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W E S T V I E W

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Foreword

This issue of Westview represents the hard work of Amanda Smith-Chesley's Editing students in collaboration with Siriporn Peters' and Todd Parkers' Illustration Studio students at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. The Editing students proofread each line and thoughtfully considered the order in which the pieces are arranged. Their meticulous attention to detail has been invaluable, and we are indebted to their dedication. The Illustration Studio students have made their mark on the issue, as well, by adding illustrations to select poems and composing the cover, which is a collage of their work, inspired by the pieces in this issue. Under the guidance of Dr. Peters and Dr. Parker, these students ensured that their creative visions resonated with the words of these talented writers. Please see their credits in the Illustrations list at the end of this issue. We especially wish to acknowledge Maggie Tran, who worked on formatting imagery throughout the issue. We at Westview wish to thank all of these students for sharing their time and skills to make this issue possible.

Student Editorial Board

Parker Long, Justin Tharp, Shiann Dawson, Michael Tucker, Sara Hutchinson, Cheyanne Smith, and BreeAnna Jackson

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Stylesheet

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2. **Electronic submissions are also preferred for artwork via dc.swosu.edu/westview/.** 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.
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Mount Unzen, Japan, June 3, 1991

for Katia and Maurice Krafft

by Michael Catherwood

Years they stared into the mouth,
threats boiling into red spittle
up from the earth's gut,
down its shoulders into flows
hot enough to inhale whole windstorms,
always off to another continent
to walk up the earth's face
to film the kiss that gave life to landscape.

Like tendrils, the scarlet
fingers reached for their feet,
sky bent into roses,
roses into cinders—
the cat and mouse play of the earth.

How heat must ripen senses into ghosts,
twist touch into gray shadows. The air and space
melted around their suits, became the rush
of wind. How we are betrayed by passions.
The full sky must have seemed insane to them,
staring into the space swallowed by red.

Written While Sitting in a Poetry Workshop at the *Westview* Writers' Festival

by Denise Landrum-Geyer

I cut a daisy from my throat.
It was dark, bloody, full of shame.
He grabbed it from my hand joyously.
"No!" I croaked, desperate to be heard.
A tear glistened.
I remembered.
I smiled.
"It will be okay," the daisy murmured.



Rumblings

by Michael Fraley

Rain like a thousand no's
Came down and made the ground
A liquid bed of sullen stares.

This was after the shaking
Had stopped, and all the buildings
Either settled into place
Or gave up standing and collapsed.

What could we do?
There was nothing to do
To prevent it from happening again.

Like the market chatter in Vesuvius
Just before the final moment,
Our talk was centered on the fear
That ran throughout the populace.

Into the Howl

by Blake Kilgore

There is another boot mark on the upward trail—
soon it will be covered, then forgotten, yet
it will not have been irrelevant.
The harbor remains veiled, distant.
It is on the other side of the mountain,
but now, closer.

Biting winds whistle, mocking,
resisting progress, carving sorrowful monuments from the crumbling, weary earth,
humiliating stone and leaning on forests,
till even the strong trees fade, lurching like crumpled old men until, finally they snap loudly
and crash to the ground
to rot.

Such a short path for such a long journey.
The lifting seems futile, the push arduous,
the laying down again brings no relief.

Many despair, and sit, yielding—
surrounded by the pitiless sandstorm, languid eyes staring past gatekeeping lids upon the
steady shifting of sameness that eventually engulfs, buries, consumes.

This is not sacred interment, though, no dead kernel burgeoning to altered vigor—
It is simply forfeiture.

And this climber mourns the stationary mounds of decay, the pale orbs that no longer twinkle,
the quivering of swollen, cleft lips, the gnashing of teeth, the repetitious murmur—

“there is no milk, there is no honey”

“there is no home, no promised land”

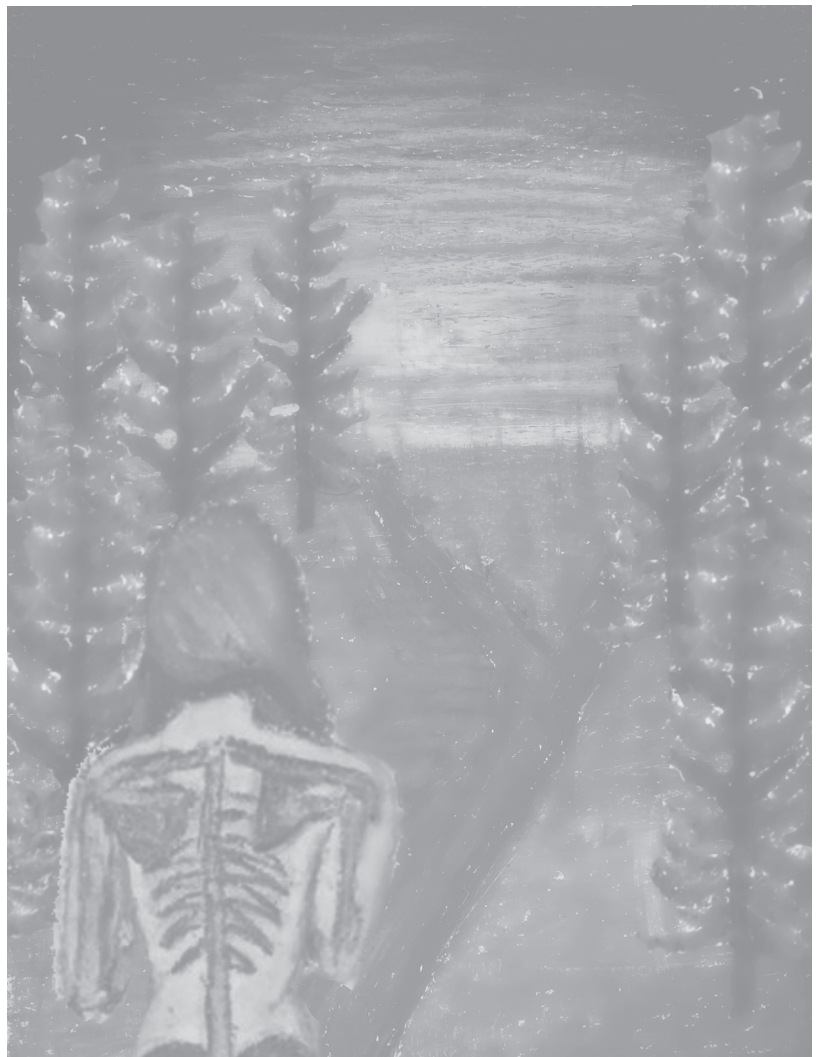
Knees creak, arthritic hips and shoulders sag; but, I drank the Blood, and it courses to my toes,
to my fingertips.

Defiant, they stretch out into the howl,
and wait,
and believe.

No More Days

by Richard Donnelly

it is foolish to think we have more days
there are no more days there never
were more days and
the fact has become a burden a
backpack we carry up a narrow valley a
trail steep I lead you follow
neither trusting the other to know how far
or when if ever we will get there



For Mother's Wedding

by Norbert Kovacs

When Denise Antoine recalled her father, the great writer, she pictured him, her mother, and herself chatting in the living room of their family's slender row house in Greenwich Village. She had her father sitting tall and confident in his armchair; herself standing beside him, an arm resting on his shoulder; her mother, the personable, intellectual historian, leaning from the couch and sharing a story colored by her usual good humor. Denise thought that much of her family's home life had enjoyed the intimacy of this portrait: their quiet walks around the neighborhood, their dinners with literary friends. When Denise was twenty, her father died in a car accident, and the picture of her family in the living room set within her as if fixed and final. However things might change, she cherished believing they were that family gathered around her father in his chair.

Denise searched for signs that her mother remained as attached to her father's memory. Mrs. Antoine showed some hint of it, Denise found, especially in the time right after Mr. Antoine's death. The elderly woman had kept home on the excuse of finishing a new book but made little progress at it. "I keep thinking of your father," she told her in those first months of mourning. Even when her mother returned to normal life—visiting friends, taking her late afternoon walks—Denise trusted that she recalled him at times. Denise believed that somehow these memories of him were what helped her mother become happy again. She considered both of her parents in a brighter light for it.

Then her mother started a personal tie with Len Schwartz, a successful businessman living in Brooklyn. Len was charming, sociable, and witty, her mother said. She confessed, "I like him very much." Denise listened to her mother discuss Len's latest joke or story about his family when they met for their mother-daughter get-togethers at a favorite café near Fifth Avenue. At times, Denise tried to discourage her from discussing him. She would bring up an older friend or the condition of the old row house to divert the conversation. Denise thought her mother had not known Len long enough to be sure he was actually her type. However, she discovered that her mother's relationship with Len deepened over time. Her mother brought him to evening parties of the friends she had known with Denise's father. Mrs. Antoine took a break from teaching at her college uptown and went on an extravagant two-week trip with him to Belize.

Mrs. Antoine then announced she would marry Len Schwartz. Preparations ensued, passing in a great blur. Thoughts of the marriage occupied Denise as she arranged paper flowers in the boutique that she owned. The wedding was set for tomorrow. Denise realized her mother would be another man's wife. She

pictured her mother—at fifty-one and with creases in her face and grey in her hair—re-marrying. She asked herself what it would mean for her as a daughter. She was her father and mother's only child, and she would remain so, even when Mr. Schwartz would be her mother's spouse. *How strange it makes me feel*, Denise thought as she headed out the door from her apartment on the morning before the wedding.

Denise went out to prepare for the event the next day. From Chelsea, she took the train to Fifth Avenue, then entered the store where she had bought her dress for the wedding. She had asked the store to alter the outfit to fit her. The dress she had bought was light yellow and made of soft cotton. The blouse was simple with modest but elegant lace ends on the short sleeves. The lower half was pleated and showed its color softly in the light. She thought it a neat, quiet dress that would make her appear neat and quiet as she thought she should for an older parent's remarriage. Denise had only needed the neck widened two inches since it had clutched too close. In the store, she asked the clerk for the dress, and he brought it to her. Denise looked at the yellow dress for the first time since she had purchased it. The store had opened the neck neatly to fit her just as requested. The dress was ready to take. But now Denise, disliked the idea of wearing it. She felt wearing the simple, plain yellow to watch her mother go to Len Schwartz at the altar would be somehow unnatural. The yellow did

not belong on her. She paid for the alteration but asked the clerk to hold the dress behind the counter while she shopped for another.

Denise walked to the racks where the dresses hung and searched for an outfit she could accept wearing. In the first rack, she found one she believed right. This outfit had a purple suit jacket of thick, hard polyester. The jacket's lapels met in a hard "V" at mid-torso where two buttons held them. The blouse that came with the jacket was solid white. The hard fabric of the dress covered the thighs in a tapering bell, white but marked every few inches by small, dark purple squares.



A black leather belt bound this dress at the waist. Completing the outfit were shoes with purple high heels and a flattish, wide-brimmed hat. On a tilt, the hat

easily covered Denise's forehead and dark eyes. She tried the outfit on in the fitting room and believed it worked. The outfit bound her; she felt insulated in its folds. *To everyone else*, she told herself, *it would be presentable*.

After purchasing this second outfit, Denise exited the store, large bag with the clothes and accessories in hand. She did not walk half a block when a short woman with flowing brown hair and very green eyes approached. The short woman's face was hard and somehow off-putting, though she did not seem angry. Denise recognized this woman: Hannah Schwartz, Len's niece. The two had met when Mrs. Antoine, several months ago, took Denise to meet Len at his Brooklyn apartment. Len had hosted some relatives there the same night and introduced Denise to them in his lounge. Hannah, who was in the group, froze and stared at Denise when she had entered the room. Denise, pretending not to have noticed, went up to Hannah as Len Schwartz led her inside. She saw Hannah's lips straighten, then curl with amusement.

"So you are Mrs. Antoine's daughter," Hannah said, once they were face-to-face.

"Yes," Denise answered quietly. She did not know whether it was because of her mother, her appearance, or something else that Hannah had reacted to her as she had. But the young woman continued to seem amused with her whenever they saw one another again that night.

The two now drew together in the street. "Very good to meet you again," Hannah said. Her hard face did not relax, and it put Denise on edge. "I didn't expect this before tomorrow."

"It is a surprise."



"So, how is it you're out and about?"

"I was getting some last minute things for the wedding." Denise lifted the bag with the outfits.

"The wedding has kept us both busy, it seems."

"You have been getting ready for it, too?"

"I am right now. Going to the hairdresser. I've had the appointment for a month. I like to look my best for these events. I assume everyone does." Hannah said then, "My boyfriend, Steve, will be with me at the wedding tomorrow. He's a Wall Street trader. They say he's a wizard of finance. He earns quite an income." She studied Denise as if to see how this affected her before adding, "I'm sure he'll be glad to meet you and your friends."

"Actually, I'm going alone."

Hannah stared. "Really? You didn't ask to bring anyone?"

"No, I decided against it. I'm sitting with my mother and your uncle at their table. It'll be enough just to talk with them, I think."

"Well, there's nothing wrong with sitting and talking with the bride and groom at a wedding."

"No, there isn't." However, Denise felt awkward admitting it.

Hannah gave Denise a weak smile. "I'm sure my uncle and your mother will make you feel welcome. But, I have to get going. We'll see each other tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow." As Hannah walked away, Denise felt relieved. However, she knew she had not settled any of her gnawing differences with Hannah. She considered as she continued down the avenue if she might have any new problems with the rest of the Schwartz family once she got to know them. *Would there be more unfriendly encounters at Len's apartments?* she thought, her lips curling toward a frown.

