cooking meals in the yard in a rusty oil drum, the father standing in line to receive government assistance—his speaker demands no pity and never falls prey to romanticizing the poverty in which he lives. Indeed, the book is often celebratory of the resourcefulness of its characters, of the comforting cacophony of overlapping voices within the ramshackle house, or the deep bonds of a family telling tales around a wood stove or in a storm cellar as a tornado rages outside. They are frequently comic, as the speaker encounters colorful persons or turns his youthful logic towards explaining events around him, from death to spelling to the unspoken but insistent presence of racism in his community.

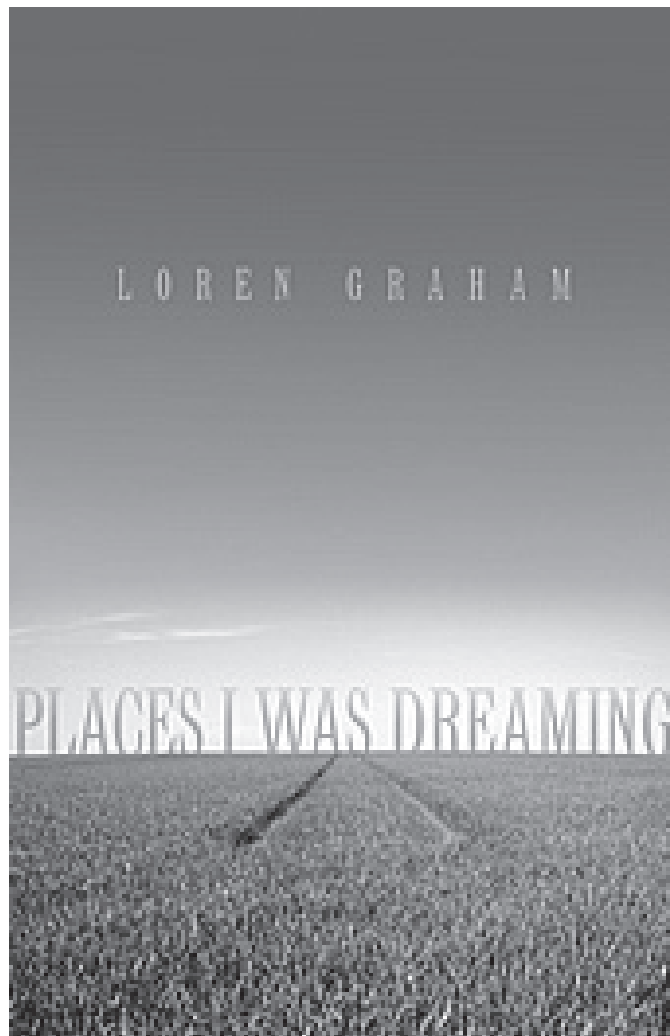
Graham's speaker feels out meaning in rhythmic, incantatory phrases, which often recall older poetic styles. In one example, the boy recounts his first memory, a rat scurrying over his body: the line “a ghostly thing sat here a yellow-toothed guest” summons the caesura and alliterative verse styles of *Beowulf*, which is perfectly appropriate in a book that revels in tales born of darkness. Graham is a skilled formalist, as his previous book, *The Ring Scar*, showed with its often playful sonnet sequences. The poems of *Places I Was Dreaming*, however, feel loose; their rhymes are buried, and their forms are apparent only if you want to look. As the book goes on teaching us how to read it, that looking and wanting happen naturally; the poems train us to cock an ear and listen, to hear the iambic music of country speech, or spin in the slow erosion of a word's meaning. This occurs literally, for reader and speaker, in the poem “Elvis,” in which the boy, saying his dog's name over and over again, reminds us, “All you have to do / is keep on saying it and a word goes / all funny and the thing it means goes away” as he twirls dizzily around the yard.

Graham and the speaker in *Places I Was Dreaming* are both deeply concerned with the ability of words to give power or take it away. The book brims with storytelling: “a story ends however you say it does” the speaker asserts in a poem that describes a joyful, two-voiced collaboration with his grandfather, inventing a tall tale together about being chased by a bear. Several poems recount the boy's early attempts and struggles with reading and writing; another describes his first crush—the “story time girl” at the county library, “where every adult I knew advised / my future lay.” But, Graham's character also experiences first hand how language can oppress and break down, noting, “a name was a verdict and a kind of sentence,” as the boys on the bus call him cracker, tax stealer, and country boy, and his teacher tells him, “Shallow / habits of speech reflect a shallow / character.” In one poem, he carries a rifle, “as though it could / give me some say.” And, in one of the most moving moments in the book, an encyclopedia salesman comes to the house, and the boy accepts his father's surprising offer to buy the volumes, even though he knows “what my yessir meant to everyone present: / another month of beans, less coal for the fire, / my father's spending his winter evenings with a drop



light / in the unheated barn he used for a garage – / the real price of privilege, its great black bulk.”

These poems honor community and connection. In “The Day of the Swarm,” a poem in which the bees living in the house’s siding (mentioned in the opening poem) emerge *en masse*, Graham’s speaker listens to them “mumbling in the hive” and finds comfort in the way their language, their communal living, ties him to rest of the world. A reader, too, will find that satisfaction in these poems: “The measure of life, no matter the circumstance. / Its constant, incremental decay. Its sweet despite.” *Places I Was Dreaming* is an homage to “the spell / of silence undone” and to a vanishing place and time. These are deeply accessible, warm poems, the kind that weave a spell and beg to be spoken.



# Mother House

by Laurie Patton

Even though  
she is now alive,  
I wonder  
what kind of ghost  
she will be.

I leave her house  
to admire its shape  
from the yard—  
a beloved trapezoid,  
and beyond it,  
a sweet rectangular sea,  
triangles of nests,  
ovals of rock.

But, the photos  
of that day  
are gray on gray.  
The ghost  
is already there,  
I think,  
and rush  
to find something  
to paint in  
the colors.

# We All Drink Wine

by Donna Emerson

Grapes grow here now,  
where I used to photograph what we called  
Sonoma Hills, green with nappy, native trees  
tucked between.

Back then, we saw the black oak. The pair of horses  
running. We picked apples in acres of orchards.

