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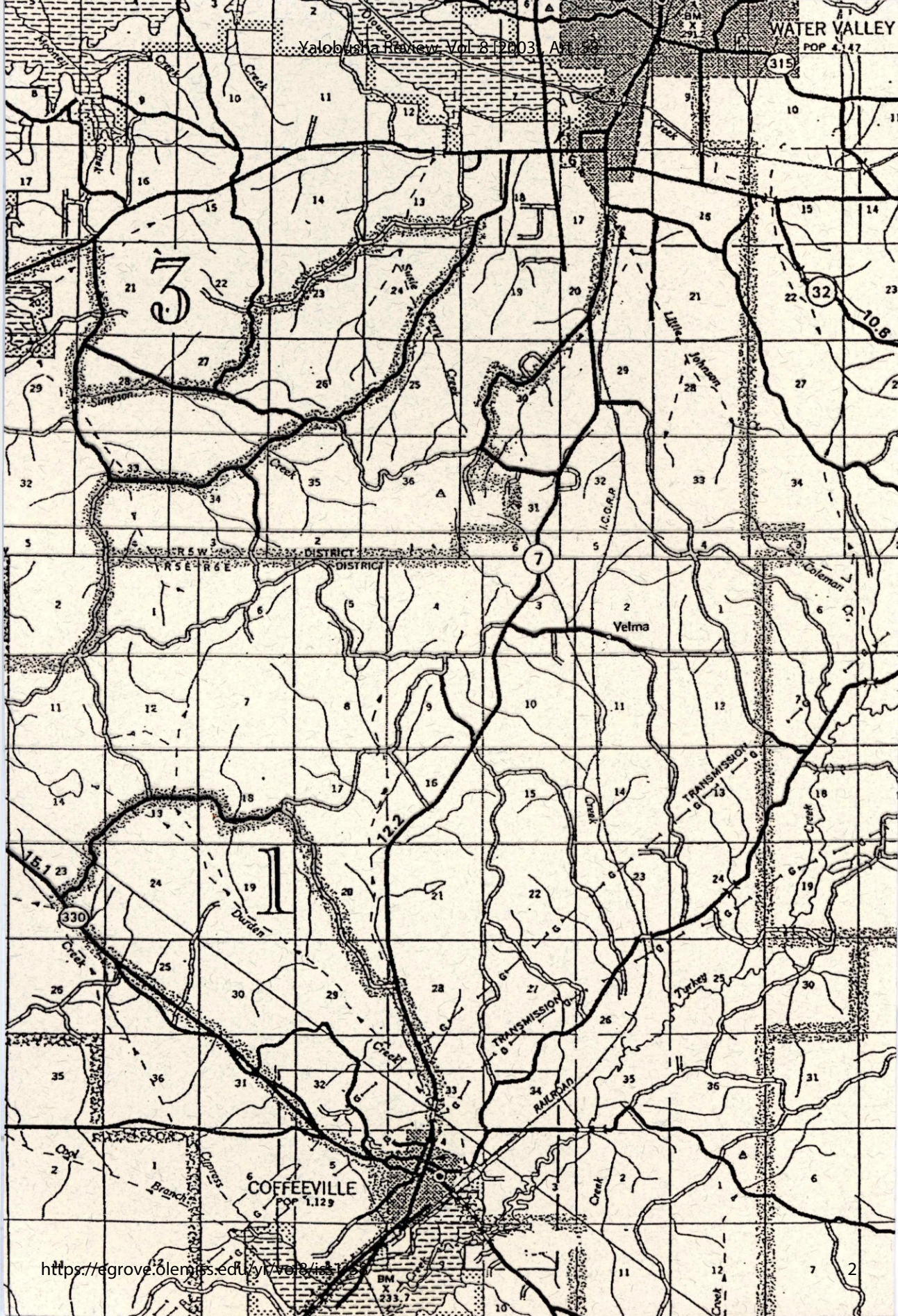
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Editors: Volume 8 (2003): Full issue

The Yalobusha Review

Literary Journal of the University of Mississippi Vol. VIII, 2003





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The Yalobusha Review is printed annually, in conjunction with the MFA programs of the departments of English and Art at the University of Mississippi. We accept fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, and black-and-white artwork. Submissions should be addressed to *The Yalobusha Review*, Department of English, P.O. Box 1848, University, MS 38677 (manuscripts will not be returned, nor do we reply without a self addressed stamped envelope). Please visit us on the web for complete guidelines or you may contact the editor at yalobush@olemiss.edu. We do not accept previously published submissions, nor do we read manuscripts March 1 to August 1. Our annual deadline is January 15. *The Yalobusha Review* acquires first serial rights of all manuscripts accepted for publication.

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End Papers: General Highway Map of Yalobusha County, reprinted with the permission of The Mississippi Department of Transportation.

Cover: The Southern Catalpa Tree (*catalpa bignonioides*) is native to the United States. A welcome shade tree, very old catalpas can be enormous. They have huge, heart-shaped leaves, clusters of white flowers and long, slender bean pods. At certain times of the year they host worms that make especially exquisite bait for fishing. The name catalpa is of Native American origin (Creek).

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The Yalobusha Review

Literary Journal of the University of Mississippi Vol. VIII, 2003

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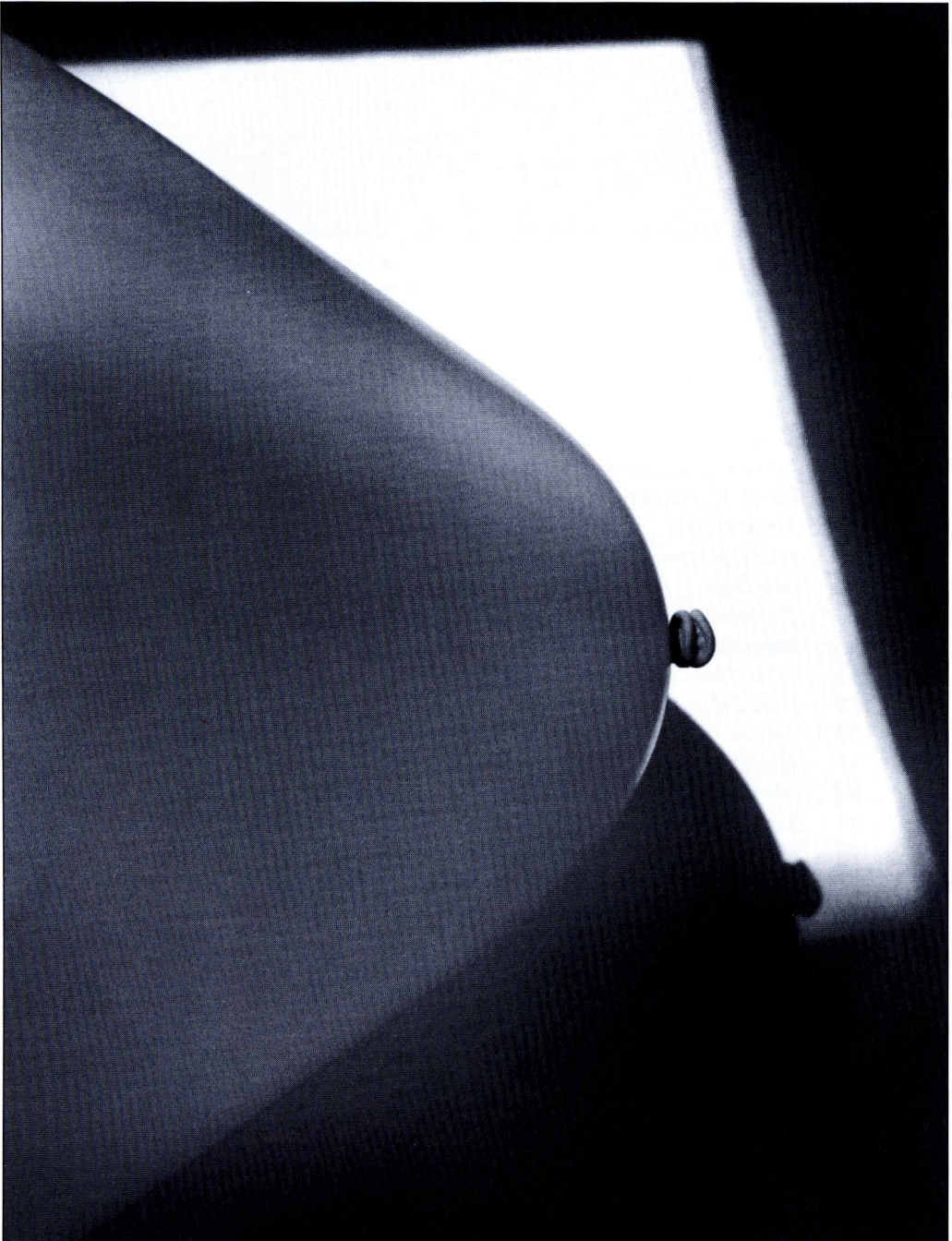
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Roger Pfingston

Sean Aden Lovelace

Crying in the Shower

We walked up from the employee lot full of Army green Dodge Darts and across the visitor's lot full of five year old Ford Broncos and finally through the physician's lot overflowing with thirty-three glittering BMWs. Sheila stopped us, grabbed my arm, which made my heart feel like I'd shoved a child from the path of an oncoming train.

"Let me smoke one more," she said, reaching into her purse.

I leaned into her ear. "This isn't the best place."

We stood behind a giant fan, an outlet from the hospital's laundry room. The air hit us like a hot slap, smothering us with a detergent/linen/rubber gloves type of odor. Sand and gravel shards and hope fibers and bits of parking lot litter stung my eyes.