Denise walked a few blocks and reached an open-air café. The café sided a pedestrian square and had thin frame tables and chairs half way out onto the sidewalk. Denise and her mother had eaten at the café many times. Denise entered the café and ordered a slice of marble cake and black tea. She went back outside where she took a seat at the table farthest from the street; the waiter came soon with her order. Denise dipped a spoon into her hot tea and stirred it slowly. *Will mother and I talk anymore at this café once she is married?* she considered as the tea leaves spun. *Will we even see each other? He has moved for business before. He was in Boston for a couple of years, I heard. She might go with him there. Or elsewhere. Everything could be different with tomorrow.* A clack of high heels sounded to her. She stopped stirring the tea and looked into the square before her table. The limestone and glass building across the café shone with the sunlight. The air was fresh and mild, and the sky showed clear above the people's heads in the open square. Denise heard their steps strike and tap the square's inlaid brick. The people passed in the shadows thrown by

the buildings behind her. Two women in spring outfits went by chatting quietly. Denise saw a man with blue eyes pass, looking at the sunlit building across the square. *The scene is beautiful*, she thought. *But how can I think it when I've been worrying about tomorrow? I shouldn't in my mood, should I?* The light showed bright from the limestone across the square. *It is very strange*, she thought. She finished the last of her tea and cake and walked from the café.

A few blocks down, Denise went to the subway station, connected to one train, then a second that took her to Midtown, where she went to see the wedding planner. Her mother had told her about the planner, but Denise had not listened. *The man has nothing to do with me*, Denise had thought with a hurt feeling at the time. She felt the planner was relevant now. When she arrived at his office, she introduced herself as Mrs. Antoine's daughter and, on being shown to him, asked to see the layout plans for the wedding ceremony. "I'd like to be sure of where everything will be before I go," she explained. "It might help me be more ready."

The planner fetched the plan laying among the many on a small table and handed the large scroll of paper to her. He stood beside her and explained it. The plan showed the chairs for the guests arranged in two lobed wings. Where the bride and groom were to meet and be married, there would be a tall, rose-clad trellis with a cragged rock beside it, tall as a man; an artificial spring from it would flow into a marble basin. The water collecting would create a soothing sound while the rites were read.



"It's a good arrangement, I think," Denise said after studying it.

The planner said, "Do you know your mother was here this week to make some changes to the ceremony?"

"Oh?"

"The backs of the seats are to have these bows on them, for one thing." He handed her a done-up bundle of fine, blue ribbons laying on the corner of his desk. She turned the bow, studying the dozen or more loops bound in a small knot. The ribbon reflected brightly in the window light. *But why had her mother*

chosen this? she wondered. It did not seem like her mother's usual taste.

The planner continued, "She's also changed the traditional wedding march to something else. The new music is classical, sort of soft and gradual. I have the CD of it if you would like to hear."

"Yes, I would please."

The planner started the sound system. Music filled the room. It was all violins, slow leading notes followed by a long, round, swelling section. The long notes expanded and stretched with a gentle, fine sound. Beneath it came the sound of violins moving in a steady march. The music fell and resumed the slow lead of earlier. Denise listened, picturing a dawn scene set to the music. The scene built in her mind a piece at a time. With the lead-in, she saw the darkness in some early morning pass into shadow. The long swelling note brought her the sun breaking the horizon. The violins beneath the long note revealed a field growing light from which the dark grass and flowers stood forth. The music repeated, and Denise pictured dark woods beyond the fields grow light. The light came through the trees to small birds in their nests. The birds awakened and stirred. The music seemed beautiful, suggesting these things of the dawn to her. However, the piece could have suggested any beginning, anything new and with promise. Denise realized then that her mother must have felt happy and confident to have chosen this music, Bach's "Air," for the ceremony. Denise imagined her mother absorbed in its fine, gentle sound, loving the long notes in the music as they expanded with the violins beneath them. Denise listened to the music's end. She thanked the planner and left his office.

Denise walked several blocks through Midtown to a large jeweler's shop on Fifth Avenue. The shop had a large glass window, bright with watches and necklaces. She entered and browsed carefully in the aisles among the glass cases. She came to the broaches and noted, near the floor, several priced within her budget for a wedding present. One had a thin silver body and shining links in the band. A second featured a gold-tinged body with a handsome clasp. The broaches were all attractive and high quality, and any of them would have made decent presents. Nevertheless, she dismissed these and turned to examine the broaches on the case's top shelf. These were finer objects, their bodies like lace, the bands delicately forged. The items cost more, too. *However, she thought, I'm giving the present to my mother for her wedding. If I try to save money on the broach, I won't give the finest I could. I'd know it was second or third best. But I can't shortchange Mother on her wedding day.* She is my parent, and she loved my father. So, Denise studied the broaches on the top shelf and chose one of flattened gold with a large pearl and a snapping clasp. She had the counter clerk wrap the broach in a small box with blue and gold striped paper.

Denise left the jeweler's, bags of goods in hand, and connected to a train going toward Chelsea. She got out at the stop before the one near her apartment and, after exiting to the street, walked to a tavern. The tavern stood below street level and narrow windows faced it. She had heard of this tavern from friends

but, busy at her boutique most days, never had managed to visit. She decided that, since she had spent most of the day out, she would have dinner there today rather than cook at home. She went inside through the oak panel door. She saw the room of the tavern was long and narrow, crowded by dark pinewood tables and chairs. It was early for dinner, so only two tables had patrons. She was shown to a small table near the bar and set her bag on the extra chair, glad to sit. When the man came, she ordered roast beef and mashed potatoes, then looked around her, taking in the room. She thought the dim environs good and comfortable. Without checking herself, she listened to a man at the other table tell a joke and his friends laugh. At the other table, young adults in black blazers talked intimately, leaned toward one another. The eyes of a young man flickered as he spoke, sensing, it seemed, the value his words had for his friends. High above the tables, the horizontal, skinny windows let in a coolish white light from the street. The tavern slowly filled with newcomers. The dark brown flats of the heavy tables drew the people to them. The new faces showed pale in the room's shade. Talk kept low at first, but soon the place filled with a busy hum. Denise followed threads of conversation. One eager man told of meeting a girlfriend for a date. A smartish woman spoke of setting her friend straight. The waiter brought Denise her food, and she ate with the appetite she had built since the café. The roast beef was juicy and cut well. She dipped the potatoes in the brown gravy before eating them and liked it. As she ate, Denise looked again about the tavern. It had become dark outside, and the small overhead lamps had turned on. They lit each table in a pale circle but left the gaps and alleys between them dark. The people spoke intimately. A few small groups had sat down at the bar near her. The bartender turned on the wall TVs, and soccer games and comedy reruns poured from the screens. A sense of familiarity and ease entered the room. Denise observed everyone, and she had no self-consciousness. She mellowed and relaxed. When she had finished eating, she sat quietly in her seat. She remembered the wedding and the reception tomorrow and told herself that both would be happy events if they were like this evening in the tavern. She felt she even could be as happy with the marriage as she believed her mother would be. Her trust in this possibility rose as she listened to the room's buzz rise, fall, and begin again around her.



Snipe Hunting

by Parker Long

Dad died when I was 12
I started looking
For purpose
Meaning
Joy

I was looking for something
That mattered, I guess
I tried lots of stuff
Jesus, to start
No help

I began to listen to punk rock
Trying to find some joy in
In Shane's slurring
But joy is rare
In hate

Girls naturally entered the equation
But innocent love felt strange
It didn't start to answer
The weird longing
I deeply felt

I began to love The Truth that journalists wrote
And I looked hard for uncomfortable facts
But I was too easily dissuaded
There's not much hidden
In Marlow, OK

Much later I discovered Hunter Thompson and Raoul Duke
And I decided that Gonzo was the place for me
Hallucinogenics are not easy to come by
It's hard to write Fear and Loathing
When I'm sober as a Mormon

Barring psychedelic pastimes, I turned to the single-malt flavor of Scotch whisky
I assured me that this time I had found something worth my energy
I looked quizzically through amber colored glasses
But again, I found that purpose was missing
Lost during the aging process, I guessed

As I've matured, I've begun to doubt that I will ever find a purpose worthy of all of my time
And maybe one day I'll learn to find joy in the moments and not just in the image
But for now I will send an amber colored salute to my dear ol' dad while
Vicious begs for anarchy and Duke tries to find the American Dream
And my wife tells me that I have no stomach for the truth

Cellphone Psychosis

by Robert Cooperman

Today, all of Denver seems afflicted:
the woman carrying her baby in a sling
like a frigate's figurehead in front of her chest,
while she goes on and on to the phone
she grips for dear life in front of her infant,
maybe thinking her voice droning on forever
is even more important for her baby's
development than playing Mozart for her;

then there's the other woman carrying
a grocery bag in one hand, holding the phone
she's shouting her life into, in the other,
so rather than stop talking for two seconds,
she karate kicks the button to change
the light from red to green;

finally, the guy in the SUV big as a tank,
dawdling at maybe ten miles an hour
on a four-lane boulevard, yapping happily,
not noticing me in the crosswalk, walking
with the light he's ignored. I jump back
and shout a string of Miltonic invective.

But of course the guy hasn't heart me,
and if he did clip me, would he notice or care,
the injustice of it all making me spit rage,

until I remember Paris last night:
too many dead and wounded by the guns
and bombs of terrorists, for me, ultimately,
to care much about the blissfully oblivious.

First Snow, Denver

by Robert Cooperman

For days, the TV weather people
talked of nothing but the storm
bearing down on us like the Youngers:
wild for bank robbery and mayhem.

So we panic shopped, stocked up
on everything, this storm allegedly
howling longer than the Ice Age,
to leave Denver a frozen wasteland.

We laid in rock salt, candles,
flashlights big as billy clubs;
we stacked blankets and comforters,
the temperature expected to plummet
like a gut-shot duck.

Then we waited and waited:
maybe a slick on the ground,
a few inches on our car,
so we kept our dental appointments,
a far more treacherous visit than the snow
that failed to send Denver hurtling back
into a Breughel winterscape.

But the TV weather guy is warning
of another one: a blizzard this time,
he assures us: twelve inches, blowing
more dangerously than stampeding bison,
as if we're huddled in a wind-leaking
sod hut on the prairie in the 19th century,
wolves howling in the dreadful, empty dark.

Those Famous Idaho Potatoes

by James Valvis

Imagine the luck. We're driving in Idaho
for the first time when, all of a sudden,
a truck filled with potatoes drives by.
I mean, really. I'm with my new bride
on vacation, and the only thing I know
about the state is they grow potatoes.
Now, here's this truck filled to the top
and overflowing with a mountain of spuds.
It's almost never like this. When I arrived
in Washington, I didn't see an apple orchard
until I lived in the state almost a year.
I lived in the Sunshine State, where it rains
practically every day. In New Jersey,
all Italians don't really belong to the mob.
Few in the military were like the soldiers
you see on television or in the movies.
One of the best people I know is a politician.
One of the worst talks of nothing but love.
"Potatoes!" I yell at my wife. "Oh, wow!"
And she rolls her eyes, shaking her head.
After all, we're in Idaho. What did I expect?

Vacant Apartment

by Lee Zumpe

shoulder pressed against window
again—
overlooking the parking lot

overhead
moon shedding silver sliver tears
and the night grinds itself
into a fine powder
which finally ignites with the dawn

I drive by your apartment
from time to time
but only echoes
haunt the caverns beneath
the live oak canopy



Never Forgotten

by Kaylee Patton

Everyone thinks that I am too young — to understand what is going on. In some ways, I am. In others, it is not hard to figure out what has happened. I don't want anyone to realize that I understand, or else they will sit me down and have "the talk" about the circle of life. I hate those talks. They are long and boring and make me sad. Everyone is too sad right now. I don't want to be sad. I try to act like my normal sassy self, but it is becoming difficult. Everyone keeps telling me it is all going to be okay and that I am fine. I know that I am fine. I feel perfectly fine. But I'm not.

Time seems to fly whenever a tragedy happens. One second, I am at my grandparents' house just getting back from church. The next second, I am pulling up into my driveway at home wondering what is going to happen next. To this day, I still remember the look on my grandmother's face when she was on the phone with my dad. Her eyes went wide, then closed, then her head fell into her hands. It was when she looked at me with tears in her eyes that I knew that something bad had happened. Everything was so quiet while we packed our bags that you could hear a pin drop from across the house. I was dreading the two-hour drive home, but to my surprise, it was quite fun. My sister and I joked around with our grandparents and cousins, and for a split second, it felt as if nothing were wrong. But only for that second.

As soon as we pulled into my driveway, I felt a sense of sadness rush over me. There were cars lined up in front of my house and down the block. Usually when I see this, I get excited because that means we are celebrating something. But not this time. I was the last to walk into my house. I didn't want to see anyone crying or upset. I finally got the courage to step through the doorway, but I instantly regretted it. The first person to catch my eyes was my mom. Her face was red, blotchy, and swollen. Her eyes began raining tears as she ran over to me and wrapped me up in her arms. I was her baby girl. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to stay there and hug her, but then again, I felt really uncomfortable and wanted to go to my room. She finally let me go so that she could talk to my sister and grandparents, and I slipped into the shadows.