Now, the vineyards stand here, parted and combed.  
Straight rows of hunched-over bushes for miles,  
covered with a mesh cape as the nights grow colder.  
I see iron gates, winery names, big white trucks.

Then, I took my son to violin lessons,  
pippin-green meadows and hills all around,  
to the shack on the edge of Sonoma,  
beside an overflowing barrel of rainwater.

# Library Sale

by William Jolliff

There's such potential in a pasteboard box  
of *Readers' Digests*. Imagine what might be:

all those canned narratives asleep between  
the trendy but aging prose of Chevy ads,

aching for years, decades maybe, to fly off  
like bats at dusk from some sealed cave,

off to tangle themselves in the air-brushed hair  
of a princess or to stand snickering behind

some star's religious conversion, third divorce,  
ill-advised career change, failed vasectomy.



# Hampton Cove Deluxe

by Bleuzette La Feir

Wiggling, then forcing the key into the sticky lock, Tom pulled back just a hair and twisted; the deadbolt scraped open. It had been a normal day at work and a normal ride home, so it's 5:20 and he's back at the monk's cell. That's what he called this place. He slowly closed the door behind him and waited. Enjoying the cool of the forced air, he closed his eyes; the burning feeling across his lids as he squeezed them was familiar and delicious. In his head, just to the inside of his ears, he heard the voices of his children and his wife welcoming him home. He opened his eyes, completing the daily ritual, and paused a moment more, allowing his eyes to adjust.

The large, open room, with kitchenette at the far wall, was cool, quiet, dim, and empty, except for a TV in the corner. It sat on a small, scuffed, black bookcase he'd picked up on moving day. The bookcase was sitting beside the large, dark-green trash bin at one corner of the parking lot. He felt sure someone was throwing it away, but it made him feel nervous to take something that wasn't his. A worn, gray recliner sat on the other side of the room, facing the flat-screen TV he'd bought for a hundred bucks from a college kid on Craigslist. He walked into his monk's cell



one time after work and caught a glimpse of that chair, sitting in the half light, like a gaping mouth ready to swallow him. Since then, he could only see it as a toothless monster; the buttons sewn deep in the back were sad eyes calling him to sit.

Two folding tray tables were at either side of the monster's head. On the right were the remains of last night's

Hungry-Man Salisbury steak dinner with mashed potatoes and a brownie. Half the corn was still in its compartment of the plastic, microwave-safe dish. It had turned brown and was crusted over. The table to the left had an iPod charger, phone charger, and laptop.

Long, vertical, plastic strips covering the sliding glass door gently swayed and clacked together with Tom's movement into the room. The skinny spaces between

each cream-colored length of plastic revealed yellow pinstripes of the sun on the low-grade, light-brown carpet. He liked how they looked. There were many days when he sat in his gray chair so long that he watched the bright stripes move across the room's entire floor and work their way up the far wall. Those perfect lines of light were the only decoration in his monk's cell.

He'd never touched any of the window coverings. He'd never opened the vertical blinds. He'd never raised the cheap louvers in the bedroom during the seven months he'd existed at the Nineveh Garden Apartment complex. And, existing was all he could call it.

The whirring of the microwave stopped with a click, and three screeching beeps jolted the skin on his head and chest, but he did not move. It was just after six now, and the other residents of the building were coming home. Tom could hear Travis and Beth, a very young and blissfully happy couple, laughing and talking and rustling grocery sacks as they walked past his place. He took comfort as he heard them struggle to get the key into their door lock. At least he had something in common with someone. Travis and Beth were not friendly, but civil. He wondered if they'd looked him up online. There was plenty of bad information out there about him, especially a few articles in the Toledo newspapers. *But how could they know his last name?* Tom felt the reeling begin; the obsessive, flip-flop thoughts took control no matter what he did to fight them. *Did they know his name? How could they know his name? But, he didn't do it. Over and over and over. Do they know? How could they know? Nah, they don't know.* The pills rattled in the orange plastic bottle as he fought with the cap. Twenty minutes for the Xanax to kick in.

As usual, the young couple no sooner got home than they had their music on. Tom didn't mind. He felt like that's what one of his kids would have done—get home from school and head straight to their rooms to crank the music and mess around doing kid stuff. He enjoyed hearing the drum and bass lines. The words were often unfamiliar to him, but they would be. He'd listened to Guns N' Roses, Metallica, even Rush, but that was twenty years ago. The music wasn't up too loud today, which allowed him to hear most of what they were saying; he knew exactly which CD they had put in: The National—a band out of Ohio. After Googling the lyrics a few months ago, he read up on them. He listened to them on YouTube. The song was "Buzzblood Ohio." He was from Ohio. He felt it was meant to be that he'd found this band. The lyrics were strange, stuff about bees and owing money, lots of money, and someone on a car. He didn't understand any of it, but he felt like it was written for him. He loved and hated it.

Tom crept to the wall. He was sure that one day they might hear him listening to them. It was thrilling and scary. Quietly pushing his chest to the cool, flat surface, he positioned himself, pressing his ear to the white paint. They were laughing and talking. Dishes and pots and pans were being readied for dinner. Soon he knew he would smell whatever they had bought at the store and cooked. Beth was sharing some antic from her workday at Hastings. He wasn't stalking her, really; he'd just seen her in there one day with her nametag on. She hadn't recognized him. Travis was actively listening to her story, laughing, responding in tones of interest and

understanding, being a good boyfriend or husband. Tom didn't know which.

Tom knew he was addicted to listening to them, but only their conversations, the laughter. He used to laugh every day, and it felt nice to hear it. He was careful now about what he allowed himself to hear. They argued one time. It was petty stuff. Stuff that just doesn't matter in the long run. He wanted to go over and give them some advice, tell them that leaving clothes on the floor was annoying but never worth fighting over. Never. He couldn't, though, because that would give him away. He grabbed his keys and went for a drive in the jagged Organ Mountains.

