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Poetry

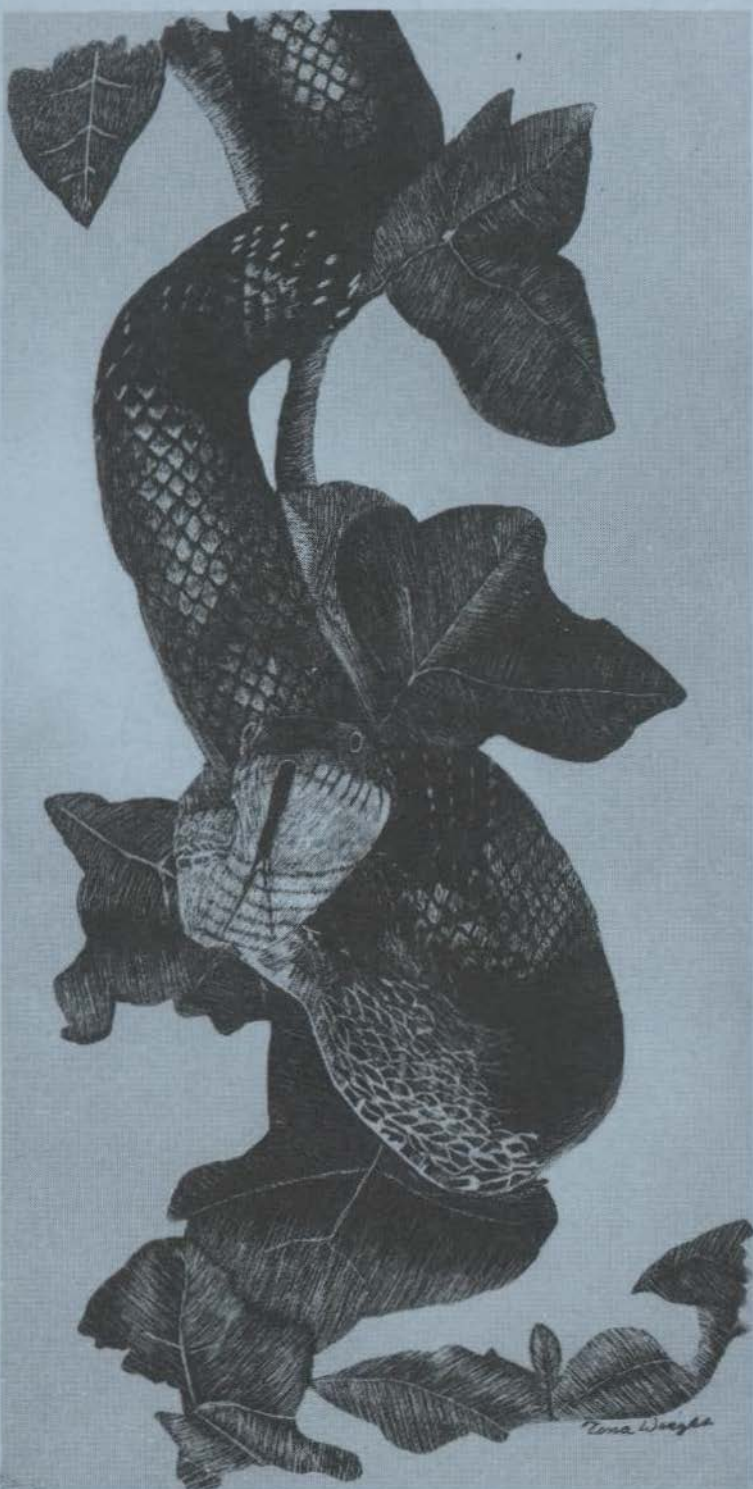
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THE VEHICLE

Vol.26, No.1

Fall 1984

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Thoughts on I-57

A poem on the highway
must be like the wind
lifting
a girl's skirt
the moment complete in one motion
one glance off the road

Frame the fields off the highway
take a picture of the girl
and the wind blows
a moment is swept away

Driving
out the window
a film goes by
too fast
no story
what?

A documentary
made by a truckdriver
at 70 m.p.h.
each time through
cutting frames
stopping moments
adding a soundtrack
—something lonely
and American

The poet and truckdriver
united in America,
seeing a montage

The poet choosing words
like a woman shopping
in a grocery store
the truckdriver stopping
the hands of the clock
(cut this mile)

A truckdriver reads maps
—looking around
not down
a poet steps through words
like an astronaut walking on the moon.

Jim Caldwell

A Night Between Lonely and Blind

My midnight
wakes me
with words,
tears in vague dream
that never break free
enough to cry.
I don't want to feel
like some lonely street child,
whose words are incoherent.
I don't want to hate
the street lights,
or fear the darkness,
or forget what my hands are like.

Jennifer K. Soule

What Is Unnatural Is Sometimes Magic

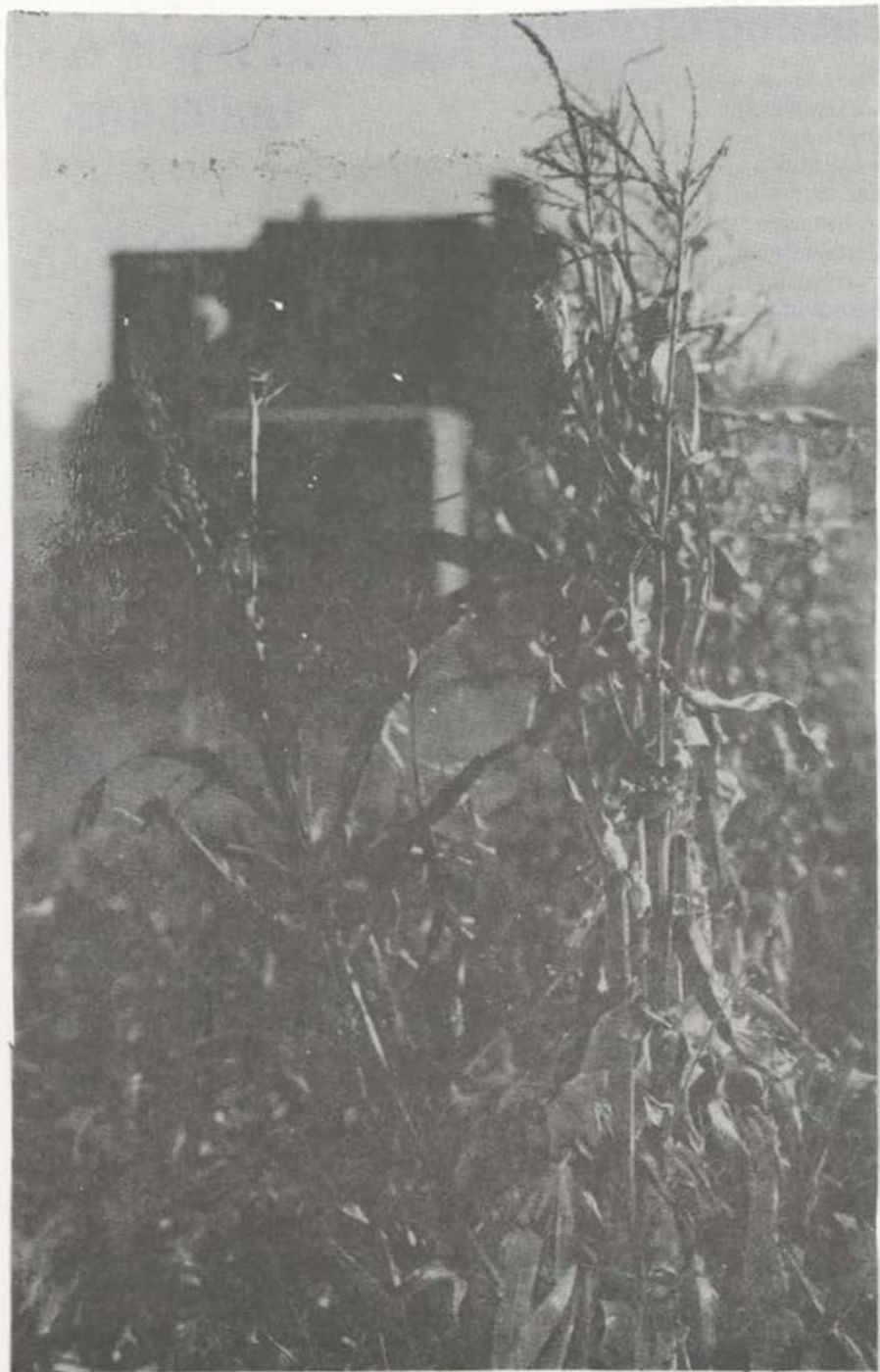
My brother was twelve when
he tore a celluloid record out of
National Geographic and invited me
to listen to the sad song of a whale
speeded up until it was the singing of a bird.
What if from the rock bottom,
a whale would gather speed and shoot
toward the surface, becoming smaller
as it shot, until it broke the water
with a small explosion that
turned fins to wings,
and it flew, gaining
certainty, ripping into
feather, bursting colors,
until it finally became
tired enough to sleep
for a while on a stick?