"I like it here," Sheila said, her hair whipping about like tentacles, tributaries of lightning, scattered thoughts.

I turned my back to the fan; my lab coat a billowing cape, Sheila huddled within, puffing her breakfast tobacco. Rocking in the wind, head bent like a hen mallard, I inhaled her: stale smoke, sweet perfume, tint of gin.

For a minute, gravity lost me. I didn't feel the weight. I didn't care about around the corner.

Shelia backed away and coughed like a seal, the zoo variety, a fit of captivity.

"Damn," she spat. "I gotta get back on filters."

"Let's go, we're late for shift."

"Pause your ponies," she said, grabbing my wrist, looking to my watch. We entered the building, the hallway like a tomb after the roaring fan. Shelia paused again, to apply more lipstick. I leaned against the wall.

"Five thirty in the morning." I yawned. "Floor full of patients. Sometimes, I don't see how we do it."

"How?" She laughed and studied my face, or possibly I'm grandiose. "Nurses are patient people, haven't you heard?"

I rolled my eyes and pressed the elevator button. A rush of purring cables. Shelia was humming Jefferson Airplane.

"Sheila," I said, looking at the perfect curve of her right ear. She was looking up, at the descending floor numbers. "In the mornings, these early mornings, do you ever cry in the shower? Just grab the nozzle, stare into its

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black hole, and cry?”

She snapped shut her compact, then ran her fingers through her hair, lifting it, poofing it, something wonderful. “Cry? No, I don’t cry.”

Bells, and the elevator arrived. We stepped inside, with a lanky janitor in a neon bandana. The doors shut.

“Me neither,” I said, too loudly, and directly at the janitor. He looked up, his eyebrows arched like rainbows.

“Floor?” he said, nodding to the buttons.

“Oncology, of course.” Sheila beamed. “Were nurses. We put the care in health care.”

Up we went. Off. Then around the corner.

Todd Balazic

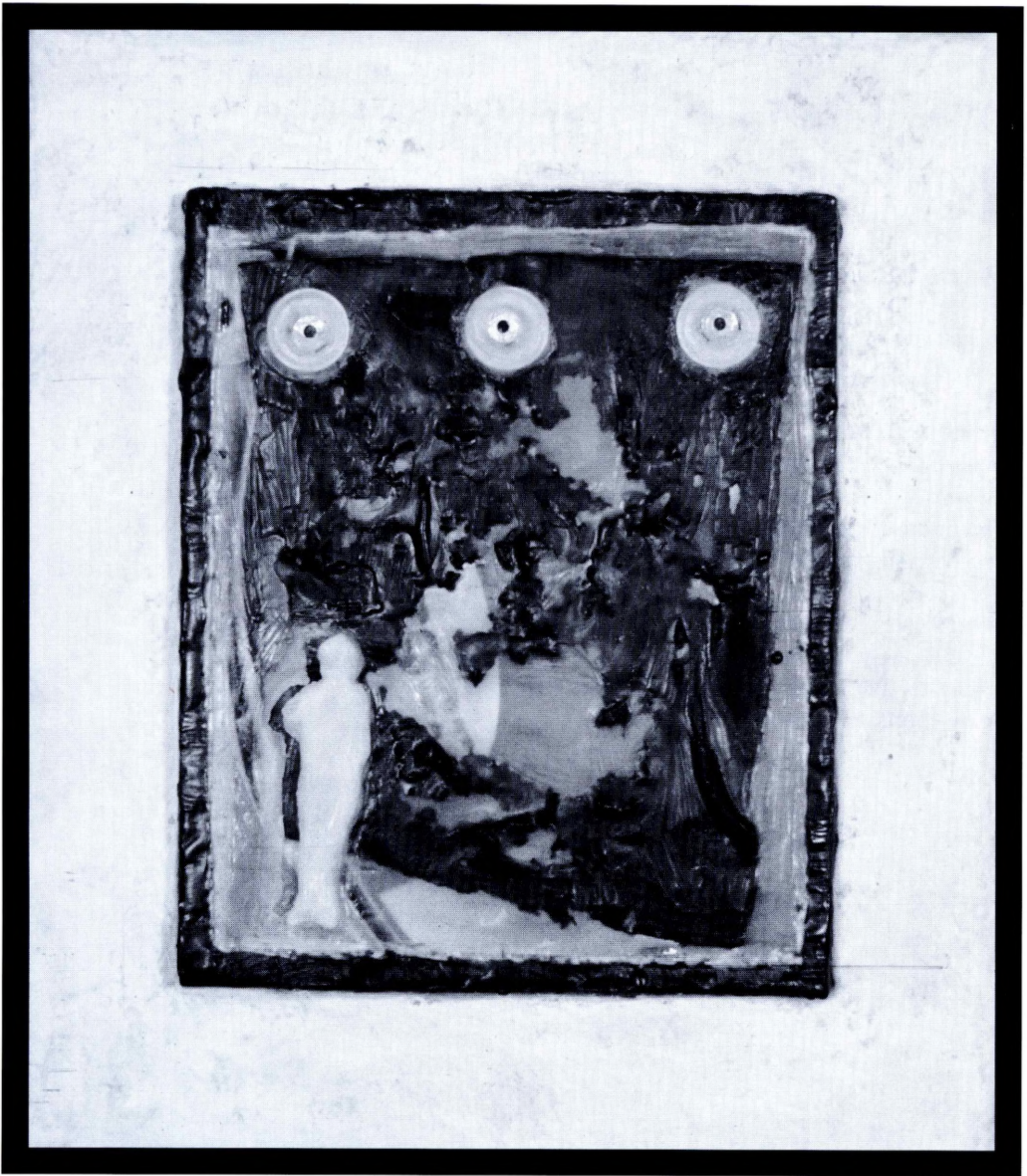
Don Juan in a Letter to His Son, Don Pedro

One day her breasts
will seem like dead jellyfish,
her lissome figure will spindle into reeds
snapping in a sea killed by sun.

It will be that bad.
It will happen fast and certain
in a senseless erection aimed at space,
stretched out past flesh and afflatus.
It has nothing to do with you.

I remember seeing this for the first time,
seeing it in the sky one afternoon—
the clouds like white boulders, the blue between
like Sisyphus ten times over.

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Preston Gilchrist

Kristi Maxwell

Deciding to End the Marriage

for Linda

Though she did it in the driver's seat,
she had the decency to move his truck
from the garage into the woods.

When she pushed the cold metal mouth,
set in a permanent scream,
against her temple, for a few minutes
she did not move, expecting it to stick out
its lead tongue unprovoked.

Pulling the trigger, red knocked into glass
like coffee he once splashed into the window,
assuming it was rolled down.

— It's sureness that makes us spill out of ourselves,
not thinking there will be a barrier.

— When he found her, he was afraid to open
the door, but wasn't that always the problem?

Colleen M. Webster

By Water, Fire, and Air

I. Into the Waves

- 28 March 1941, River Ouse, Virginia Woolf commits suicide

One stone, two, three, and more
to weigh down the pockets
match the burden of my body--
yet each brings relief, lifts
guilt from my frame
as cool, wet, roundness calms
my fingers, curving around
their promise.

One war simmers behind me
and no words are enough
to ward off a second.

Leonard, I must go
where no voices ring my ears
and I can empty my head
with the void of water.

I need a slippery place where
no bomb makes a noise,
no lovers see the sky
lowering its head as I sink
from view, through water,
to sandy bottom where no
dead men can find me.

II. Through the Flames

-10 March 1948, Asheville Hospital, NC, Zelda Fitzgerald dies

Though I am painting, giving color
to Bible verse and meaning, I know
these oranges and greys are not
of my making.

Smoke filters in,
wraps out through barred windows
-Paris, New York swirl
through soot mist, shrieks of hysterical
dancers and drinkers crushing my ears.

Women all around me
dance, arms in loose hair
skirts wavering bare knees
and I strain to hear music.

Then, from the corner, Scott beckons
and I realize we will waltz again
colors exploding around us
tearing away this drab world
to give back open spaces and
the searing heat of release.

III. In the Oven

-11 February 1963, London, Sylvia Plath commits suicide

Only thirty and already weighted
with one philandering husband who blooms
in other women's arms
while my two children nurse
on no confidence.

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My flat is empty of grownup voices,
tea whistles for one, dirty dishes
clank in the sink.

But the gasman is calling
from the street and I hear salvation
in his tones.

Yes, we need some.

I will show him the way,
as he has shown me mine, take the dark
quiet of my kitchen,
my little space where I am left
to shrink to domesticsize,
mother/wife body wrenched
to a head bristling with words.