He'd taken to making sure he was elsewhere Saturday afternoons, as well. He felt it just wasn't right to listen as Saturday was sex day—well, sex-in-the-living-room day, anyway. They were young and full of energy. The first time he heard them, months ago, he let himself listen. It didn't take long for the churning in his stomach to bring bile to his throat. After only a few minutes, he felt sick, but he fought it and sat there on the floor with his warm ear to the cool wall. Heart sinking into his gut, he didn't care; he felt close to them. He was only inches from them. He imagined his hand pushing through a liquid wall, reaching out, touching them, feeling their warmth. Tom's vision went blurry, a dizzying guilt took over, and he ran to the toilet. The water splashed back at him as the vomit hit. He felt he deserved that. He never did it again.

A cheesy version of a Mozart overture broke his trance. Tom pulled himself away from the wall and saw the area code: 419—Toledo.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Tom?"

"Yeah, who's this?"

"Mr. Fullerton, your outstanding bill with the Summertime Pool Company will force us to report you to all three credit agencies. Do you understand the ramifications of your failure to pay us?"

Tom froze.

"Hello, sir, are you there? Don't hang up—that will just make matters worse. You are in default of the final three payments on the Hampton Cove Deluxe above-ground pool with natural swirling filtration system that you purchased on March nineteenth, two thousand and thirteen."

"What?" Tom hesitated. He knew most people would hang up in this situation, but he liked her voice. It was rich with a streak of sweetness. She was the only person who'd called him in three weeks. He didn't even know why he had a cell anymore. He didn't want to hang up.

"I'm glad you called. I was going to call you guys. Listen, I just need a little more time is all. There's really no need to report me. I'll pay you in full next month, okay?"

"Mr. Fullerton, next month is too late. Our records show you've defaulted on three prior payments. If we don't receive the amount you owe us today, we'll be calling

to report you.”

“Now, hold on a minute. I didn’t default on any payments. Something happened. They told me they’d call you.”

“Sir, I don’t know who they are, but no one has spoken to anyone here about your bill. Why don’t we get this cleared up, and get it off your mind. What credit card would you like to use today?”

“It’s not on my mind. What’s your name?”

“My name is Miss Jensen. I’m with the Wilson-Wright Collection Agency in Toledo, Ohio.”

“I lived in Rossford before I moved out here to New Mexico. Do you know Rossford?”

“Yes, I do. Mr. Fullerton, our firm represents the Summertime Pool Company. They need payment. What credit card would you like to use today, sir?”

“Look, uh...my kids and, and my wife, they’re gone, three weeks after I bought that damn pool.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, but as of right now you are in arrears one thousand, five hundred ninety dollars and four cents. How would you like to pay this balance today?”

“Look, you don’t understand, ma’am.”

“Mr. Fullerton, did you and your family use the swimming pool?”

“Yeah, yeah, of course, of course we did. Toby learned to swim. My son, eight years old, was afraid of water...learned to swim last summer. He even dove in. He was so brave.”

“Mr. Fullerton, I’m happy to hear that Toby learned to swim. The Summertime Pool Company made that happen for Toby. But, you have to think about setting the right example for your son. Pay this bill or your credit score will drop severely due to this one financing default.”

“I don’t give a damn about my credit score...Miss Jensen, they’re gone. Do you understand what I am saying to you?”

“I have kids, too, Mr. Fullerton. We can’t afford a pool. I sure wish we could, but I’m working this job for money that I could have spent on a pool to buy my sons’ school lunch cards and sports shoes. Do you know how expensive cross-training shoes are for three teenage boys?”

“I was only supposed to be in Cincinnati for two days. I left that damn thing on. I did it.”

“I...I’m sorry your...sir, I’m so sorry. I’m really sorry you’re having a hard time.” Her tone softened. “But, you do still owe for the pool, Mr. Fullerton.”

“You know...that pool was the only thing that made it. Everything else—black and demolished. But that damn pool, bright as could be, full of water, just sat in the middle of the grass.”



“Sir?”

“They actually suspected me of doing it. I would never, I could never have done that.”

“Mr. Fullerton, please, let’s get this cleared up. If this goes to the credit agencies, it will be on your credit score for no less than seven years. You don’t need that.”

“Seven years?” Tom felt it. He knew it was coming. His chest sunk further into the big gray chair. He could hear The National playing next door, the next song on the CD, the bass line, the drums.

The scent had finally made its way to him. Travis and Beth were cooking chicken.

“Mr. Fullerton?”

He couldn’t speak. His focus slipped into the scenes he’d made up, images he’d become familiar with but were not real. They flashed through his head. He tried so hard to push them out. Trying to convince himself that his mind had made them up, so his mind could erase them. But, the infection ran too deep. The flames flashing fast into the wooden floor from the basement below. The curtains swirling from the energy of the heat. The dog and cat clawing at the back door to escape. Found huddled together in a corner of the kitchen. They’d never liked each other.

He asked himself why people do what they normally don’t do, why things happen when they normally don’t. Tom normally never left the space heater on. Hell, he normally didn’t use it. There was a deep cold snap that was not normal, only supposed to last two days. Nothing was normal anymore. Fire chief said they normally don’t do it, but Tom asked for a copy of the report.

Section 1a: 10JUN13

Section 1b: 23:49

Section 2: 11506 S. Ironwood Dr., Rossford, OH 43460

Section 5: Combustibles too close to portable space heater in basement.

Section 6a: Deceased – 3 – asphyxiation due to smoke inhalation.

The coroner pulled him aside and said they felt no pain.



# To Know the Locals

by Pat Sturm

Seek the cafe with the most cars,  
The cafe with TAKE STATE  
tempera painted all over the windows  
in gaudy school colors like  
purple and green, the cafe  
reasonably named Al's or Bertha's.

Look for Pearl, the waitress who  
drops menus on your table  
as she slides water glasses across  
the one next to you, flips open  
her order pad and promises,  
"I'll be right with ya."

For quick, guilt-producing  
eggs, bacon, and pancakes, order the  
"2x2x2 for \$2.99," and commit  
all the gastronomic sins—loaded fat,  
calories, and sugar—before ten a.m.  
Pearl keeps hot coffee coming.

Observe a large family filling long or round  
tables where four generations look at  
mirror images of themselves,  
past and future. The youngest, curious,  
pokes up her head and clips Pearl's elbow  
just as the waitress arrives at the table,

arms proudly lined with five plates  
of the special. She saves all but one,  
smiles through gritted teeth, and  
hollers to the cook, "One more two-by!"  
Leave a big tip and take a jar of homemade  
peach jam placed next to the register.



