



EXILE

Spring 1991

EXILE

Denison University's Literary Magazine

35th Year

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Table of Contents

<i>Once and for All</i> , Michael Payne	1
<i>Alone Over The Trees</i> , John Stoddard	2
<i>Caught You</i> , Nancy Booth	3
<i>Mother's Words</i> , Julie Green	4
<i>His Token</i> , Donna Marie Voldness	11
<i>Global Warming</i> , Eric Franzon	13
<i>Amish Mystery</i> , Shannon Salser	15
<i>For Peace</i> , Robin Schneider	16
<i>Elvis, the Lizard King, and Me</i> , Stewart Engesser	19
<i>Norpell Woods</i> , Brandon Pfeiffer	23
<i>Blue Suit, Red Dog</i> , Jack Beck	24
<i>I Am Without My List of Excusses</i> , Douglas George	25
<i>Sometimes - Satre Would Not Be Proud</i> , Dana Wells	26
<i>The Flock</i> , Carter Holland	27
<i>Dance of Alabaster</i> , Jay Speiden	34
<i>Winter Solstice</i> , K. Lynn Rogers	35
<i>Fish Story</i> , Jim Dixon	37
<i>Slumming</i> , Stewart Engesser	43
<i>Beached</i> , Chris Dealy	44
<i>The Missing Man</i> , Tom Ream	45
<i>Elegy</i> , Scott Dexter	48
"Close Range", Jay Speiden	49
<i>No Longer</i> , Shannon Salser	50
<i>In A Bar In Georgetown, Colorado 1990</i> , John Stoddard	51
Brian Wills	52

Once And For All

You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

Ezra Pound

Once And For All

Once and for all I will close my eyes
like a tree caught in raging flames
refusing to ignore the war, airplanes,
feedback from the radio, and I will think
of you in your radar battery
your dented pillow turning beneath cloudless skies
and I will hate the mail, T.V., the passing of time.

I will not listen to what Stephanie says
but instead pay attention to the cow and bull
making love on the crest of pasture
beyond my breakfast window.
When it is over I will hold them to it
like a governess, spreading sweet alfalfa
for the calf at the corner that touches my backyard
and I will not look away.
I will stand in my Redwings at four in the morning,
bending under the low heaving beams
of my neighbors barn, holding an old
railroad lamp, burning oil to illuminate
the birth, the motherly tongue freeing
the fledgling from its sack,
saying, "You are mine,"
saying, "You will always bear my smell."
Returning home through the small valley
I will inhale deeply the fog
remembering what I have seen,
and I will hold them to it.

When it is over I will send her packages
of roses and honeysuckle from America.
She must continue to smile in that Basque way
I remember, and I will remember this
before she goes, before I cry aloud
remembering how she went
with the November mist turning to frost
wool on skin, gloved hands, cold lips in the dark.

(for Trish)

Michael Payne

Alone over the Trees

We sat in a surplus septic tank
buried in the floor of a soybean field,
covered with boards and brown corn stalks,
and waited for geese to pitch
into our decoys.

I sat on my hands with my gun between
my knees and listened to the guide talk.
"Geese stay with the same mate
for life." he said

as he rubbed his bare hands
that he held close to his camouflaged chest
under the pair of wooden calls
that dangled from his neck.

I watched my dad blow
the heat from the coffee
in the Thermos cup,
take a sip, and close his eyes to rest
and thought about him
thinking about my mother
trying to sleep alone
in a full size bed.

And in the grey light of that blind,
with his eyes closed, and his head back,
I wondered who he was.

Six geese set their wings to land.
We pushed the top open,
emptied our guns,
and when their screaming stopped
we climbed out of the ground
into the light, and separated
to pick up the five bodies
in the field.

I heard my dad shoot
a cripple as I watched
the one we missed fly
alone over the trees.

John Stoddard

Caught You

Caught you smilin' at me.
That's the way it should be.
Your Mama told you not to talk to me,
But you're looking, and you're looking good.
Who's standing with you?
One of Daddy's boys?
Listen to him, he's talking to the side of your head.
Can you hear me talking to you?
You remember what I used to tell you.
You remember what we used to do when your Mama wasn't
Around, you used to tell me you didn't care what she
Said. You said you would do anything for me.
I just had to look at you and you would do anything.
That's what you said, I just had to look.
I'm looking. Do you see me looking?
Do you feel me looking?
I'm looking baby, I'm looking.
Do you feel me looking? I'm looking

Nancy Booth

Mother's Words

Charlie felt his mother's fingertips fall from his shoulder and he walked down the portable orange hallway to the plane. "Don't forget to call me, Charlie," she said. He turned and waved, and she smiled, her face pink from giving into the tears she had promised herself she wouldn't cry.

On the way to the airport she told him to call as soon as he got to his father's apartment. In the line checking his suitcase she again reminded him to call, "but call from the airport, collect. I know your father, Charlie. He'll whisk you off to every California hot spot the minute you step off that plane, not even thinking of me, sitting back here in Cincinnati worrying about your safety." Now she stood right next to the gate attendant, in the pathway of the other boarding passengers, watching her son's back walk away from her. He turned once more and she waved a snotty kleenex and mouthed silently to him. "Call," her mouth said. Charlie smiled and stepped on the plane.

His assigned seat number was 12A, a window seat. He ducked in and sat down. Charlie watched as other passengers filed by, stopping every now and then, dodging from the over head compartments, checking their passes, and then moving forward again. He lifted the shade and looked out to the runway where squat blue men in headphones drove luggage carts between the wheels of the aircraft. His side of the plane faced the tinted windows of the terminal, behind which he knew his mother was still standing, counting back twelve of the plane windows in search of Charlie's face.

A middle-aged woman took the seat next to him. She wore a purple suit with large black buttons. She sat and set her black purse on her lap. She opened it and pulled out a white linen handkerchief which she placed behind her head, over the top of the chair. Charlie watched her and then turned to look at the bottom of his tray table on the seat in front of him.

"You never know who sat here before you," the woman said.

"Excuse me?"

"I said, you never know who sat here before you. That's why I always bring my hankie." She wore red lipstick on her lips and some smudged on her front left tooth.

Charlie looked back at the tray table and nodded once.

"They never change these covers, you know. I'd hate to catch some form of dreadful head lice from a stranger." Then she, too, turned to face the tray table in front of her.

When everyone was seated the stewardess checked seatbelts and the captain announced the time, apologizing for the delay in taking off.

Charlie looked once more at the tinted windows and silently bid his mother goodbye one last time, promising to call.

The plane sped down the runway and lifted off the ground. Charlie lay back in his seat, his body pressed into its curves at the neck and waist. Next to him the woman in purple gripped the arms of the chair. Charlie looked at her, and noticed that she kept her head forward, away from the back of the seat.

Cincinnati became a land of children's toy blocks below him, and the plane was soon above them. Charlie closed his eyes and heard the tone of the smoking and seatbelt signs go off.

"Are you coming or going?" Charlie felt the woman's hand on his arm and thought of his mother, clinging to him for as long as she could before he left her.

"I'm sorry?"

"Are you from Chicago?"

"No, Cincinnati." His throat was dry.

The woman in purple nodded her head. "So you're going." She was quiet for a moment as she lifted the handkerchief and then replaced it again. "I'm from Chicago. I had an hour layover in Cincinnati. It's a nice town."

Charlie didn't know if she was judging the city by one hour spent in the airport, nor did he care. As if reading his thoughts she continued, "I have only been to Cincinnati via the airport, but it seems nice enough."

She no longer looked at him when she spoke. He watched her hands. They were white, almost translucent, and he could see light green veins beneath her fair skin.

The flight was short and calm, but the woman held tight to the arm rests the entire time they were in the air. When they landed she turned to Charlie again. "In case you didn't notice," she said, "I hate to fly. You were a nice person to sit next to. Thank you." She unbuckled her seat belt and eased herself into the aisle, and waited for the line to move forward and deboard the plane.

Charlie waited until the plane was almost empty and then got off. He had an hour and a half in Chicago before his connecting flight to San Diego. He walked slowly to his gate, looking at the people. His aunt always talked about how the airport was a perfect place to get a glimpse of society in one of its more rare forms. People were either nervously awaiting their flight, excited about an arrival, or panicked about being late. There were very few people that were completely relaxed. Perhaps that was why they were in the airport, thought Charlie. They all needed to get away.

Across from his gate was a small newstand and a pizza shop with a green awning that hung out into the airport hallway. 'Antony's' was written in yellow and red across the front. Charlie went inside and ordered a

large piece of pepperoni and sat at a table near the entrance. Across from him sat a family of four, two little boys with their parents.

The mother cut one of the larger pieces into two smaller ones and gave them to her sons. "Eat this," she said, placing a napkin in their laps. Charlie could hear his own mother's voice saying "call me." The smaller boy with the striped shirt got on his knees in the chair and the napkin slipped to the floor. He ate with both hands and chewed on the pizza as if it was a large piece of bubble gum, taking another bite before he had swallowed the first.

"Swallow first," the mother said. "This isn't a race."

"But the plane," said the son, chewing as he spoke.