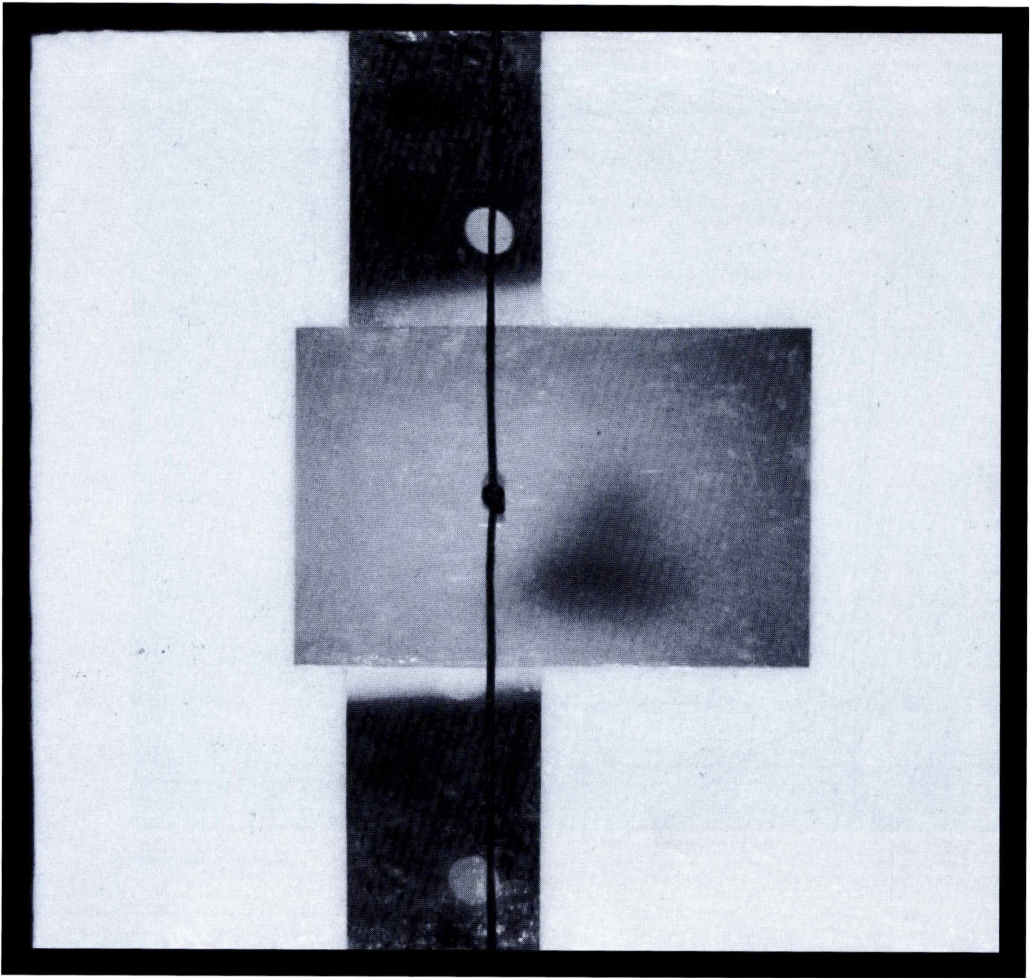
Here I kneel,
head bowed to leave,
one breath, two, three and more.

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Robert Jordan

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Preston Gilchrist

Emily Rosko

Before Surgery

Paintings in waiting
rooms never fit the
appalling décor

of teal plastic
chairs, confetti
carpet, and the homey

wallpaper dappled with
a rosette motif.
The prints are

the same—either
architectural shapes:
looming triangle,

halved circle. Or the
landscape in calm
relief. Trees edged

with winter, white-blue
snow swept
nothingness. Toneless

sky. The subject
backing
away from itself.

Steve Bellin

After Chagall

for my Father

1.

From the burning shop at the center
of “The Flying Carriage,” one’s eyes
are drawn to the edge, where

a green goat is beginning to pull
itself and the cart up
into a yellow sky. The driver,

startled, has just given himself
over to the flight, arms frightened
into ascent, the way Elijah

might have felt when he curled
his useless body as the chariot
galloped out of the mute river.

2.

When a building burns, it turns
in on itself. Heat builds
from the inside out, like a fever,

and emerges from the roof
with nowhere to go. There’s a man
with a pail who’s forgotten the flames,

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house within a house, bursting
through the windows. Someone he knows
is leaving this life so slowly

he won't blur at the edges.

3.

The body is a charred room
left open to the air. Now the woman
trapped in the blue night begins to sink

among the stones, ground that effaces
her figure like a startled ghost.
Who can say why the shop

won't stop burning, why the driver
is frozen in his escape, hung
just inches above the red earth?

If the next life comes,
may we stand still for it, burning.

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Sarah Katherine Dossett

Ed Orr

Villanelle That, Having Lost Its Way, Would Be a Sonnet

Heart traced in a cowpad—what meaning there?
Much of love but more of hate? The unmistakable?
There will always be those who, like water,

would wed themselves to the form of things. Either
that or fuse, like water, forms intractable
to form, one another—each thing one integer

in which little hate but love, unmistakable,
for meaning, form, warms the heart traced in a cowpad
steaming in the cool spring of irresponsible

April. Clearly, the artist eschewed those subtle
shades of impressionist flowers, unclad
models of Renoir. Is coarse reprehensible?

Love is not a sonnet. Nor does passion kill.
In denying one's self, one takes his fill.



Michael Eble

Ed Orr

Tattooed Man

The tattooed man in necklace with his head
thrown back has nothing to say. He is, after all,
the Mayan symbol for zero. In the interlude,

other glyphs for naught were introduced:
half a flower, faces, full figures, snail-shell,
shapes anonymous as the man in necklace with head

thrown back. Perhaps he is clearing his throat, having said
in thought what he would say in speech. His words fall,
then, like speech on deaf ears. In the interlude,

other thoughts come to mind. He has a cold.
To clear his throat, he throws his head back, full-
tilt—the tattooed man in necklace with head

bent like a nail, to gargle sun. Unsaid,
what he has to say lies dormant as ink in an inkwell,
the Mayan symbol for zero in the interlude.

Picasso fractured space, Dali Einsteined
unpalatable flesh, nothing prohibited.
The tattooed man in necklace with his head
thrown back, for naught, ciphers in the interlude.



Michelle Jones

Amanda Jean Briggs

Grace

A framed oil portrait hangs over my mother's bed. Clothed in a white sheath, she presides over a garden resplendent with throaty lilies and opalescent narcissi. I'm on the ground at her feet, forever seventeen, legs skewed beneath the scalloped hem of a dress two sizes too big. The dress once belonged to my maternal grandmother, an immaculate, impenetrable woman who, at the age of seventy-four, was half a foot taller than I. No matter; my mother, her lips bristling with straight pins, tethered the linen folds, which smelt distantly of baby powder and cedar chips, down my spine. Arguing was pointless.

I'm thirty-three now, still single, still living in Fayetteville, North Carolina, in a rented condo a mile from the house where I grew up. I work out of my kitchen these days, customizing curtains and upholstery for an interior design business run by Mrs. Tamplin, one of my mother's friends. Too old for long hair and frosted eye shadow, I buy cardigans and pleated wool slacks on sale at Talbot's to please her and my mother, women who deliberate the ins and outs of ladylike behavior, who supervise their daughters' garden clubs and crowd their living rooms with bowls of lavender potpourri. My mother, bedridden these last six months by back pain, says my generation hasn't the foggiest idea what the word duty means. She insists we're irresponsible, self-absorbed.

"Can you believe Ruth Stewart's daughter? Can you believe she had the gall to sell her mother's house to a *stranger*?" My mother huffs; this is where she tugs the comforter over the top of her ruffled nightgown. "Ruth was my best friend and next door neighbor for thirty-odd years. That woman who's there now? She mows the lawn in a bronze bikini with sequins across the bottom. You can see all the way to France. If Ruth were alive, she would have a fit and fall in it."

Nearly sixty, my mother detests technology, has combated time the way a woman like her will: she's employed the plastic surgeon's knife to obliterate its signs. Over the last five years, young Dr. McBride, whose father bequeathed him a bevy of Ferragamo-shod patients and an office on Metro Medical Drive has lifted my mother's lips, boosted her cheeks, tucked her eyes and tightened the skin around her neck. Dr. McBride's office is part of a slanting complex that stands in the shadow of Cape Fear Valley Hospital.

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Before she took to her bed, my mother and I used to journey every summer to this outpost in her Cadillac, to this modern Shangri La of scalpels and sutures. My mother, an inky full-length mink coat pulled over her blazer despite the heat, sat next to me while I wound the black car down narrow streets, past shorn housing divisions (Huntington Park, Kingsford, Vanstory Hills) and strip malls withering in the mustard haze. Rarely was there a moment of silence: had I heard about Mrs. Tamplin's thirty-something son-in-law, my mother wanted to know? Was I aware that he had hung himself last Tuesday night with one of his father's snakeskin belts? Did I know that his wife Judith and the law firm's rickety janitor had found him hanging over a desk in his high, old Richmond office? And was I aware that Mary Ann Arnold had left her husband and a passel of children and run off with Mrs. Lawson's stringy-haired daughter-in-law from Vermont? According to Ruth Stewart, the two lovers were holed up in an airport motel somewhere on the outskirts of Greensboro. George Arnold was absolutely beside himself. And really, what in God's name were those two thinking anyway, pulling a crazy stunt like that, my mother wanted to know?

Now, when I look back on these grim monologues—on the last five years of my life even—it's as if everything has been consumed by these trips. I finger this thought, like so many of the others, as carefully as one would the keys of a piano mined by a faceless army, one whose erratic retreats and subsequent retrenchments seem cruel, relentless. Despite this, despite the fact that my fingertips may stray across the wrong key at any moment, I cannot resist asking myself why. Why, when I recall my mother's car drifting down Fayetteville's streets like a parade float blown horribly off course, didn't I stomp on the brake, kill the engine, fling open the door, find my own way home? Why? Because, invariably, at some point during each trip, I would catch sight of my mother's face in the rearview mirror—the spidery veins blossoming from the outer corner of each almond-shaped eye, the irises the color of rain, the stiff licks of hair protruding from each temple—and she would appear as she did when I was a child, a slender figure lingering behind the screen door in our kitchen on Skye Drive, the tan length of her collarbone rising from a creamy sundress, and it was all I could do to keep the Cadillac from running right off the road.