Angelique Jennings

Cutting Closeness

The knives
we used
that day
were sharp
and cut
to the core.
But we were
careful,
removing
each other's
"skins"
with delicate
surgeon's hands.
We were
the peeled and pared
apples
in each other's hands.
With careful strokes
we cut
away the bad
until all we had
was the good.
The real you.
The real me.
Then slowly,
carefully,
we lifted off
layer after layer
until we came
to
the
core.
Held in the palms
of our hands,
we finally saw each other,
the seeds of our souls
which, if nurtured,
would grow
and begin a
new generation.
I never knew
I could feel so close
to a man
by simply making
and baking
an apple pie.

Becky Lawson



The Sensuality of Corn One Week in August

Drifting between sleep and wake, your body
uses warm syllables to rub away the chill
from the rainstorm pelting the window above
the bed, sinking into variegated fields full
of the heat of your hand on my belly, pressing
away in the dark the ache cradled there,
not knowing how much of it I feel
or how long it will last.

Your leg over mine, your head on my shoulder,
streaming soft tassles and warm husks tickle me
in your sleep, interrupted by the tug of my hand
at your chest to wake you.

I breathe tight-lipped the air once tucked
between the dark rows full of gnats pushed
out into the lane, so dazed am I by the grain
swaying starched wind so far away
from your hand on my skin
and your eyes on the ceiling, and I wonder
which one of us the rain
will put back to sleep first.

Michelle Mitchell

American Music

playing the guitar
as a flopping fish
out of water

music dragged
on the shore...
running fast outlaw sounds
the rhythm of chains
six-gun drums
bomb blast madness
violence west

Jim Caldwell

Water is Waiting

Breath swells. Women
look among the rims of
glasses, hold the slow
dance of heartbeats deep
inside,
with the pulse of wishes
and water waiting. Cool
ice melts the glass in
their tendril hands.

Elsewhere in the night
the roll of a lonely
ripple counts itself from
source to shore, rides
over
the wish of water. The
silent rise of touch
causes foolish whispers
along the edge of grass.

The air is a tight chance
which binds the wanting
flow of water. Tonight
long fingers wrap ice
around
moist throats: they
swallow convulsively.
Eyes touch and never
meet. Nervous ashes fall.

Michael Kuo

Where

Where could you be
if not in my mind,
but contemplating your world?
If you could know
a perfect metaphor,
if you could compare grass and shoes,
would you feel them beneath your toes
differently than you imagine
how love feels?
Would you uproot the grass,
feel the clumps of dirt
between your fingers,
and think only your hands can feel?

The Fishing Hole

Heralding the start of day,
The sun looms low in the east
As the nocturnal symphony
Of crickets and toads sounds its finale;
Now is the time for the larks to sing
And the peckers to go about drilling their homes
As the cool night dew departs for the day.
The anglers come slowly
From the cavern of oak and beech,
Being led by an age-worn path
Strewn with remainders of past seasons.
Their thin, flexible poles are carted
Easily over jacketed shoulders;
The men talk softly, as the
Bobbers fight furiously to be rid
Of the thin line that binds them
Unrelenting to their work.
Going each his own way,
The men seek a favorite spot
And settle; lulled in time
To the rhythmic rippling of the water
And the sober sounds of a daytime forest.

Jan Kowalski

Miller's Pond

When I was young, we used to go down to the fishing pond on the Miller's land. The pond was a beautiful sight, all secluded by trees and the water, so clear you could make faces at the fish before you caught them.

Mom used to tell me it wasn't proper for a girl to run barefoot with the boys to Miller's pond. She said I'd never learn the art of being a lady if I continued to be one of the boys. I never did pay any attention to her because I knew I would have to wear shoes sometime in my life, but not then, not when I was nine years old and running free on a farm.

Many summers were spent keeping up with the Parker twins, Bob and Bill, and Harry Long and Robbie Beardon. I especially liked Robbie. I was always his partner in kickball, tag, or whatever the game of the day was. He was my best friend up to graduation from high school, of course, by then we had replaced tag and kickball with homecoming dances and movies.

Even in high school Mom didn't think I was truly a lady, but Robbie said he liked me just fine. I was quite proud of the fact that I was the only girl in science lab who didn't squeal in horror when we had to dissect a frog.

The night we graduated from high school Robbie and I went to the Parker boys' party. It was a sight, people all dressed up, food and music everywhere. There was also plenty of beer, and Robbie and I drank more than our share that night.

Around eleven Robbie asked me to go for a walk. I was pretty dizzy from the beer and needed the air. We walked out towards Miller's pond.

The pond never seems to change. The scenery around it changes from season to season, but the clearness, the stillness, of the water itself is constant.

I closed my eyes and listened to all the night sounds. The noises of the night have never frightened me. I have always found comfort listening to the chirp of the crickets and an occasional hoot of an owl.

I was just drifting off, trying to hear the screams of joy from long ago when we caught a "big one" in the pond, when Robbie pulled me close and hugged me tight.

The hug was strange for Robbie and me. We had never been physical with each other. Once we goofed around and even tried to French kiss, but it never strayed further than that. Robbie was my best friend, and somehow we never got around to a sexual relationship.

I pulled away from Robbie and saw he was crying. I never had seen Robbie cry like this before. I felt scared because I knew something was wrong. Robbie and I shared all of our growing up problems, but I knew this was a different kind of problem. I did not really know how to handle Robbie then.

Then a thought crossed my mind. Maybe Robbie wanted me in a physical way but was scared to show me. I decided to kiss him. Robbie seemed to like that for awhile, but pretty soon he pushed me away.

By this time I was so confused that I began to get angry. My graduation night was being ruined because Robbie was sad and wouldn't tell me why. I told him I was leaving and that he should come with me. When Robbie didn't make a move to follow me, I walked back to the party.

The next day Mom woke me up really early. She was crying. I had never seen Mom cry before, and it shook me up so much that I began to cry also. She finally told me that Robbie had been found in Miller's pond earlier that morning. He had shot himself in the head.

Where Robbie got the gun I still can't figure out. He was my best friend, and best friends are supposed to share everything. I miss Robbie, but I can't blame myself for that night. Robbie would have asked for help if he had wanted it. I wonder what made him do it. Everyone in town says Robbie went crazy.

I went home last weekend. I brought my little boy and girl. They are at the age where questions never cease. They wanted to know where I played when I was young. I took them to the pond. As they watched the fish, I closed my eyes and listened to the sounds, only to open them quickly when my little boy screamed with joy, "There's a big one!"



Kathy Stoner

Young Man Reading To His Lover

She watches his words
evaporate into his beard,
seeing him perhaps
twenty years away,
his brow tinged in age.
Then too, he would stop in his book
as though to share a thought.
But on seeing her, mouth set
tightly against the nightly news,
he would think better of it
and go on reading.

Maggie Kennedy

Shells

Water sucks sand from beneath bare feet
as it flees forever the stagnant land,
leaving behind a broken ghost town
like a flag on the moon.

A sunglassed woman smiles, picking up
what the sea rejects as she listens
to what she does not hear,
the houses and temples of Atlantis

a continuous surf is drawing,
burying them in a frothy grave.
Dolphins smile, believing they hear
children playing in the streets.