"We have plenty of time," she said. He took another bite and chewed it, taking another before he swallowed.

A fat man paused at the news stand in front of Charlie, taking his attention away from the family. He picked up a newspaper, a candy bar, and a car magazine. Charlie could hear the change in his pocket as he dug deep to find the exact amount. He held out a pudgy hand a moment before putting the paper back. He paid for the candy bar and the magazine and walked away without exchanging a word with the woman behind the stand.

The little boy had finished his pizza and watched his older brother lick the sauce from the crust of what was left of his own piece. He moved his tongue slowly along the edge and he looked at his younger brother as he ate.

"Can I have another piece?" said the boy, his eyes still on his brother's crust.

"No," his mother said mechanically.

"But I'm hungry."

"No, you're not."

"Am too." He never looked at her, he only looked at the crust. "I'm hungry," he said again.

The mother did not answer this time. She began to gather the napkins and paper plates and put them on the orange plastic tray. She looked at her husband and asked him what time it was. He answered and Charlie noticed that he was also watching the piece of crust.

"Let's go," she said, rising with the tray in one hand, her purse and coat hanging over the other. Her family still sat at the table.

"We have plenty of time," said the younger son.

The woman emptied the tray into the trash and returned to the table. "Okay, guys, let's go," she said again.

As they walked out into the hallway, the older son, still chewing on his pizza crust, slapped his brother on the top of the head and then scooted up to catch the pace of his parents. Charlie could hear the family

walk down the hallway, the younger boy whining as he told his mother that he had been hit, and her calm, mechanical responses advising him to forget about it.

Charlie sat in front of a large window that looked out on to the runway. He watched three different flights land and pull into their respective gates. Behind him he could hear the anticipation of reuniting friends and families. People came with flowers, balloons and signs. 'Welcome Back Katie! We Missed You!' Charlie thought his own father would most likely be running late from work, or wherever. His mother had warned him about this. "If he isn't there, Charlie, don't move. Wait for him to come get you at the gate. There are strange people in airports, especially airports in California. And Charlie, call me when you get there." Charlie would not have the welcoming party that Katie had. He thought it was alright that he wouldn't be greeted with signs and balloons, he would rather it be that way.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" A girl's voice broke into his thoughts. He turned and saw her, a girl with a large straw bag hanging over one shoulder. She was pointing and Charlie followed her finger to the ashtray that was connected to the chair next to him. "Do you mind? There are no other free ashtrays."

"No, go ahead," he said.

She sat down heavily, exasperated. "I hate airports," she said. "They smell and are always so crowded, full of gross people." She took off her sweatshirt and stuffed it into the straw bag. "And hot," she said. She pulled a smashed pack of Camel Lights from a small leather purse. She turned and offered one to Charlie, looking him in the eyes, but saying nothing.

He declined, silently as well, lifting his hand in resistance. She looked about his age, maybe a little older. She was pretty, he thought, naturally so.

"Bad habit, I know," she said. She lit a cigarette with a match which she waved out and tossed into the metal ashtray between them. "I have been craving this for a week," she said. She crossed her legs and then her arms, lifting the left one when she took a drag from the cigarette. Her fingernails were painted a coral color.

"Are you from San Diego?" she asked. They both looked out the window as a Delta flight landed, the wheels of the plane blurred by the film of the gas.

"No, Cincinnati. You?"

"San Diego. I'm finally going home."

They sat quiet and Charlie listened to her exhale and smelled the fruit of her perfume mingle with the smoke. As she sat and smoked her left leg bounced off the knee of her right leg. She ashed after every fourth drag.

It all seemed so systematic to him. Exhale, kick, kick, exhale, ash, kick, kick. And the sound of his mother said, "Call me," and the little boy said, "I'm hungry."

A flight attendant announced that their connecting flight from Cleveland was on schedule. The waiting area was now full of people, mostly families with children. They will be the first to board, thought Charlie, remembering that the elderly, handicapped and 'those with small children' have priority over the other passengers.

The girl put her cigarette out, mashing the orange ashes to black with the butt. "What row are you in?" she asked.

Charlie checked his boarding pass and answered, "Seventeen."

"The back. It's loud in the back. I once had to sit in the last row. I thought I would go deaf by the time I got off the plane. I'm in 14C."

No one sat next to Charlie in row seventeen. He thought of the woman in the purple suit and how she had thanked him. Across the aisle were two business men. They did not speak to each other until lunch was served on small trays that just fit on the tray table that fell back from the seat in front. The man next to the window asked if the other liked carrot cake. He didn't. Neither man ate the carrot cake from the front left square in the tray. Charlie ate only the carrot cake and the roll with butter. He thought about asking the men for their cake, but decided he didn't want it. Charlie looked down at the tray, and remembered the plates his mother used for him when he was younger. They too had the six divisions, one for each of the four food groups, one for the dessert, and one with a circled ridge for the matching cup. A cartoon train had been drawn along the edges of the divisions and on the cup was a red caboose. His mother always made meals that would fill up the five squares and put milk in the caboose cup. She probably said "eat this," like the mother in the airport, but Charlie couldn't remember.

"Hi."

It was the girl from the airport. She said she was going to use the bathroom. "Can I sit with you a while? The man next to me is snoring and I hate to disturb him."

She seemed to have an excuse for sitting with him, Charlie thought. She sat in the aisle seat. "How was your lunch?"

"I only ate the carrot cake."

"Me too. I don't eat things that look like they might walk off my plate before I cut into it. What the hell was that any way?"

"Some kind of casserole, I think. I'm not big on airplane food myself."

"Do you fly a lot?" she asked. She sat sideways in the seat, facing him with one leg tucked under her body.

"No. Actually, this is the first time I'm flying alone. I'm going to see my father. He lives in San Diego."

"Oh." She looked past him out the window. "Divorce?"

"What?" Charlie watched her profile.

"Your parents, are they divorced?"

"They have been since I was five."

She looked at him. "I'm sorry," she said.

"Sorry?" She could hear the surprise in Charlie's voice and faced him.

"Yes, I'm sorry. I don't know how it would be if my parents split up. I wouldn't be able to take it." Her voice was matter of fact and she turned to look out the window again.

"Well, I guess it seems to me like they were never even together," Charlie said. "I have always been with my mom. I guess I have always only had one parent."

"So why are you going to visit your dad?" She brought her knees in to her chest, encircling them with her arms.

"He invited me out. I haven't seen him for five years."

"Did either of them remarry?"

No. Well, my mom didn't. She thinks my dad has a girlfriend." He smiled as he remembered his mother's words. She had tried to sound careless, but he knew that she hoped Charlie would find out the truth. "Your father has a way, you know, when he has someone on his mind. A woman someone, I mean." She laughed to herself, "and he likes to wear this goofy tie with hearts and arrows on it. You should look for that tie, Charlie. Just to see if he still has it. She had looked him straight in the eye, "But don't tell him I said anything." He saw the girl looking at him as he laughed to himself. "My mom's funny," he said.

"Would you mind if one of them got remarried?"

"I never really thought about it."

The girl realized she was intruding on the life of a total stranger. "I'm sorry," she said, "I don't even know you and I'm sitting here in a seat that isn't even mine prying in to your life."

Charlie smiled. "It's okay. At least the flight is a little more interesting." He stuck his hand out towards her, "I'm Charlie, and you're not prying."

She smiled and took his hand, "Beth."

"Hi."

"Hi." A look of embarrassment crossed her face and she stood up suddenly. "And I really did have to go to the bathroom." Charlie smiled as she walked to the back of the plane. He noticed the two business men across the aisle looking at him after she left and looked out the window again.

He could smell her before he saw her. Perfume and a trace of smoke on her clothes. "You don't mind if I sit here a while longer do you?" She still stood in the aisle.

"What about you?" he asked when she was sitting again. "Who were you visiting in Chicago?"

"Oh, I was in Atlanta, visiting my sister."

"That terrible, huh?"

"What?"

"The cigarette. You made it sound as if you'd had a bad time," he explained.

"Well, not exactly. My sister did though. She's just filed for divorce."

Charlie tapped his fingers along the arm of the chair. "I'm sorry," he said.

Beth smiled and they were quiet.

The captain announced that the plane would be landing and the stewardesses checked seat backs, tray tables and seatbelts as they walked down the center of the plane, brushing their manicured hands across the seats as they passed.

"It was nice to meet you, Charlie," Beth said. "Have a nice time with your Dad."

"Thanks. You too. I mean, it was nice to meet you too."

She unfolded her legs from underneath her and paused when she stood in the aisle. "Well, bye."

The business man on the end seat leaned in and watched as Beth returned to her seat and then winked at Charlie. Charlie smiled at the bottom of the tray table in front of him

Beth's parents greeted her at the gate and Charlie watched the three of them walk towards the baggage claim. A man in a suit jogged towards him, and Charlie recognized his father.

They met in the middle of the hall with a handshake. Charlie smiled shyly and his father pulled him to his chest.

"Collect, from your son," his voice cracked.

"It's me, mom. I m here."

"Oh, thank God, Charlie. Take care. Be good. Have fun." Her voice was thin. "And call me, soon."