Situations like these make me uncomfortable. I feel like if I say something, I'm just letting off a bomb of emotions that I won't be able to control. I am not the type to let people see me cry. Even at six years old, it made me feel vulnerable. So, I ran away to my hiding place: my bedroom. As soon as I got to the door, I immediately froze. I had forgotten that this wasn't just my room; it was hers, too. The door was shut, and I began to wonder why. All sorts of questions that I now feel dumb for thinking were running through my head: *Was the door locked? What was inside? Was she in there? Did I just misunderstand and she's actually just napping in there? Or, is the door shut because this is where they will keep her until the funeral?* I must have stood there for a good thirty minutes before I finally twisted the knob.



The first thing that I noticed was how bright it seemed. The light was shining through the window, and it looked just as we were always taught to imagine heaven. The second thing I noticed was that she wasn't in there. Her bed was neatly made, as it hadn't been in who knows how long. All of our stuffed animals were sitting on the bed, just as they had been whenever she got scared, and I would surround her with them to comfort her. I looked at the dresser and saw a bag of Goldfish. Instantly, I remembered the time I put them into her feeding tube because she told me she wanted some. My mom didn't believe my excuse, but still took a picture because it was funny. I guess I should have remembered one thing: my sister wasn't able to talk to anyone except for me. That wasn't entirely true, but I was the only one who knew when she wanted something. I knew when she was happy, sad, upset, hungry, or sick before anyone else did. It was always a weird bonding thing we had. Then, it hit me: my sister had really passed away, and that bond was now broken.

That is all I remember from that day. As soon as the realization that my sister was gone hit me, I went brain dead. I didn't really see what was going on around me anymore and just went along with what everyone else was doing. It took me about a month to go back into that bedroom. It is full of so many good memories but also the worst memory of them all. I ended up moving into my other sister's bedroom just to get away from the hurt. Now it doesn't faze me to go in our old room. It has changed so much that the memory doesn't cross my mind when I walk in. But this doesn't mean that I don't still miss her. I still cry at night sometimes. The months of May and August are the hardest because one is the month she was born and the other is the month she died. Other than those times, I am fine. I know that I am fine. I feel perfectly fine. But I'm not.



Growing Young

by Dennis Ross

Young people are immortal
do not believe a time will come
when taking their FJR 1300 cycle
to the max on poor rubber
will seem imprudent,
when joints ache and stairs
become an assault on Everest,
when pepperoni pizza is not
manna from a beneficent god.

The possibility of mortality
sneaks up slowly at first
then with unstoppable authority
with an aortic aneurysm or stroke,
but a trapdoor opens, you tumble
down a rabbit hole, and end up

floating down in a crystal blue sky.
The frantic dance slows, sunlight
ripples from the wings of a bee
hovering over Queen Anne's Lace,
a black snake slips quietly
into the pond, small voices
call again as they did as a child,
the world opens out from a hard bud
with crawling black ants into a peony.
What matters that the blossom
will not last forever?

Nameless, Coffeeshop Woman

by Gregory Brown

Aqua, turtle tank top
and sagging milkbone
bag of flesh
drop khaki-clad hips
into the corner seat
by the stained, paisley couch.
Bedrock mirror eyes
keep my own set
on the blank
computer screen page
when the tin rattle
bell bounce sounds
against the wooden doorframe,
pulling city gasps
into the murmuring storefront.
Lion-roar breaths bring tight this
scoliosis spine set,
not light, moon-moth flutters,
but the tired transfer
of an old acrobat, shaking
shoulder weight around
stiffening sockets
in figure-eight ellipses
against the thatched chair-back.
Typewriter pupils
demand the clacking
of my nerve-sweat fingertips.

Three Journals

by Scott Thomas

Speaking from what I know of that long-ago era,
Life moved much too quickly, and people rarely
Kept accounts of their daily lives. Don't forget.
This was the time of commuter trains, the time
Of morning coffee gulped to the sound of a screen
No one was watching. For the most part, the details
Of their day-to-day existence are lost to us.
In the case of my current subject, we have only
A fragmentary record, and we see him first
At nine years old only because his mom bought him
This leatherbound diary for Christmas...*Go ahead.*
...I trust you. On January 1, as you can see,
He was filled with excitement. Here he scribbles
About ham, science books, and how he made
The control panel of a spaceship out of a thing
Called Lite Brite. Note how each day there is less
And less detail until, by mid-March, he is reduced
To entries like, "Dear Diary, Today
Was a good day," or, conversely, "Dear Diary,
Today was a bad day." While I am happy that
The good days outnumbered the bad in 1973,
Such brevity does little for my research.
Enough of that.

Next is this tattered, yellow
Legal pad. It picks up the story nine years
Later between his freshman and sophomore years
In college. He was bored at home that summer,

Cutting lawns. One afternoon, surveying the world
 From a hillside of dandelions, he convinced himself
 That a girl one hundred miles away, in the shadow
 Of the farthest mountain range, was in love
 With him. He was wrong. When the diary trails off
 That September, he was sitting in his dormitory
 In the shadow of the farthest mountain range.
 Though disappointed in love, it seems
 There were always friends knocking at his thin door...

...Which brings us to his last journal. He was 32,
 Still without a girlfriend or wife: this diary,
 Sometimes comical, often sad, documents
 His desperate attempts at finding love in a cold,
 Uncaring world. Then, as now, love was an
 Elusive thing, and the questions he poses will be
 Familiar to you: *Does love come through persistent
 Effort like a Boy Scout lighting a campfire
 With only a piece of flint and a pocketknife,
 Or does it come, whether you deserve it or not,
 Like a forest fire borne of a lightning strike?*
 He has no answers for us. In the final entry,
 The last time we ever hear from him, he is assessing
 Yet another prospect. "We'll see tomorrow if she
 Is the one," he concludes. Then, it is almost as if
 The next day never came (though we know it did:
 I checked the database. He lived to be a very
 Old man.) Interesting, isn't it? What does it mean?
 Could it be that she was indeed the "one" he spoke of,
 That now, with the answer revealed to him, with love
 Putting a final end to his quest, he had neither
 The time nor inclination to write? Should I
 Complain? After all, history's loss is his gain.

Whole Life

by Richard Donnelly

I found her at the West Highland
Bowl at midnight and took
her home
she had worked as a waitress in La Jolla
and driven a cab or small bus I
guess it was she was almost married to an older man
but left him a note and moved
to Las Vegas putting everything in
a car and driving
all night she had never had a baby she both
regretted this and didn't she never stayed in
one place for two months her
whole life she said and I am so tired
I let her lay her head on my arm
and let her sleep



Beer and Pool and the Gravel Voice

by Michael Catherwood

Pink and I sat in Walt's New Frontier Tavern
drinking pitchers of beer after the Florence
Days Parade wound down. The bikers
were doing burnouts on the floor
of the bar, and the fumes from the tire
smoke stung our eyes. The matchstick
bartender threatened to call the police,
so the bikers roared and backfired
out the open front door. Fezzes lined
the bar as Shriners drank martinis
from the their stools while a one-armed guy
in a Vietnam Vet cap ran the pool table.

Pink thought he'd challenge him and put
his quarters up. "Are you next?" the one-armed
man asked, coming back from the bar;
his voice scratched with gravel and cigarettes.
"Yeah," Pink said. "For beers?" "Sure," the pool player
said. Pink racked the balls while I drank the beer.
Then I noticed bugs swimming in our pitcher.
I motioned for Pink to come over. "Jesus,
what are those?" "Ticks, I think."
Then the one-armed pool player walked
over. "Ticks alright. Look up. They drop down
from the ceiling. He keeps the dog in here
at night." He laughed, "No charge for meat."
The tire smoke hovered behind the fezzes.

These Wants

by Mark Belair

The bow of the wooden rowboat
scrapes the beach and you step out
into ankle-high lake water
and angle in the polished oars
and pull the peeling boat
ashore, far enough so that
it won't float back out even
if it storms
and you trudge toward the rental cabin
and dip your feet, sandy from the beach,
into a dented aluminum basin of warm tap water
and leave damp footprints
on the dark green porch steps
then your sun-tautened skin
chills in the porch shade
and clinking sounds
from the still-hidden kitchen
alert you to a thirst
you didn't really notice
out in the boat, rowing
alone, while a waft
of onions simmering
in butter reminds you it's been
hours since you ate,
then you notice that the few steps
that take you through the sitting room
feel ungainly, stiff, you need, after
all that rowing, to rest your arms and legs
(and to pause in the bathroom too)

but you're eager to tell your
 loved one all about your
 boating adventure
 (in which not much—yet everything!—
 happened) so soldier on
 into the unfamiliar kitchen where
 the familiar back of your loved one
 (as she tries to unscrew a balky cap,
 her hair casually gathered up, her
 lovely swan neck pleading
 for a spray of rosebud kisses)
 stops you in your tracks
 for it dawns on you
 just then
 in the dusky light
 how all these simple wants
 now gathered to a keen point
 of feeling
 are the everyday wants
 (and here your jar-abstracted
 loved one, hearing your approach,
 turns to see your tears
 suddenly well
 so softens in tender perplexity
 which nearly makes them spill)
 you forever
 and ever
 want.

Written on the Skin

by Robert Cooperman

Mr. Markowitz, the owner
of the neighborhood market
always rolled up his sleeves,
forcing us to read the blue
numbers on his left forearm.

When my mother sent me
the three blocks to the store
for something she'd forgotten,
his smile a wolf, when I'd stare.

"He uses those numbers,"
my mother fumed,
"so you'll be too embarrassed
to argue that he overcharges
by a nickel or dime."

This was back when markets
delivered: his regular man, flu-bound
one afternoon; so after he'd rung up
the Kotex my mother blushed for,
Mr. Markowitz bicycled a big order
down Avenue H, and as he passed me,
pointed toward the corner,
to Tommy Lockhart—
our neighborhood kapo—
first big, hard, and merciless.

"Help!" I wanted to shout,
but knew Mr. Markowitz wouldn't:
how he'd managed to survive.

What Will Become of Him?

by Robert Cooperman

As she leads her son away
from my niece, at the wedding,
I hear his mother's calm, coaxing voice:

"Come on, Ronny, don't bother
this nice young lady," his synapses
shortening in an obsession with my niece,
whose hand he kept reaching for
to stroke as if a kitten's soft fur,
as I was about to rescue her.

But his mother takes his arm,
as if a blind man in danger of tripping
over furniture, though I hear her mutter,

"What will become of you?"

And I recall an older cousin,
about whom everyone clucked,

"Slow," when I was metamorphosing
into lubricious adolescence: my thinking
all muddled, and too young to worry,

"What will become of her?"

‘You Were My First Grade Teacher,’ The Woman Said Smiling

by Kevin Acers

Which child is this?

Looking at her face,
I vaguely recall a mother,
a woman whose demeanor
her daughter has absorbed.
I quickly sift through
my thick mental catalogue
of one-time six-year-olds
compiled over the course
of forty years.

Ah, yes. There you are.
A yellow dress.

But What Will I

by Richard Donnelly

it's been two years he told us standing at the
bar two whole years and now I have a chance to go back
her sister called she wants to see me but
the trouble is I don't know what she'll say
I don't know what to think I'd go back to San Jose
tomorrow but what will I tell her
what can I tell her that it was a mistake to take that
job that I should have stayed but didn't
we drank the bartender got us three more glasses
wiping down the countertop
I mean Kyle said it's been two years
two years the bartender said taking his empty
pint glass and putting it into soapy water
try twenty-five years

A Thumb on the Dragon

by Kelley Logan

“Look, lady. Get. In. Line. You can pee all you want after you buy a ticket.” The man in the ticket booth glowered at her and then refocused his attention on the couple in matching blue sweats, who were looking at her like actuaries at a flood site. She stepped back from the ticket booth and looked down the line. There were at least twenty couples and a few more singletons. Those were the ones she could see. The line wrapped around the old brick building and down the alley between it and the jeweler’s next door. She was going to wet herself before she got in.

“Really? I swear I’ll come right back out.” She tried to widen her eyes pleadingly.

“Sure lady, and I’m your Dutch uncle. Next.” The blue sweat suits shouldered their way past her. The woman dug a coin purse from her bra and started counting out bills.

“A Venti, who the hell buys a *Venti* coffee and then walks to a movie?” Shirley muttered a little desperately as she walked back along the line that had now formed halfway back to the parking lot along the side of Roxy’s Retro Cinema.

She had been spending a usual Sunday reading free newspapers left in the neighborhood coffee shop, eating scones, and drinking an absurdly large coffee when an ad for a Hitchcock retrospective caught her eye. The movies would kill the rest of the afternoon and give her something to talk about at work tomorrow—something better than describing the rather bland brick-like scones and vat of coffee in front of her. She popped the last bite of scone in her mouth, took a swig of coffee to soften it, and headed for the door.

Three blocks later, she realized that deciding to do anything after ordering a Venti was a bad idea. She needed to go. Her bladder was not as cooperative as it had been before her ladies’ operation. Sometimes, it would sneak up on her and throb until she sat for barely a trickle. Other times, she wouldn’t even think about going until she got home from work to empty a bladder that seemed to hold more than she thought should be possible.

She stopped by a closed hardware store to think about her options: There was really nothing much open even during the week in this area. Sunday, everything was dark and defended—chained, barred, and promising watch dogs. Although there were empty lots, closed stores, and very few people around, she was not the sort of woman who peed in alleys. And she was halfway there. If she turned back to the coffee shop, she would surely miss the opening credits of *Vertigo*. She was the kind of woman who watched credits.

She kept walking.