Christopher R. Albin

In The Shade

Beneath the waves
the octopus tends
his wonderous garden.
With ease, he collects
the corn and beets
and gathers the string beans.
His tomatoes
demand special care.
He tenderly pulls
one apart from the stem
that grows straight
upon an iron stake.
Its red is ripe,
precious like blood.
He watches for sharks,
softly handles it in awe,
then takes it to rest
with him in the shade.

John Fehrmann

Fall

The cycle is almost complete.
Tree gets its first bud,
Forest thrives in sweltering heat,
Corn field yellows.
Soon Nature will be covered in
Snow that glares,
Giving her much needed rest.

Don't weep for Fall.
Cool, dry air is stirring,
Apples drop, begging to be baked,
Crickets have outlasted their welcome,
Leaves impress with a palette of color,
Sun sets like glow inside a pumpkin.
It was a good year.

When blanket is tossed aside
Baby will be born.
Thriving through adolescence,
Ripening as an adult to lusciousness,
Drying up in later years.
When tucked in the eternal blanket
The cycle is complete.

Without fear
The Earth will open
To forcefulness of sprouting seeds.

Lynanne Feilen

Indecision

The stream flowed
Between, around, and over
The rocks.

Dave L. Bryden

Dark Falls Softly

The old man filled and overlapped the chair like a huge flesh balloon which was slowly losing air. He leaned over his belly to reach the television. His wrist turned, the button made a plip, and the picture shrank and went black.

"Come on in."

The door shuddered loudly against a melon—size rock placed on the floor to keep it from banging the wall behind it. The boy's boots sounded two loud steps inside the door, then were silenced by the thin rug.

"Where you been?" the old man demanded.

The boy turned up the visor on his cap. His squint was serious. His eyes were too much alive; they caught and grabbed at things.

"Been in the woods."

"What for?"

"Seeing things. There's all kinds of things alive in the woods. They're too fast to catch, though. You've got to be fast to even see them."

"I could shoot em."

"No."

"Sure." The old man nodded slowly. "I used to do it."

"My dad says people kill little things to make themselves feel big. He says I can't kill things. Not now."

"Your dad says a lot of things."

The boy's eyes glittered. "Boy, Clayton. You don't even go in the woods. Why do you want to think all the time about killing things?"

"Gotta eat."

"You eat."

"Gwon! Git home. Tell your mama to let out your britches a little. Gwon now, git! When I was your age I lisen to my elders, not all the time goin round givin them the headache. Git outa here."

"What're those piles of bones back there in the woods?"

"I ain't seen no piles a bones."

"You have. These're old. They're all white, and some are even kind of powdery, they're so old. Big bones. Leg bones and stuff. Maybe they're people killed in the war. Or by Frank or Jesse James. Clayton, you said they lived right around here, and came through here all the time when you were young, and your mom fed them one time, right at the kitchen table..."

I told you gwon. Git."

"Come on, Clayton. My mom told me to look in and see if you need anything."

"Yeah. An I'm gonna tell your ma what you need, if you don't git. Right now."

The boy's boots clubbed the dirt as he headed across Clayton's yard to the rental house, the only other structure in sight. The trees threw shadows down on his head and he could feel, on his skin, the change between sun and shadow as he walked.

"Why ain't you in school?" the old man called from his porch.

"Not time yet," the boy answered, without turning.

Clayton ate two soft-boiled eggs from a bowl in the refrigerator. He ate ten eggs a day, sometimes a peppermint stick or square of Ex-lax. No sense cooking for one. Besides, he was used to having someone to do things for him. If there wasn't anyone to do for him, he'd just as soon do without.

He sat in the chair and pretended not to hear when the boy knuckled the door, timidly at first, then more impatiently. The voice was filled with the early summer morning. "Clayton? Clayton, it's me."

No answer.

The old man sat and watched with drooping eyes as the heaving school bus burped to a halt out on the blacktop and swallowed up the boy, leaving the yards quiet until afternoon.

Clayton scuffed into slippers that slapped behind him as he walked. He took a bright green cap from a nail on the wall and pressed it on top of his head. He painfully walked a ladder—back chair over to the door. Like trying to dance with a crippled partner, one leg, the other leg, he pushed it along under the force of his belly. He held the doorknob and tried to put his foot on the seat of the chair. It would not lift. He grabbed his leg under the knee and wrestled his foot onto the chair, where it lay on its side, useless.

"What's the good of havin a damn foot if it ain't no good for standin on?"

He sat on the edge of the chair to ease his foot into the slipper that had fallen off. He rubbed his fat thighs with his palms and worked his lips against each other. That gun had been hanging over the door for twenty years. He put it there, and it was his to get down if he wanted it. He went to the kitchen and returned with a yellow broom handle.

He stood to the side of the front door and began to poke the stick at the stock of the shotgun. The bent nails that held the gun would not let go. His vision turned black, then dotted with colored points of light. He put his hands down to his sides to rest.

Then, with an explosion of determination, he jabbed at the gun again and again, no longer trying to hit a certain part of the gun, just trying. Finally the stock of the gun flew out of the crook of the nail containing it, and flew up over the barrel end, releasing the gun. It came down butt first on the seat of the chair, then bounced against Clayton's shin. The pain made him reel for a moment.

Clayton's spotted hand closed around the barrel, almost closing around something of himself that he could not quite remember. He twisted the gun up under his arm with the barrel whispering in his hair, an inch from his ear. He carried it with him while he searched for shells to load the gun.

"Kit, kit, kit..." he called the old pusscat from her safe place in a back room, and kicked her out the door on his way. His foot slipped off the back step and he fell on his back in the dirt, losing twenty minutes gathering enough strength to heave himself upright again. He discovered that he had dropped his green hat when he fell, but it would take too long to stop and pick it up.

"Shoulda never rented that house. Too much trouble havin neighbors."

"Not even a path anymore," the old man sighed.

His heavy belly nearly overbalanced him at every stumpy movement of his swollen legs, the layers of leaves shuffling and cracking beneath his tight feet. He feared the leaves that stuck between his heels and his slippers, and the dew on the leaves that threatened to slip him on his back. Birds' wings snapped the air as the woods responded to the intruder.

Clayton rested his body against a tree, cheek against the rough real bark, heavy arms clutching it as a lover would.

"No good for anythin' anymore." Twenty years since he had been this way. Twenty years! Twenty years of sitting in the same chair, having the same blanket tucked in around his puffed up legs, in a house not a spit away from the edge of these woods.

He started forward again. The pusscat twisted after him for a while before she darted into the brush, a shudder of leaves following her.

"Shoulda had the boys keep this path cleared." The boys. They couldn't do it, both working in the city. Good jobs, too—with the government. They never had been hard—playing boys. Not like Clayton and Eb. Now, when they had been small, they'd kept the path cleared just running down it every day.

"A bit of grapevine, that's what I need. A bit of grapevine...a bit..." He studied that thought until it became like the line of a song, repeating itself in his head. Grapevine. He lumbered around a bend of the footpath, worked his way east of the sinkhole, and then the gully took his feet on down until he could hear water gurgling in the distance. His mind wandered around in time, as unsure as his feet on the path. His mind could no longer weigh and balance, just as his arms were no good to keep him from tilting over the edge of the gully and rolling into the sewage that had created the crevice. Again, his fear forced him to choose a tree and cling to it, breathing with conscious effort.

A dog yipped in the distance. With it came the sound of a woman's voice. It grew closer, a song—like conversation, though the leaves did not crack and the bush did not tremble. Then he saw her.

"Mama?" His voice was just a whisper. Mama always was one for talking to herself. Suddenly, he was very young. Behind the tree, he pressed his hand to his mouth, to keep from bursting.

She came down the path, her apron held up as though it was full of something, the big dog wagging and sniffing either side of the path as he pleased. Only woman ever worth her salt. Almost. She was still talking as she came close.

Clayton jumped from behind the tree. "Who you talkin to, Mama?" he shouted. Mama stood there red-faced.