Through the window Charlie could see his father waving a cab and he heard the drone of the dial tone over the line and hung up the phone.

His Token

Unloading the freezer
that quit
two days before Christmas, I pulled out
from behind thawing peas,
a frozen placenta, wrapped
in a ziplock bag
and forgotten,
for seven years, after
the nine long months
I had thought
he was a girl.

In the spring,
Justin helped me
plant the garden
and bury his womb
under one of the hammock trees. When
last summer,
daydreaming
to & fro
in the shade and humidity, he asked
what birth was like. Afterwards,
he was all too glad
to be a boy,
and seriously apologized
for both the skid marks,
and the eight pound
stretch. Pushing him outside

Julie Gruen

one day,
in the yard wide with children,
he wandered
off on his own. I watched
how he blew
wishes from weeds,
and ran, laughing
through
their soft
airbourne trails.

Playing softball, I saw
the sun's
terrific brilliance, in the common
dandelions,
freckled
across the field of grass, where Justin
quickly skimmed the earth
reaching homebase. He looked up at me,
and shrugged his head sideways,
smiling
in luminous kneed
jeans, I can't wash out.

Donna Marie Voldness

Global Warming

Yes, child . . . I remember.
I remember when we called this change
"seasons. I remember their beginnings:
Marked by the end of my impatience,
and a day or two of passionate play
As with a new Christmas toy.

*April Showers,
Bring May Flowers . . .*

And the wait began again,
for another Christmas,
another Solstice.

Turn, Turn, Turn.

I remember their ends,
with oaths of "at last!" melting into the earth,
giving way to Spring:
The time when a young heart turns to thoughts of

Summer.

I remember, child.
I remember when we had to wait
longer than a nap, a sit com, a Big Mac,
for our favorite season.

I sigh; thinking how easily your own children will accept
the nursery rhyme that you have just taught me:

*Monday is sunny.
Tuesday's dry.
Wednesday is runny
when God cries.
Thursday snows,
and Friday blows,
and Saturday and Sunday—
God only knows!*

I remember, child.
I remember when we would pack our wool
lover-tight in aromatic cedar.
But now the Mothball Moguls
have turned to laundromats for their fortunes,
and we can see It's A Wonderful Life
365 days a year.

Eric Franzon

Amish Mystery

Night coming on fast,
in the Ohio February way,
I . once more, was driving
north on 661. Winter rain,
beating to get in the car,
slaps the windshield
as loudly as the wipers.
Reflecting off the damp air,
my headlights illuminate little,
except the reflective triangle
on the Amish buggy up ahead.
Homer, the sign reads in green.
I slow to the next sign's forty-five,
turn my head to see why the buggy
is stopped. strain to see, perhaps
sickness, the rain too hard for horses?
As the father waits under the buggy's
canopy. a girl, his daughter, stands feeding
coins into a red and white Coke machine.

Shannon Salser

For Peace

Women's ways of knowing
of speaking in a different voice
learning to hush and to comply
reminded of their mute status
patriarchal hammer banging women's heads
father's fists sealing daughters' lips
educated women
fearing repercussions that accompany success.

Silent women, afraid
voices kept in locked rooms
mothers' muffled words
and fathers' shouting
brilliant gifted women
qualified and frustrated
denied a chance to speak
to live in harmony with the world
as they see it.

It is the men who speak
and who are heard
taught aggression from childhood
dressed in blue for courage
pink for sin
men decide whose voices are weak
whose will be heeded
and ignored.

Playing with guns
with chemicals
with young boys' lives
mothers' sons
nations' futures
these men
spilling oil in to beautiful seas
bombing cities
fighting wars with others' lives.

I have a question
what of the women's voice?
if it was heard
if people listened
if it COUNTED
outside of the nuclear unit
we call home
would there be war?
would people be dying?
would shores be blackened with oil
if women ran the world?

Sympathy, empathy, compassion
thoughts for others first
things men call weak
be strong!
fight to the top!
care for nobody
but yourself
just get there
strong and competitive
this dog-eat-dog-world.

Rid the earth
of these foul dogs
leave the world to pansies
crybabies
the selfless, the concerned
before all is destroyed
gender roles, stereotypes
designed to keep women weak
continue the capitalist, patriarchal, oppressive regime
Society
competition
greed and power
this country that has got itself into a war
out of control.

Women's ways of knowing
and speaking in a different voice
attempting to avoid conflict in sandboxes
while boys fight for new rules
would find resolution
compromise
anything to avoid the hurt
would remember to consider
who is going to die.

Robin Schneider

Elvis, The Lizard King, And Me

As the freezing North Dakota wind tore at the cheap aluminum siding outside and the jukebox tiredly played "Candy Colored Clown" by Roy Orbison, I came to believe that the two middle aged men sitting next to me were more than just drunken, unemployed factory workers looking to kill their downs with liquor. The lights were dim, and the drone of conversation mixed with the lilting music drifting out of the juke made it hard to hear what they were saying, but as I lit a cigarette and snuck a look at them, I just knew they were different. Factory workers don't dress in sequined suits or leather pants. Then, as I sat and nursed my beer, I caught enough of their conversation to confirm my suspicions: sitting next to me at the bar, in a cheap dive in the middle of North Dakota, were none other than Jim Morrison and Elvis Presley.

It took me several minutes to work up the courage to enter their conversation. But finally, as both long-lost legends lifted their whiskies to their lips, I leaned over and whispered, "Nice to see you gentlemen are still around."

Elvis, sitting nearest to me, casually set his drink back down and turned to face me. His proud cheekbones were flushed with alcohol, and his thick upper lip rose in the patented Elvis sneer. He whispered back in a slurred Southern drawl.

"Well now, boy, I don't believe we've ever met before . . . why don't you be a smart little boy and turn around and forget . . . forget this, boy."

As The King's speech trailed off, Jim leaned around him and stared into my eyes.

"Yeahhhhhh . . . mmmmm . . . alright . . . alright . . . listen to the King . . . royal blood speaks wisdom's words, in this dark exile . . . yeah . . ."

As Jim turned away and began mumbling to himself, I desperately tried to come up with a way to win these guys over, to let them know I wasn't like all the vipers and leeches who had driven them to self abuse and finally this cruel exile . . . I was like them! I, too, had come to this High Plains Wasteland to escape the clutches of the anonymous hords . . . I, too, had run away from a world that tried to limit me and rape my soul . . . On a dismal day in January I had finally thrown up my hands and walked away forever from the frenzied demands of my customers, abandoned the McDonalds on West Main of which I was assistant manager, and headed for the open skies of the Great American West. But how could I ever convince these mythic Gods of music that I was with them? How could I convince them to let me hang with them?

"Would you gentlemen like to, uh, get a bottle of tequila and find some women? I know one who lives out on Odessa, she wears her jeans

so tight they look they were just painted right on her, and I tell you, she's got the body for em, too, and I know she'd just love to see you, if you know what I mean . . ."

They exchanged glances and turned back to their drinks.

I scoured my brain, trying desperately to think of something else these living idols would want to do. I began to sweat; to be this close and not get to hang out with them would be too much.... how could I win them over? I decided to change tack.

"How about some peyote? I bought some off this Indian a few weeks back; been saving it for the Super Bowl but hell, it's there to be taken, right? I'd be honored if you gentlemen would eat it with me....We could wander around in the hills and, uh...."

My brain went blank. I remembered reading somewhere that Jim had gone out into the desert once and eaten peyote, but I couldn't remember what the article had said he'd done while he was out there...something about looking for something....

Then it came to me.

"We could search for visions!"

This time Elvis didn't even look up, and Jim just let out a low sigh and ran a hand through his hair. I was blowing it. As I wracked my brain, trying to think of some way of getting their interest, Elvis raised his hand for the bill. No ! They couldn't just leave ! I'd never be able to live with myself .

As the bartender began adding up the tab, I took my last shot.

"Hey....you guys like to bowl?"

I'd remembered seeing a special story on "A Current Affair" about deceased rock stars' favorite sports, and both Elvis and Jim's had been bowling. As my words settled on their ears, I hoped I was in.

Elvis lurched over and his hot breath steamed up my glasses.

"Did ya'll say . . .somethin' 'bout bowlin', boy?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Presley, yes I did." I replied. "Would you and Mr. Morrison like to go bowling with me at Earl's Bowlerama? The shoes are free if ya drink a six-pack . . . it's a really, uh, cool place . . . it's got twenty lanes!"

I crossed my fingers, I prayed to God in heaven . . . please say yes! Please come bowling with me! I prayed so hard my hands began to shake. The King turned to Jim and relayed my offer. Time stood still.

Finally I heard Jim mumble "Yeahhhhh . . . pretty good . . . pretty neat . . . bowling . . . alright." Elvis turned back to me and said "Alright, boy, let's us and you do a little bowling."

I could hardly believe it. My heart sang, my kness went liquid; I felt like a school kid after his first kiss. Me ! Going bowling with Elvis and Jim Morrison!