Hitchcock brought back memories. Her grandfather had liked Hitch. It was one

of the few things they had had in common. Sunday afternoon, after sweating through the hell and brimstone of mandatory church, after the three-bread, five-vegetable, two-meat Sunday dinners that her grandmother invariably made, she and her grandfather would turn the on the TV and search for an old movie. Sometimes it was a Gene Kelley; those were alright. Sometimes, it was one of the old film sirens from Hollywood's golden era—a Jean Harlow, Rita Hayworth, Myrna Loy. Shirley did not often get through these. Her grandfather was sure to lapse into a running commentary about women today and living up to ideals. Shirley wasn't toeing the line, wasn't trying, wasn't the girl she could be. Wasn't ever going to be one of those women. She learned to slip out at the first set of commercials if one of these were playing.

But Hitchcock! Oh, Hitch was just right. The beautiful women were venomous, harrowingly vulnerable, or icy—nothing to wish on a granddaughter, so Shirley always stayed through those sitting on the floor by her grandfather's Barcalounger, grabbing his trouser leg when the heroine was stabbed or the birds got the lady in the bedroom. He would pat her gently on the head and whisper, "It's a movie, Shirl." Once though, after the second time they had watched *Shadow of a Doubt*, he snapped off the old TV and stood quietly by it, a hand on its warm, broad top. He then turned and said, "Girl, get up and come with me."

They had gone to the unused back bedroom that her grandmother kept for her other son, Shirley's uncle, who rarely visited. Shirley had sat on the bed while her grandfather had dug around in the closet, lifting down boxes of old clothes and sliding junk around on the shelf above the clothes rod. After a few minutes, he pulled down a shoebox.

"That Uncle Charlie fella, he was real smooth, but she caught on to him," he said, weighing the box in his hands.

Shirley nodded.

Her grandfather tipped the lid off the box and poured the contents onto the coverlet. Shirley turned to look, hitching her knee up on the bed. The junk that tumbled out was typical: old pin back buttons, a brass cigarette case with an owl etched onto its face, five pairs of cufflinks, two tie tacks, a broken pair of scissors, a watch, five rotary pins, a tiny compass, two keys, and four pocket knives among assorted ticket stubs and other paper rubble. Her grandfather shifted through the heap and picked up a red Lucite knife and handed to her. The handle was slender and nearly as long as her hand. On one side, there was a gold dragon, on the other, a bull and matador with the word "Mexico" at his feet.

"Hold the knife in your right hand, girl, and keep your thumb on the dragon. That way you can press the catch." He took the knife from her and showed her the little brass toggle at the top that flipped the blade out, "You have to press it back up to lock the blade in or out of the handle. Like this, see?" He held the knife gently in his hand, sliding his fingers up the dragon's scales, and deftly

flicked the toggle down. The blade snapped out as his grip shifted to lock the toggle back flat against the top of the hilt. “The blade locks in place so you can’t cut yourself.” He handed the knife to her. “Don’t tell your granny.”

It was the best present he had ever given her and the only secret they shared. He had been dead now for ten years. Shirley kept that knife sharp and oiled, tucked in the side pocket of her purse. She might not have been what he had wanted in a granddaughter, but he loved her.

Now she was in line, jiggling and shifting her feet, seriously worried that her bladder would give up and let go before she could buy her ticket and get in the theater.

As she came alongside a metal emergency door, it opened. A scrubby guy in black stood just within the opening.

“Hey, you the one who’s gotta go?”

“You’ll let me in?”

He smiled, “Yeah, if you’ll do something for me.”

She sighed, “How much?”

“Not money,” he grabbed her arm and drew her into the doorway. The couple behind her stepped around and refilled the line. As he stepped back into the dark of the theater, he whispered, “I want to watch.”

Her breath caught, “Watch?” For a second, she thought that he wanted to sit with her during the movie, then she realized what he was asking. She smelled him more than saw him there in the dark and thought fleetingly of bathing and hot running water. This made her bladder spasm. She tenderly pressed her lower belly. “I can’t do that.”

“How bad do you need to go?” His face was flat, his small eyes a steady gleam in the dim corridor.

She realized that the answer was *bad enough*. She stepped through the doorway and was blinded by



the sudden darkness as the heavy metal door swung shut; she felt his hand slip into hers, almost comfortingly. He led her forward toward the gaily lit concession area until she could see, dropped her hand, and pointed down the right hallway. She brushed past him and went down the hall and on into the lavatory.

It was cold, the walls a deep pigeon-blood red with fake plants on the counter and bordello inspired borders along the ceiling. She thought, *they want it to be exotic*. Shirley felt a bubble of hysteria rise, but she swallowed it down and then felt only the air conditioning and a slight nausea. She turned without thinking down the row of stalls and hurried to the last one. Opening the door she hesitated feeling the heat from the man's body so close behind her. But she really had no choice. She barely had time to shift her skirt forward and pulled down her panties; she wasn't on the seat before her bladder released.

"Hey! We had a deal," he roughly shoved her back against the tank, one hand squarely against her chest, the other lifting the front of the skirt, "I get to watch." She looked up at him, nodded, and spread her legs on either side of the toilet, planting her feet. She swung her purse forward and slipped her thumb and forefinger down into the narrow front pocket.

He had expected the prim old gal to put up a fuss; they usually did, that was part of the fun. He had been doing this for years. The best ones wept and turned red from shame. He was shocked to see her reach out toward his fly almost supplicating, palm down like a dog begging. Just his luck, he picked a weirdo. Then he felt a quick punch in his groin.

"Bitch!" he cried, "You bitch!" She had missed her target if she was trying to clock him one, but he could teach her a lesson. "You missed," he hissed; he raised his hand to slap her. Mid-motion he felt a warm wetness running down his leg and looked down. A dark stain was spreading down his leg. He stepped back and braced himself in the corner of the stall, suddenly anxious that she would laugh at him. He couldn't be pissing himself because she tried to hit him in the balls, could he? He felt light-headed and shivered. It was always so damn cold in the ladies' room. He looked back up at her, now sitting primly with her knees touching, "What did you do?" She smiled softly. He fell forward on his knees in front of her. The stall was filling with the bright, tinny smell of blood. He tried to grab her, but she seemed so far away, and he couldn't seem to hold on to anything.

As the man tilted forward toward her, Shirley caught the front of his shirt with her left hand and pushed him away from her until he fell out of the stall, one leg buckling under him. He moved slightly and then was still. She wiped herself, flushed the toilet, and thought about the handle.

"It's a public toilet." Her voice bounced off the metal walls of the stall. She looked at the tile floor. There was enough room. She had to hop over his extended leg and the growing pool of blood. She didn't get anything on her shoes. She walked back to the sink to rinse the knife off under the sink, gently rolling the sticky handle in her palm—dragon, matador, dragon, matador—until both were clean

and unsullied. She then carefully dried it and slid it back into the front pocket of her purse. She pushed open the door; nobody was in the hall. She slid out the door, hurried toward the front of the theater, and joined a noisy group of teenagers entering the lobby. She followed them to the concession stand.

She looked into the glass case at the brightly colored boxes. There were always too many candies to decide between; she bought popcorn and a small Coke instead. Shirley smiled at the girl as she handed over her money. "I hope I can find a seat about midway. I hate the front, don't you?"

The girl smiled back, "Well, you won't find one in the back, not with that crowd you came in with."

Shirley laughed and winked. "You've got that right." As she turned to go in, she could hear the first spirals and circles of Bernard Herrmann's score. She had not missed anything.



Baby Monitor

by Scott Thomas

Last night, I heard her signal
Carried on the digital brook
That flows in the nursery.
The baby monitor amplified its range.
Otherwise, it would not have been heard
By any soul who understood—
A repeated tapping
Embedded in the gurgling water,
Three quick beats followed by two of two—
Come in Fred...come in...come in...
Come in Fred...come in...come in...
But Fred never responded,
And, like an automated distress beacon,
Olive's message kept repeating—
Come in Fred...come in...come in...
Fred and Olive are nowhere.
Their cabin sits deserted,
Their birdhouses condemned,
But, thanks to them, I can tell you now
What death is like.
Confused and lonely,
They try to contact spouses
With patterns in a sound machine.
They are not even close.
The baby sound asleep...
Come in Fred...come in...come in...

Brow

by Guy R. Beining

1.

a blue field
is conquered.

2.

boulders collide
on lunar hill.

3.

time is uncorked,
rolls out of a bottle,
still not drinking.

4.

a black bear
crept over a hill
enormous as night.

5.

years ago
on a sail boat
we spoke to
a dark continent.

6.

looking thru stain glass
window of a church
silver eyes of a knight
brushes a tilting world.

Bone

by Guy R. Beining

1.

the channel was
all purple &
the night got colder.
at 4 a.m. the man
changed channels,
but then a pulsing
appeared & madly
churned, then began
to slow down
making the man
nervous.
he changed channels
again & gasped
as he watched
a brilliant redness
invade the screen.
it appeared to
be pumping.

2.

visual ploys were
meeting visual happenings.
there was no
integrity controls,
no smart card,
or network accounting.

Wet Pavement

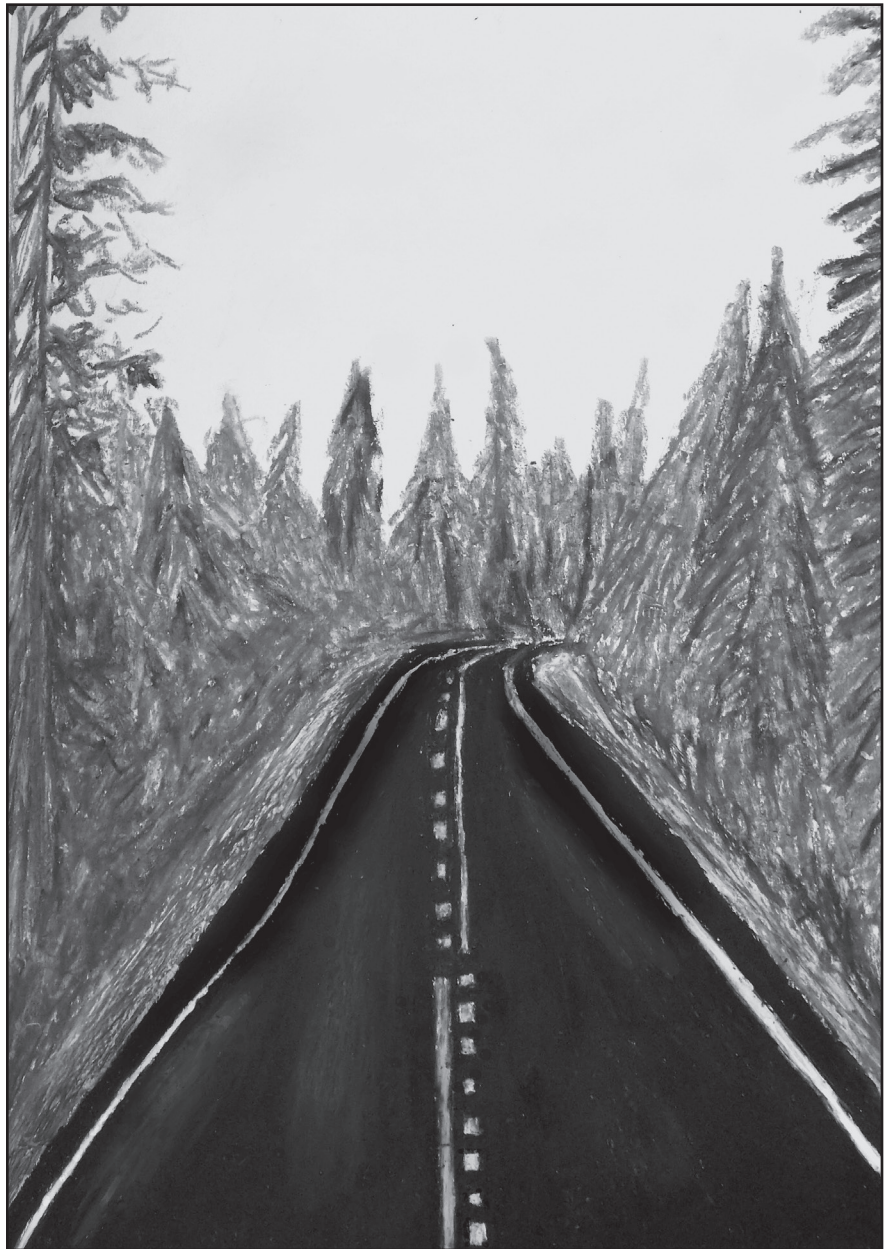
by Lee Zumpe

wet pavement,
moist eyes;
fingers curled white-knuckled
around the wheel.

hours before dawn,
between Supply and Southport;
two-lane traffic.

swarms of scant stars swimming,
low country mists drifting:
tangled knots,
wispy tatters,
stroking the rutted road,
curb crawling,
sweeping the silver twilight

miles ground down
beneath these spinning tires;
absorbed silently into
wet pavement.



Full Moon, House Cats

by Gregory Brown

Thunder slams against the floor
in concentric semicircles
beneath the white, textureless
ceiling, nipping fur-covered
haunches with snapping teeth, pulling
up tan carpet loops behind
open crescent claws, clipped short
just last week, when you wrapped
your teddy-bear body around
my taut wrist like a serpent,
kick'd up t'ward my unshaven face.
Tufts of black hair, dandruff, and
neon-painted nail caps float down
past your rolling ribcage, you
two hot-lap the empty hallway,
I run my pen on top of
mountains, the scabbing trail bisect-
ing my plumping cheek, and the
moon closes yellowed eyelids
behind the cover of clouds.