"I'm talkin to a smart woman, that's who." She turned off down the path, still holding up her apron. Before he could call out, she was gone. He stumbled after her. The backs of his legs throbbed and twitched like a

horse bothered by flies. He shoved himself a few small steps, afraid to let go of the tree, until the grapevine song came back into his head. Grapevine.

The dog barked again, farther away. That had to be Ol' Shep. The times he had with that dog! Him and Eb, down by the hunting dog pen, with Ol' Shep watchin' Eb make Clayton smoke a store-bought cigarette. Shep took to shaking his head in the corner of the shed, growling and yipping...before they knew what was happening, Ol' Shep came out swinging a king snake, big as your arm, and flung that snake right around Eb's neck like a collar. Eb let out a scream and began stomping on the snake as though he was doing a dance.

Dances. The big barn was a fine place for dances. Big Leonard would call the steps, and Clayton, would play the fiddle. No one else was as good as he was.

"Too crippled up to fiddle. Too old to dance. No good to myself anymore."

Clayton panted along, his insides beginning to hurt from the exertion. He clasped another tree to keep from falling into a pile of bones. Bones. White powdery bones like the boy said. He had to think hard, and a long way back, to remember where they had come from.

While his daddy lay sick in bed, Clayton had gotten a job with the county. A good job for a man who couldn't write his name. The boys were both small, and Lucille was still pretty. There was talk around the town that their biggest boy belonged to Shed Lammers, not Clayton. Clayton had heard, but he had no idea. Part of the county job was to pick up dead animals off the road and put them into the big truck. Clayton would bring home the animals and feed them to the fifteen coon dogs Daddy had penned up out toward the woods. People came from all over to buy Big Leonard's dogs, and the dogs had to eat.

Once Shed Lammers had a horse die, and Clayton went out there to pick it up. For the first time it seemed to Clayton the stories might be true. Shed paid just a little too much mind to Little Clay, and Clayton began to feel funny about the boy...it was like having a lie you told come back in your face later on.

That horse lasted a long time, out in the barn, the dogs eating a little of it every day. Clayton made Little Clay go out and feed them. First, the horse had to be hacked apart with a saw—a leg, then another leg...the dogs would go at each other in a big ball of fury when Little Clay tossed huge chunks over the fence. Later, the horse got so ripe that it would fall apart when prodded with a shovel. Little Clay would gag and try not to look at the dogs while they fought over the meat. By the time the horse was gone, Clayton had begun to feel a little sorry for the boy, and had helped him haul the bones in a wheel barrow down to the sewer gully, where they had sat in silent pile ever since. Not quite silent.

The old man kicked at the pile, and the top bones rattled down to reveal the jawless head of the skinless horse, accusing him. The whole pile accused him. He tried to kick at the head, but his chest grabbed him,

and seemed to haul him around. He tottered in the other direction, sweat breaking on his forehead.

Suddenly, air cooled his skin. He looked up from his feet and saw it. The spring! It was just as pretty as it had always been. Prettiest place in the world. Prettier because he'd been away. The water gurgled up in the pool, filling it to its fullest point, then surging away underground, without spilling over the edges. Clayton felt himself filling too. The pool caught at lattices of sunlight and shimmered them into a thousand glitters, throwing them up into the leaves on the trees. Shade beckoned him.

He wobbled close to the spring and found a dark vine holding tight to a tree. It was as large as Maudy's fat black braid. He wrapped his hand hard around it, and used the gun to feel around behind him for the ground, letting himself down slowly.

"Once I git set down, no sense tryin to git up for awhile." He took his slippers off, not with the eager tugging he had done as a boy, but using the toe of one foot to work the slipper off the other foot. He waited for his breath to calm, and squinted at a group of turkeys, herding each other away from the spring, turning their heads to look at each other as if they talked among themselves. He could hear small rodents and tree toads, but could not catch sight of them. It was just as the boy said; you have to be fast. He held onto the vine and inched himself forward until the soles of his feet rested on the surface of the moving water. He let out a sigh of pleasure.

Clayton placed the gun across his knees, broke it, and fumbled with a shell. When the gun was finally loaded, he nodded his head down to his chest and closed his eyes.

There were too many pictures in his head. Here he sat, his daddy's gun on his lap, too tired to watch for anything to shoot. If he squinted through the trunks of the trees, he could see the back steps of the rental house. It had taken him half a day to get this far, and when he squinted, he could still see where he had been.

Lucille was dead. The boys were gone away. He lived in the house where he had been born, but his mama and everyone else was gone. His mind, and the house, were too full. In both, there were rooms that had not been touched for many years. He did not want to touch them.

There was a room that belonged to Daddy. After he had died, Mama had not touched it either, except sometimes to say, "I'll bet the dust in that old room is growing deep." Clayton could imagine his daddy's belt, with a buckle like the state of Oklahoma, hanging on a nail beside the wall lamp. He could see Daddy lying in the bed on top of two feather mattresses, drawing in rattling breath and allowing it to escape on its own. He could smell the stale sick smell of a big body growing small.

There was a room for Mama, a room like roses. It was withered now, brown where it had been pink, brown where it had been green. Mama had not died in that room, but in the back yard under the clothesline, with a litter of kittens playing all around her. Brown kittens, grey, blue, black. One three-colored kitten with a black patch over its eye like a pirate. The room was closed up now, like a dead rose, dry and smelling of dust.

There was a room for Lucille, and a room for the boys who were not dead, just gone away, their faces fuzzed with the time that had passed. There was a pantry where, behind the door, Mama had nursed Clayton long past the time when he was old enough to ask for it, because he would throw a fit she could not stop. It was the pantry where Mama would hide Clayton at dinnertime so Daddy would not know he had refused to go to school. So Daddy would not make the rose-colored welts on the backs of Clayton's legs with the Oklahoma belt.

Clayton felt the pusscat brush in and out through his legs. Maudy's braid brushed across his lips. He opened his eyes to see her standing over him, and in the shadows of her face was something he felt with shame. The water on his feet was terribly cold, and he lifted his legs with his hands, setting his feet on the grass to let them dry. Maudy still stood over him. Not old Maude, but Maudy...

"Come and set, Maudy...I thought you were..." The words didn't quite seem right, and his voice trailed away, like forgetting. She sat. She tossed her black braid as she always did, and it caught the sun and turned blue, like the head of a crow in bright light.

"I been wantin to tell you, Maudy...all those years I wanted to tell you. It wasn't because I didn't love you."

"I know that now."

"But I was married. And two little boys. I was tryin' to do what was right. And you were so young...you were the prettiest thing I ever saw, Maudy."

"It's fine now, Clayton."

"I loved you. It was the saddest thing I ever did. Just put you on a bus, hand you fifty dollars, and send you off like that."

"I went back to my pa."

"Seems like we do what we think is right, and every day after that we know it isn't right. But you were so young."

"I know that now."

"She's gone now, Maudy. But you were gone, too..." He looked away. "Let's just sit for awhile. I'm tired."

She didn't answer. The spring bubbled up, softly muttering, and soon Clayton reached behind him for the grapevine to help himself up. It wasn't where it had been. The gun slipped from his lap, and he let it. He thought he heard the boy calling, "Claaaaaytonnnnn, it's meeeeee..." The birds called and answered, and far away a dog yipped and growled. Very softly, like dust, the dark fell all around them.

Angelique Jennings

Not a Parked '57 Chevy in the Summer in the Country

I am old enough
for a bed. My damp back, untouched
by frigid backseat vinyl,

isn't seen by the smokey green light
of a dashboard, when the blue flood
of television takes its place.

The shadows of actors move over
your shoulders, the blades almost sharp,
like knives for butter.

The digital clock beats
out twenty years a second.
I press my palms
as he does, on the screen.

I hear you breathe and feel
the scenes change from Jekyll
to Hyde, dropping the club,
spilling the liquid.

When it's over I love you
more for the strangeness
and hard sleep after.

Michelle Mitchell

Bird

Below the moon only
In glideful, glorious bounds,
Riding the wind through the clouds,
Denying death in his day.

Annie Heise

Clouds Created Only For Poets And Certain Women

Lock me in a room
free of distraction,
with one open window
overlooking a field in spring.