Elvis and Jim stood up. I told them I'd pay their bill and meet them out front, and they staggered off to the men's room. I dropped a twenty on the bar, lit another cigarette, and went out to warm up my Chevette, whistling "L.A. Woman". After about ten minutes I began to worry . . . did they slip out the back or something? Just then the door to the bar opened and out they staggered. Jim was waving something that looked like a cable guide in the King's face and I heard him say something about driving before Elvis told him to shut up and get in the car. I smiled, still unable to believe what was happening, and as they piled in I silently thanked God for hearing my prayer.

We drove in silence for a minute, the two exiled superstars staring out into the night. As I took a left onto Hyacinth Street, I asked them how long they'd been living in North Dakota.

"I've been here since I left Paris in '71." replied Jim. "All that . . . acid . . . all that fast living, man . . . all those vultures waiting to feed on carrion flesh, man . . . Man, Rimbaud was right, man. I had to quit the scene and get back down to the world, you dig? . . . like the golden rose comes with golden thorns, man, and yeahhhh . . . yeah . . . so I took the highway to the end of the night and ended up here, and now I ride the harvest of my dark funeral parade, man".

Elvis reached up from the front seat and hit Jim on the shoulder.

"Fuck you, Morrison, you little pansy. You don't know the first thing about trials and tribulations, you goddamn hippie freak long-haired communist bastard!"

Morrison laughed, reached back and gave the King a playful powerflick to the nose.

"Vengeance is sweet, man...Do not anger the man who rides with snakes....you'll get bitten and swell to twice your size, yeah....yeah"

"I was in the goddamn army, you little pinko!" bellowed the King."I went and put my life . . . my life . . . oh god . . ."

Elvis started coughing."Pull over . . .oh god . . . I'm gonna be sick . . ."

I quickly swerved the car to the shoulder, but it was too late. Elvis let fly right in the back seat, his near-holy vomit splattering all over the vinyl seat. But I didn't mind. After all, this was The King!

I got a rag from under the seat, and as Elvis opened the door and fell out, sucking in the cool night air, I smiled. Not many can say they've had the honor of cleaning up Elvis Presley's vomit. As I got down on my knees and wiped up the glorious mess, I made a vow to never wash the towel again.

After Elvis collected himself and I had cleaned up the car, I started her up, pulled off the shoulder, and began to head for the bowlerama again.

"Hey, boy.... to hell with the goddamn bowling. Lets go to our place and watch cable. "whispered the pasty-faced Elvis from the backseat.

"License to Drive comes on at eleven " mumbled Jim. "Yeah...'License to Drive,...yeah.

This was unexpected.

"Are you guys sure you wanna watch cable? I mean, don't you wanna do something crazy, like eat speed and drive fast with the windows down?"

Morrison turned in his seat and looked at Elvis.

"The kid's right...let's be wild, like the old times...let's play Nintendo when we get back....yeah...Nintendo, oh I want to play Nintendo and I want to...now...now? ...NOWWWWaaaaahhhhhoooooOOOWWWW!"

Elvis started singing 'Love Me Tender', Jim started screaming obscenities, and I thought for a second that maybe they hadn't changed after all. But then Elvis stopped, turned to me, and spoke in a sober tone.

"Listen, kid. I like cable. I like Nintendo. I just want to be like everybody else....God, I wanna be me!" His voice rose to a shriek. "Why doesn't anyone understand? All I want is to be left alone! All I want is a nice bed and a lawn and a color T.V., boy! All I want to do is watch cable and be left alone! Take me the fuck back home." Elvis broke into tears.

Morrison spoke up. "I think you'd better take us home, man....It's getting late and Elvis needs some rest...yeah...why don't you just take us on home?"

I looked into the rearview mirror, and for the first time I noticed the scars that time had left upon Elvis's face: the bloated cheeks, the flabby neck, his receding greasy gray hair riding the skull in a weary pompador. I turned back to Morrison, his thinning hair hanging limply around his lined and haggard face. His eyes looked pleadingly into mine.

"Come on, man. It's almost eleven....'License to Drive', man...c'mon....just take us on home and let us live our lives."

So I followed Jim's directions to Lazy-Tyme Trailer Parke, just outside town on 71. As they climbed out and stumbled toward home I called out to them. "You gonna be at Louie's tomorrow? I'll buy the first round! Niether turned around, and Jim just waed me off as he helped Elvis up the steps and inside. I sat in the car in silence for I'm not sure how long, watching as the lights came on, and as their shadows moved around a while and slowly settled down. Finally I could hear the sound of the television as it drifted out to me on the clean, cold wind of the Plains, and I knew it was time to go. As a tear rolled down my cheek, I started up the Chevette and pulled slowly away. Before I edged out onto the highway, I looked both ways to check for traffic, and as I started back toward home I caught one last glimpse of their trailer before it was lost in the inky blackness; one last glimpse before it receded into the night, and was gone.

Stewart Engesser

Norpell Woods

My second time

in these woods and I'm lost.

I stuck sticks up in the moist soil
for next time.

I saw a tree with four penises
and seven breasts.

Another that was so old and ugly and beautiful
it would speak to anyone.

Old trees that I wanted to let to know
but haven't seen since.

When I hit familiar ground I wondered that anyone
could live off the trail.

It was the valley north of the salt lick
behind the pond.

Brandon Pfeiffer

Blue Suit, Red Dog

The blue suit, a new suit
watches me from behind the desk,
scribbling notes, looking up to stare.
I'm ready for a question to break silence.
It won't ask.
I look down. I see only fur.
Somehow, I'm not me.
I have the experience, the diploma,
but no longer qualified, I imagine.
I cough. Words elude me.
It judges my appearance, my breeding, perhaps.
I seem to be losing it.
I snarl with white teeth. It looks displeased.
I shouldn't have. My fur flames red as brick.
Any tricks? I must know tricks.
Lick scratch drool bark pant.
It opens the door, motioning with a sleeve.
I obey instinctively. Tongue out, show teeth,
smile.

Jack Beck

I am without my lists of excuses

I am without
my lists of excuses
and newly-born explanations for once.
For once I have silenced
it's just that and
all I was trying to say;
I just won't think
and maybe it'll go away.
It's not quite silent,
a dull vibration
behind the glove box,
maybe that crossbrace on the exhaust again,
or wheel bearings, damn, an entire new seal
that'll be costly, and I'm
avoiding
everything.
Maybe it'll go away and maybe
her delicate pieces will
untangle themselves
and we'll be granted a reprieve.
I need a new approach,
what did Hemingway say,
very simple operation, just letting the air in,
but thinking is like
writing on pieces of wet Kleenex
and I stop.

My hand accidentally moves
from the defogger to her jeans
and at least she doesn't pull away.

Douglas George

During this time the divorce of the
body from the soul is accomplished;
the hand rests inert between the warm
hands of her companion - neither consenting
nor resisting - a thing.

We shall say this woman is in Bad Faith.
- Patterns of Bad Faith
Jean-Paul Sartre

Sometimes- Sartre Would Not Be Proud

A stab of guilt reminds me of
flowers- a peace offering
But you meant more than that.

Still I lied to you just as so many others
had used me
Lived in Bad Faith.

Crushed petals of a pale pink rose
Lost between scraps of lace.

Dana Wells

The Flock

As the sun eased into the sky, the tops of the maples turned a lighter shade of green. Stumbling out of bed, Jake Cranston tried not to wake Mary. He quietly slipped out of his pajamas and into a faded pair of jeans and a white tee shirt. He moved across the room to his dresser to view himself in the mirror, but his foot slammed into a chair. The leg of the chair found an unbelievably tender spot between his toes, the pain seeping into the ball of his foot. Wrinkling his face, he kept from making a noise. He put work boots on and headed outside.

After throwing some feed to his chickens, Jake watched them devour every morsel and chant for more. Another handful of assorted grains landed in the moist flesh of the earth and the birds raced like football players trying to recover a fumble. They argued and cackled at each other, but as always, some won and some did not.

"You want eggs this mornin'?" Mary called. Jake was surprised to see her standing in the doorway.

"What are you doin' up, hon? You should be . . ."

"I heard you kick somethin' . . . woke me clear up outa my dream." She coughed, then cleared her throat. "Don't matter anyway. You want eggs?"

"Sure, eggs'll be fine."

She turned and walked back into the house. He watched her, the pink nightgown he gave her a few years ago rippling as the wind squeezed in past her. The door closed and Jake turned and faced the east. The sun was warm on his face.

"You gonna bring some wood in?" Mary sneered. "Enough to last us through the night anyway?"

"What are you all huffy about?"

"Don't like wakin' up with a cold butt. Did this mornin'."

"Yep, I will. But can I finish my breakfast first?" Jake chewed his bacon and sipped his coffee. He loved the combination of the two. "Sides, your butt wouldn't be cold if you slept next to me. We do sleep in the same bed." He chuckled. "I think."

"You ain't no ball of fire, Jake. At least you ain't under the covers."

"Hmph . . ." Jake thought about saying there was no fire anymore because she lost her spark, but that wouldn't make things better. He kept his mouth full of food instead. "Be a good day for huntin'."

"Jake Cranston, when was the last time you went huntin'?"