# Hometown Festival

by Pat Sturm

The lanky, scruffy artist  
sat stoically in his canvas chair,  
offering thousand-dollar oils  
of cowboys, horses, and  
pioneer women with pinched faces.

Patrons admired his work  
yet carried small canvases of  
flashy flowers, homemade soap  
sporting belts of lace, and  
ceramic cups with a slight lean.

Lines formed for Methodist chili dogs,  
Baptist taco chips with generous cheese,  
and Church of Christ cookies dripping  
with sugar frosting. Diets were  
not invited to these fundraising booths.

Back in the performing area,  
ballerinas in jeans and pink ballet shoes  
braved the concrete floor to  
execute pirouettes and formations  
to the delight of faces with

Genetic similarities that beamed  
from the stands even while fathers  
and grandfathers couldn't push  
worries of wheat harvest  
from their minds.

At the end of the day,  
the scruffy painter loaded his unsold  
oils back into his Tahoe, realizing  
that he had misjudged this festival,  
where art was the excuse,

Not the reason for the gathering  
where friends and family supported  
and celebrated each other and  
their talents in a small town

far from a major city.



# The Library

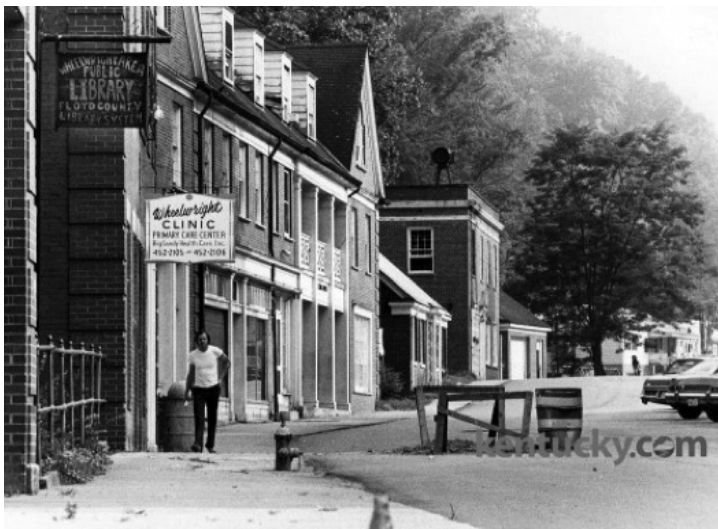
by Timothy Caldwell

It was a hot, humid, summer day in 1953, as our dad drove us along the narrow, crooked roads that led from Allen to Wheelwright. Dad was a Southern Baptist preacher who loved starting new churches in the hills of Kentucky, and Wheelwright was the latest stop on his pastoral migration.

It was moving day. Dad and Mother sat in the front seat of the car while my two sisters and I were in the backseat surrounded by smaller household items that did not fit into the stuffed trunk. Two rusty pickup trucks followed us with our furniture wedged into their flatbeds, covered by stained, musty gray tarps.

I was eight years old and unhappy. The church parsonage in Allen was a small

tumbledown hotel with eight rooms on the second floor, only three of which my family occupied. I had made it a private theme park, complete with roller-skating, for my buddy Tommy and me. Wheelwright was only a few miles from Allen, but I felt like I was being taken to the other side of the world from my playmate.



The small convoy eventually crossed a

bridge straddling a shallow creek and entered the hollow where Wheelwright lay. When it stopped in front of a tiny house in a row of tiny houses, I felt my stomach sink. I didn't even want to get out of the car, but moping was not allowed when there was work to be done.

I didn't mope long because, within a couple of days, I was exploring the hill that abutted the back of our house. I also wandered into what I called the "downtown" of Wheelwright where I found a grocery store, drugstore, movie theater, small hotel, and the elementary school that I would attend in the fall.

There were some offices mixed in among the stores, but most of them did not have signs. One day, I noticed an office that looked different because there were some books sitting on the windowsill and a sign with the word "Read" taped onto the window. It was a sunny day, so I put my face up to the window and cupped my hands around my eyes. The room was full of books. There was a lady sitting at a

desk that faced the window. She looked up and waved at me. A day earlier, a lady in another office had scowled and waved for me to go away, but this lady seemed to be motioning me to go inside.

When I opened the door, the first thing I noticed was the cool air on my shirtless skin. There was a small sign on the door: "Air Conditioned." I had never been in air-conditioning before. It felt really good compared to our house, which Mother said was like an oven.

The lady was old, like my mother, but very pretty. She had short, dark hair and smiled at me as she stood up. I was ready to run out the door, but something about her manner let me know she was as nice as her smile.

"Hello," she said. "I'm Mrs. Pace. What's your name?"

"Timmy," I said, putting my hands in the pockets of my short pants.

"Nice to meet you, Timmy. Are you new to town?"

"My daddy is a preacher. We came from Allen. Is this a bookstore?"

"No. This is a library."

"What's a liberry?"

She told me I didn't have to buy any books, but I could take some home for a week for free. Then she asked if I would like to have a library card.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"When you take a book home, I need to know who has it in case someone else wants to borrow it."

"I don't have any money for a card," I said.

"The library card is free," she said. She went to her desk and pulled out a little piece of paper with lines on it. She asked for my name and wrote "Timmy Caldwell" as I looked over her shoulder. She smelled nice, like my mother smelled nice when she went to church on Sunday morning.

"What's your address?" she asked.

"It's the blue house, five houses from the church. The first time I came downtown I forgot which house it was 'cause all the houses look alike, but then I remembered it was blue and I heard my mother singing and went in."

"Okay," she said after a pause. "Which church?"

"The Southern Baptist church, down there," I said as I pointed in the direction of the church. "My grandfather said I'm part Indian, so I always know where I am 'cause Indians have to know where they are so they don't get lost in the forest. Indians can walk on dry leaves and not make any noise. I'm not very good at that, but I'm working on it."

She said I should look at the number on the house, write it down, and bring it back to her sometime. Then, she took me to a section marked "Children."

"All the books in this section are for children," she said. She pointed out a low

stool for me to sit on if I got tired of standing. She told me I could stay as long as I wanted, and I could take a book home if I wished.