I will escape the silence
of my lover's sleep,
find release from midnight sheets,
laugh and be understood.

I will imagine clouds,
created only for poets and certain women,
the color of your garden's tulips,
and a misted crystal green,
that you would prefer to be blue.

I will imagine
the two small birds
you say are just alike
have left the cage in your room,
taken flight over wild flowers,
discovered they really were
declaring love in endless chirping.

I will take your hands in mine,
search them
for the pathway of your expression,
be once again uncertain
that my world will hurt yours;
in a moment of careful silence,
I will know your inside.

I will forget I have dreamt
that my lover's arms
were yours,
and that there is no flower
the color of your eyes.

I will realize the simplicity
of what you say makes us poets:
that we understand truth and beauty
are the same,
that we store it inside,
preserve it and give it freedom.
I will release it
through the open window,
then watch it emerge as wildflowers.

Jennifer K. Soule

Sand

No, your bones
shall not be broken glass
on the sidewalk, sharp
epitaphs swept away with other
dead things.

I will remember your bitter mouth,
the candy red muscle flexed
sweet inside.
I will remember your words, as a
boy remembers guilt, begs to be beaten,
and is happy stretched across
the knee.

I will also remember the ocean
of your back, waves my fingers
read there.

Gone now, blind gropings.
The grave is earth, tired
earth, with her poisoned gods
and demons.
She, too, must be anxious to
cough up the death clogging her
throat.

When light is gone, fingers of
the moon are flaccid, disabled by
what is, unable to grasp
the mysterious memory of illumination
and distort it.

Still, I would have preferred you
had not made a sound. Preferred you
had left in silence.

Sounds stab our sight when they are evil.
We remember the crying and not the tears.

Graham Lewis



Fred Zwicky

The Judgment Call

I want to go to the ball park with you,
Not to see the players
But to play our own game.
I want to walk down the chalk baseline
Barefoot, so my toes turn white.
You can stand on the pitcher's mound,
Pretending to spit tobacco.
I'll crouch behind homeplate
Signaling for pitches.
And when the bases are loaded
With a strong hitter at bat,
I'll walk to the mound,
Hug and kiss you,
Then we can run across the outfield,
Climb into the bleachers,
And drink warm beer.

Cathy Moe

“I was hip that night”

And I was thinking to myself, “Gosh, I hope I look hip.”

Sitting on the bar rail at Papagaio’s, gin fizz in hand.

Bobbing my head to the crazy, nutty, new wave group,
A Flock of Crows.

They’re hip.

I had my best Chess King shirt on. It had about as many snaps
and zippers as my grandma’s old girdle I used to steal to
straight-jacket my terrified dog into.

The shirt is hip.

My only regret was that my mom didn’t let me borrow the car
so I could go get a hip, east-side haircut.

And so I noticed this HOT CHICK, (who I could tell was HOT
because her Madonna-style hair was tied up by a rag, and she
had on a hip, denim jacket with almost as many snaps
and zippers as my shirt)

and she was dancing.

Provocatively.

She might have been Norwegian.

Please.

So I gave her a smile and a wink.

I don’t remember which eye.

I should’ve given her a ‘cudahy -Mo explained how to ‘cudahy a
HOT CHICK when we were at a happenin’ Marquette bar one night.

So, it had been a hip night so far: lots of HOT CHICKS who
looked like Madonna, a gin fizz, and mega-amounts of that
crazy new wave music.

Aces baby. Woo. Yeah. Hot rockin’ Flame throwin’

About this time, I noticed that a skull was watching me from
the end of the bar.

I pretended not to be alarmed.

“Hip,” I tried to convince myself.

The skull was attached to a full rack of bones, and had a
Chess King shirt on that was somewhat similar to mine
(no zippers), but this
did not make the situation any less unnerving.

Since I was in a hip club about to pick up a HOT CHICK,
I tried to stay cool.

I flipped the skeleton in the Chess King shirt the aces sign
and slammed down my gin fizz which was spilling out of the
glass because the ice was melting and I hated gin.

Just then, the skeleton in the Chess King shirt
spoke over the bar.

Over the nutty, coo-coo, crazy new wave music.

Over the cliched conversations.

Over the snorting sounds.
And over the heavy strategy of this meat market.
"Let's go Brad," the skull said in Charlton Heston's voice.
Lots of resonance.
The east-side hipsters pretended not to notice,
because in a hip,
new wave club, ANYTHING goes (aces baby), and one isn't
supposed to get alarmed at unusual behavior, even if someone
is getting raped or killed or something.
As I approached the skeleton in the Chess King shirt,
I didn't recognize him.
"Do you go to Marquette?"
"I like your shirt."
"Why are you here? Why did you call my name?"
The skeleton was silent until the Charlton Heston voice
rose up again.
"I am death. I am not hip. You are Brad. You are not hip.
Let's go."
The skeleton in the Chess King shirt then cleanly lopped off
my head with a ten-foot sickle, and my head rolled out onto
the dance floor at Papagaio's.
We left, and the hipsters pretended not to notice.

Dan Hintz

A Sight Of Wind

As the wind ebbed
I saw
a page of the Tribune
crouch
to the ground,
then rustle,
rolling out of sight,

and the wind
—timidly—
followed.

Dan Von Holten

"Tillard"

After twenty-nine years of service,
your retirement plaque hangs
proudly on the living room wall.
With the bungalow paid for, and
A.G. Edwards' investments
providing you dividends,
your nest of security smolders...
inside and out.

With forty-six years of cigarette smoke
stored in your lungs,
you wheeze while planting
this year's red and white onion-sets.
Stopping to catch your breath,
you look toward your tomato-bed,
thinking of the hybrids...
your thirty-fourth season.

Turning over the rich, black gumbo,
you dig at the roots of the crabweed,
wanting to tear her
from your wet and muddy garden.
Gardening, your place of retreat,
cultivating season after season
of tomatoes, onions, carrots,
potatoes, peppers, and green beans...
Rearing Alicia, Virginia, John,
James, Jorge, and me...
your produce—your source of pride.

Scraping the shovel with a rock
to clean the surface,
you sit on the picnic bench
waiting for your sentence.
Your stubborn pride keeps
you from crying...
you hear her open the back door
of her angry and bitter life...
you stop with the shovel
to light up another Old Gold cigarette.

Isabel M. Parrott

The Widow

It is not until now;
when forgotten is the curve
of his hip slipping into hers,
that she is able to sit
in the fading heat of the day
and cry for lack of someone
to complain to
of the humidity.
For it is his head
nodding beside hers
that she misses.

And so she weeps.
Not because they
can no longer linger,
watching the evening melt
orange about the green
canopy of the elm trees,
but because no one
is there to call
from shopping
so as to say
she'll be late.

Her tears help cool
the truth so well described
in the bored smile
of the waitress at lunch.
She had held her. Not
let her go for the words
that poured out like
melting snow from the hills;
slowly dripping, then
gushing forth until nothing
was left to draw from.

Maggie Kennedy

The Separation

He stares into his coffee,
opens his lunch
and tells them her breasts
don't fill his hands.

She knows the wallpaper, the curtains,
as well as she knows the back
of his head
in bed, at night.

He tells them he slipped
into the shower, once,
when she was in there.

She, three children
beyond amazement,
was amazed.

He says it was nice. He says
he might have done it again
and closes his lunch.

Michelle Mitchell

The Garden Hose Trial

The cold hit hard, like a man's fist,
separating to small
pinpoints, like icicles stinging.
A hundred stabs for each pulse
of my brother's counting.

I held on, face thrust
in the spray of the garden hose,
until each pinpoint painted
a dash of color across my eyes
and I jumped back grabbing for air,

and in that moment the air
held the very sweetness of
the leaves it swept through,
for I had stood his test;
lasted against the garden hose.

But it was not enough,
for my brother only looked down
and laughed. "Fool," he cried
and danced away as the garden hose
coiled about my feet.

Maggie Kennedy

Interruptions

It isn't that the day
has been too long,
or that the rain
annoys me,
ruining the purest
white snow
with piercing holes,
or that when night falls
the flowers in the window
close against the dark,
or that voices
from downstairs
rudely interrupt.