"Why, what are you talking about? I just went about . . . well, a couple a months ago."

"Who you tryin' to fool, huh?" Mary, washing last night's dishes, stopped and turned towards Jake. "Last time you was out in the woods was when our toilets broke." She began scrubbing again and looked out the window over the kitchen sink. "And that was years ago."

"What do you mean, years ago? I went huntin' . . ." He paused.

"Don't matter you can't remember, Jake. We're old. We're not as . . ."

Jake slammed his fork down on the table. "Damn it, Mary." He had always been a good, powerful speaker when he was angry. He wasn't like Mary, who when she got angry or upset, couldn't find the right words. She always got tongue tied. Jake knew exactly what to say when he was annoyed. It was almost as if he had planned out all of his angered responses beforehand, and then just picked one from a multiple choice list. His voice was firm and without a quiver.

"Don't start in with this rememberin' thing. I told you a million times already, my mind is the same as it was fifty years ago. I remember our first date . . . hell I even remember what you were wearin'. That little white lacy thing. And I know what the date is today, and I knew what it was two weeks ago today, and if there's one thing I ain't forgot, it's the last time I went huntin' in the woods." He wiped his lips with his napkin. "It was last Easter when I shot them two ducks. And you cooked 'em up real nice for Easter dinner. And the Talmadge's came over and helped us eat 'em."

Mary had stopped washing in the sink and was now facing Jake with one hand on her hip.

"Is that what happened?" she asked, pretending to concentrate.

"Ah . . . maybe you're the one loosing your mind." He half smiled, tasting victory. "That's right, that's what happened. So don't you go hollerin' about anybody forgettin' anything. 'Cept you." He paused for a moment. "If you wanna holler about your own senility, well that's fine with me."

"Well . . ." Mary said as she walked out of the kitchen. Jake could hear her rustling some papers around in the den. He finished his last egg and sat back sipping more coffee.

"What are you doin' in there, bird?" he asked. The rustling stopped and Mary mumbled something.

"Ha!" she said as she came back into the kitchen with something grey in her hand. "You think so, huh?"

She dropped what appeared to be some kind of pamphlet on the table in front of him. He picked it up and fumbled it through his stuff fingers. Mary stood across from him, staring at his face and waiting for his reaction. Reading the inner sleeve, a look of frustration and fear crept into Jake's face. He set the pamphlet down, and reached for the newspaper, rechecking the date. He looked back at the pamphlet and then up

towards Mary, who wore an "I told you so" smile. Jake frowned. It was a copy of the eulogy from Betty and Phil Talmadge's funeral. They had been killed in a automobile accident four years ago.

Jake rinsed his mouth twice. After drying his face with a towel, he looked carefully at himself in the mirror. A few scars from his teenage acne days remained on his cheeks, but he was the only one who noticed them. He was thankful he hadn't gone bald; he figured it was a stroke of luck. As a child, he was told that he was destined to loose his hair. "Baldness comes from the Mother's side of the family," his dad would say, "and your mother's father has got no hair at all. He uses a toothbrush to comb the five hairs behind his left ear. You're in trouble, son." But Jake had a full head of thick hair. Once it had been deep brown; now it was snow-white. Despite the color, he was glad it was still there.

Leaving the bathroom, he could hear Mary humming a tune in the kitchen. He thought it sounded like a hymn but couldn't think of the name. He sat down on the edge of the bed and glanced across the room and out the window. A group of mallards flew over the house next door.

"What are you doing, Jake?" Mary asked coming into the bedroom. She had a pile of clean clothes in her arms. She placed them down on the blanket chest at the foot of the bed. "Hey, anyone there?"

"What am I doin'," he said, "I'll tell you what I'm doin'." He paused for a moment as if he had to first think of something, then tell her. "I'm goin' huntin'."

"What on earth you . . ."

"That's right. I'm goin' huntin'. Too beautiful a day to pass up. And 'sides, the birds are flyin' south."

"Sure you're goin' hunting, Jake. You go right ahead."

"Don't start feeding me that sarcasm of yours, Mary. I don't like it."

"Well, I don't think you . . ."

"I know just what you think. Just because I'm gettin' older don't mean I'm goin' crazy."

Mary's bottom lip began to tremble a little. "Now Jake, I don't think you're crazy. Why, I do stupid things. I'm just not as smart as I used to be. It's just that . . . well, . . . I don't want you to go huntin' because . . ."

"Because what?" He turned and looked at her. "Because I thought I went a few months ago and I haven't actually been in years? Four years? You're damn right that's why I'm going."

Mary didn't know what to say. She stood looking at her husband, her eyes beginning to fill with tears. Irritated, Jake rose and went to the closet. He pulled from the top shelf an old, heavy, wool sweater that Mary had made for him a long time ago. He put it on and then walked to the back of the closet. There, on the last hanger, was his army-green

hunting jacket. He removed it from the rack and despite the strong mothball odor, put it on and fastened the buttons. He started looking for a cap to wear, then realized it was down stairs with his gun. He left the bedroom, not even noticing Mary, who was accidentally putting Jake's clean boxer shorts in his turtleneck drawer.

Wearing his neon-orange cap, and tucking a box of ammunition under his arm, Jake removed his shotgun from its carrying bag. He could hear Mary coming down the steps quickly, and figured the sooner he could be on his way, the less likely it was that he would have to continue arguing with her. She didn't want him to go. He knew that. But it was something he had to do. And anyway, he knew those woods well enough to walk through them blindfolded.

Closing the door behind him, Jake felt Mary grabbing the inner handle. He let go and started out of the house through the garage. Mary watched him, nibbling on her bottom lip. She called to him but he kept going. She called again, and this time he turned around.

"Be careful, okay?" she said.

"Don't you go worryin' about me. I'll be fine. I know these woods like the back of my hand." Warm air came out with his speech, turned to mist, and vanished. "And you might want to put a pot of hot water on the stove, or get the oven good and clean. Jake Cranston never goes huntin' and comes back with nothin'." He smiled at her. She blew him a kiss but he had already turned toward the woods. With his gun over his shoulder, Jake walked happily into the thick brush.

The cold air felt good on Jake's cheeks. His nose began to run as he kept his pace to a brisk walk. He had always wondered why it was that his nose ran when he was exercising in cold weather. The walk made Jake feel strong; his leg muscles worked hard carrying him over root and rock covered terrain. He had decided earlier that he would stay relatively close to Patriot's Path. Named during the Revolutionary War, it was a twenty mile pathway going through the woods before coming to another residential area. Every fifteen yards or so, trees that lines the pathway were marked with blue dots. He noticed some of the dots fading into the tree bark. He wondered when they had last been painted. It didn't really matter. Jake knew where he was going, with or without the dots.

Looking up, Jake saw a familiar clearing ahead of him. He came out of the woods and stood on top of a rather large rock, overlooking Ladelle Pond. The water appeared as smooth as glass, undisturbed by the nature surrounding it. Watching the clouds change in the water, Jake saw a ripple float through the sky. Two brown-tailed ducks had just entered the water on the northern edge of the pond.

Jake saw this as a excellent opportunity. Kneeling, he unbuttoned his

coat and pulled out the box of cartridges. Removing two of the cartridges, he loaded his gun, careful not to scare the birds away. He closed the chamber and raised the gun to eye level, but he had lost the ducks. With the gun following his line of vision, Jake found them nearing a bank. He waited until the first bird was just about to hop onto land. Holding his breath and concentrating, he pulled the trigger.

The sound shook the entire forest. A group of heckling crows in a nearby tree decided to take their discussion somewhere else. Letting the gun down a bit, Jake saw one of the ducks flying away. It lifted itself up, over the trees, quacking madly. Jake looked toward the bank where his shot had been fired, but couldn't see the other. He picked up the box of cartridges and hurried over to the bank.

Jake approached the water and searching for his prize, but it wasn't there. He heard something. He looked up and saw the other duck surface in the middle of the pond, hurrying to escape. Jake remembered the other cartridge in his gun. He lifted it and fired. The bird fluttered and dipped, and then soared high above the trees and disappeared.

Frustrated, Jake looked over at the rock he had been standing on earlier. His right knee ached a little. He considered heading for home, but the thought of returning with nothing made him turn and walk deeper into the woods. He knew of a field not far from Ladelle Pond where there were no trees to obstruct a line of fire. And Jake remembered, as he walked between two rather large oaks, that deer were known to graze there.

It had been a while since Jake had shot a deer. There had been a time when he enjoyed shooting them, not only for the meat but also for the sport. They were challenging targets, bounding across fields or darting between trees. But at some point, his interest switched to birds. They were smaller targets and usually flew faster than deer ran. To Jake though, the biggest difference was the meat. Venison was often tough. And if it wasn't cooked just right, it could be compared to a leather suitcase. Mary usually cooked it well; but duck was her specialty.

As he walked along, Jake could taste Mary's roast duck smothered in cranberry-orange sauce. The tender slices of dark meat were Jake's favorite. He savored every bite and it was odd if he didn't have second helpings, sometimes even a third. His stomach began to growl.