Snapshot of My Sixth Birthday Party

by Lee Zumpe

children without names,
now, scattered across the
clean, green grass of late
summer, frozen in

awkward poses, smiles
pinned to some, others
captured in the middle
of some unhappy

thought, like why do
parents weep, or why
am I so different, or
why is everyone else

so ecstatic. children
imprisoned in a moment,
confined to one emotion,
one driving passion.



Motorhead

by Loren Smith

My brother adopts orphans from
grease graveyards. He adopts children
with twisted turbines and dead pistons
and with his wrench he teaches their sparks
to explode again. He teaches their axles to spin
and their engines to roar and then
he does his childrens hair with blow torches
and clothes them with spray painters. He puts
new shoes on their feet with tire irons and
zooms on back country roads with
a hand wrapped around their hand.

My brother is tempered fire. A father
to the strays and the lost.

Ceremony

by Parker Long

Ice retreated to water
Tackle boxes were organized
Reels rebuilt
Hooks honed
Bait bought

He stood on my left
Gear was tied
Lines wet
Hopeful of luck
In the murky shallows.

We spoke softly
to not scare the bass
We cast and watched
Spider wire sparkle
Over the water

Reeling plastic worms
Against the muddy bottom
Feeling the new lakebed
Finding fallen trees
Navigating weeds

All day spent in search
Of the one fish
Who would make the day
And make us fight
And wake our senses

He always showed:
Biting hard
Fighting for each inch
Leaping through air
Earning his release

Tackle boxes were packed
Hooks put through guide-eyes
Line tightened
Stories regaled at Mom
Who had no stomach for fishing
But loved the ceremony.

Mom's Famous Pie Crust

by Kwyn Bollinger

"All right, we are going to need...three-fourths of a cup of Crisco, two cups of flour, and one teaspoon of salt." My mother sets the ingredients and measuring cups on the counter accordingly. "Now, put all of that in the big bowl there and mix them together."

Nodding, I eagerly examine the things before me: the blue and white can of shortening, the big jar of flour, the salt container, the ceramic measuring cups. I'm not sure how all of this is eventually going to make a pie crust, but I trust my mother's judgement. She knows just what is needed for this sort of thing.

This is my first time making Mom's famous pie crust for myself, which is why I'm so excited. My mother is well-known for her pies. She usually bakes them for church lunches, which earns widespread approval among the congregation. Our pastor even compliments her baking abilities from the pulpit. After he's concluded the sermon for that morning and starts giving out announcements, he often says something like, "Also, next Sunday we'll be having a meal following the services...and Mrs. Martha's going to bake a pie," as he peers up at our pew with a humorous yet hopeful look. All of the church members laugh, and I glance down the pew to catch my mother's reaction. She just smiles modestly and nods. Our pastor seems satisfied.

Now, if I could just make pies like that is the phrase replaying itself in my mind. At the age of nineteen, I have yet to contribute much to the church luncheons in terms of baked goods. Another one is coming up, and this time I am determined to give baking a shot. So, I go to my mother for advice.

"Well, I'm making a pecan pie and a blueberry pie. Why don't you just help me make one of those?" she asks.

I am happy to comply, especially if it means unravelling the mystery behind Mom's heavenly pies. So there I stand, measuring out all of the ingredients and mixing them up per Mom's instructions. When the Crisco, flour, and salt combination starts to form pea-sized chunks, I am supposed to add



the contents of a smaller bowl. This one holds a thin, glue-like batter of flour and water. It lightly moistens the top of the other mixture as I pour it in. I start stirring once more.

To be truthful, pecan pie isn't my favorite flavor, but it is my dad's favorite. I couldn't help but think that's why Mom had chosen it. My parents, Scott and Martha, have been married for over forty years now. They complement each other so well, balancing out their relationship with their different personalities and abilities. Mom has always been a stay-at-home mom; Dad is a retired teacher and coach. When he was working, Mom would always listen to his stories about what was happening at school and discuss situations with him. She would often go to the games he was coaching to root him on. Now that Dad's retired, he does a lot of farmwork out at his mother's place, and Mom sometimes goes with him to spend time with relatives or do chores. They harmonize in a number of little ways, too. Mom, for example, washes the dishes; Dad dries them. Mom plays the piano at church; Dad plays the organ. Mom likes to bake pie; Dad likes to eat pie, especially pecan. They share a love of old Western shows, 60s music, and trips to the city. Something else they've shared in is the raising of their eleven children.

Our names in order from oldest to youngest are Kari, Kory, Karli, Kayli, Kami, Kolby, Kynzi, Kyler, Kwyn, Kade, and Kolton. Mom said the use of "K" as the first letter of everyone's name "just kind of happened." When I asked her why she and Dad decided to have eleven kids, she said that just kind of happened, too. We laughed at her nonchalant answer. For many people, however, that is no laughing matter. When I talk about the size of my family, most people have a hard time wrapping their minds around the parental duties that must be involved. How was my mother able to do it all? Deliver all those children? Change all those diapers? Doctor all those boo-boos? Listen to all the questions, chatter, and sometimes arguments from her little brood of people? Motherhood has taught my mom a number of things. One of them is not to procrastinate: "The things that need to be done, need to be done timely. Housework, doctor's visits, school needs...I try to make it a priority when we need something to get it taken care of."

She has always done all of this with such a graceful easy air that it took me a long time to realize how unusual having eleven children was. To Mom, I don't think it's unusual anymore. But what a job it really must have been for her: taking care of each one of us, relating to us on an individual level, and—perhaps most challenging—keeping so many people with differing personalities close together. Some of us kids are more quiet-natured and studious like our father; some of us are more plucky and outspoken like our mother, and some of us are something in between. Yet, we'd all been thrown into the same bowl together, so it was necessary that we mixed well. This didn't always happen smoothly, however. Conflicts among such a group were practically inevitable. According to my mom, the greatest challenge of motherhood is being a referee. She had to

develop an effective strategy to deal with disagreements among us kids.

"I usually separated the two that were fighting and made them go into different rooms where neither of them could see anyone," Mom recalled, "then I let them think about it for a while. Calmer heads prevail after that." She paused before adding, "If you jump in between two mean dogs that are fighting, you might get bit yourself."

Finding ways to relate to us was another thing that took work. My mom's method? "I try to have conversations with you and find out what your personality is, what your likes and dislikes are, and I try to encourage you in those fields. Everybody is born an individual, and everything about them that the Lord gives them makes them unique. That uniqueness is to be treasured and not stifled," she said wisely.

In the mixing bowl, the dough for my pie crust is starting to come together, but it's getting tiresome to use just a spoon to stir the thick substance.

My mother notices my struggle as she passes by the counter. "You can use your hands to blend the dough if it's too thick," she says. "Try to make it into a ball shape."

I act on her advice, sticking my hands in the gritty, moist dough in order to knead it out. Eventually, I achieve the desired rounded appearance. The texture of the dough clod is somewhat unpleasant, but that's where the rolling pin comes in.

Mom hands it to me. "Roll the dough as thin and in as much of a circle as you can. But don't roll it too thin, or it might tear," she says.

Up for the task, I set the dough on some flour-sprinkled paper towels, take the two handles of the rolling pin, and start working my way in. At first, the dough



tries to wrap itself around the pin, but, soon enough, it smooths out. Over and over again, I roll until the dough starts to resemble a big, gooey pancake. At one point, however, I see that I've stretched the dough too thin because it has ripped near one of the edges.

"Uh-oh," I say in dismay, frowning down at my blunder.

"Oh, that's all right," Mom says quickly, swooping in to fix it. She then easily patches it up with another piece of dough. "There ya go."

"Thanks," I say, rolling the pin over the added dough to blend it with the rest.

It had been hard to bid my siblings goodbye when they started leaving the house one by one. My five older sisters and one of my older brothers eventually found spouses and moved into homes of their own. Two of my other brothers also moved out after buying their own houses. At first, I was worried that I wouldn't get to see them very much anymore. We had been so close, and now they had all moved so far...well, at least to the other side of town. Some of them much farther than that, though. That's where Mom came to the rescue with her brilliant idea—Sunday lunches after church. Almost all of our immediate family attends the same church. After the morning services, it has become customary for everyone to gather at our house and share a meal prepared by Mom. Typical dishes include spaghetti, hamburgers, hotdogs, chicken, and tacos. My personal favorite is the turkey she makes around holidays. I also can't forget her delicious desserts.

My mother usually rises before the crack of dawn on Sunday mornings in order to set the food in readiness. Somehow, she manages to prepare food for over twenty people and clean up the whole house with some help from us and Dad. She is fifty-nine years old, but she seems to have just as much energy as I do. Mom also has an uncanny ability to look camera-ready within a matter of minutes, dark hair perfectly coiffed over her shoulders and natural-looking makeup accenting her full face and keen brown eyes—all of this before she leaves the house for the Sunday morning service. Then, it's back home in order to receive all of her guests and prep the food to be served. She never goes first through the food line. In fact, Mom is always helping to feed one of her five grandkids before she even thinks about getting anything for herself.

These Sunday afternoons have been wonderful for our household. Sitting at the table only to look up and find myself surrounded by my brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, sister-in-law, nieces, and nephews is a true joy. At the center of it all, I see Mom presiding with the calm poise and dignified air of a queen. She smiles as she sits next to Dad, beams as she listens to a story from one of her daughters, and laughs as she feeds her grandson macaroni noodles that he keeps dropping "on accident." There is no question in my mind that the effort she puts into Sunday afternoons—the cooking, the cleaning, the entertaining—are part of the paste that holds my family together. My mom certainly enjoys these lunches, but she also sees them as part of her ministry. It's just one of the

many ways she reaches out to her kids. She knows that there will have to be times that we're apart, but she always makes sure our family isn't stretched too thin.

When the dough for the pie crust is the right size and consistency, it's time to flip it over the pie pan. Once the dough coat is fitting snugly over the white ceramic dish, my mother helps me press it into place and trim the excess from the edges.

"Another thing I do is go all around the edges, take a piece of dough, and jam it between my fingers," says Mom, demonstrating the procedure by pinching a small area and leaving a decorative triangular shape behind.

"Oh, what does that do?" I ask.

"It just makes it a little more special."

My mother never overlooks the details. Over forty years of marriage and almost as many of motherhood, she has learned all the finer points of family living. She's passed some of that knowledge down to me: things like making sure you take the price tag off a gift before you give it to someone, checking an egg carton for broken eggs before you buy it, or poking holes in a pie crust so that it won't bubble up. She has also mastered the art of little, random acts of kindness over the years. Many days I have come home from school to find a package of three chocolate chip cookies sitting on my bed. I know instantly Mom put them there. It may seem like a small thing, but it always brightens my day. Besides just the cookies, the knowledge that there is someone who cares enough to surprise me with something I enjoy is very comforting. These tidbits of wisdom and kindness are like the pecans sprinkled on top of the pie.

When the whole outer ring of the crust has been garnished, the pie pan goes into the oven at 350 degrees. Then, it is time to wait.

My mom has a lot of experience with waiting. Pain, silence, and the tears of her children have helped teach my mother to be strong. One of her favorite sayings is "In all things, give thanks." She explains, "I remind myself of that a lot when things are hard. There've been a lot of hard times, but a lot of wonderful times. You have to have the bad times to appreciate the good times, I think." She has constantly relied on her Christian faith to help her through all of those hard, messy, painful seasons that motherhood can bring.

Not only has my mother's faith helped her weather the hard times, but it has also helped her rejoice in the good times. She cites the greatest joy of motherhood as seeing her children trust in the Lord and walk by faith. "There is nothing a parent can do better than living a life that shows their children Christ," my mom declared. And my mom has certainly modeled this to me. Since my earliest days, I've known that she is someone I can go to with problems concerning



deeper, spiritual issues of life. I've benefitted so much from her wisdom and learned so much through her example. I can't deny that I've tried to imitate her in a number of ways. One of the highest compliments I've received on my appearance is being told that I look "just like my mother." I do resemble my mother. Same facial features and stature, calm demeanor, and keen brown eyes. I believe it would be just as good to look like her on the inside, too; when I look at my mother's life, I see something that I dream of having. Her faith, her influence, the way her entire family gathers around her on Sunday afternoons--all of it is inspiring to me. Someday, I want my children and their children to be sitting around my kitchen table smiling, laughing, and sharing stories with me as I sit next to my husband. Maybe they'll even be enjoying one of my pies from my mother's famous recipe.

My mom's description of her own parenting style is simple yet profound. While dwelling on this theme, she said, "I think that parents need to love their children just the way they are, not make them into something that they're not. If you love your children truly in a spiritual way, you'll be happy with them the way they are." She continues, "Maybe things won't turn out exactly the way you want them to, but that doesn't mean you stop trying or loving. You just have to see beyond today. You just have to keep praying they'll become the person the Lord wants them to become. Sometimes it doesn't happen overnight. Sometimes it doesn't happen for years..."

After ten minutes, the timer on the oven makes a beeping sound. I hurriedly sweep over to retrieve the pie pan. I set it down on top of the stove, where the ceramic dish makes a scraping sound against the rungs of the burners. The pie crust now appears more brown and stiff and has the pleasant aroma of homemade dough. After letting it cool for a while, Mom helps me put in the filling, which is a caramel brown color with a sweet taste. The finishing touch is to sprinkle pecans on top. The oval-shaped nuts cover the top of the gelatinous filling in a thick layer. Then the pie goes back into the oven so the filling can bake. Once everything is finished, Mom and I gaze down at the work of art.