It's the glaring light
from the unshaded bulb
in the corner
that makes me
shade my eyes.
I am stranded,
sorry for the rain,
and the interruption
of your hidden beauty.

Jennifer K. Soule

On Happening Across Jesus While Cleaning the Basement

Propped atop
a yellowed, McIntosh
apple box, labeled Xmas,
He rests, his halo
a circle of gold
in the dust coating
the glass frame, cracked
somewhere in the years
since He'd hung
above my bed.

My mother used to say,
as she stroked my hair so softly
as I knelt in prayer,
that He tended to listen
extra closely to what
children requested.
We were her direct line
to heaven, she'd laugh.

And as I'd lie waiting for sleep,
safe in the shower of the hall light,
I'd wonder if,
had He the desire,
been able to see his halo
suspended above his head.
And I'd reach fast
beyond my pillow
on the chance of catching any
that were floating there.

I place the painting
in the pile of things
to save and try
to remember where
it was I'd stopped
reaching for halos.

Maggie Kennedy

Gileon

The doctors at the Tuberculosis Sanitorium had refused to perform an autopsy. They had said that "It was just too much of a risk" and that "Immediate cremation would be the safest way...of course." Glen Cox knew each stifling syllable of the speech and didn't need—didn't want—to recall the hushed, cold way in which it was delivered on the day of her death. The words turned slowly in his mind, as slowly as his key turning in the padlock hooked to the supply closet door. He pulled back the door and reached in the near dark for the white container of formaldehyde solution, lobbing it up into the crook of his arm. With the other hand, he pulled out a metal bucket on a push cart.

It was, as he had expected, a moving sermon. He remembered watching the minister's white breath sweep the eulogy through the bitter, mourning air. He remembered how the funeral director never stopped smiling, and how a squirrel sat on a funeral marker a few yards away, biting an acorn. What could anyone say? She was only eight. They buried her ashes on April 10, 1911, at the Stockton Memorial Cemetery. "Only the ashes," he thought as he wheeled the cart down the long, dark corridor. It was five a.m., a peaceful time of day, with the exception of the persistent cough echoing its way through the building.

Glen was the janitor, the only janitor of the poorly funded Sanitorium; and it was his job to see to it that the place was sanitary, a big job for a sixty year old man. He carefully performed the formaldehyde disinfection of each room that required it after room changes, discharges, and death. He knew that this time would be the worst.

The women in the kitchen were just beginning to bang the dishes around and to stab the breakfast pork with butcher knives. Behind the laboratory door across the hall, Glen could hear the test rats galloping in circles and hitting the sides of their cages. It was a sign that they were ready for a busy day in the labyrinth, a bacilli-drowned sugar tablet sitting in the center. Glen knew the lab, the cold metal and the white porcelain of it. He'd cleaned the thing for years. Today, he passed it by. Room 34 was just at the end of the hall, locked tight. He took the keys from his denim pocket and turned them over in his hands. There was still the cotton to get; that, and the wire.

He put down the solution and unlocked the door to still another supply closet, trying to give his full attention to grabbing out the cotton and the wire. But his eyes traveled to the room at the end of the hall. He knew the trick: just to do it. Just disinfect the damn thing, like all those other times. He picked up the distiller from the shelf. It seemed heavier than he had remembered. The hall light spat a liquid yellow light at the doorway, missing it by inches, and he lowered his thin frame onto a can of floor wax. The white container on the floor in front of him faded into the wall on the other side.

Why, on that particular day, had he taken her onto his lap? What had possessed him to visit her before removing his work clothes, clothes probably rancid with tuberculosis dust that his own granddaughter could in-

hale? The marionette. That Goddamned puppet. He'd seen the toy in the dime store window. It had smiled right at him, he was sure. He'd immediately thought of Ann.

"What's that, Grampa?" she asked him, pointing.

"What's what?" He grinned at her.

"You know...behind you, in the box." He shrugged his shoulders, and she played the game.

"Is it a candy?" Her eyes lit up.

"Nope." He shook his head and sat down in the rocker.

"Is it a story?" She wiggled into his lap.

"Nope." He poked her in the stomach. She giggled.

"Then what is it grandpa? Show me...please?"

He took it out of the box and held it before her. She leaned back, afraid at first; but when he moved the strings, the fear switched to amusement.

"Can I hold it?"

"Sure can, pumpkin. It's yours!" He handed the toy over to its rightful owner.

It was such a happy toy. The way it had danced in the breeze, the way she had held the wooden mechanism and had made it dance, the way she had held it on her lap that afternoon, insisting that she be the one to tell the story.

Gileon. That's what she called it. Got it from a book. Glen remembered how she would rock it to sleep in her rocking chair—even in the sanatorium. "Wonder what ever happened to the thing?" He muttered, pulling himself up from his uncomfortable seat. "Surely, they must have done something with it when they...when they took her." The sunlight in the hall was considerably brighter now, though not full force. Glen checked his watch. "Twenty minutes for cotton. A real shame." He was disgusted with his own waste of time. It was understood though, that this disinfection was to be his only task for the day.

He closed the closet door and snapped shut the padlock, mumbling, "Yep. A real shame." He moved the supplies around on the push cart, and a chill ran over him. The feeling was almost permanent in this building. Above each door is a sign which silently drills. "Patients must have Plenty of air and sunshine. Leave all the windows and doors left open for the Rest Cure." Door number 34 was closed.

"Hope this stuff takes the first time," he said under his breath. The creaking of the metal cart drowned out his shuffle to number 34. He tried to whistle, but the dry air stuck in his throat. He unlocked the door. Three of the four windows along one wall were wide open and staring at him. The fourth was enveloped by a small white window tent which circulated air from outdoors to the skeletal bed sitting lame against the wall. A vacant light seeped into the room. Soon the sun would be full force. Low, wooden ceiling beams took the aerial view of the disinfection, and the paint peeled its pale green from the walls. A large wall mirror captured him at once. Glen ignored the reflection.

He walked over to remove the tent, almost expecting to see the child through the small window on the side of the tent, seeing instead the emp-

ty pillow. After putting the tent on the floor and closing the windows, he strung a wire from the top of the middle window ledge to a hook on the opposite wall. The wire cut through the center of the room. It was for the books. He hung each one over the wire, making sure the pages were loose. One of the books was entitled **My A.B.C's**. He remembered drilling Ann on her ABC's, not the standard alphabet ones, but the Consumption Alphabet.

"We'll have to get you better again, Pumpkin." He sat in the chair next to her bed.

"My throat, Grampa. It scratches." She rubbed her eye with one hand.

"Try not to cough, Babe. Now, can you tell me how many of 'em you can remember from yesterday?" Her eyes brightened. She'd been looking at her instruction book all morning, and she had that I'm-gonna-show-you expression on her face. She knew she'd get a peppermint for each one she could remember.

"Well, there's "R" is for rough playing that can make me hurt myself or my friends, and if I get hurt, I need to tell the nurse; and there's "A" is for anybody who can help prevent consumption, and"...She coughed softly, putting her hand over her mouth. "And "E" is for eating no food which isn't clean, and "F" is for fingers that I can't put in my mouth." She fell back on her pillow, smiling, her eyes huge and dark with the disease.

Glen knew that those makers of that alphabet had forgotten to put a special instruction in. "'T' is for the Tuberculosis Sanitorium worker who infects his own granddaughter." He handed her the candy.

There were fifteen books in all, and he made quick work of hanging them, a lump forming in his throat. He could hear voices in the hall, indicating that the patients were starting to get up. Everyone knew what had happened. They would smile apologetically and nod their heads, and because it wasn't uncommon for patients to infect doctors or vice versa, they would soon forget the pain etched on his brow. They would only concern themselves with keeping their own hands away from their mouths.

Glen moved the bed. It scraped loudly, leaving just the slightest hairline fracture on the wooden floor. As he pulled the bed to the center of the room, his stomach jumped into his throat. The marionette stared up at him. It was smiling, almost laughing, as it was revealed, its legs tangled together around the strings of one arm. "Must have dropped it in her sleep," he said aloud, in a tone he normally used only for excuses. He made no attempt to get a closer look. He could see it well enough—perhaps too well. Sunlight sprayed dustflecks down onto the wooden body. The months had not been kind.