Somehow we always made it to Dr. McBride's office. And while he inked a web of purple lines over my mother's face with his felt-tipped physician's pen, I sat in the empty waiting room with a stiff copy of *Architectural Digest* spread across my lap. I never opened it. I stared out the window overlooking the parking lot, eyes fixed on the teal-garbed physician assistants dotted across the glittering, car-clotted asphalt. Most had cell phones pressed up against their mouths, and their lips moved silently, frantically in the

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burning air. Like the white beam of a microscope, the midday sun bore down on the women's faces, and under such scrutiny their maroon lips were reduced to a jumble of right angles; it was as if the world had been drained of all the sonorous, curving circles and semicircles that I loved. But despite all this, nothing in Fayetteville has changed really since the day Mrs. Lyon arrived to photograph my mother and me for the portrait she would paint.

When Mrs. Lyon mounted the brick steps leading up to our front porch, it was late September. Around her, the world, under the spell of Indian summer, shimmered with light, a smooth yellow light whose undulations were ripe with pinesap and the first twisting autumnal smoke. Mrs. Lyon whipped open our screen door and clasped the hand my mother proffered her. My mother eyeballed her. *How could you leave the house looking like that?* Mrs. Lyon, product of an established Raleigh family, only smiled, oblivious to the unspoken reprimand. Clad in a lavender T-shirt with I LUV 2 LAF! scrawled across the front in curvy black script, she let her forty-something breasts go free, a fact of life her husband, a Korean stand-up comic, no doubt appreciated. A woman who ditched nursing school to paint, she spent the next hour traipsing across our kitchen assembling a tripod, her cracked heels bulging over turquoise flip flops.

Her beauty was unlike anything I'd ever seen. Indistinguishable from her pupils, her irises bespoke a line I'd read in a book whose title I've since forgotten. Dark eyes bear more secrets than light eyes. The faces of the women she'd painted inhabited them, each intimate detail preserved, though she'd never lain across from them in bed, never pressed a single finger to the hollow of their neck. Yet she was conscious of the mysteries and idiosyncrasies of the flesh; she knew its curves, crevices and kinks. And somewhere, behind those black eyes, on a dove-colored fold of tissue buried in her brain, this knowledge—its light iridescent—lit that darkness from within. I smiled when Mrs. Lyon said that behind each subtlety lurked yet another layer of exquisite specificity.

After she finished photographing us, Mrs. Lyon explained how she would use the pictures to create special flowers to match our faces. My mother, perched on one of the mahogany chairs clustered about our kitchen table, glanced up at her. An envelope shot from the pocket of her blazer. When Mrs. Lyon broke its seal, lilies, baby's breath and narcissi spilled forth—all the usual suspects plucked from *Southern Living* with a pair of manicure scissors.

"Anything else I should pay attention to, Mrs. Andrews?"

My mother smiled, oblivious to the change in Mrs. Lyon's face and tone.

"Oh, I don't know. I don't want you to feel like you have to go to extra trouble on my account."

"It's your painting."

"I trust you."

"I'm glad, but if there's anything else you have in mind, I need to know

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about it now.”

“Well, maybe there are a few things. Small things, really.”

My mother snaked an arm around my shoulders. My back muscles tightened.

“I want my face to be smooth. As smooth as a baby’s bottom. Like Grace here. Doesn’t she have the best skin? Just like all the women in my family.”

Mrs. Lyon’s eyes searched my face.

“Is that all, Mrs. Andrews?”

My mother raised her left hand, and the fading light pierced the ring anchored to her middle finger. It was a fortieth birthday present from my father; at cocktail parties, he referred to it, dryly, as “George Anna’s headlight.” My mother’s friends didn’t know it, but she had threatened to leave him if he didn’t buy it for her.

“My stones. Let’s paint them bigger.” My mother giggled. “Let’s double them in size at least.”

When it was time for Mrs. Lyon to go, I lingered by the screen door on the front porch. A keenness in the air had thinned the day’s burnished warmth, and in the graying sky overhead, the Canadian geese streamed south in a wide, vibrating lavender V. I had worried all afternoon about this moment and now, standing with the cool lacquered boards beneath my bare feet, I could only watch as Mrs. Lyon climbed into her crumpled Mazda. But moments later, the drumbeat of its motor was broken by the whoosh of a window coming down, and when I lifted my head, she was smiling at me in the encroaching darkness, and I saw her brush tracing the lilting architecture of my collarbone, felt her finger racing along the span of my eyebrows. I heard her say I was lovely, unique, and for one impenetrable moment, the silvery current at my center poured forth into every corner of my body.

Then she was gone. Her car disappeared down the driveway, around the corner and onto the highway beyond. I held my position, barely able to breathe, until the night air had extinguished the last red whisper of her car’s taillights. Still, that red gleam was to linger, as red as the fires my father built in our fireplace when I was little, as red as the garnet eyes of the twin black metal hawks that girded its smoke and flame.

I read Mrs. Lyon’s obituary this evening in *The Raleigh Observer*. Breast cancer. She was fifty-nine. According to the paper, she died at home in a canopied bed she designed herself, attended by her husband and four children. There’s no photograph, but when I close my eyes, her face, always absent always from my dreams, is suddenly, inexplicably, burned into the circle at the end of the moving kaleidoscope of my memory. Everything—her auspicious eyes, her forehead’s silvery sunspots, the hammer toe on her right foot—is arrayed before me, untouched by time.

Tonight is Christmas Eve, but my mother’s house is practically deserted. Five years ago, after our father died of a heart attack, my older brother

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moved to Birmingham, Alabama. He's there with his wife and their new baby boy. It's always been different for him, and now, though he still tries to pretend otherwise, even he knows that everything here is growing denser, is drawing up, is winnowing down toward some finite, microscopic point. And so, in a few days, he'll come home for a couple of weeks, maybe longer.

"Grace, did you hear me calling you? Where were you? Were you in the bathroom? I was beginning to think you had left."

My mother glares up at me from her bed. It belonged to her grandmother and is so tiny that my mother, a slight woman further narrowed by pain, appears twice her size. She's doused the room with perfume, but beneath the redolent aura of Oscar de la Renta, something dank and faintly metallic, like moldered plaster, lurks.

I sigh. "Did you really think I would leave you alone on Christmas Eve?"

"How am I supposed to know what anyone will do?"

"Austin's wife called this morning. She said he liked the putter you sent."

"That girl. She'll be lucky if he sits down to eat on Christmas. Why she ever agreed to marry him, God only knows."

My mother sips her water. "Probably thinks she'll change him." Her burgundy lipstick leaves a sullen imprint around the straw. "Men do what they want. They don't care. You just wait. She'll see."

"Do you want to have dinner in the dining room?"

"You know I can't get up."

About six months ago, my mother's spine began deteriorating rapidly. Her doctors have yet to figure out why.

"I'll fix you a tray and set up a card table by the bed for myself."

My mother groans and sinks further into the appliquéd pillows framing her face. WELCOME TO BEDLAM, proclaims one. ARE WE THERE YET? demands another. A bag of gourmet cookies drifts along the comforter's swells. She's gnawed the head off a sugared Santa Claus, and I try to block out the image of him inside her, drowning in the acid in her stomach.

I edge my way over to the bed. I dim the Imari lamp on the nightstand. My mother's blue enamel pillbox, stuffed with pebbly painkillers, is next to its base.

"Mrs. Lyon died yesterday."

"Who? Who's that?"

"The woman who painted the portrait."

"Oh, right. I remember. Ugly as homemade sin. Thank God you didn't turn out like that."

Inside my chest, something buckles.

"Listen." My mother yanks the comforter over her chin. The rifts around her nostrils are clotted with broken blood vessels.

"Do you hear that, Grace?"

"What?"

"That noise." My mother squeezes her eyes shut.

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“What are you talking about?”

“That noise. What’s that ticking noise?”

I stretch my hands, palms down, over my thighs. “It’s probably that old clock in the hallway. I wound it while you were asleep.”

“Whatever it is, I can’t stand it...”

My mother’s eyes jerk open. Normally a murky periwinkle, the banded muscles around her irises are the lapis lazuli of dreams, vast and absolute. But each pinpoint within is so cold and hollow and strange that the porcelain walls around me don the color of an inky fish’s eye. I blink once, slowly, automatically, before drawing my body away from her bed and toward the doorway, where the hallway’s glow wavers from a great distance, as if conjured from memory. Can all of this be real? And if it is, how did it come down to this? I clamp my fingers around the doorknob and close the door behind me. But on the other side—the hallway’s sequined hush can’t last forever—my body is still. I stand there, heart pounding, as if at any moment the past will assume a physical body and hurtle into me, the resulting collision like two halves of a geode smashed together.

Before the Demerol, before the plastic surgery, before Mrs. Lyon even, there was my mother. On those reddened summer nights, when I was seven and the weeping willows hung low and heavy about our house, she crisscrossed the kitchen tiles, kitten heels clicking in concert with the ceiling fan whirring overhead. She was lithe in a pressed linen sundress with a scarf threaded about her waist like a belt. Her scarves, Christmas presents from her mother, were sapphire with white camellias, gold with amber crescents, pale green reminiscent of the ocean at first light. Depending on her mood or dress or both, sometimes she wound the silken ends into rosy knots, other times she left them loose. It was the mid-1970’s and though those years are remembered for pantsuits and platform sandals, I didn’t know Donna Summer or orange carpet existed.