The shotgun slipped from his grip. He tried to catch it and in the process, tripped on a root and fell. He mumbled a four letter word as he wiped a tiny bit of mud from the knee of his jeans. He picked up his gun, stood and looked in all directions. He couldn't see a field anywhere near him, and wondered if he had gone in the right direction when he left Ladelle Pond. His watch read twelve fifteen. It had almost been a half and hour since he left the pond and he didn't think the field was that far. He

decided to return to the pond and maybe try another route to the field. The ache in his knee was getting worse.

Jake's breathing grew heavier. The cold air filled and exited his lungs, a small cramp pinching his insides each time. He figured he should probably stop to rest for a minute. At least to catch his breath. He leaned against a tree. The sky was still a magnificent blue, a few clouds changing shapes here and there. Jake checked his watch again. Twelve forty-three. He glanced around and didn't see Ladelle Pond. His stomach groaned and his feet were starting to get cold. He figured he should stay on them.

He looked up towards the sun hoping to get some sense of east and west. Unfortunately, it was directly overhead, blindly beaming down through leafless limbs. Jake sighed and continued walking towards where he thought Ladelle Pond was. Constantly turning his head back and forth, searching for something familiar, he thought he saw the edge of a clearing up ahead. There was a break in the trees allowing blue sky to enter the forest. Relieved a bit, he hurried toward the blue sky, but when he reached it he found that it was only a hill where someone had cut down trees with a chain saw. The felled trees still remained near their trunks; it was as if they had only been cut down for fun.

Jake was breathing quickly now. He put the butt of his gun on the ground, leaning the barrels against one of the stumps. Sweat was beginning to dot his forehead and moisten the white tee shirt under his sweater and coat. His hands began to tremble as he looked in all directions and didn't recognize anything. He picked up his gun and started down the hill, telling himself that if he kept going in the same direction, he would eventually get somewhere.

At the bottom of the hill, nothing seemed familiar to Jake. His knee, now throbbing, started to feel stiff. Despite the pain, Jake kept moving. He began imagining his leg becoming swollen and infectious. He envisioned a group of hunters stumbling across his stiffly, frozen body tomorrow morning. His mind began to work so frantically, he didn't even notice the flock of Canadian Geese honking loudly and flying over his head. He was breathing hard, phlegm building in his throat.

Stopping again to look around, Jake heard a thunderous boom followed by a couple of shouting voices. He turned toward the voices and ran through the trees. He tried to avoid as many branches as possible, waving his arms and gun in front of him. knocking most of them out of the way. Some small twigs lashed at his face, stinging his flesh.

Slowing down, Jake looked up and saw three men about thirty yards in front of him. The men were carrying on, jumping up and down, shouting and laughing. Jake slowed to a walk and approached them,

trying to collect himself. He cleared his throat, spit into the ground and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. The youngest of the three saw Jake and called out to him.

"Hey Mister! My brother shot a deer!"

Jake didn't say anything. He just continued to approach them, steadying his pace. When he was close, a man holding a shotgun spoke.

"Afternoon," he said, smiling.

Jake nodded, tipped his cap and took a deep breath. "Well, looks like you got yourself a pretty good sized buck." Jake looked at the deer and the gaping wound in its side.

"Oh no, my son shot this one." The proud father pointed. "Did it all by himself."

"Well, that's a fine shot," Jake said. "Give you enough meat for months."

"Years!" yelled the little one. Jake chuckled.

"You have any luck?" asked the father.

"No. Not today." Jake paused for a moment, then continued,. "It's been a while since I been out here." He cleared his throat again and looked around. "Say, by any chance, you know where Patriot's Path is?"

"Sure. Right over there." The man pointed with his gun. "See the blue marker on that maple?"

"Yep, I see it. Thanks." Jake tipped his cap again. "I'm on my way back. My wife gets worried if I stay out here alone too long."

"Mine's the same way," said the man. "Good day."

Jake smiled and waved and started walking towards Patriot's Path. He forgot where the blue dot was.

"Where's that marker again?" he asked, turning to the group.

"There," said the son who had shot the deer. He pointed to it and smiled. Jake turned to look for it. He finally saw it on the maple tree, the blue paint fading into the bark.

"Thanks," Jake said, walking toward the marker, never once taking his eyes from it.

Carter Holland

"Dance of Alabaster"

I see you in a dream and
your beauty is unbearable.
I want it to last forever
but then, the dogs arrive.

You are dancing under
a winter fat moon in an endless
field of upturned earth.
Your body is polished marble,
your eyes, sparks of black obsidian.
Two arms float in infinite arcs
that bend blue, fluid as a thought,
from the grace of god.
I watch the silent dance
and drink you with my soul.

Then the dogs come,
savage and wild.
They circle you with snarls,
fangs bared, ready to strike,
their yellow eyes dead with empty lust.

The lead dog lunges,
a slashing box of kinetic power,
his teeth search for your flesh
but instead find stone
and shatter.

Jay Speiden

Winter Solstice

Overhead, the sun's faded trail bisects grey sky,
journey shrouded in muting overcasts.

Tainted vermilion circuit complete,
he retires at the dominance of darkness
and submission of light.

Standing against the backdrop of the dirty sunset,
he is poised on the verge of obscurity,
his silhouette disguising the equal but opposite,
the black and white, the yin and yang:
restless, they swirl and shift,
a struggling, dynamic equilibrium.

Reflective among the scattered, anonymous cairns,
his mortality blinds him to the infinite,
fingers interpreting the rutted runes
and characters morbid.

A gothic portrait in silvered greys,
his art feigns life -
metallic expression of contrasts
rapturous in salute to his mistress, the moon.

The vampires of his lineage sleep deep
beyond the reach of sun;
the darkness and loam nurture their bloodless
and perfect pallor.

While above, the analogous monochromes,
framed in display of common reverence,
oxidize yellow with light and time.

Their legacies of eternal and listless ghosts
roam the damp catacombs of his spirit,
hiding themselves from consciousness glare,
appearing briefly in daydream and nightmare,
equal and inscrutable.

Alone and unwary of the supernature of his blood,
he harbors no waters, no crosses, no psalms:
in denying the Holy,
he embraces faith in omen
and spirituality of self.

Surrounded by the swirling mists and fogs,
strange vapors of decomposition,

He kneels upon the frozen composte mound,
reaches a hand to the ghastly, paling limbs,
stretches a finger toward trembling, rubied droplets
suspended from fleshless, flashing fangs,
fallen to whet lean and lecherous lips.

He cloaks himself in the guise of night,
a creature of absolutes,
he becomes indistiguishable
as a cat from the shadows he abhors
for their indeterminate shades.

He makes to dwell on graveyards' hallowed grounds:
intent and earnest in his vigil to attend
the hoarse-whispered utterances of
his darkest ancestors.

K. Lynn Rogers

Fish Story

"All right, you just sit right here on the bank, I'm gonna fish for my dinner while I tell you my story. Here, let me take off that blindfold so's you can see, it's ok here. You're the first one I've let see me in years, let alone ask me questions."

The old man put on his green rubber waders and walked out into the river up to his thighs. He placed a large, gray, minnow shaped lure on his line and cast it toward the far bank.

"Don't you go moving around, you just sit right there where I can watch you."

"What? You want to know when it began? Well, I suppose that's as good a place to start as any, at the beginning. Just let me give you a little background first."

Having just finished reeling in his first cast, he paused while he flung the lure again toward the opposite bank, some thirty yards across the brown water.

"You see, I've been fishing this river since about '13, yeah it was '13. Before that I had been travelling around trying to set things right. City to city, state to state, I tried to tell them that it just wasn't right. They didn't care, they didn't even have to say a word. They just let us run around in circles. . . they knew they had us beat. Time was on their side."

"In '11, yeah, I'd been seeing her for just about a year. Well it was in '11 that I wanted to get married and start a family. . . "

"What? Oh, you've got to be kiddin' me! Married. Married. You don't know what married means. Holy. . . well, I have been out here for a while. Married is, was, when a man and a woman were in love, and they wanted to live together forever and start a family, you know, have kids."

The old man waded a little upstream, though never letting me out of his sight, and cast again toward the opposite shore. He reeled his lure in methodically, slowly.

"Well, anyhow, she had other ideas. She just up and left me one day. . . out of the blue. Sure she left me a note, but that didn't help me any, it just got me more worked up. Her note was simple, to the point. It said, 'Dear Adam, I don't need you any more. Love, Gloria '. She was never much for words."

"Oh, yeah. So from then on out, that is until '13, I spent half of my time looking for her, and the other half trying to convince them that what they were doing was wrong, really, really, wrong."

"Once, I ran into one of them in Seattle, no, maybe it was Portland. Well anyways, this was one of the few of them that would even talk, most of them just smiled. So I says 'What you're doing is wrong, it's unnatural' and the reply I got was 'Too bad, we're doing it. You're future is in a museum.'"

"So like I said, I been up her since '13. It was in that year that I heard that, and it was in that year that I decided to turn tail. They hadn't decided to kill off anyone yet, don't get me wrong, but I got the feeling they might. You know, just to speed things up a little."