One of its eyes was missing. The red and black paint around the splintery socket was flaking and peeling back like burnt skin. The other eye was bright with the lifelike toxic brilliance of Consumption. Dark, thick hair matted around its face; and a pile of small wood scraps hung loosely together, tied up tight for a naked torso. There was something perverse about the way the thing smiled, something Glen hadn't noticed a year ago when he saw it in the store window.

"Have to hang the thing. It'll need disinfection just like everything else, or possibly incineration. She slept with it." He kneeled down and picked it up by the wooden hand control, careful not to brush against the head. He carried it as if he were carrying a dead animal to the trash can, and the wooden joints knocked together. "Sound like hideous wind chimes," he mumbled. When its jaw dropped open, and its head jutted forward, Glen's heart raced in his chest, the sight was so human. Glen maneuvered the hand control to close the mouth. Glancing at the spot where the puppet had lain in a heap, his mouth went dry. He ran a large, red hand quickly over his bald spot.

There, in a circle of light, lay the perfect skeleton of a mouse. "How did that..." He didn't finish. He knew that he could lose his job over something like this. A decomposing rodent...in what was supposed to be a sanitary room? He looked back at the puppet. "How?" he wondered, listening to the voices in the corridor. The nurses were leading the early rising patients out to the rocking chairs on the front porch. He went to the windows, and although they were closed, Glen could hear the rhythmic creak of the rockers. He stood there for a moment, just taking in the morning light. Someone stood on the porch. Someone rocked in a chair. Someone coughed in the hallway. Gileon's body beat against itself. Glen stewed, turning to get the cotton.

The laboratory door was just a few doors down. There was a chance that the consumptive mouse had limped into the room, infecting and reinfected Ann, just as he had infected her, that first time. He would remove it after the disinfection. Yes, he would go ahead with his business and remove the thing later.

Glen tossed the puppet onto the bed, where its hands landed over its eyes. He grabbed the package of cotton and walked to the windows again, where he began carefully inserting the cotton into the crevice of each window sill. Without warning, the slap of wood on wood rang through the cellular room, making him jump where he stood. A strip of cotton floated to the floor.

Glen turned quickly to see the puppet in a heap on the floor, its empty socket eyeing him. "Damn thing," he said, hesitating before he picked it up and laid it on the bed—more towards the center this time. He would hang it soon. He knew he wouldn't want that thing hanging up for very long—at least not while he was still in the room.

His long, yellowed nails worked the thick cotton into the grooves, trembling slightly with each tedious step. A strong wind blew up and beat at the windows, moments before subsiding into the trees. The rockers rattled answers to one another on the concrete. Within minutes the crevices were sealed, and the keyhole spat small, white tufts of cotton from beneath the glass doorknob. Glen took hold of the bucket and shuffled to the faucet in the supply closet, where he filled it with water to douse the walls and the ceiling. Soon the water streamed down the peeling walls with each splash from the bucket, sending the mouse skeleton skimming on a thin sheet of water. It stopped by the bed. He stepped over the thing on his way back to the closet to refill the bucket. He

bumped into the bed on his way, and the puppet's head lolled to the right. It was 6:45.

Glen could hear familiar voices in the hall, the voices of doctors. "I'm sorry Mr. Cox. I'm afraid Ann's been infected...she's been infected...infected with tuberculosis. Could you tell us how she might have contracted the disease? Was she around anyone with the disease? Could you have infected her Mr. Cox? Mr. Cox, do you hear us? She's been infected, you know, infected with tuberculosis. How could this have happened, Mr. Cox?" He threw a bucket of water full force at the closed door, the imaginary droning of the doctor's voices still loud in his head.

After the dousing and the placing of more cotton, the room bled water from every pore in the room, and Glen reached for the marionette. The bed sheets were to be removed next. He wrapped his fingers around the wooden neckbone, the head and body draping his hand, the wooden control knocking against his stomach. He laid the stringed toy over the wire. Gileon stared upside down at him from above. He stripped the bed and carpeted the damp floor with the white sheets and curtains. Through the swampy silence of the dripping walls pierced a raspy cough. Glen looked at the puppet, which was still frowning with his upside down smile. The cough sounded again, and Glen's face reddened.

The sound had come from the porch, the sound of a child's cough. He eyed the petite spittoon in the corner and thought of rocking Ann to sleep. The room was suddenly a blur seen through his watery eyes. He wiped the tear away with the back of his hand. "I'm sorry, Mr. Cox. She's been infected. How could this have happened? Mr. Cox?" He stared straight at the puppet, hating it, despising its grinning half-moon smile, hating himself for being so possessed by the toy that he would subconsciously risk her life to bring it to her.

The white plague was a strange thing, the strangest. He'd never been infected. Didn't know if he ever would. "Damned puppet!" He called out, hoping no one in the hall could hear him. "Filthy, stinking piece of wood!" He kneeled beside the formaldehyde container and tried to open the cap. His fingers seemed useless to him.

He pulled himself up and moved to the bed, sinking down on the green, plastic mattress. The springs groaned. He ran his hands over the network of veins ripped into the mattress cover and looked up at his own reflection in the large wall mirror. His fleshy, red skin was a series of parallel lines, cut and recut by the water drizzling down and down, joining with other water spots left after the dousing and falling to the floor. His high, arched brows staggered across the top of his face. His gold-rimmed glasses shone like perpendicular lines against the grain of the wet mirror.

He watched the last few drops trickle down, letting his fingers trace the torn mattress cover next to him. He took a deep breath, knowing that he should try again to mix the formaldehyde solution into the distiller. The wind smacked the sill, making the wire quiver above him. The wooden skeleton of the puppet rattled, and his double-jointed neck loosened its grip on the wire.

Gileon fell. His wooden hand mechanism caught hold and suspended him for a brief second in the air at Glen's eye level. Before Glen had time to move or to think, Gileon danced his way down onto the bed, onto the cracked plastic mattress, onto Glen's outstretched hand. Glen jerked his hand from underneath the puppet, staring at the hideous woodpile next to him. He started to get up, until he caught sight of himself in the water-spotted mirror. His own nervous reflection didn't alarm him. It was the puppet's reflection that caused a scream to beat the cavity of his throat. Gileon was sitting up. His painted face twisted slowly into a smirk. Sheer terror blurred Glen's vision, and his throat ached with the pressure of the undelivered scream. He was transfixed by the sight, yet he was too terrified to actually look to the bed.

He watched Gileon begin to sooth and to stroke something, something small, something alive. It was the mouse, fidgeting in the wooden lap. The rodent coughed and wrapped its pink tail around the puppet's wooden leg. Gileon shook his head in slow motion and now sat lifeless, eyes shut. The mouse went limp. Pushing the dead animal off his lap in disgust, Gileon looked with accusation straight into the mirror at Glen, who was frozen in his own horror.

Glen looked down in his own lap, afraid of the sudden breeze which filled the closed room and terrified of the sudden weight on his legs. She was there...in his lap. Ann was there, her long, blonde curls framing her pallid face in the sunlight of the room; her eyes, huge dark blotches of toxic brilliance, staring up at him. He had forgotten about the puppet, he was squeezing her so tightly, the tears spilling from the corners of his eyes. He held her away from him just in time. Her neck started to swell, and her skin bolted with perspiration. She was choking on her own phlegm, and her eyes rolled back in her head. Her chin hit her chest, and her body fell to the floor. She was gone.

Glen reached for his dead granddaughter; but the forgotten puppet put a cold, splintery hand on his arm. Glen looked down on the bed for the first time, and actually looked at Gileon, ripping his hand back. "Get away!" he screamed, the sound echoing and re-echoing as it hit the walls. Gileon smiled. Glen jumped from the bed, a hollow scream developing again in his throat; but when he opened his mouth to deliver it, he delivered instead a loud, grating cough, the phlegm rising and bubbling in his hot throat. He coughed loud and long and stumbled over to the spittoon, missing the bowl with his yellow mucus only by inches. He knew he had it. He had been infected. "You're infected, Mr. Cox. You've been infected with tuberculosis, Mr. Cox. We warned you from the beginning, Mr. Cox. How could this have happened, Mr. Cox? Ann has been infected, Mr. Cox. How could this have happened?"