I don't remember how long I stayed that first day, but I was enthralled. The books had a sweet, musty smell that I liked, and I enjoyed the feel of them. It wasn't long before I was wandering around the library, looking at all the other books.

The book I chose was not from the children's section. I wasn't a baby; I wanted to read real books with only a few pictures. Mrs. Pace said it might be hard for me to read, but it had a neat picture on the cover: It was a knight on a horse and a short, fat guy riding beside him on a donkey. The title was *Don Quixote* (pronounced "Don Quick-soti" in my head). That was the first book I ever checked out of a library. Sure enough, I struggled through a few pages and didn't understand any of it.

I took it back the next day and told her it was a pretty good book, but I wanted to give it back. She showed me a magazine: *Boy's Life*. I didn't tell her, but it looked a lot easier to read than the Quick-soti book and more like the magazines Mother bought. I was hooked.

That was the summer I fell in love with reading. Even though I eventually made some friends that summer, the library was the place I liked to go the most because of all the books and, of course, I could talk to Mrs. Pace. Two years later, my time with her and the small library came to an end when we moved to Sarasota, Florida.

\* \* \*

I visited Wheelwright decades later when I met with Lisa Perry, the director of the Wheelwright Historical Society. The corporation that owned Wheelwright sold the entire town in 1965. Many families left to find new jobs, but there were families who had generational ties to Wheelwright, so they stayed. However, the new owners of the town (a mining corporation) provided few services and allowed the infrastructure to collapse, so the town and the remaining inhabitants sank into poverty.

Lisa, along with a few local folk, was attempting to save what remained of the devastated town through rebuilding and education. Part of her plan was the creation of a new library. She had contacted a number of former residents, including me, and I had come to make a donation of several dozens of books I owned and to see what had happened to the town.

We visited the room that housed the original library, and as I gazed through grimy windows into the empty room, I told Lisa about my experience there and how much Mrs. Pace affected my intellectual life by making the library a welcoming place for a kid.

"I loved being in this room, surrounded by books, and talking to Mrs. Pace," I told her. "Even now, I walk into a library and feel like I've come home," I said. "I wish I could tell her that, but she probably died years ago."

"No," Lisa said, "she's very much alive. She and Minor, her husband, are in their nineties, and both are still mentally sharp. They contacted me when they found out about the Historical Society, and I speak with them about once a month."



"I'd like to thank her," I said.

"I'll ask her to contact you," she replied.

When I returned to my home, I wrote a short account of my first encounter with Mrs. Pace and sent it to Lisa. She included it in one of the Society's newsletters.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Pace called me at my home in November. She had read my story and liked it, she said. She didn't remember the visit I wrote about, but she remembered me as a little boy and some of our time together.

I told her what my visits with her meant to me and thanked her for spending so much time with a talkative kid. I did this with only a couple of catches in my voice.

"I not only love reading books," I said, "I wrote one. It's about my experiences when I was in the Army in Vietnam. I'd like to send you a copy."

"Yes, please do," she said.

"I'll warn you, the language gets pretty rough."

"I've spent most of my life around miners and engineers," she said, "so I've probably heard all the rough words that might be in your book."

My eyes were tearing when I hung up the phone. Rarely had I been able to say thank you to people who influenced my life in small but incalculable ways, and I was grateful she had called me.

\* \* \*

A handwritten letter from her appeared in the mail the week after Christmas. She wrote that my book had arrived, but rather than opening it, she wrapped it for Christmas and put it under her tree. On Christmas day, when her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren were at her home, she made sure that the box that held my book was the last present opened.

She wrote that she held the book when she told them the story of my first visit as I described it in the newsletter.

"That little boy who liked to read books grew up and wrote his own book, this book," she told them. "After I've read it, I'll put it in a special place on my bookshelf. That way, when I see it sitting there, I'll think about that little boy and be glad he remembers me with kindness."

She thanked me for the book, then wrote, "When you get to be as old as I am, it is easy to get depressed and feel like nobody outside of the family remembers you. You begin wondering if your life made any difference to anyone. Thank you for remembering me."

She added a P.S. "Did you really think I was pretty?"

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# Repast

by Alita Pirkopf

The forms  
holding my past  
are fast disappearing.  
Turning white;  
they melt like candles,  
disappear like dinner—  
my sustenance; leave,  
like guests  
when the party is over.

But some never leave,  
day or night, or reappear,  
and together we unfold  
ourselves,  
our common fabric,  
our shared past—  
rumpled like a tablecloth

on top of which we find  
our unexpected feast.  
We still are becoming  
ourselves, changing  
into new combinations—  
from whatever we were,  
to now, and memory.

We hold the glass, the bottle,  
the platter, for one another.  
In surprise and delight, we  
help ourselves to the rich wine,  
and celebrate with courses  
we never dreamed of tasting.

# On a Peaceful Morning

by Kelly Talbot

The God of War  
sits in a small boat  
and drifts in the mists  
across the lake.

He sees a slow  
silhouette that moves  
closer in the stillness

toward his boat.

It is a heron,  
white and silent,  
who spreads her wings  
and glides, landing  
across from the God  
of War. She says nothing.

He thinks on this  
for quite some time.

Then he nods, reaches  
forward, and gently strokes  
her feathers. She sighs  
and rests her head  
on his shoulder.

They sit this way  
for a long time,  
breathing softly.

Then, she flies off  
into the morning mists.

The God of War smiles,  
knowing that tomorrow

he must make war,  
but that on some days,  
there is no war.

He will return to  
these waters again.



# From My Daughter's Farm: Drought and Heat

by Terry W. Ford

It isn't Texas, after all.  
We're only thirty miles in from  
Lake Michigan,  
and weather comes from the west.  
How could we not have rain?

In May and June we sweltered.  
Clouds towered on the horizon,  
but no rains came.  
Pastures turned brown;  
they looked as if we'd had a brush fire.

In the coop, my daughter found a dead chick.  
Our dependable Columbian Wyandottes  
stopped laying.  
We turned on sprinklers  
to cool the cattle and the horses  
(neighbors lost a milk cow  
in the heat).