The old man cast his lure again into the muddied waters, reeling his lure back in the same steady fashion.

"I don't know, I was optimistic. I was hoping that things would get back to normal on there own, maybe that they would realize on their own exactly what they were doing. Shit. . ."

The old man's lure had hit a snag in the murky river waters. He strained, bending his pole into a c shape before the line finally broke free. He quickly reeled in the slack line.

"From the looks of you, and what you been asking, things are never gonna get back to normal."

The old man looked at me inquisitively, rather gravely, before he again cast upstream.

"Well, anyhow, I imagine you're tired of all of that personal stuff. I suppose I'll start in with the story of how it all began, well. . . the beginning of the end. Just let me know if you need anything, I got tons of fresh water and dried salmon. . . hunh, dried salmon. Well I got plenty if you want a taste."

"How old did you say you were? You didn't? Oh, well how old are you? Sheeeiit, nine-teen, well you don't know nothing about anything do ya'. So that means that you were born, well conceived, or whatever, in '43 or so. Boy, I have been up here a while."

"Well, things began on this very river in '84 I believe, yeah it was '84. Hang on a second while I get something to chew on."

The old man reached into his pants pocket and pulled out a pouch of chewing tobacco. He removed a rather large wad and placed it in his mouth, compressing it under his cheek. The hair on his face kind of bristled and stuck out when he chewed. He had an awful lot of hair on his face, more than I'd ever seen.

"I'll bet you're wondering how I get a hold of this stuff, aren't you? Well, you see, every time I need a little something, you know, fuel for my lamps, or matches, or something, I sneak down river, now this is just between you and me, I sneak down river to Loraine's Tradin' post and break in and take whatever I need. It was quite surprise to find a carton of Red Man in the back, so I took that too. It was all covered with dust and grime. I think Loraine must of been saving it, cause I knows they don't make it no more."

"Any way, just a couple of miles upstream there was a place called the Oregon Salmon Hatchery, I believe it started up in the summer of '52, quite a while before my time. Well anyways, the men who started it up

thought they would supply all those restaurants out east with all the salmon they wanted, so they set up all these hatching pools directly fed by the waters of this river."

"Yes, I believe it was run by all men at that time, women weren't exactly accepted in the work place. They just kind of stayed home and took care of the family, or maybe they taught, or nursed, or were secretaries or something. You may find it hard to believe, but that's the way it was. Men ran everything."

"So anyhow, this hatchery did real good business, and they were always trying to stay ahead, you know, do better than the competition. Well, it was in '84 when they introduced science into the business, and that's when things started up."

"How do I know this? Well, my Daddy worked in this place, and he told me all of this before he died."

"What? What's a 'Daddy'? Jeesus. Well, let me try to explain. My daddy, well that's my father, he and my mother got married when they were young and started a family."

"Well, anyways, they brought the scientists in in '84 to try to get the edge. That's when it changed from the Oregon Salmon Hatchery to the Oregon Salmon Hatchery and Breederly. They were trying to breed the best tasting salmon in the cheapest, most economical fashion."

Between casts the old man placed his rod under his arm to wipe his forehead. The morning sun was getting warmer, and small beads of sweat were appearing on his forehead. He removed his hat, revealing a balding head. The top of his head didn't have any hair. It was shiny, kind of like a small infants head. He cast again towards the opposite shore, spitting as he began to reel it in.

"Oh, now don't rush me, we got all day. Let me take my time and tell you the story straight, I don't want to skip nothing. You need to know the truth."

"So these scientists, all of them men, began to try to find out the best way to breed salmon. Well, what they discovered is what started this whole thing. They did their tests and their experiments, all kinds of stuff, and what they discovered was that the female salmon grew larger and tasted better than the males. So what they did was try to figure a way to breed only female salmon."

"They solved that problem right away. They started fooling around with these salmon's genetics, you know, their genes, what made them what they were before they were even hatched. Well, eventually, I believe it was in '87 or '88, they discovered a way to breed only female salmon. They rigged the female salmon so's all they would have was more female salmon, and the remarkable thing was this. . ."

The old man stopped to spit in the river, again casting his lure to the opposite shore.

"God damn those salmon, they made it so the female salmon didn't even need the male salmon to do it. The female salmon laid the eggs and fertilized them themselves, on their own. They didn't even need the male salmon."

The man stopped and placed his rod under his arm again. He reached into his pocket and withdrew a crumpled piece of paper.

"You see this, this is an article from the New York Times, I've had it with me for years. My daddy gave it to me on his death bed. Here look at it, it explains everything."

He handed me the article. It was dated August 15, '90. It explained everything about the breeding of the female salmon.

"You see this. . ."

The old man had removed a pink lure from his hat, he held it up like a prized possession for my inspection.

"This is my baby, my lucky lure, it never fails me. This one used to work well, but I think it's lost its charm."

The old man removed the gray, minnow shaped lure from the end of his line. He replaced it with his lucky one. It too was shaped like a minnow, but it was larger than the first, and more brightly colored. He expertly tied the knot at its nose, careful to avoid the two hooks that hung from its underbelly.

"Yep, this is my lucky one. I only use it when the salmon aren't particularly active. It never fails me."

The old man waded a little deeper into the water, moving a little further down stream before casting again to the opposite bank.

"You understand, this all didn't happen over night, it took years before it really began to have an affect. Apparently a few women scientists got a hold of this information and began a few tests of their own. They began testing it on American Eagles. They figured that since they were endangered species they would use the engineering to try to save the breed. You see, the bald eagle, that was the female eagle, was more beautiful and more able to stand up to the harsher conditions. So sure enough, after a few years the eagle was no longer endangered because it bred the stronger female types."

"So after that, they tried it on other species, the Panda bear, the tortoise, animals like that, trying to stop them from dying out. It worked, all those animals survived and reclaimed their lost numbers in a matter of a few years. What we didn't realize was that some of the more radical women scientists had other ideas."

The old man reeled in his line. He turned toward the bank and began to wade in.

"This story's gonna have to wait a minute. Nature calls."

He laid his rod down next to me and began to walk into the woods.

"Don't you go nowhere's honey, this'll just take a second, then I'll finish my story."

The old man had advanced a few yards into the woods and stopped right next to a tree. He turned his back to me, turning his head so he could see me in the corner of his eye. He began to fiddle with his waders, letting them drop around his knees. He then unfastened his pants, standing still and holding something.

"What, what's that? Well of course I'm standing up, don't they teach you anything?"

At that point the old man began to laugh like he had never heard anything so funny.

"Well," he said, laughing "I guess they really wouldn't get into the particulars about how its done, now would they?"

With that he fastened his pants and hiked up his waders. He didn't stop laughing until he was back in the river, holding his rod, preparing to cast.

"Well, anyways, all this happened about the time when I was a young boy, growing up and learning to fish this river."

"Well, what also was happening was that these women had been experimenting on other women too. They were fixing their genes the same way they fixed those other animals, the same way they fixed the salmon."

"It didn't catch on fast, it took a couple of years. The whole time there was never any news of it until it was too late. That was just about the time my fiancée, that's the girl I was gonna marry, left me, just about the time when we began to realize what was happening. But it was too late."

The old man again cast his lure to the other shore.

"Well that's when the shit really hit the fan. Women from all over the place left their husbands to go get their DNA altered. They never explained themselves, they just took off and got fixed, that's what we called it. We kind of joked about it at first, but it didn't take long for the humor to wear off. I think my daddy knew what was coming, because he taught me how to fish, and how to get around out here in the shelter of these hills. You see. . ."

At that moment the old man violently yanked his rod upward, setting the hooks into the mouth of his catch.

"I told you, it never fails."

The old man firmly reeled in his catch, grunting and wading back toward the shore.

"Quick hand me that net over there."

I handed him the net that was laying on the bank beside me, next to his tackle box.

"This ones a fighter, she's giving me all she's got."

The old man plunged the net into the water around his feet. He quickly pulled the net from the water, ensnaring the struggling salmon.

"You see, I was one of the last men born the old way, you know naturally, from sex between a man and a woman. That's the way we used to make babies. That was in '91."

The old man stepped from the water with his catch, kneeling on the bank beside me.

"You see, look at this, look familiar?"

The old man held up the salmon in front of me, removing his lure that was attached to its jaw.

"Look at that, she's a female, but she's got the extra parts. The last time I pulled a male from this river was in '15, the fall of 2015. He wasn't that big, maybe eight pounds, and he wasn't as colorful as this one. Well, I pulled him from the water fully intent on making him my dinner. But he had this look in his eyes, he looked really scared, like he was trying to swim away from something he knew would catch him. I threw him back."

Again, he showed me the underbelly of the salmon. It looked normal, egg pouch and fertilizing duct between its rear belly fins.

"Since then, I've only caught these."