A cold chill came over him; his bitterness mounted with the fermented guilt. The thought of a smoldering puppet sharp in his mind, he dug his nails into his palms and ran for the door.

Michelle Mitchell

If My Father Were A Writer, He Would Still Build

Everyone has a channel from the outside
to the inside; it sucks things in
and bubbles them through with interpretation,
fountains them out again for others.

My father's is blocked with wood dust,
shingles, and twisted wire. If it were not,
he would sit at the table in his socks
and stack colored blocks around a core
of words he wants to give to me.

He would take things usually done without words
and build paragraphs like dollhouses, cabinets,
and couches, phrases that ring like a hammer
on a spike. He would turn his heart over
like making a new shed from an old barn.

He would write about hands that untangle twine:
they do it to use it again, working knot loose,
pulling bundle through it, a long strand
threading under, fuzzing up, puddling
on the ground; He would note the patience in hands
that stretch grey twine and work as if they are
carding wool, until it becomes a cat's cradle,
a loop, a yarn, finally ready to be bound
onto a piece of cardboard, but not tight enough
to separate the strands.

He would speak of the danger of death
in the small black snake of a wire,
end bared with a penknife to show
a copper tongue; he would tell a secret
that lies under the skin of each dark scar
on his arms. He would keep words,
hot as the spark of a saw, rich as the dust
of walnut, in a pocket beside his matches.

I am one place away from him, and it falls to me
to take what he is and push it further,
like moving furniture in the night.
He does not think about thoughts;
he likes things that have weight, and splinters,
and sounds when you drop them, things that can
be altered, things that grow more beautiful
when left alone. He does not trust his dreams.

Angelique Jennings

A Visit to Grandpa Gib's House

The overloaded station wagon
Crawled slowly, heavily
Up the long driveway,
And six screaming "ya-hoos"
Ran up the porch steps.
Grandma always
Hollered from the kitchen,
"Better wash up—
Dinner's on the table!"
Then Grandpa Gib
Would walk in
In dust-covered overalls.
"Beans look real good,
But I don't know if the corn
Will make it.
Billy, why don't you
Let them rascals stay
A week or two?"

The chicken and dumplings
And new potatoes
And hot, light-bread and apple butter
And just-ripened sweet corn
Straight from the garden
And ice cold tea
In the red and white pitcher
All made their way around the table.
Then Grandma brought out
The cinnamon-sweet apple pie,
Still warm and bubbly from the oven,
And we delighted in its flaky goodness.
After the coffee pot was drained,
The girls would wash the dishes.
I got to go roll down the hill
Because I was too little to work.

After dark we'd all sit
In the front room,
And Grandpa Gib would tell stories
About "hobo-in" across the country
During the Great Depression.
He'd tell about meeting Grandma,
And she would interrupt and say,

"No, Gib, it wasn't like that."
Grandma always remembered.
Then Mom would say,
"It's time for bed."
"Just one more story—."

Grandpa Gib always knew which one
Would be the best—
The Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo.
I was always going to be a cowgirl
When I grew up.
I'd show those old bulls.
Then I'd go to sleep
Seeing cowboys and horses
In the yellow-edged patterns
On the leak-stained
Ceiling wallpaper.

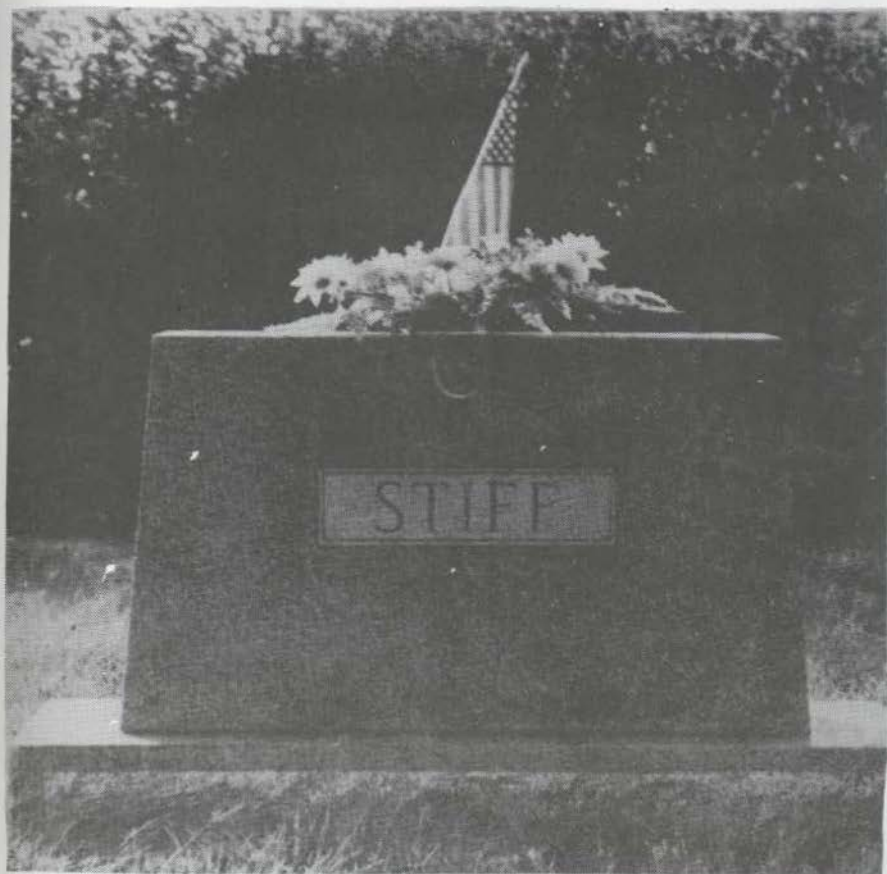
Grandpa Gib auctioned off the farm.
Nobody lives in that old house anymore,
Just the weeds—they've grown
Up through those
Three, great old porches.
Even the cowboys are gone.

Tammy Veach

For Having Seen

Spotted Mrs. Bishopjoy hovered on the curb
fingered her scuffed pocketbook
snapped open her lips and moved one
teacher's shoe to test the bricks. I saw
the boy who had no license come around the
corner fast and wide over the walk
saw it over again in the dark behind
my eyes. The flat woman went up
into the trees hit the red street
like a coat filled with bricks
and my heart went off: sick stomach
sick knees. Three years later it is my job
to watch the blue-headed woman
put pink sponges in her hair and ration
colored tick tacks for her headaches
sick stomach sick knees while she
tells me of a boy with no mother
who ran over her on the corner
across from the store. She is rumped
and filled with bricks
and I am still guilty.

Angellique Jennings



Judy Klancic

The Earth in Blue

I awaken to the sun's light
fingertips on my face: Sneaking
a look outside, I see the early
sunrise of reds, yellows, and oranges.
Trees moist with the morning dew,
shimmering branches swaying in
the breeze.

Flowers in full bloom stretching
open, showing their colors, bees
dancing among the petal beds.
The sky opened up its arms and
hugged the earth in blue.

Susan J. Bielsky

Things I Could Have Said

What can you say, he asks,
to help me remember your name?
All the things I don't want to say
in a room this large: like I can't
type without watching my fingers
and I used to look a lot like Bob Dylan
with a fresh shave and I like to
turn on the tv and the radio and squeeze
myself between dancing bowlers and
Shakespearean actors moving to Today's
Sounds. There is a crack on my
bedroom ceiling that looks like a
pepsi bottle or a squat Venus de Milo
and my childhood picture of hell always
had an ice cream truck with a bell. If
I were God, everything green would be
blue, and I once read an article about
eight people who killed in their sleep,
and there is certain music that opens
my chest and pins the flaps back against
my shoulders.

I like the smell of turpentine and
the sound of trees gnawing my house
at night and I hate to bite my tongue
when there is no one else to blame.

Angellque Jennings

Acrostics

What you say to
Others when you
Really
Don't know how to
Say what you mean—You know?

Annie Heise

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