With nothing in the fields for grazing  
we are feeding hay—in summer.  
It's gone from twenty  
to eighty dollars for a bale.

From the roadside,  
feed corn looks to be fine.  
But the cobs aren't filling in.  
(feed and hay will be sky high  
this fall and winter too).  
This spring a friend of ours put  
sixty thousand into seed;  
he's lost it all  
and has no crop insurance.

We slaughtered our steers and heifers.  
We'll have to sell some breeding cows  
to folks who can still  
afford to keep them.  
We're seriously discussing  
getting out completely.

Last night, rains came—  
pounding, driving against  
our parched, dry fields  
and gardens.  
The air cooled;  
we slept upstairs.  
This morning, I wore a jacket  
to do the chores.

In the henhouse,  
there were four eggs.  
It's at least enough  
for breakfast.

One of the cows did not come up for  
grain.  
I found her far across the pasture  
under the shady pines,  
nursing the smallest calf I've ever seen—  
new this morning.

Our horses are feeling frisky,  
butting each other  
and rolling in the mud.

After chores, I took the dogs for a long walk.  
A morning like this is almost enough to make you hopeful.  
But I doubt the break will last.

# Contributors

**Jan Ball** started seriously writing poetry and submitting it for publication in 1998. Since then, she has had 162 poems accepted or published in the U.S., Canada, and England. Published poems have appeared in: *Atlanta Review*, *Calyx*, *Connecticut Review*, *Iodine Poetry Review*, *Nimrod*, *Nth Position* (England, online), and many other journals. Poems are forthcoming in *The Great American Poetry Show*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Pearl*, *Third Wednesday*, *Wild Violets* and *Willow Review*. Her poem “my face emerges from my face” was second runner-up in the Spring 2010 contest issue of *So to Speak*. In another contest, her poem “carwash” won the 2011 Betsy Colquitt Award for the best poem in a current issue of *descant* (Fort Worth). Her two chapbooks, *Accompanying Spouse* (2011) and *Chapter of Faults* (2014), have both been published by Finishing Line Press and are available on Amazon. She is a member of The Poetry Club of Chicago. Besides her poetry publications, she wrote a doctoral dissertation at the University of Rochester in 1996. The title is *Age and Natural Order in Second Language Acquisition*. Ball currently teaches ESL at DePaul University in Chicago. She lived in Australia for fifteen years with her Australian husband. Their two children, Geoffrey and Quentin, were born in Brisbane. Jan is a twin to Jean Helmken, and Jan was a Franciscan nun for seven years. When not writing poetry, teaching ESL, working with her personal trainer, going to book group, or traveling, she and her husband like to cook for friends. These background experiences infuse her poetry.

**Caroline Bruckner** is a screenwriter and short story writer from Stockholm, Sweden. She wrote a short film, *The Confession*, which was nominated for an Academy Award in 2011. Her picture book, *Moritz*, was published by the clothing company H&M within their UNICEF “All for Children” Initiative. After years living in both the US and the

UK, Bruckner now lives in Vienna, Austria. Her short fiction has been featured in *Crack the Spine*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Forge*, *The Minetta Review*, *Willow Review*, and others. Having survived a strict Catholic school (run by wart-faced, choleric nuns), a chronic disease that left her paralyzed for years, and a series of faith crises, Bruckner enjoys writing about desperate people in times of great change.

In 1972, **Timothy Caldwell** began a career as a singer and teacher in higher education that would last almost forty years. His articles have been published by major professional journals and magazines, and his non-fiction book, *Expressive Singing*, was published by Prentice Hall (1994). In 2009, his novel, *The Chaplain’s Assistant: God, Country, and Vietnam*, was published by Glenn Street Press. Caldwell’s other creative writing has been published in *Amarillo Bay*, *Blue Lake Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, and *The Storyteller*. He has appeared on many radio programs as a national advocate for better mental health treatment for veterans and their families, and he is currently at work on his second novel and a collection of short stories.

**Gladys Justin Carr** is a former Nicholson Trustee Fellow at Smith College, University Fellow at Cornell, and publishing executive with McGraw-Hill and HarperCollins book publishers. Her work is widely published in literary magazines and journals and has been cited and quoted in *Literary Magazine Review*. Publications include: *The New York Times*, *Manhattan Magazine*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *North Atlantic Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *International Poetry Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Bayou*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *California Quarterly (CQ)*, *Connecticut Review*, *Fourteen Hills Review*, *Fulcrum: An Annual Of Poetry And Aesthetics*, *Existere Journal of Arts and Literature (Canada)*, *Gargoyle*, *George Washington Review*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Inscape*, *Iodine Poetry Review*, *KNOCK Magazine (Antioch Seattle)*, *Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, *Nimrod International*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Red Rock Review*, *Rhino*, *The Saint Ann’s Review*, *Salamander*, *Sanskrit*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Spillway*, *Tampa Review*, *Word Riot*, *Bartlett’s Unfamiliar Quotations*, and *Quiddity International*

*Journal and Public Radio*, among many others. Carr is the author of *Augustine's Brain—The Remix* and co-author of *Edge by Edge* (Toadlily Press). The following chapbooks by Carr are forthcoming: *American Love Story*, *Spectrum*, and *Spring, you bitch*. Her work is featured in *The Best Of Toadlily Press: New And Selected Poems*. In the past seven years, she has been nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize.

**Maureen DuRant's** poetry has appeared in one print journal, *Crosstimbers*. She has been selected as a reader at the Scissortail Writing Festival in Oklahoma for the past two years. Additionally, she wrote a postcard history of West Point published by Arcadia Press.

**Donna Emerson's** work has received numerous prizes and awards including the Labyrinth Society (2005), California State Poetry Society (2008), Tiny Lights (flash prizes, 2007, 2010), Naugatuck River Review (2010), and the Redwood Writers (2010). Her second chapbook, *Body Rhymes* (which was nominated for a California Book Award), and third and fourth chapbooks, *Wild Mercy* and *Following Hay*, have been published by Finishing Line Press in June 2009, September 2011, and Fall 2013. Her work can also be seen in anthologies such as *Echoes* (2012), *Keeping Time: 150 Years of Journal Writing* (Passager Press), *A Bird in the Hand: Risk and Flight and Deep Waters* (Outrider Press), *The Mountain* (Outrider Press), *Chopin with Cherries*, *A Tribute in Verse* (Moonrise Press), *Music In The Air* (Outrider Press), *The Phoenix Rising From The Ashes* (Adonis Press), *The Place That Inhabits Us: Poems of the San Francisco Bay Watershed* (Sixteen Rivers), *Bearers Of Distance* (Eastern Point Press), and *Songs for a Passbook Torch* (Cherry Castle Publishing).