Jim Dixon

Slumming

The table was too small
to hold the empties
and the place was filled with
twenty-year-olds in flannel shirts
waiting for something cool to happen,
it was 9:30 on a Thursday night
and under the blue light of
the neon sign outside
a man with his spine ripped out and
no shoes
slept on the sidewalk in
the razor wind of ninth street.
Somebody in a hunting jacket
with a blond vestal virgin on his arm
stepped over him and
swung open the door;
he imagined everyone turning
to look at him
as he walked up to the bar and
ordered two beers, glancing
left and right
slowly
like a Bogart B-movie private detective,
he thought he looked real damn smooth
and under the table John's knees
rubbed against Sharon's and I
called for another round
as the jukebox seemed to scream.

Stewart Engesser

Beached

I fall below bubbles
Gurgling toward different skies.
My shadow
Glides above silver fish
And soft green stones.
I float in a parade,
Gently drifting.
Hair, dancing slowly,
Sways around my eyes.
Rolling over, I see
The sun bend its milky rays.
All is calm beneath
This translucent blanket.

But, my heart
Taps, knocks, then pounds
Against its lungs.
To the surface I wiggle.

Hair matted to my brow,
The sun,
With its hot broad hand,
Smacks my neck and shoulders.
I thrash and squirm
To stay afloat,
Coarsely catching the air
That holds me to its shore.
A thudding motor
Dragging a snaking skier
Sends the message home.

Saline blood replenished,
I fall into deep
Emerald green harmony,
Under the suns gentler hand.

But soon comes a long moment,
And I wiggle back to shore.

Chris Dealy

The Missing Man

Julio walked the wall he had just made. It was cinder block. A grey and light looking wall. It was his custom to walk his walls when he was done. That isn't to say that he was balancing on his wall. That would be stupid and might ruin the job. He just walked up and down next to it a couple of times to make sure he hadn't missed a spot. There had been a space in one wall that he'd built on the top floor of a small building. How he didn't notice the opening was a mystery to his boss. Julio didn't wonder why the opening was there, he knew he was capable of this kind of incompetence. That is why he walked his wall his light looking cinder block wall; to make sure he hadn't skipped an opening.

There was no hole this time but that didn't mean he hadn't left one. Julio had a hard time seeing his mistakes. When he missed the spot on the top floor of that small building his boss thought that it must have been difficult for Julio to create a space in his walls. But Julio was ready for the complaint. He replied "But sir. Do you not have anything missing? It would be strange to me if you did not."

His walking the walls he had just made was a small concession to his foreman who expected him to be more than himself. He kept this understanding clearly in his head while he walked.

When he was done walking his wall and was sure that his foreman would have no complaints, he looked to see what time it was. His silver watch tucked in his pocket, couldn't tell him. He pulled it out anyway, even though it had been some time since it had worked, and watched the low afternoon sun reflect off the watch face and onto his wall. All that told him was that it was hot.

"Hey Julio," his foreman yelled. "It's four forty-five. You got some time left." Julio was sure he was done for the day, but made busy until his boss was sure of it too.

"Okay Julio. You can go. No holes in your wall today?"

"No. No holes." Julio was ready to leave. And he did.

Julio walked, a different walk, home. He walked, slow and comfortable, down the street a few blocks. He was not in the city but in a neighborhood. Clean but not nice houses passed on either side of him. Actually, he passed them. He didn't wonder about them, and he didn't care who lived in them. He wasn't even curious about a boy who walked up to him on his walk and asked, "Where you goin'?" Julio didn't break his stride. He just said, "Home," and kept walking. It wasn't until he came to the end of the neighborhood, where he saw a stone mason putting rock up against a wall a light cinder block wall, that he quit his stride.

"Excuse me sir." Julio said. "What are you doing?"

The stone mason turned. Julio saw the red tendons in the mason's neck flare as he turned from a crouch to see who was asking him the question.

"What are you doing sir?" Julio repeated.

Julio waited some time for the mason to understand his simple question. He answered, "Putting a stone facing on this wall. "

"It looks heavy," Julio said to the mason.

"I suppose you'd rather I just left these blocks showing. "

"That could be nice, " Julio said. Julio then turned to go. He knew the mason had to cover up the cinder blocks and he didn't like to argue.

"Hey you," the mason called after him. "You retarded or something?"

"No," Julio said.

"Where the hell you goin? You don't look like you're from around here, " the mason said .

"Home. " Julio confessed for what he hoped would be the last time.

It was only a mile outside of town, Julio's house. He was already more than half way there when he passed the mason and left the neat neighborhood. What was left of his trip home he spent walking through a field organized into neat piles of disguardred concrete chunks, and twisted, used construction steel. He could see the edge of the houses he'd just left behind, and just ahead he saw the woods that edged the field of scraps.

It was hard to see Julio's house from anywhere beyond ten feet, unless you were in the air. He had built his home in a recession in the middle of the field. Nothing grew in or around the recession. The field was covered with long dry weeds, but in Julio's crater, nothing grew.

He came to the edge and looked in. He saw his house. He smiled as he noticed that, just like the day before, his house seemed different. It filled him with pride.

Julio had built his house out of the same cinder blocks that he loved at work. He had collected them from scraps left in the field. He used broken ones, and ones that had too much cement on them, and every now and then a block from work that looked like a perfect fit. He also borrowed little mortar for stability .

Like Julio's walls at work, he had often left spaces in his home. With these walls, however, he had done it methodically. For every block that he placed, he left an opening. The walls of his house looked like standing checker boards.

Julio stepped through the doorway. It contained the door which was the only solid portion of his house's design. His house was as unique inside as out, except that the evening and morning light patterned light across his walls. It kept him from pinning up even a calendar inside. calendar might disrupt his light's design.

He was guilty of putting up a sheet on occasion though. It screened the light from one side and altered the pattern on the opposite wall. He thought this was cheating though and he didn't do it often.

It was as he had left it this morning, save that everything he loved about it, the light designs, and where he chose to sit, had changed. So Julio picked a spot on his floor and looked around him. "It 's good to be home," he said.

And the sun patterned light on his face as the spring breeze brushed across his lap.

Tom Ream

Elegy

I sit
Dining on your brain
And the cat yowls in the chimney
Upside down.

The orchids on the vanity
Menace me
Tusks dripping with neurotoxins.

The gerbil in the cellar
Burrows in to the wall
Finding solace in cold stone.

The Happy Man has not called me
The orchids devour my brain.

Scott Dexter

"Close Range"

Juice of a ripe peach
runs down the windburned face
of a little Hopi girl.
It drops off her chin
and spatters against the
desert floor.

To the ant, the drops come
as bombs of delight.
Dust mushrooming on impact,
filling craters with sweet nectar
to be savoured.

The redtailed hawk is circling,
miles above
against the sky of liquid turquoise.
He floats, silent,
with the wind.
The pearl of his
brown eye rotating
moist in the socket,
spying out first
the girl,
and next the ant.
From up here juice
hitting the desert floor
sounds like mortar shells
impacting
at close range.

Jay Speiden

No Longer

The wind in my hair
goes at the speed of light
as my legs, tan and hairless,
pump the bicycle faster
in order to thrust me through
the space. "Just enough room".
I scream as I fly
between the bumper of Grandma's
brown Dodge and the tree at the end
of the driveway, the one Dad sometimes
bumps into, backing up, when he is drunk.
I am seven. A big boy my mother
says as she explains the rules of riding.
'Stay on our street. It's a dead end so
there's no traffic. And you will
come in when I tell you to.'
"Yea, yea", I say running out the front
door, paint flaking off in the warm breeze.
"Yes." I silently repeat.
On the fourth time through the space,
I realize Mom, Dad, even Grandma, sit
on the porch. when there was a porch.
"Watch me, watch what I can do."
I say, turning the bike back towards
the empty street. My whole body,
moving to create speed, hurls
itself and the bike back to the tree
and the car. The wind roar in my ears
perhaps deadens my senses, for I crash
straight-as-an-arrow, as Grandma later
recounts, into the tree, which my
father cuts down two years later.

Shannon Salsler

In a Bar in Georgetown, Colorado 1990

"You can sit here as long as you like."
said the waitress with the western smile
as she dropped the check
on the hardwood counter.

We ate cactus and corn chowder,
took long sips of cool beer,
and talked about the summer.
My index finger traced the circle
left on the bar by the glass, and
I looked at you in the diamond dust mirror
and smiled.

Earlier, the waitress had sprayed
a flashlight beam on the mirror
making the diamond chips sparkle
like sun on spring snow.

"This here is diamond dust,"
said the woman.
"Guaranteed never to fade
or grow dull."

John Stoddard

I leave today for reasons of yesterday,
The man working at the fence post plant called,
And I returned his call,
For the rest of the day, I don't eat.

Off to the side of my mind I remember something about farming,
Fence posts are very important, and need to be put up father and son,
Father and son,
Going with this thought, I pack a meal for Warner, the German I know
will
be there, and drive.

Thoughts of the Germans that dad got from the POW office,
how glad they were to work for my family, as mom killed two chickens
everyday for lunch and set a place for all eight at the table.
Only if they knew we were Jewish. Jewish tobacco farmers.

They were glad to be here, instead of home. At least for now.
Sie Frei, Wir Frei.* They liked the fried chicken.

Chains and bald heads, make me think prisoners, happy prisoners.
I decide not to work today, but I do drop off lunch for Warner.

*You free, we free

Brian Wills