"Looks good," says my mother. "You did a good job on it."

I beam. "Thanks." Though she probably has done most of the work, I feel quite pleased with myself.

Stepping into my mother's shoes for a moment and recreating her specialty has been illuminating. But have I found out the secret behind Mom's famous pie crust? There doesn't seem to be one. It is just Mom doing what she always does.

Everybody enjoys my pecan pie at the church lunch. At least, I assume they do because it all gets eaten. Thankfully, I manage to get a piece before it's too late. Despite my doubts about pecan pie, I find that I like it a lot. It is sweet, crunchy, and nutty all at once. My favorite part has to be the crust, though. It makes me happy to view the part of the pie I have worked the hardest on, right down to the decorative edges at the end of my slice. My family, who is sitting around the table with me, compliments me on my work.

Since then, I've learned something about pie crusts. Though they're the part of the pie that often gets overlooked, a lot goes into them. Sure, the filling seems to be the real centerpiece with its colorfulness and decoration; it's the part that's on display and reflects what type of pie it is. It can be composed of a variety of things: fruit, custard, pudding, meat, meringue, toppings. There are certainly a lot of things that go into the filling, and it is important that these ingredients blend well. The crust, though, is the shell; it's what holds everything together. Without it, everything would spill out and become disorganized. It provides the structure of the pie, the backbone. Without the crust supporting it, the filling wouldn't be able to stand up on its own. It needs the crust. The crust, in turn, warmly embraces the filling to help it reach its potential.

I wrote down the recipe for Mom's famous pie crust, and I keep it safely tucked away. It's already come in handy on more than one occasion. I know that it will continue to do so in the future, and I plan on using it often. It will be great to give those who come after me a taste of my mother's specialty. That way we will never forget what all goes into her famous pie crust, and I will never forget her lasting influence.



How I Became a Christian

by James Valvis

They visited the barracks on weekends,
usually Saturdays, an hour before
my roommate and I hit the NCO club.
They tried to save my fallen soul.
A father and son, devout evangelicals.
Fun to argue with. I schooled both
on Nietzsche and Schopenhauer,
gave lessons on Voltaire's *Candide*.
I used some lines from Anatole France, too.
Nothing thrilled me more than taunting
their ignorance, those holy rollers,
Jesus freaks with nothing better to do
than waste my time with fairy stories.
What fools they were, I told them
and laughed, hung raunchy posters
of naked women for their weekly visits
and took them down for inspections.
Then the day came they no longer came.
They still worked the barracks, other rooms.

One day, I bumped into them in the hall
and asked why they stopped coming.
I loved setting them straight, I said.
The father told me he knew a lost cause
when he saw one and something else
about shaking the dust off his feet.
I laughed. I told him if he had filthy feet,
he should try a shower and went on
my merry way to a discharge,
unemployment, homelessness,
until, with no one to argue with,
and no one to laugh at but myself,
and God alone would have me
for a friend, the only fool
who could convert me finally did.



Too Many Words

by Lee Zumpe

a silent mouth moving
beneath a crush of empty dialogue—
hesitant yet persistent

the spark of a soft voice
beneath a flood of harsh criticism—
altered frequencies

always too many words surfacing
above the static buzz of living
drowning out important whispers

Palms

by Richard Donnelly

tall
dusty dropping
fronds no
shade any-
where
they're only
good to look at



Free Enterprise

by Frank De Canio

Some politicians opt to plant the seed
of lenience to cultivate its soil.
As such, constituents are fit to breed
the fruits engendered by another's toil.
Nor do they have to share the husbandry.
Indeed. How often do they spare each weed,
surrounding rosebud, bush and maple tree,
if only for promoting rampant greed
against the prudent farmer's hacking scythe.
What matter if it generates a blight.
They much prefer the forlorn farmer writhe
with grief at harvests lost than that he slight
ambitions that they'd shrewdly bring to fruit.
And should he balk, he's cut off at the root.

Sunset at Point Reyes

by George Young

What Darwin taught us—the bloody strife
of saber-tooth against bear,

giant lizard done in by egg-stealing mammal,
mammoth frozen in the ice,

crafty Cro-Magnon killing off Neanderthal—
is true, yes, but there is something else

in nature to decipher as we stand together
on this high cliff, love, looking out

at the orange message above the sea.
Aboard a crimson cloud-ship sailing across

the sky, is that a star or a signal flare?
And below, dark waves turn like the pages

of a book for us to read as raucous
California gulls write wild words in the air.

Hello, Reptile

by Parker Long

He is my Abyss,
and I have stared
into His ugly mustard eyes.
Now He stares back and hisses a laugh

If given half a chance,
Reptile would devour the world
To satiate His hunger
But it wouldn't be enough

All the girls in all the dive bars
Do nothing to fill him.
Pleasure is prioritized
Because love takes time.

A co-worker curses me
Reptile hocks poison in his ears
Spurring me to fight
Craving a kill

He shows His works
Not accepting critique
Explaining His genius
And their idiocy

A pretty girl walks by
With a pretty boy
Reptile bares his teeth,
At them, but at us.

To deny Him is masochistic joy.
I don't often have the will
or the morality
or the give-a-damn.

Hello, Reptile.

Inflammatory Verse

by Frank De Canio

Why would you smuggle in a renegade
idea inside the outskirts of the mind?
Although a foursquare sonnet's to be made,
it nonetheless will put you in a bind.
For otherwise you'd have to let him in
and brook the consequences of the law,
or keep him out with his subversive grin
revealing his incendiary flaw.
But now your verbal finery conceals
his mischievous intent behind a set
of quatrains and a couplet. This appeals
to sensibilities that will abet
the fugitive to snuggle in your breast,
while his unwitting host will scarcely rest.

The Art Teacher: A Sonnet Crown

by Terri Brown-Davidson

1.

The teacher mocks his computer. Shut off,
Shirt rumpled, hair spiked like a hedgehog's,
He fiddles in corners by art cabinets
Layered with shadows whose dark tones
He's mastered. An audit, an adjunct, an academic
Peon, I've enrolled to study ephemeral brightnesses,
Discover why shadows are colored—never black—
Fragile as butterfly wings. I'm avid to learn
About foreshortening, about the way a pencil
Tracing contours can make a body rise singing,
My left hand smearing graphite, sketching a figure.
In secret until my classmates and I—pseudo rapturous—
Draw cones and cubes and cylinders,
Twenty dead objects heaped glaring, unshadowed.

2.

Twenty dead objects heaped glaring, unshadowed
Make me spill coffee. A girl straddling her art horse
Peers at the mess, mouth tightening, lipstick chewed.
No laughing or the teacher's eyes, blue as lightning bolts,
Will shift and kill want in its wake. This teacher,
Tall, gangly, starved as a scarecrow, lopes by
With his shirt untucked, scrutinizes our magnum opi.
In art class or sonnets, there's always a turn; the sonnet shift,
The "volta," refutes an argument via a rafter
Of launched examples. If the sonnet is wrenched,
The "examples" waft clumsily as turkeys escaping a hatchet.
The art class's turn is more subtle than a sonnet's:
The teacher stares; the pencils stutter.

3.

The teacher stares; the pencils stutter.
My master an artist among cockroaches.
In Drawing I we're more mongrel than pestilence,
A cowardice of curs, leaping and licking
Our chops, drooling for each praise scrap
The Art Teacher bestows. Only one student's blessed,
A shy Hispanic woman, greasy black bangs
Slicked down with a comb. Her contour drawings—
Squares, rectangles, spoons and knives, chipped coffee
Mugs—the teacher pronounces superb. Effervescent!
A middle aged parvenue, I try to squelch
My jealousy when he praises her, .
A wind-tunnel of loss.

4.

A wind-tunnel of loss.
Here the students are like refugees
Who haunt freeway offramps, ragged-shoed, rambling,
Grabbing wadded bills, pacing between cars.
Who, like the Art Teacher, wax sullen then explode.
We're all sinners except Ladette, her shy,
Round face gleaming then vanishing.
I join her at lunch, her deft pencil stilled.
Ham sandwiches, Cokes. The sun burns our
Minds. I rise, meander dead-footed inside
The trailer. Ladette watches the Art
Teacher; the computer screen glows. Like me,
She wants only to draw, to tumble into
An Art Hole. Never climb out.

5.

I tumble into an Art Hole. Never climb out.
And here—in the classroom—art holes abound;
Tripping, stumbling, we skirt each crumbled mouth,
Each black abyss, never fall far though
Our teacher's apopleptic because we can't draw
Straight lines, render acute angles, twenty objects aligned.
The Golden Mean represents the teacher's mind:
He gazes, scrutinizing, at our abject faces.
Measuring the distance between our eyes, between
Our cheeks and mouths. Staring into his rage-
Reddened eyes, I'm convinced he can measure
The depth of each nasal-labial fold
I can't conceal with makeup. It's unsettling,
How accurate he is. How heartless. How cold.

6.

How accurate he is. How heartless, how cold.
He meanders among our horses like a nobleman
Surveying his fiefdom. If we quiver, cower,
Who's to say we don't sneak off in secret, keep drawing
At our homes? There, I suspect, the magic buoys us.
There we're as lovely as Ladette the Sinless.
Our pencils fly across reams of shining paper.
We draw ourselves rightside up, upside down,
We render our little stick figures
With a breathlessness that belies true talent.
The Art Teacher has flayed us raw,
Left us unpulchritudinous. But I want
What I've abandoned. At home, I hide in the closet,
Give my warped paper everything I've repressed.

7.

My warped paper reveals everything I've repressed.
By Week Seven, I sit in the class alone. The other students
Have fled. They don't want this sad class marring
Their weekend dreams. They want to sleep
Twitching beneath blankets.
The Art Teacher still shouting at the ghosts
Of his missing students. I sit on my horse, study him.
Ladette the Sinless has abandoned her crown,
Left her pencil stubs. I stare into The Art Teacher's eyes
As he packs his Land's End bag, his beloved cell phone.
He glances at me and shrugs. "Want to stay?"
He asks; I shake my head no. I leave fast
Because I don't want this darkened room
Shining with melancholy, seeded with loss.
The teacher mocks his computer. Shut off.

Fullerton Shopper

by Richard Donnelly

leaving the newspaper with the
Help Wanted ads on the
counter he finished his coffee
and walked into
the L.A. sunshine
that's how sure he was of
of his own belief and how wrong
he could be

Sinister

by Richard Luftig

I got tired of people asking me why I moved from Southern California where the sun always shines to Cincinnati where it's cloudy 284 days per year. After a few months of trying to explain, I'd just answer, "Because Cleveland was closed." Then, while they struggled to get their head around that, I'd just walk away.

But, I guess a more serious answer is required. It's just that it's so involved. My ten-year marriage tanked when my wife left me for another woman. She got half of everything as community property, then had the balls—every pun intended—to sue me, and won alimony. After that, I fell into a deep depression, had the obligatory bouts with alcohol, and lost two jobs in three years.

But that's just the prelude. How I ended up in Cincinnati is even more bizarre. It all came down to a dart. And even that had complications.

I decided that if I had any chance of getting my life back I needed to hit the rewind button. And that included moving to a new place where no one knew me or my past. From there, it was an easy step to ruling out California. I needed a place where I had no ties, where I wouldn't come face-to-face with bad memories at every street corner.

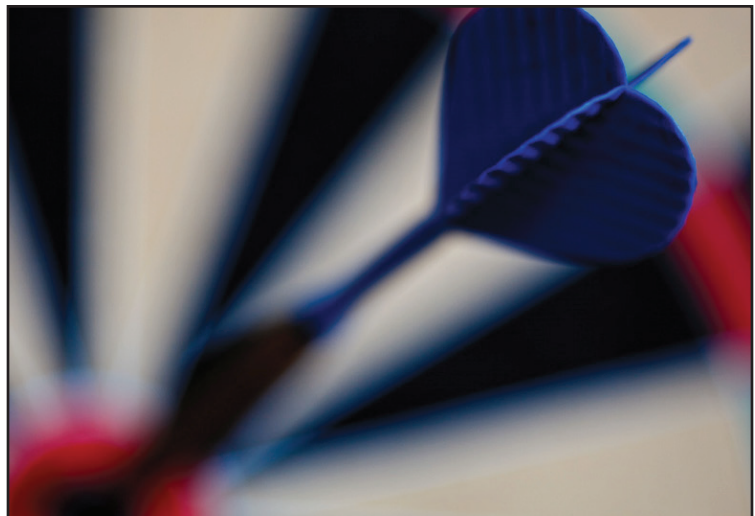
For the same reason, I ruled out the Southwest as well as Oregon and Washington. I considered moving to Saskatchewan but thought that learning Canadian might prove too difficult.

That left every place east of the Mississippi. So, I decided to blindfold myself in order to leave everything to chance and throw a dart at the eastern states. Wherever it struck was where I'd move.

Except, I'm left-handed.

If that seems like a non-sequitur, consider the map of the United States. On the left, near my throwing hand, was every western state that I vowed

to avoid. Considering that I had been the wildest left-handed pitcher in the history of Little League, I wasn't prepared to blindfold myself and throw a dart



across my body at the right side of the country. With my luck, I'd aim for New Hampshire and stick myself in the thigh.

The solution took a while, but it was really pretty simple: throw right-handed.

But, that was easier said than done. My first dart landed below the map and presumably would have hit Guatemala. My second landed in the Atlantic Ocean. The third dart did the trick. I hit Cincinnati spot-on.

You've probably heard about not making a wish because you might get what you wished for. That was the case with me and Cincinnati. I wanted a place where nobody knew or cared about my history. But, after a year in town, I was still invisible.