**Bleuzette La Feir** was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She is a graduate of the University of New Mexico with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theater. Her work has appeared in *Blood Lotus*, *Blue Lake Review*, *decomp*, *descant*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Forge*, *Lindenwood Review*, and *Storyscale*, and she has contributed to *Velvetparkmedia.com*. Her flash fiction piece, "Bangs," was nominated for the Best of the Net 2012 anthology.

**Terry W. Ford** is semi-retired from four decades of full-time teaching for Kent State University at Stark. In that time, she served as English department coordinator, spoke and presented at numerous academic conferences, was featured in campus literary publications, earned a distinguished teaching award, and was honored as a distinguished woman of the university. A longtime supporter of Ohio and Midwest writing, Ford was a perennial organizer and grant writer for the Midwest Writer's Conference. Now, teaching only a few classes, she enjoys reading, writing, gardening, and grandmothering. Her work has recently appeared in *The Chaffin Journal*, *Corium Magazine*, *Existere*, *Foliolate Oak*, *Folly*, *Grey Sparrow*, *Meridian Anthology*, *Our Town North Canton*, *The Portland Review*, *St. Ann's Review*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, and *Viral Cat*.

**Wendy Fox** earned her MFA from the Inland Northwest Center for Writers in Spokane, Washington. She has worked in community colleges and universities, and she is currently employed as a corporate director of marketing. Fox's essay "Coming Clean in Kayaseri," based on her experiences working at a Turkish state university, was included in the #1 English-language best seller in Turkey: *Tales from the Expat Harem* (Seal Press, 2005). In 2011, her fiction manuscript *The Seven Stages of Anger and Other Stories* was a top-five finalist for the Minnesota State University at Mankato's Rooster Hill Press short fiction competition, and her story "Ten Penny" was selected as part of a series by The Emerging Writer's Network for National Short Story Month. The collection also won the Press 53 Award for Short Fiction. In 2013, her short story "Map of the Americas" was chosen as a semifinalist for the Tucson Festival of Books Literary Awards competition, and she was invited to attend Middlebury College's Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Fox's other work has appeared or is forthcoming in *10,000 Tons Of Black Ink*, *Apple Valley Review*, *The Coe Review*, *descant*, *Grasslimb*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *The Madison Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *The Pinch*, *Pisgah Review*, *PMS poemmemoirstory*, *The Puritan*, *Quiddity International Literary Journal*, *Sanskrit*, *Tusculum Review*, *Washington Square Review*, and *ZYZZYVA*, among others.

**Jonathan Greenhouse**, recipient of a 2014 Willow Review Award, was a finalist or honorable mention in 2014's poetry contests from *Naugatuck River Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Red Hen Press*, *River Styx*, and *Peregrine*. His website is [www.jonathangreenhouse.com](http://www.jonathangreenhouse.com).

**Andrew Jarvis** is the author of *Choreography* (Johns Hopkins University), *Sound Points* (Red Bird Press), *Ascent* (Finishing Line Press), and *The Strait* (Homebound Publications). His poems have appeared in *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Tulane Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Stonecoast Review*, and many other magazines. He was a finalist for the 2014 Homebound Publications Poetry Prize. He also judges poetry contests and edits anthologies for Red Dashboard LLC. Andrew holds an M.A. in Writing (Poetry) from Johns Hopkins University and is a recently retired college instructor, licensed clinical social worker, photographer, and writer of poetry and prose. Some of his publications include *Alembic*, *Assisi*, *Broad River Review*, *CQ (California Quarterly)*, *CALYX*, *The Chaffin*, *Clare*, *Crack the Spine*, *Crone*, *Dos Passos Review*, *Eclipse*, *Edison Literary Review*, *Embers and Flames*, *Euphony*, *Forge*, *Fourth River*, *Fox Cry Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *LUX*, *New Ohio Review*, *Organs of Vision and Speech Magazine*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Passager*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Praxis: Gender & Cultural Critiques (formerly Phoebe)*, *Quiddity*, *Rougarou*, *The Round*, *Sanskrit*, *The Schuykill Valley Journal*, *Slipstream*, *Soundings East*, *So To Speak*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Spillway*, *Stone Canoe*, and *The Tower Journal*.

Originally from Magnetic Springs, Ohio, **William Jolliff** currently serves as Professor of English at George Fox University, just south of Portland, Oregon. His poetry and criticism have appeared in *West Branch*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Appalachian*

*Journal*, *Poet Lore*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Center*, and many other journals.

**Desirée Jung** is a writer who has published translations, poetry and short stories in *Exile*, *The Dirty Goat*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *The Antigoniish Review*, *The Haro*, *The Literary Yard*, *Gravel Magazine*, *Tree House*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Ijagun Poetry Journal*, *Scapegoat Review*, *Storyacious*, *The Steel Chisel*, *Loading Zone*, *Belleville Park Pages*, among others. Her book of short stories, *Desejos Submersos*, is published by Chiado Editora, in Portugal. She has received a film degree at the Vancouver Film School, as well as an MFA in Creative Writing and a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of British Columbia. Her website is [www.desireejung.com](http://www.desireejung.com).

**Laurel Kallen** holds an MFA in Creative Writing from The City College of New York, as well as an MA in French and a JD degree. She is currently an executive speechwriter at IBM. In the past, she has served as a speechwriter for New York City Mayor Bill DeBlasio and former New York City Mayor David Dinkins. She has also taught creative writing at CCNY and Lehman College. Her poetry collection, *The Forms of Discomfort*, was published by Finishing Line Press in September, 2012. Poems and stories of Kallen's have appeared in *Jabberwock*, *Willow Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Portland Review*, *Devil's Lake*, *Amarillo Bay*, *Big Bridge*, and *La Petite Zine*. Her awards history includes the Stark Short Fiction Award and the 2009 Teacher/Writer Award.