That June my father, who played golf in the afternoons and evenings at our country club on Raeford Road, began taking my older brother to Highland with him. There, on a mound overlooking acres of gleaming grass, they wielded drivers while I shucked corn on our front porch. Most nights, my mother did the first ear for me, just to get me started, before setting me to work outside with a steel colander.

Every ten minutes or so, my mother stopped cooking to peer out the bay window overlooking our front yard. She was searching for my father’s Cadillac. When it finally pierced the driveway, she scurried out of the kitchen and stood, trembling, on the edge of the porch steps. She smiled the wistful half smile that she reserved for my father and brother; I knew its curves by heart. But, crouched over my bowl, I could only watch as she receded down the lawn, her head moving further and further away until she was lost in the shadows curving across the lawn. *Where are you? I can’t see*

you! There was a pause, a sucking in of breath, then from some corner of the twilight emerged a tinkling laugh and the edge of words that curled and vanished as quickly as they were spoken. I made no attempt to decipher them; I gazed out at the lightening bugs spiraling skywards, their translucent abdomens secreting an emerald flair, and I discovered that if I looked at them long enough and hard enough, I too became a part of the thickening air, like the flame on the tip of a match, snapped out.

One night, at the end of August, my father called to say he and my brother would have dinner at Highland. They did this three or four times a week now. Just the boys, I imagined him informing my mother, his brusque voice halting her vigil. From my spot on the porch, I heard my mother place the phone, a practiced *click*, back in its cradle. A few minutes later, she wandered through the screen door and settled on the wicker love seat a foot from where I sat Indian style. Earlier in the day, she had shaded her eyelids a silvery gray, and in the light from the overhead fixture, they glittered somberly. She drew a strand of platinum hair down the slope of one bronze shoulder. Her face was still, strange.

“Mrs. Stewart called this afternoon while you were asleep.”

I pushed the bowl of corn away. We would have something simple and delicious, like hot dogs and baked beans, for dinner now.

“You can keep a secret, can’t you, Grace?”

“I can keep a secret. I swear.”

“A lady never swears.”

“I promise.”

My mother pointed to a spot on the bench, and I scrambled up next to her. I pressed a scabby knee against her thigh, and breathed the heat in great gulps. Wet and dusky, it wiped out the present and brought forth the past so that our weeping willows seemed to rise, like giant water lilies, from a time ancient and inexorable. I was sure my mother sensed this too, and as twilight became night, it was as if we were the only two people alive in the world.

“Do you remember Mr. Jackson, Grace?”

I shook my head.

“Hold still, or I won’t go on.”

Hold still.

“Yes, you do. He lives in the brick house at the end of the street. Remember last Halloween? He and Mrs. Jackson dressed up like Elvis and his mother, Gladys.”

Mrs. Jackson put ruby lollipops shaped like hearts in my trick or treat bag. I remembered that.

“Are you listening?”

“Yes.”

“Well, last night Mr. Jackson told Mrs. Jackson he was in love with another woman. He told her he wanted a divorce.”

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Divorce?

“After he told her, do you know what happened?”

“What?”

“Mrs. Jackson went down to the cellar and got out Mr. Jackson’s hunting rifle. Her little boy showed her how to load it.”

See how still I am?

“She waited for Mr. Jackson to get in the shower. Then, when she heard the water running, she kicked open the door with her bare feet.”

I have no idea what my mother’s face looked like. I only know that I held myself still. What I saw then was simple and small as childhood things go: a screech owl, brown and round as an egg, that my brother, armed with his first BB gun, blasted from a pine tree earlier that summer. My brother, who peed on trees and wore a studded leather holster, never knew I was behind him; I had followed him into the wooded lot near our house. Crouched behind a sap-encrusted trunk, I watched as he knelt over the owl’s crumpled body and sobbed. Cheeks burning, I covered the lower half of my face with my fingers and leaned forward until my forehead was pressed against the damp earth. And only when I was sure he was gone, only then did I creep out into the clearing and gather up the owl. Cradling her, I spread the tiny wings and drew a finger over the liquid tension of each feather and thought of the night before, of my brother and I asleep in our rooms, the gun tucked away in the utility room, the owl’s body beating against the limbs swaying in the night. I buried her beneath a trio of mulberry trees in our backyard and kept the grave a secret.

“Did she hurt him?”

“She shot him in the back. He died this morning.”

“What about Mrs. Jackson?”

“The police found her stretched across the bathroom floor. Naked as the day God made her. They had to get a woman officer to come and dress her. She wouldn’t get up.”

Oh!

“Mrs. Jackson couldn’t stand it, Grace.”

The weeping willows’ fingers lay on the grass. Nothing stirred in the heat.

“He didn’t love her anymore.”

Then my mother’s arms were around me, warm and lovely and misted with the most gentle of hair. My eyes closed, and I nestled my head in the hollow between her jaw and collarbone and drew greedily on her scent, a potent jumble of Johnson’s baby powder, sweat, crushed mint and, in the pale triangle behind her earring, a last luminous trace of Oscar de la Renta.

“Please, Grace, please. I need you to tell me. Tell me you love me. Promise me we’ll always be together. Promise me we’ll take care of each other. That’s right. That’s my baby doll. Your mother’s baby doll. I knew you wouldn’t let us down.”

I clung to her quivering body, and I prayed for a stillness to descend and

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envelop us. A childish wish I would, eventually, find a way to satisfy myself. Huddled in my girlish bed on Skye Drive, that moment replayed itself within the glowing tunnel of my mind's eye, drawing out like a shadow lengthening under a dwindling sun. I tried over and over again to pinpoint the magical thing I had said or done that brought it about, and it wasn't long before I began waking in the middle of the night, surrounded by my pillows and blankets of red and white checked cotton, heavy with the dream of a windowless, turreted house. I did not know this house or its contents, only that it belonged to my mother and me. Inside it was black as pitch, and I struggled to find a door. I could hear my mother, always in the next room, scratching and flailing against the walls that separated us, as if she too was searching for something she would never find.

Now, with that cindery summer gone, I tell myself that I have found something, though I no longer know what to call it and would have no way, no hope of ever describing it to someone else. I understand too that I am a woman who has sought comfort—some might even say love—in that tenuous pocket of space that coalesces around people and places. Tonight, looking down my mother's dim hallway, past her foyer, into the kitchen beyond, I long to find a crack in the floor, the ceiling, the wall—some physical sign of this truth. Yet everywhere there is only order. Any cracks, if they ever existed, have been painstakingly painted, papered over.

When our dinner is ready, I will carry two trays to my mother's room. We won't discuss her or me or Mrs. Lyon. No, there'll be no more talk of Mrs. Lyon tonight. But when it's time, when I'm finished here, I will pack up everything—my grandmother's furniture, the gold-edged plates, the portrait—and ship it to my brother's wife in Birmingham. For I am not like my mother, and though I have yearned to be, I am not like Mrs. Lyon, either. I could never figure out how to live in the place where I was born and still inhabit a world entirely of my own making.

Yet because of her I will leave Fayetteville. Because some part of me went out to her and came back believing in what lies behind those realities simply accepted as true and unalterable. This was the peculiar quality of her disturbance; it is her blessing to me. And with it, with her flare over the road ahead, I will journey out of this land of shadow and sorrow, remembering that any real leaving, even in the finest of moments, is a precarious undertaking, as fragile and fleeting as hope itself.

Still, it's enough.

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Josh Dean

Shay Youngblood

In the City: A Photograph, Evidence and a Proverb

1.

How far can you stretch your sex? Aquarius Legend, my girl Q, snaps like a rubber band. Born in the year of the Rabbit in the hours of the Horse, Q is black and Chinese and who knows what else, a girl who looks like a pretty boy who likes girls on Sundays. Girls, she says, are good for kissing and holding hands and telling secrets, but she likes boys on Monday who are better at holding her legs in the air. Girls are better at going downtown on Tuesdays. On Wednesdays she goes solo, to the movies, Meow Mix, to the bars and the low down places with no names to remember in the morning. On Thursdays she likes Mike who doesn't know what sex she is from behind. He doesn't care where she goes or what she does on Fridays with the boys who look like girls who braid orchids in her hair, sleep in her lap and cook very good things for her to eat, like lemon jelly and marbled eggs, pretty dishes of candied violets and square blue plates of smoked eel, tomato roses and sticky rice and doesn't care where she got her slanted eyes and velvet voice box that sounds sooo sweet when she calls their name in the room with the red lights. On Saturdays Fernando/Fernanda paints her nails silver, massages her neck and shoulders after playing basketball and a couple of songs on his/her classical guitar. Sometimes she simply weeps with joy stretching her sex six ways from Sunday and twice on Mondays. How far can you stretch your sex?

2.

Her race expands and contracts from Avenue A, to Little Brazil, from Park Avenue to Club Zanzibar. Everything in New York looks like she's seen it all before and everyone looks interesting at the parties and she's sure she's met them before she just can't remember the name of the dark, blonde in the red satin slip dress with the Argentine accent and the Euro attitude or where she met the shirtless guy with the little beard and the glossy hair dancing wildly in a floor length pink leather wrap skirt his braid slapping at the back of the CEO in a black Boss suit. Almost before she can recover she remembers the blonde selling the allure of owning a Mercedes SUV on a TV commercial and then she looked WASP, now she looks Mexican and the glossy leather wrapped guy in braids was dancing in khaki's in a Gap ad. For five weeks his

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face was plastered on an enormous bill board in Times Square that is three stories high and thirteen windows wide. The woman who looks like Susan Sarandon walking with her son on Seventh Avenue probably is, except this woman is Indonesian. When Q passes she thinks the woman is pretty close up, even when she realizes it's not Susan she feels like she knows her because she's seen her half naked in a movie. Q smiles at her, a Southern habit, but no sign of recognition crosses her face, so Q lowers her hand and takes back the smile. You think you know somebody because they come into your living room everyday at four o'clock or make love in your bedroom as you watch lonely turn to desperation and it's your mirror you're looking in?