I found a place to live right away. Even though I was taken to the cleaners by my ex, I was able to scrape enough to get a one-bedroom apartment in Coryville on the west side of the city for seven hundred a month. That might sound like a lot, but compared to Los Angeles prices, the place was a steal.

And it was quiet—in fact, too quiet. Even after three months, I had talked to my landlord exactly once and still hadn't met my neighbors. I had heard that Midwesterners kept to themselves, but this was ridiculous. If I died in my apartment," no one would notice until I gave off a stink. By six months, I was seriously considering putting a sign on my door that said "Solicitors Welcome."

Finding a job wasn't hard. I majored in accounting in college. If jobs for CPA's were tough to find in Southern California, they were easy in Cincinnati. I had three job offers within a week. The only thing I could figure was that everybody in southwestern Ohio had tax issues.

Meeting women, however, was a problem. Part of it was my fault. I'm thirty-seven—that number represents both my age and waist size—and I pretty much look how you'd expect an accountant to appear: glasses that my ex-wife said made me look like an owl, brown hair graying at the temples, and height that was never going to scare anybody in the NBA. Plus, I was the only person from southern California not sporting a tan. Folks in my family had a tendency toward skin cancer, so I pointedly stayed out of the sun. Maybe that's why I found myself at home in the constant gray of Ohio.

Cincinnati is not exactly the singles capitol of the country. I'm not big on exercise: sit-ups, push-ups, any exercise with the word *up* defies the law of gravity, and I always obey the law. So, gyms were out. Churches were also out. The last time I went to confession was when I was in the sixth grade, and the priest told me I had a dirty mind.

That left bars. Maybe I just picked the wrong places, but it seemed like at every tavern I went to, the best-looking women had two missing teeth and three tattoos.

So, after three months, I was lonely. At six months, desperate. After a year of

my first Midwest winter alone, I was babbling in Icelandic.

Then, I read a newspaper story about a TGIF singles hookup at an upscale hotel along the downtown Riverfront District. I was so desperate that I decided to attend.

Big mistake. First, my attire. Remember, I'm from California. We wear jeans and polo shirts to the Grand Opera. But, every guy at the bar wore a suit and tie. Everyone was twenty-something, beautiful, with straight white teeth, and blond hair.

It was apparent—at least to me—that my open buttoned shirt, casual khakis, and receding hairline were not going to be big hits among the beautiful people of Cincinnati, all vying for hook-ups, nightcaps, and perhaps one-night stands.

I didn't even go inside.

What to do now? The thought of going back to my apartment and eating last night's pizza was unbearable. So was the alternative of wandering around the Riverfront alone.

Then I saw it. A sign in the hotel lobby: "Sinister Society of Cincinnati. See If You Qualify!" Under the sign, a woman sat on a metal folding chair at a small desk. There was a second, empty chair next to her. She wasn't knockout gorgeous, not in the way that the beautiful singles group I had just left were, but she was pretty with shoulder-length brown hair and light, almost transparent eyes, which were unfortunately hidden behind large glasses. The lower half of her body was hidden behind the desk so I couldn't see her legs, but she looked trim: not an hour-glass figure but still shapely. And, she looked a lot more natural and unmade-up than the women in the group I had just left.

I walked up to her desk. She was wearing a handwritten name tag that said "Sarah," a nice old-fashioned name, I thought, that seemed to fit her exactly. Above her name was a printed message: "Don't be shy. Go ahead, ask."

"Hello," I said. "My name's Bill Nelson."

"Glad to know you Bill," she said in a friendly voice. "How can I help you?"

"I'll bite," I said. "What's with the 'Sinister' name? You a bunch of Mafia members?"

She gave me a smile that seemed to contradict the Society's dangerous connotation. "Can't tell you," she said. "At least not now. If I told you, I'd have to kill you."

The thought crossed my mind that I was dealing with a nut case. But, she seemed so benign. And pretty. Besides, I assumed not just any whacko off the street could set up an information table in a five-star hotel downtown.

I shook my head. "So, let me get this straight. This is an information table, and you're wearing a name tag that says 'ask me,' but when I do, you can't answer me."

"Kind of. I can answer only if you qualify."

"Now I have to qualify," I said. "Jesus, your club sounds more secretive than the Masons. At least tell me this: are the members of this club witches or devil worshipers? I can find those easily enough on my own."

She laughed, a sexy kind of laugh that I liked. "Nothing as dark as that. Still, like they say in the credit card advertisement, membership has its privileges. You qualify, you get in. You get in, I explain. You game?"

What the hell, I thought. This was the most conversation I'd had with a good-looking female in six months. What did I have to lose? If I didn't qualify, I could go home. If I did qualify, and didn't like it, I could walk away. Besides, I wanted to get to know her better.

"What do I have to do?"

She reached for a copy of *Moby Dick*, opened the thick novel to page 518 then scanned the text for a few seconds. She pointed to a paragraph and gave me a blank piece of paper and a pen.

"Sit down and copy this."

Now, I knew she was nuts, but I sat down and began to copy the passage. Out of my peripheral vision, I could see her watching me intently.

It took me maybe two minutes to finish. "Done," I said and pushed the paper back to her. "Now what?"

She took out a magnifying glass. "Now, we score it." She carefully read what I had written, studying each of my written words.

Had I fallen in with a group of evil penmanship teachers? I was tempted to look around for the hidden camera telling me that this was all a joke for some comedy show, but I held off. Besides, there was a vague feeling gnawing at me that I couldn't quite define.

Then, it hit me. I wanted to pass the test.

She put a big red check mark on the top of the paper. "Okay, you passed part one."

"Part one? What is this, the SAT exam?"

She smiled. "Hey, you should feel proud. Only about ten percent of applicants pass round one. There are two parts. Pass the second, and you're in."

"And that would be...?"

"Deduce the meaning of part one."

I shook my head. "This is crazy. You guys are tougher than the CIA. Why would I spend my time trying to figure out part two?"

"Because you don't have better things to do with your time."

Now, I was getting a bit angry. "And you know this how?"

"By the fact that I saw you checking out the Friday night singles meet-up across the way. That you didn't go in tells me three things."

"Which are?" I asked.

"Elementary, my dear Watson. First, that you are single. Or you're cheating on your wife, but you don't seem the type. Second, you're shy and not very self-confident."

"And the third?"

"That you don't have much of a social life. None of these are pre-requisites for joining the Sinister Society, but they indicate that you might enjoy membership."

I shrugged. "Why not. But I still think you're out on a day pass from the mental hospital. I'll probably hear about your capture tomorrow on the morning news."

She laughed again. "If that's the case, then both of us had a hell of a night." She reached for a scrap of paper. "Here's my name and number. You figure out part two, and then we'll see."

I took her number and carefully placed it in my wallet. I knew this was insane, but I really wanted to solve the puzzle and qualify for membership. Actually, I didn't really give a damn about the club. I just wanted to see her again.

The bad news was that two weeks later I still wasn't any closer to solving the puzzle. The good news was that at least I had something to do with my free time.

I'd gone over our conversation dozens of times but had gotten nowhere. I checked out *Moby Dick* from the library and found the page that Sarah had me copy. That didn't solve anything.

In desperation, I read the book cover to cover. Then, I read all of the *Cliffs Notes* I could find. I tried to figure out what was sinister in the book. Perhaps Captain Ahab. Maybe the Great White Whale. But even if this were true, it still didn't give me any clues as to what I had to do to qualify for membership in the society.

I took Sarah's phone number out of my wallet at least twenty times. I wanted to call her. But, what would I say: that I was too stupid to solve the problem? That she should let me have membership anyway? If my goal was to impress her, that hardly sounded like a good plan.

It was a Friday night like most other Fridays, which meant I was going to be eating alone. My choices were also the usual: Chinese or Italian take-out while watching whatever banal reality show the networks were running.

For the record, I chose Chinese: General Tso's Chicken. I've often thought about who General Tso was and what he did to have a famous dish named after him, but I had about as much luck with that as solving the mystery of the Sinister Society.

I went to the restaurant to claim my order. The bill, with soup and egg roll, came to \$11.86. I hadn't gone to the ATM, so I was little short on cash. No problem.

I handed the cashier my Visa card, filled in \$2.50 for a tip and signed. Then, I stared at the receipt.

"Son of a bitch," I said, loudly enough for the people at the first three tables to hear.

I had left my cellphone at home. You know those radar signs the police put on surface streets, the ones that flash how fast you're going over the speed limit? Mine clocked me going sixty in a thirty-five. That's how much of a hurry I was in I was in to get back.

I opened the door of my apartment, threw the food cartons onto the kitchen table, and fished my cellphone out of my other pants. I punched in Sarah's number and texted the message: "*Moby Dick* my ass."

Her reply was almost instantaneous. "Who's this?"

Damn, I thought. Her caller ID wouldn't work for my cellphone. She probably thought I was a whacko stalker.

"This is Bill Nelson. I hope you remember me. We met a few weeks back at the Hyatt. You were manning the Sinister Society membership desk."

Again a quick reply. "Yes, I remember you. Have you solved part two of the test?"

"Absolutely."

"So, what is it?"

I paused and took a deep breath. What I was about to do was as far from my usual self as Los Angeles was from Cincinnati. With my luck, she'd disconnect, and I'd never hear from her again. Still, no risk, no reward.

I punched in the letters. "Uh-uh. You want to know if I've solved the puzzle, then have dinner with me?"

My screen remained blank. Thirty seconds, one minute. I had blown it for sure.

"Okay. Tomorrow night. But I pick the place. Do you know Marcello's in Mt. Washington?" I knew it. A nice family-owned restaurant at the east end of the city. Good food, moderate prices. Very public. A good place, especially for a woman who didn't know if her date was an axe murderer.

"Yeah, I know where it is."

This time her response was quick. "Make reservations for seven. But you better have the right answer!"

Seven o'clock couldn't come fast enough. I worried about what to wear, whether to order for the both of us, and what kind of wine she might like. I kept playing over the solution in my mind, alternately doubting myself and feeling confident



that I had found the right answer.

I arrived at Marcello's at six-thirty and took a chair facing the door. I had decided on a sport jacket, shirt, and tie. Of course, this was the wrong choice. Every guy in the place was wearing jeans and an open-neck shirt. Some were wearing shorts and sneakers. I determined to write the Chamber of Commerce suggesting that a pamphlet on correct social attire be issued to all out-of-state residents.

She arrived thirty minutes late. That would have been fine any other time, but with each passing minute I became more convinced that she was standing me up. When she entered the restaurant, she looked so pretty in her print dress that I instantly forgave her.

I didn't know if I should stand when she came to my table. I'd lost all confidence in knowing the Cincinnati Rules of Etiquette. But, I figured that being overly polite held less risk of being rude, so I stood.

She offered me her hand. It was warm and firm. A nice hand. I took it and tried not to be too affectionate in my grasp. No sense scaring her off even before dinner began.

To my surprise she gave me a kiss on the cheek before sitting down. It had been a long time since any woman had performed even this minor gesture, and it felt good.

The waiter came over with the bottle. "I took the liberty of ordering wine," I said. "I hope you like red."

"Oh, a man who takes charge." She swirled her glass and smelled the bouquet. I panicked. I hadn't been expecting a wine connoisseur.

She took a sip. "Wonderful," she said. "Thursday was a good year."

I must have had *panic* written on my face because she laughed. "I was only kidding. It's really quite good."

She ordered spaghetti and meatballs, my personal favorite. I ordered the same. We enjoyed our wine in silence for a few moments.

She put down her glass. "Okay," she said. "Put up or shut up time. What qualifies you for membership in the Sinister Society?"

I prayed one last time that I was right. "Amazingly simple," I said. "I'm left-handed."

"And *Moby Dick*?"

"A ruse, a red herring. You just needed to see if I wrote with my left hand. You could have given me the encyclopedia, and the result would have been the same."

She smiled. "Good for you. You're the first guy I ever had who got both parts right."

Our salads came, and I happily dug into mine. "So, what exactly is this Society? What do I win, and I hope it's not a trip to Buffalo. Winters are worse there than here."

"Let's save that until after our entrées arrive." She tore off a piece of bread. "Let me ask you: why do you think it's called the Sinister Society?"

I put down my fork. "You mean there's a part three to all of this?"

She laughed, "No, you passed. Consider it extra credit."

I thought but came up blank. "I don't have a clue."

"Did you take Latin in school?"

"No, German. Why?"

"I did. Left in Latin is *Sinestra*. Sinister. In the middle ages it was believed that people who were left-handed were the devil incarnate. Some were even put to death."

I shook my head. "I never knew that. So, is the group named because everybody is left-handed or because you're Satan worshippers?"

"Sorry. That is something that you're going to have to learn for yourself."



We sipped our wine. "You a gambling man?"

I was surprised. "I've been known to be. Why?"

"I'll bet you a second bottle of wine that you can't answer me a left-handed trivia question."

To tell you the truth, I didn't care if I won or lost. A second bottle would give me more time to spend with her. "Okay, I'm in."

"Four presidents since 1950 as well as one of the most famous child actors currently living in America and his mother are all left-handed. Who are they?"

I thought about it for thirty seconds but came up blank. "Jesus, who would know that? You win. Who are they?"

She giggled. "Boy, are you dumb. Ford, Bush the Senior, Clinton, and Obama."

"And the kid?"

"Bart and Marge Simpson."

"Hey, you cheated," I said. "They're cartoons."