**Betsy Martin's** poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Alembic*, *Assisi Journal*, *Barely South Review*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Existere*, *Front Range Review*, *Gemini Magazine*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Inertia Magazine*, *Juked*, *Limestone Journal*, *Louisville Review*, *Minetta Review*, *Organs of Vision and Speech*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Sanskrit*, *Schuykill Valley Journal of the Arts*, and *Weber-The Contemporary West*. Her poem "Byzantine Stillness" was nominated for Best of the Net.



She works at Skinner House Books in Boston. She has advanced degrees in Russian language and literature and lived in Moscow studying at the Pushkin Institute during the exciting transitional period of glasnost. Martin enjoys birdwatching, and she is learning to sing.

**Kate McCorkle** received her master's degree in Humanities from the University of Chicago and her bachelor's degree in English from the College of the Holy Cross. She has regularly attended the Greater Philadelphia Wordshop Studio since Spring 2012, and she attends Push to Publish, sponsored by Philadelphia Stories, in 2012. Her work has been published in *Apiary Online*, *Dark House Books*, *The Rain, Party, & Disaster Society*, and *Diverse Voices Quarterly*. She regularly contributes to LiveQuestions.org. McCorkle has worked as a freelance writer and editor since 2006. Prior to that, she worked in higher education for several years. Four children under seven demand much of her time; she enjoys swimming to stave off insanity.

**Anne Britting Oleson** has been published widely in North America, Europe, and Asia. She earned her MFA at the Stonecoast program of USM. She has published two chapbooks, *The Church of St. Materiana* (2007) and *The Beauty of It* (2010).

**Laurie Patton** earned a B.A. from Harvard University and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, and she is serving as professor of Religion at Duke University. She teaches Early Indian Religions, Comparative Mythology, and Religion and Literature. Her scholarly interests also include the study of women and Hinduism in contemporary India. She has written or edited eight books and articles in this field. Patton had two books of poetry published: *Fire's Goal: Poems from the Hindu Year*, which was published by White Cloud Press in 2003, and *Angel's Task: Poems in Biblical Time*, which was published by Station Hill of Barrytown in 2011. Her translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* was published in 2008 in the Penguin Press Classics Series. She has also worked as a Fulbright scholar in India and Israel. Her poems have

also been published in *Nimrod International Journal*, *Calyx*, *CCAR Journal*, *Compass Rose*, *Confluence*, *decomp*, *Fox Cry Review*, *Grey Sparrow*, *Kerem*, *Phoebe*, *Plainsongs*, *Red Wheelbarrow Literary Magazine*, *The Round*, *Reed Magazine*, *Sanskrit*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal of the Arts*, *The Alembic*, *Stickman Review*, *Studio One*, *Summerset Review*, *Tulane Review*, *WomenArts Quarterly Journal*, and *Women's Torah Commentary* (United Reform Judaism Press).

**Tom Pescatore** can sometimes be seen wandering along the Walt Whitman bridge or down the sidewalks of Philadelphia's old Skid Row. He might have left a poem or two behind to mark his trail. He maintains a poetry blog: [amagicalmistake.blogspot.com](http://amagicalmistake.blogspot.com).

After receiving a master's degree in English Literature from the University of Denver, **Alita Pirkopf** became increasingly interested in feminist interpretations of literature. Eventually, she enrolled in a poetry class at the University of Denver taught by Bin Ramke. Poetry became a long-term focus and obsession. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Alembic*, *Caduceus*, *The Chaffin Journal*, *The Distillery*, *The Griffin*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Harpur Palate*, *Illya's Honey*, *Lullwater Review*, *Quiddity*, *RiverSedge*, and *Ship of Fools*.

**Rochelle Jewel Shapiro's** novel, *Miriam The Medium* (Simon & Schuster, 2004), was nominated for the Harold U. Ribelow Award. Her short story collection, *What I Wish You'd Told Me*, was published by Shebooks in 2014. She has published essays in *NYT* (Lives) and *Newsweek*. Her poetry, short stories, and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in many literary magazines such as *The Iowa Review*, *The Doctor TJ Eckleberg Review*, *Stone Path Review*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *Stand*, *Inkwell Magazine*, *Amarillo Bay*, *Poet Lore*, *Crack the Spine*, *Compass Rose*, *Controlled Burn*, *The Griffin*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Reunion: The Dallas Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Memoir And Moment*, *Negative Capability*, *The Louisville Review*, *Amoskeag*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Rio*

*Grande Review*, *RiverSedge*, *Peregrine*, *Gulf Coast*, *Existere*, *Passager*, and *Willow Review*. Shapiro's poetry has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize, and she won the Branden Memorial Literary Award from Negative Capability. She currently teaches writing at UCLA Extension.

**Pat Sturm** reads, writes, gardens, and rescues animals in Western Oklahoma. "I never thought I could write poetry," says this teacher of twenty plus years, "but since my retirement, it has become my passion." Her garden columns have appeared in *Oklahoma Gardener* for five years, and her poems are anthologized in *Travelin' Music* and *Elegant Rage*, both tributes to Woody Guthrie from Village Books Press, Cheyenne, Oklahoma.

**Kelly Talbot** has edited books and digital content for 20 years, previously as an in-house editor for John Wiley and Sons Publishing, Macmillan Publishing, and Pearson Education, and now as the head of Kelly Talbot Editing Services. His writing has appeared in dozens of magazines.

**Donald Mace Williams** is a retired journalist and professor. His poems have run in three dozen magazines, and his historical novel *The Sparrow and the Hall* was recently published by Bagwyn Books. He lives in Canyon, Texas.

**Corrie Williamson's** first book of poems, *Sweet Husk*, won the 2014 Perugia Press Prize and was released in September. Her work has appeared in *The Missouri Review*, *AGNI*, *Shenandoah*, and many other journals. She lives and teaches in Helena, Montana.

**Victor Wolf** is a writer, bassist and composer who lives in Weatherford. He received an associates in Music at Northern Oklahoma College before graduating from SWOSU with a degree in English Writing and a minor in Music. You can follow him on twitter: @vectorwolfmusic.

## Photos and illustrations

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