3.

Being born in water is what must have made her think she could float through life. She's the girl who was born on the second Sunday in a leap year. A night baptism, a ritual of forgiving. The midwife couldn't tell what sex she was. She simply floated away from her mother like spice sprinkled on water. When people ask her who she is, she says, "My name is Aquarius Legend and I live at the Soho Grand. I live at the Hudson, the Royalton, or the Library Hotel," depending on what weekend it is and who's asking. She pays a modest rent for a room with a single window that looks down from the tenth floor onto Lexington Avenue. It is a three hundred square foot box where she keeps clothes, shoes, books, bed and a hot plate, a non-stick wok, a bowl she bought for three dollars from Pearl River on Canal Street, teak chopsticks that came with a meal at a fancy restaurant and a roll of toilet paper on a hook. She works on Wall Street, answering telephones for a company that sells financial services. "The bulls are running, how may I direct your call."

Her parents were hippies, one black and something else, one Chinese and something else altogether. They left her three days after she was born, with her grandfather, hard quiet and gray, on a chicken farm in Tennessee. She and her grandfather delivered eggs in his big green truck. She carried baskets of eggs to the back doors of houses that looked like palaces. She pressed her nose to the stained glass windows and wished herself inside. Inside a family, dressed like a princess, loved like money, praised like a job well done, made into a sandwich by a mother, and a father who would hold her hands between them even as they slept. She wanted to sit at the long wooden table and eat cake with a silver spoon and be a favorite toy, the best part of the day, the sun when the curtains of night closed.

She went to school, didn't study too hard and when her grandfather died, she sold what little he owned (the truck, the furniture and the chickens) and took a bus to New York City. She found a room, bought a radio and taught herself to speak the new New York language, a kind of esperanto: Commerce-Spanglish-business-Wall Street-uptown-downtown-Japanese-eastside-westside-loud-fast and superficial.

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She found a job, bought some clothes and took a bus from Wall Street to Spanish Harlem. She was home. In time she figured out how to push herself behind the stained glass windows, the velvet ropes and frosted glass doors to the other side. She sells dreams to the dreamless.

“Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Exhale. Now imagine that your body is a bolt of pale blue silk unraveling in a light breeze. Deep breath. Exhale. When you are completely free, stretched to your limits, relax, float in a cloudless sky, like a lake above the trees.”

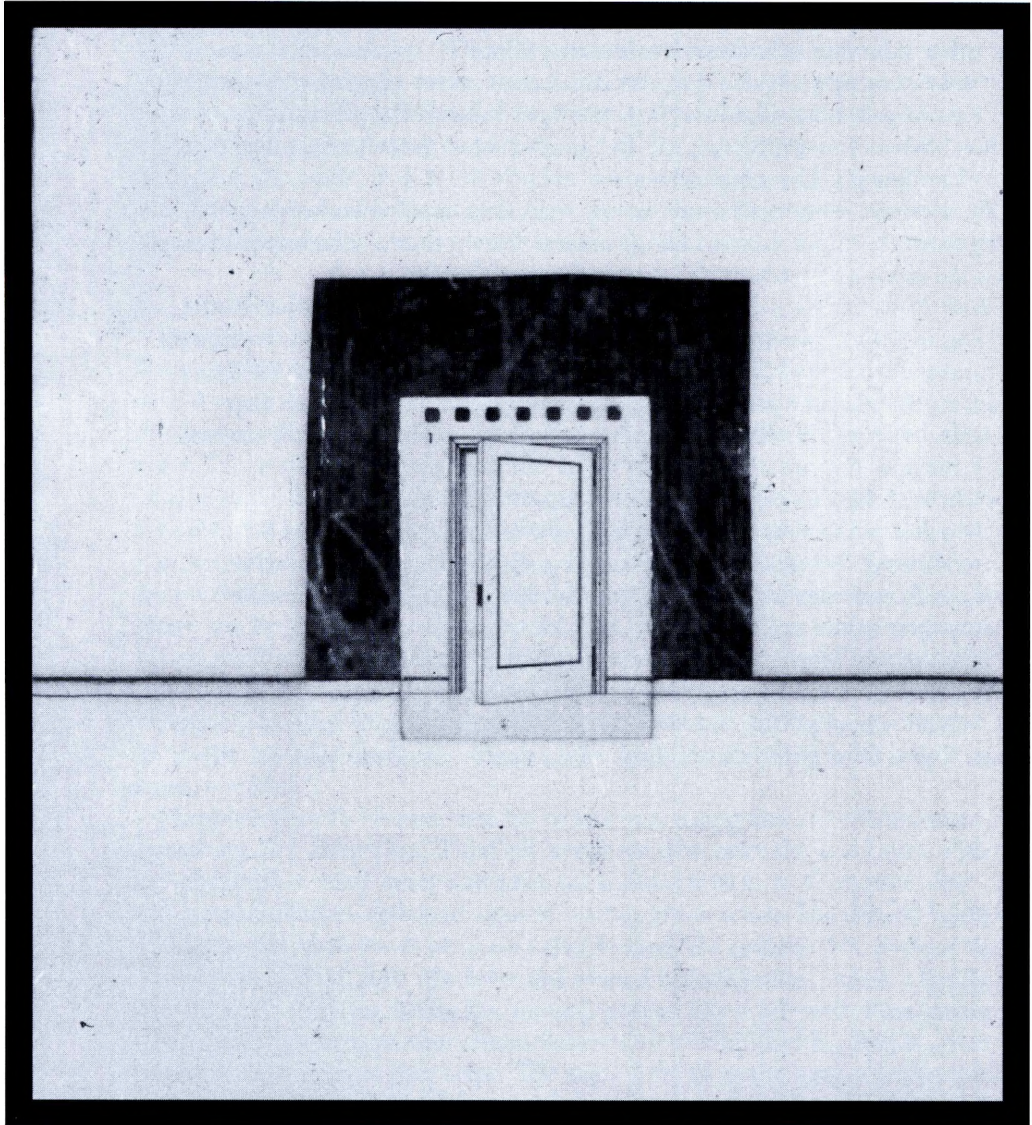
The rich she found had more money than they could spend on material things and too much time to fill up in large lonely rooms. She was paid more than the price of a week at the Ritz to live her dreams.

From Friday at six o'clock until Sunday noon, she lives in luxury. Room service, in room massages, HDTV and ten-dollar cocktails. She is a princess, living on a grand scale, in style with grace. Nobody mistakes her for the maid, or the delivery person or the girl who gives a damn. “Curb the attitude,” she tells the brother in the crisp white uniform who tries to out black her.

Each weekday morning she drinks a cup of coffee black, eats a package of crackers left in the break room, morsels tossed in the garbage can when no one is looking, but when she lives at the grand hotels she orders steak and potatoes from room service with braised beets and bowls of fruit with Champagne sauce.

Now that she's behind the velvet rope, sitting at the candlelit table surrounded by the dull, the bitter and the bored, she realizes that she would get better company from the Renoirs at the Met. A curtain rises. Her hope soars. She is filled with harmony and inner peace. She floats above it all.

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Preston Gilchrist

Janet Flora

The Make-Up Chair

The pretty, petite, thirty-year-old woman needed no introduction when she came into the makeup room at Court TV. Pinned to her chest, like a poster on a milk carton, were photos and information about her father, who was last seen on the 94th floor of the north tower in the World Trade Center on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. It was now Friday. She and her brother and sister had come to talk about their search, and to show pictures of their dad on TV.

I have been standing in one makeup room or another for the past 20 years. I have stood in this particular makeup room at Court TV, in midtown Manhattan, for the past four years.

I've worked on soap operas and feature films. I'm skilled at making others look the part. Sometimes it means adding blood, or removing perspiration. Sometimes it means making people look glamorous, better, or sometimes just feel better.

But I didn't know if I could do either for this young woman, or if she wanted me to try.

The intimate act I perform includes not only the face—but someplace deeper. Seeing the reporter, or the anchor, before they go on camera, is not very different from what the world sees. Even though I may smooth out the complexion, define a brow, or exaggerate a lip; the real transformation is in the ritual itself.

It involves close proximity, touch and trust. Part of that trust is often immediate, simply because I am recognized as the hired professional with a long list of credentials. But it is the daily repetition of the process—like a well-rehearsed routine between dance partners that establishes confidence and comfort that goes beyond makeup.

We were in the midst of that process when the first plane hit, just before 9 a.m. Our regular programming was cancelled. I wanted to go home. But our anchors and reporters had to go on the air to report the details of the attack. And they still needed, if not to feel their best to look like themselves—the people our viewers depended on for analysis and facts.

I didn't know yet how many people would be declared dead or missing. I didn't know yet that some of the families of the missing would pass through our studio. I didn't know yet that not only the city I was born and raised in

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had changed forever, but all its people and the world as well.

But, when I left the building at noon to get something to eat, and saw the migration of men and women walking north up Third Avenue, smeared with gray ash, I knew that this powdery substance might wash off, but would still leave a permanent residue on their skin.

Returning to the makeup room, I took some powder and rouge and went into the studio to touch up the anchors who were on a short break. They didn't really need more makeup, but it wasn't really powder or color I wanted to add, it was simply all I had.