She emptied her glass. "Too bad. Pay up fool."

Our dinners arrived. I watched Sarah begin on hers. Something bothered me as she ate but I could quite put a finger on it. Then it hit me. She was eating with her right hand.

"Are you ambidextrous?" I asked.

She laughed. "Yeah, I've always been a hard worker."

"Don't bullshit a bullshitter," I said. "Are you right-handed?"

She nodded. "Guilty as charged."

Now I was totally confused. "So how did you get into the Sinister Society?"

"I'm the founder. I can do anything I choose"

"I don't understand," I said. "You mean you're the president of the local chapter?"

"No, I mean I created it out of thin air. It doesn't actually exist."

"Excuse me?"

She looked into my eyes. "Boy, you really are slow. There is no such thing as the Sinister Society. I made the whole thing up."

I thought she might be teasing me, seeing if I was even more gullible than I appeared. But she appeared to be dead serious.

"Why in the world would you make up something like that?"

"To meet interesting guys," she said.

"Seems like a hell of a lot of trouble just to meet a man. What about the traditional ways? Too mundane for you?"

My questions seemed to anger her. "Oh, you mean like bars, gyms and online dating? Tell me, how's that been working for you?"

"Not so well," I admitted.

"Well, trust me, it's even worse for a woman. You'd be surprised at the kooks crawling out of the woodwork."

"And creating the Sinister Society works better?"

"Sure," she said. "I get to screen who I want to meet, maybe take it to the next level, all the while controlling the interview process because the poor guy thinks he's applying for membership in a club while I'm sizing him up. It's the perfect cover. If I don't like him I shoot him down for my make-believe membership on the spot. If he seems interesting, and if he solves the riddle, I might take it further. No matter what, I'm the one in control."

I had to admit, it was a pretty good plan. But one thing still confused me. “Ok, suppose I grant you that your crazy game made sense. But that doesn’t explain the left-handed angle. What’s with that?”

She sat silent, studying the wine at the bottom of her glass. “I walked out on my husband the day he broke my jaw.”

My mouth opened in surprise. “Jesus, that’s terrible. I’m so sorry. But what does that have to do with the whole left-handed business?”

“It has everything to do with it,” she said. “He was a bully and had a temper. I knew he was capable of violence. When he raised his hands, I was looking at his right. That’s the one I was worried about. I forgot that he was left-handed and that was the one he hit me with.

“Right then and there I swore that if I ever went with another guy, he’d have to be totally left-handed. That way if he was a son-of-a-bitch I’d never be sucker-punched again.”

I guess I shouldn’t have laughed. I mean, domestic violence is a terrible thing. But, I had to admit her prerequisite for future boyfriends was ingenious.

She smiled. “It’s okay to laugh. I have to admit my whole plan has been pretty scatterbrained,”

“No,” I said. “It’s ingenious. I mean, you’re nuts for coming up with it, but as they say, whatever works.”

The waiter came over and took our dessert order. I asked for another bottle of wine. “All right,” Sarah said. “Now you know everything about me. But I know nothing about you except that you’re left-handed, good with puzzles, and like to bet. Let’s start easy. Where are you from?”

“California,” I said, and held my breath.

“Really? How the hell did you end up settling in Cincinnati?”

I began by explaining how Cleveland had been closed.



The Night We Met

by Lee Zumpe

I puffed up my chest with a huff of air
as the door to her apartment opened

and I urged the corners of my to
stay propped up like christmas lights

drooping lazily in mid-january; I kept
my baggage tucked neatly in the trunk

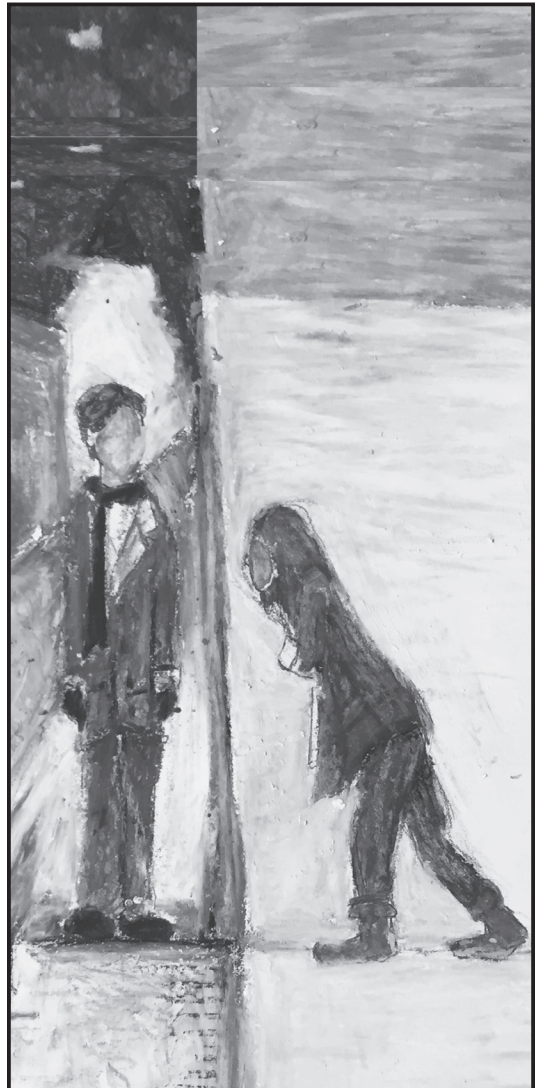
and avoided asking her for a synopsis.
too early to get mired in yesterday.

we relaxed and shrugged off our neuroses
and spent the better part of the evening

painting portraits and opening windows.
years later, I wish I had recognized her,

wish I had paid more attention.
we so rarely pay enough attention.

I'm still holding my breath.



Contributors

Kevin Acers, to the extent that he is known, is known as a cat person. A clinical social worker by trade, he lives in Oklahoma City with his wife, their cat, and a tubercular houseplant named Fronds Kafka. Acers has published three collections including *Time Machine: Prose Poems & Vignettes*, *Dead Mouse Poems*, and *The Murder of Crows and Other Quirky Poems* (finalist for the Oklahoma Book Award). His writings have appeared in a number of literary journals and other publications. His fourth book of poetry, *I Am Not a Dog*, is a work in progress.

Guy R. Beining's work has recently appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Fiction International*, *Cairn*, *SKidROw PeNtHouSe*, *The Bitter Oleander*, and *Creosote*. This year, *Placing Stones in the Right Spots* will be out via Marimbo Press, and Unarmed will print *Heisting Hesse 1-18*.

Mark Belair's poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Alabama Literary Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Poetry East*, and *The South Carolina Review*. His books include the collection *While We're Waiting* (Aldrich Press, 2013) and two chapbook collections: *Night Watch* (Finishing Line Press, 2013) and *Walk with Me* (Parallel Press of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, 2012). A new collection, *Breathing Room*, is to be published by Aldrich Press this year.

Kwyn Bollinger is currently a senior at Southwestern Oklahoma State University studying to become an English education major. Reading and writing are two of her favorite hobbies, and her dream is to become a teacher and author. She has a big family with a deep appreciation for faith and fun. Her family inspires her to see the metaphors in everyday life and capture them in her writing.

Gregory Brown spent years as a literary editor and award-winning newswriter at Oral Roberts University before graduating in 2015. His work has appeared in literary journals both at home and abroad, including *Promethia Literary Magazine*, *Peeking Cat Poetry*, *Midnight Circus*, and others. He lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he works as a digital content producer for a local news station.

Terri Brown-Davidson's work has appeared in *North American Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Triquarterly*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The South Dakota Review*, and elsewhere. She has received the AWP Intro Award and a Yaddo fellowship, among other honors.

Michael Catherwood has recent work in *Bluestem* and *The Minnesota Review*. He's been an Associate Editor at *Plainsongs* since 1995, where he also writes essays. His first book is *Dare* from The Backwaters Press. His second book, *If You Turned Around Quickly*, is from Main Street Rag. His third book, *Projector*, is forthcoming from Stephen F. Austin University Press. He is the editor at The Backwaters Press.

Robert Cooperman's latest collection is *Just Drive* (Brick Road Poetry Press). Forthcoming from FutureCycle Press is *Draft Board Blues*. Cooperman is a past contributor to *Westview* and has had work in *The Sewanee Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and elsewhere.

Born and bred in New Jersey, **Frank De Canio Jr.** works in New York. He loves music from Bach to Dory Previn and from Amy Beach to Amy Winehouse. Shakespeare is his idol, writing his hobby. He monitors a café philo workshop in lower Manhattan on alternate Thursdays.

Richard Donnelly lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a cold northern prairie town where everyone huddles in crumbling steam-heated cafés drinking wine and writing poetry. What else is there to do? His first book, *The Melancholy MBA*, is issued by Brick Road Poetry Press of Columbus, Georgia.

Michael Fraley has contributed to *Ship of Fools*, *The Road Not Taken*, and *Plainsongs*. M.A.F. Press published his chapbook *First-Born*. Tamafyhr Mountain Press published his e-chapbook *Howler Monkey Serenade*. Michael's poems have appeared internationally in five countries. He received a B.F.A. in photography from the San Francisco Art Institute and an M.A. in writing from the University of San Francisco. Michael lives within walking distance of the San Francisco Zoo with his wife Gail, daughter Bunny, and four cats. Besides reading, he also enjoys photography and vintage cameras.

Part Texan, part Okie, **Blake Kilgore** fell for a Jersey girl and followed her east. A history teacher by day, he also coaches basketball and performs original folk music. Blake is a skeptic who still believes. As such, he is grateful for much that is still good, and particularly for his wife and four sons. Blake's stories have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *The Alembic*, *Forge*, *The Bookends Review*, *ginosko*, *Stonecoast Review*, and *Thrice Fiction*.

Norbert Kovacs lives and writes in Hartford, Connecticut. His stories have appeared, or soon will appear, in *Foliage Oak*, *Squawk Back*, *Corvus Review*, *Ekphrastic*, and *No Extra Words*.

Denise Landrum-Geyer is an associate professor of English (specialty—Composition and Rhetoric) & Writing Center Coordinator at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. She is interested in the ways in which creative writing and composition pedagogy intersect, especially in creative nonfiction. Her research interests also include essay studies, genre theory, computers and composition, qualitative research, feminist and critical pedagogies, composition history, invention studies, writing across the curriculum, and writing center theory. In addition to being a professor and essayist, she is a bit obsessive about dogs: dachshunds, shih tzus, German shepherds, and Newfoundlands are particular favorites. She has been in Oklahoma since July of 2009, and she is constantly learning what it means to live life on the Great Plains, especially as a wife, mother, and University of Kentucky alum and sports fan.

Kelley Logan is a faculty member of Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Her last publications were "Transubstantiation" and "The Doppelganger" in the Sugar Mule anthology *Ain't Nobody That Can Sing Like Me*. She lives in Weatherford, OK with her husband, an aging cat, and dark thoughts.

Parker Montgomery Long was born in Weatherford, Oklahoma. His father, Keith, was an English professor at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, and his mother was a homemaker. In his poetry, he primarily wrestles with issues like identity, duality, and the particularly difficult problem of being an outdoorsman.

Richard Luftig is a Midwesterner now living in California. He is a recipient of the Cincinnati Post-Corbett Foundation Award for Literature and a semi-finalist for the Emily Dickinson Society Award for Poetry. His stories have appeared in numerous magazines including *Bloodroot*, *Front Porch Review*, *Broadkill Literary Review*, and *Pulse*.

Kaylee Patton is 20 years old and from Perryton, Texas. She is an orientation leader at Southwestern Oklahoma State University and is also in a sorority. She is a health science major for pre-physical therapy with a minor in child development psychology. Patton's dream is to be a pediatric physical therapist and to be able to work with children who have disabilities.

Dennis Ross taught and did research at Iowa State University. Now retired, he has gone back to his first love, writing poetry, as a second career. He has about 180 poems published. *Relatives and Other Strangers*, his first chapbook, appeared in Finishing Line Press.

Loren Smith's work is forthcoming or has appeared in *The North Central Review*, *Prairie Margins*, *Enormous Rooms*, *Coup d'Etat*, *Red Cedar Review*, *Scribendi*, *Green Blotter*, *Straylight*, *Westward Quarterly*, *The Oakland Arts Review*, *30 North*, *Illumen*, *The Great American Wise Ass Poetry Anthology*, *Trysts of Fate*, *Outposts of Beyond*, and *Detectives of the Fantastic V2*.

Scott Thomas has a B.A. from Bard College, a M.S. in Library Science from Columbia University, and a M.A. in English from the University of Scranton. He is currently employed as Executive Director of Pennsylvania Integrated Library System. He lives in Dunmore, PA with his wife Christina and his son Ethan. His poems have appeared in *Mankato Poetry Review*, *The Kentucky Poetry Review*, *Sulphur River Literary Review*, *Poem*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *Floyd County Moonshine*, *Talking River*, *Pointed Circle*, and other journals.

James Valvis has placed poetry or fiction in *Arts & Letters*, *Barrow Street*, *Ploughshares*, *River Styx*, *The Sun*, *Westview*, and many others. His poetry was featured in *Verse Daily*. His fiction was chosen for the Sundress Best of the Net. A former U.S. Army soldier, he lives in the Seattle area.

George Young is a retired physician living in Boulder, Colorado. Recent publications include a chapbook, *Bird of Paradise* (Parallel Press, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011), and a book, *The Astronomer's Pearl* (Violet Reed Haas Poetry Prize given by Snake Nation Press, 2013).

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