In the days following the attack, we continued to report on the crisis rather than returning to our usual programming, which had been interrupted. But none of our lives had been as interrupted as the young woman who sat down in my makeup chair to get ready for her appearance on TV.

We looked at each other's reflection in the mirror. Her pecan-colored, chin-length hair framed large green eyes.

Running her index finger over two pimples on her chin, she said, "My skin has not broken out like this since I was a teenager."

"I can fix that," I said, relieved to be of some use.

I started to fasten the makeup cape around her neck, but stopped when I realized I would be covering the photos of her father with the black fabric of the cape. After applying some liquid foundation, I busied myself brushing concealer and powder over the blemishes that were pebbly and pink on her otherwise smooth olive skin. We both looked at the result in the mirror.

She nodded her head up and down approvingly and said, "You made them disappear."

I nodded too. The ritual was in motion, but I still felt tentative, unsure about continuing.

Over the years at Court TV, many people have passed through the makeup room not because of any celebrity or expertise. They too had come to talk about an agonizing ordeal. There was the father of Amadou Diallo. And the parents of the teenagers killed when a drunk driver slammed her car into the car full of teens on spring break. But that was different. Time had passed, a year or more. They were used to masking their pain, and my presence seemed welcomed. The mother of one of the teenagers chatted with me, commenting on the view of the urban skyline from our studio on the 19th floor. She said, "I wish I could see you every morning. I love the way you made me look."

But I wasn't sure how to make this young woman look.

So I asked. "Do you think we should do some eye makeup?"

She ran her hand over her chest as if straightening a fine garment, and said, "You know, my dad would want me to look nice on TV."

Bending at the waist, so I could be eye-level with the photos held on her tee shirt with safety pins, I examined the pictures of her father. She had his green eyes and olive skin. His hair was fashionably cropped short and beginning to gray. There was a photo of her mother and father together, and another with

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his children, and one of him alone smiling for the camera. He was 52-years-old.

“He is so handsome,” I said. “You look like him. Let’s make sure you look nice.”

“What is your name?” I asked.

“Alfie,” she said.

“Alfie?”

“It’s short for Alfia. That was my grandmother’s name.”

I nodded. And she smiled at me. This was the first time we were looking at each other rather than our reflections in the mirror.

I put a thin line of brown pencil on her upper lids and some waterproof mascara on the outer lashes. Finally I brushed a berry-colored lip stain on her mouth.

Her brother and sister came in as I was straightening the ends of her hair with the blow-dryer.

“Where are you going to the prom?” her brother asked. We almost laughed. I asked her sister if she would like some makeup. She looked at me, then at Alfie.

Alfie said, “Do it. It feels good.”

Her sister sat down in the chair.



Martha Castle

Lacey Galbraith

Jill McCorkle & Lee Smith Interview

Jill McCorkle is the author of eight books of fiction, five of which have been named New York Times Notables. She received her B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her M.A. from Hollins College. In 1984, Algonquin Books simultaneously published her first two novels—*The Cheerleader* and *July 7th*. Her last book, the short story collection *Creatures of Habit*, was published in 2001. McCorkle is known for her wonderful ear and quick turn of phrase. Witty, vibrant, and often wise, her stories and novels inspire devotion and high praise from both critics and readers alike. She is the winner of the North Carolina Award for Literature, the New England Booksellers Award and the John Dos Passos Prize for Excellence in Literature. Born in Lumberton, North Carolina, she now lives with her husband and two children outside of Boston.

Like McCorkle, Lee Smith's success came early. Her first novel entitled *The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed* was written while she was still a senior at Hollins College and published two years later in 1968. Since then she has gone on to write thirteen other works of fiction, among them *Oral History*, *Fair and Tender Ladies*, and *Saving Grace*. Many of Smith's novels are full of multi-narrative points of view and with her strong sense of place she is frequently cited as having brought attention to the often overlooked Appalachian region. Smith has been awarded the Lila Wallace/Reader's Digest Award and the Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters while her latest novel, *The Last Girls* was recently featured on "Good Morning America" as a book club selection. Born in Grundy, Virginia, she now resides in Hillsborough, North Carolina.

G: This is a two part question: Do you agree that when people look at the South, they often automatically picture the Deep South, the land of cotton and plantations, and they forget that there are many other distinct regions? Have you found that people outside of the South debate or even care about such questions as, "Do we have a Southern literature?"

M: It is so interesting because it is a blessing and a curse. The very things that make the South so rich for that oral tradition—and Lee can certainly talk

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more about oral history-but any time a society, for whatever reason, has been alienated or isolated that a certain literature grows out of that and out of the oral tradition and out of the desire to preserve everything. Of course it does tie us right back to the War. On one hand sort of what makes every Southerner cringe when something bad happens on the news about racial things. To be living in New England I'm especially sensitive because I feel people seeing the South as a whole. So whatever happens in Mississippi, if I'm in the room people are going to look at me like, "this is your place," and not even thinking about all the different types of people who fit into these very large places. That same stereotype of sort of the old years in the South-the years in my case would be a lot of small farmers who were not educated but relied heavily on storytelling-produces a kind of literature that it has for the Irish and a lot of Jewish writers and probably other groups who at various times have been separate from the rest of the world.

S: It produces a very distinctive body of literature but it is interesting that outside of the South there is still a great deal of sort of automatic stereotyping that goes on and it is just kind of amazing. I think a lot of it, of course, has had to do not with the writing but with media. Movies like *Deliverance* you know and "Hee Haw" and stuff like that. People think that the South is just one South and it's like magnolias-magnolias and mansions. Well, you know how various the South is and the many different regions with cultures completely different from one another like the Appalachian South and the plantation South or the yeoman South, the piedmont farmer. These are all completely different.

M: Not only is Lee thought of as a woman writer and a Southern woman writer but she is very much the voice of the Appalachian and that older generation of mountain people who again have no written voice. It is all based on the folklore and the songs and things that have been passed down.

S: I think that's really true. I do feel like that we're, all of us who are from a sort of an ethnic or racial minority, making a little headway just because there has been such an interest in multiculturalism over the last years and I think that has been very beneficial for Appalachian writers. Instead of just saying, "Oh I don't want to hear any of that old mountain twang," I think not only for African-American and for Native American and all kinds of groups but I think for Appalachian-Americans this is to the benefit. We have a lot of books coming out-many more that were being published by Appalachian writers previously are coming out right now.

G: I remember reading an essay by Rodger Cunningham that talked about how you have the South and then within the South you have "the Other" which is Appalachia.

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S: It's what John Shelton Reed has referred to as the South's South.

G: How do you approach teaching creative writing? Is there a particular line or thought you use? Is it hard sometimes to wake up your students and steer them away from that stereotypical or "workshop" style.

M: I feel like there is a lot that can be taught in a workshop. I rely on having my students read short stories of other people, well-known famous short stories, that we then discuss. Then I think much of what happens in a workshop is you're coaching people along. You know sometimes the hardest thing for a young writer to get used to is just having the work in front of a class without feeling completely violated and humiliated. I think that's a big part of the job that you're going to live with for as long as you write too—the ability to separate yourself as much as possible so that you're able to take criticism.

S: I think that having them read is really very important. I know there are some people who don't do that and they just simply have the students share the work they're writing—they don't have a text—but to me it's really, really, really important to have them reading; if it's a short story class to have them reading short stories, if it's a novels class to have them reading novels because then you can say, "Look at this approach that William Faulkner did here or Jill McCorkle did in this." You all have the same frame of reference. It also helps them to have something to aim toward. It's particularly awful if you ever have a workshop—and I have taught some—where nobody is writing really well but they don't even know they're not because nobody's doing any better than anybody else. That's why it's always good to have good students in each class because when a story works you can critique that just as stringently as you critique the stories that don't work. The whole class can talk about, "Why do you like this? Why does it work?" You've got to have something to hold up otherwise you're just saying negative stuff. It's just real helpful if they're all reading some really fun stories and some people who have particular styles, like Raymond Carver, so you can get at certain aspects because very few of them have developed a real style.

G: What about your own style? I know Lee you've said you've been influenced by Eudora Welty. It seems there is this canon of traditional Southern literature but in a way, don't many writers feel the need to try something different, to go off in some other direction?

S: Well, along with Eudora Welty I would have to say Virginia Woolf was a real influence on me early on. I really do like to experiment with time and place and multiple voices so I think when you say the traditional Southern style that runs so much the risk of being cliché at this point. If that's your

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experience, if that traditional Southern experience is the experience you're writing out of—which I pretty much am—you just have to try to make it new through the language.

G: You both have such distinct styles and I wasn't sure if that was the result of a conscious decision on your part or rather if it was something that just developed given time.

M: I think it's something that really does develop. Because I have to say if I thought about it too much I wouldn't be able to write a word. That's the furthest thing from my mind. That's the sort of thing you think about when you're revising.

S: Exactly, but I do think that as a teacher of writing that the more writers you can expose your students to because sometimes they'll have their own body of experience and they won't really necessarily know how to get at it, but then you can show them a certain writer who has had maybe a similar kind of experience, life experience, and suddenly "Boom!" they see. One of my students is Silas House who is a wonderful young Appalachian writer and I remember when we were first working together I felt like some of his things were maybe sort of sweet or something so I sent him a whole bunch of Larry Brown. It was great because he just said, "I didn't know I could write this stuff."

M: I had a student last semester and I called a moratorium on Raymond Carver. I made him read really long-winded works. I made him read Faulkner.

S: Make him read Mark Helprin. It's like prescribing an antibiotic and you know you can get the cure.

G: Jill, you've said North Carolina will always be home for you and that you could write about a character from the North but that he or she would probably have some Southern tendencies. Lee you've said that when it comes to writing it's the way you first heard language that is really influential. Why do you think this is?

S: Well, you don't have to stop and think about it so much. It's necessary to me to just sort of go into a kind of fit and let it rip. If I were trying to write somebody whose pattern of language was completely alien then it would be really hard. Although in my case the language that I first heard is really almost completely gone now because it would be the real old Appalachian dialect. I can still write it easily but it's not as easily read by people so I have to really tone it down I think.

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G: In coming back to that first language is a writer trying to hold on to the past?

S: When you are a child you are really a *tabula rasa* in a lot of ways and what you hear and see and feel and experience makes a huge imprint upon you. Somebody once defined a writer as a person who's sitting in a little room thinking about their childhood. I think that's probably true.

G: What about the idea of the artist as outsider? In many cases, whether through personality or geography or experience, an artist feels different from those around him or her. Do you think that such "not fitting in" can offer some form of perspective? I know, Jill, you've moved away from the South. How has it affected you?

M: In a lot of ways, I think, it has given me more perspective. I find myself wandering more and more out of my own field just because I have children growing up in this region and so a lot of what they bring home to me is in what sounds like a different language. I don't know how that will play out over the years. I know that for me there is sort of what I think of as home base and it is very much southeastern North Carolina. Oddly though, not even as it is now but as Lee's saying, more of my grandmother's time and all of these older relatives who I did hear talking and talking and talking throughout my childhood.

S: I think the position of any artist has got to be the position of an outsider because if you are completely comfortable within your place, within your situation, then you're not going to see the story. You have to be able to stand outside of yourself, outside of the situation in order to see the story.

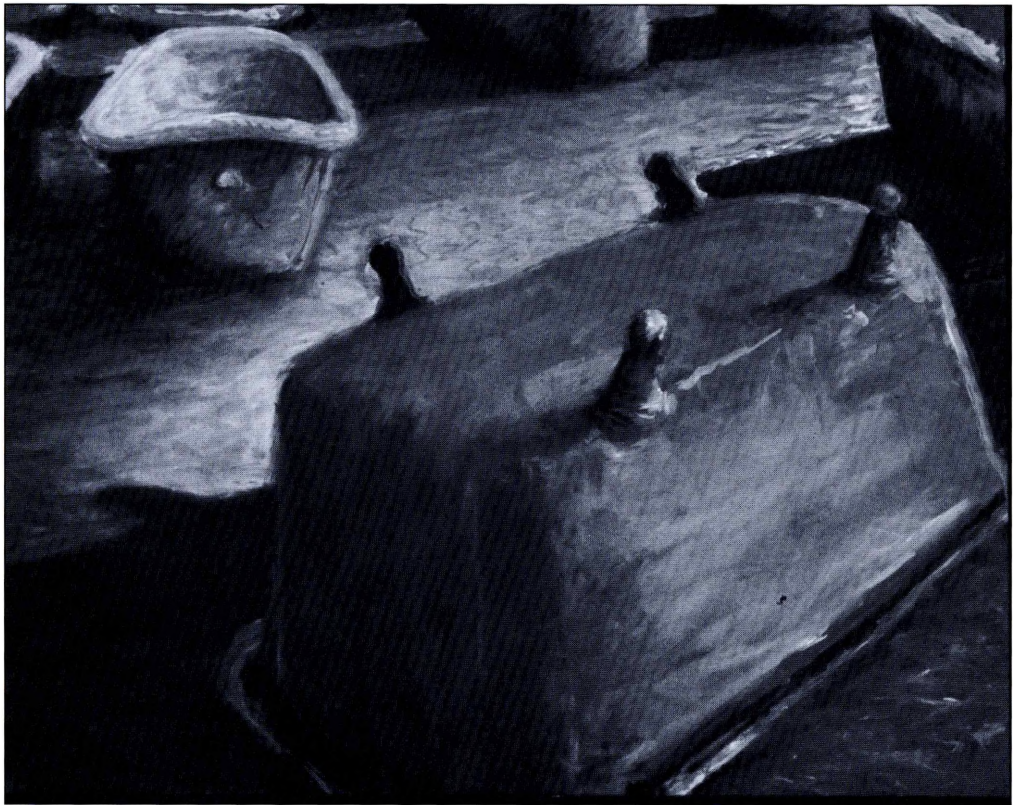
M: I absolutely agree.

S: And so every writer, every artist really is an outsider. No matter if they are somebody like Eudora Welty who lived in her same town still; she could observe with the eyes of an outsider, yet with the knowledge of a person who's there. You have to be able to have a perspective. If you're right in the middle of it you'll never see the story.

M: Eudora Welty is a perfect example of someone who was not Southern by birth if you're going by parentage. So though she grew up in the South she sort of automatically had this broader picture.

S: Her parents were from West Virginia and Ohio and she spent a lot of time there and so any distance like that gives you a great perspective. West Virginia and Ohio are completely different from Jackson, Mississippi. She

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Chad Mars

would spend all those summers up in West Virginia and that makes things that would be just so familiar as to be not worthy of note just suddenly very interesting.

G: Both of you have mentioned listening to the conversations of your grandparents or great-aunts and uncles. In so many of your books there is that strong presence of an older generation. Is this because you grew up with an extended family of sorts?

S: I'm sure that's true. I have had students in class tell me that well they just really didn't know either of their grandparents. I think in the South many of us have tended to grow up in the extended families where the grandmother was always around and you always went to the grandmother's house all the time. Again, that's just a part of the fabric of your childhood

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where it is no longer a part of the fabric of today's child necessarily because of the mobility. It's just different.

M: It is and yet I still think, relying on childhood, I do try to push my students in that direction because I think so many people come in with the idea that that's not important material. You read all the time these reviewers who will say, "Just what we need, another coming of age story," and yet I really do think it's at the heart of what every writer is doing. I agree with Flannery O'Connor's whole thing that emotionally you're set before adolescence. I think as a writer that I do tend to look back to moments in my childhood where a certain emotion was just pure and crystallized before you get older and it becomes complicated. So very often I have students trying to look back at those moments and it's amazing how well we all remember when it first occurs to you that your parents are human and they'll die one day or that everybody's not a good person. Just these moments where you all of a sudden come face to face with a fact that changes life forever.

S: Those kinds of assignments really will bring forth your students absolute best work. Then you can say, "Look, look at this." It's very hard to write about something that happened last weekend because you don't have the aesthetic perspective.

G: Lee, weren't you Jill's professor at the University of North Carolina?

S: Well, Jill was in my class. I don't think I really taught her a thing.

M: Oh, she did.

G: What was that like?

S: It was actually funny because it was the first class that I ever taught on a college level. I had been teaching high school and then suddenly I had gotten this job because somebody had quit. I was absolutely terrified and Jill was in that first class.

M: Well, I remember Lee was very good in that first class about reassuring us that an eighteen year old from a small town had as much to say as anybody. I remember Lee even told us you didn't have to chain smoke and drink bourbon and wear a beret and a tight turtleneck. You know, the whole list of things.

S: Stereotypes of the writer. So many times your students come in with stereotypes of what a writer is like and a writer is just like anybody else and

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you have to dispel those sorts of stereotypes.

G: Do you think writing about autobiographical material can ever restrict a writer when they're young or can it act as more of a jumping off place for them?

M: I think the whole idea of the kind of exercises I use are more mood pieces than anything, to get the sense of an emotion. I always tell my students, undergrads, you're not old enough to have lost a spouse but you have lost somebody or some thing that meant the world to you so go back to that corner and think about how you feel upon losing this person and then try to intensify—you know, age yourself thirty years or whatnot. That's when the role-play comes into effect. I think to draw on something really, really close teaches them how as a writer it doesn't have to have happened to you and yet the feelings are universal. You've felt everything you've needed to feel.

S: I think that's really true. In a way, a fiction writer is like a magpie. A fiction writer is going around and picking up a little bright piece of something here and a little bright piece of something here and a little piece of something here. You do go back into yourself, finally, for the emotional reality as Jill is saying of each thing you're trying to do so I don't think it is diminishing or limiting for a writer to use her own life. I mean that's the only life you've got.

M: No, as a matter of fact, what's funny is usually people never see what is real and assume what's made up is real.

S: That's right. People will never know. You have to be able to say, just pluck something here, pluck something there. A whole lot of it is going to be from your own life because your own experience is all you've got. You may have something somebody else told you or something you read about or whatever; there are little bits of things that all make their way into a novel. It's a work of fiction but it's made up of real stuff.

G: Who are writers you are reading now? Do you even have time to read?

M: I'm trying to think of what I've read most recently. When you're teaching I feel like I do so much student reading and if I could keep up with what's coming out of the South and people I know, like through Algonquin, that'll keep me busy. I'm actually reading this little tiny Joyce Carol Oats novella right now called *Beasts* and I had just bought William Trevor's new book *The Story of Lucy Gault*. He is so great.

S: I just read all of William Trevor. He is absolutely wonderful.

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G: Who are some people that you two are fans of? Are there any writers that are maybe not as established or as well known but you think people should be aware of?

M: Well, he's very well known but if people are not aware of Richard Bausch they should be.

S: Absolutely. Of course one of my absolute favorite writers is Alice Munro who I don't think is as popularly read as she should be. Gosh, I don't know, I like so many people. Another is W.G. Sebald.

G: What about when you both were children? I'm assuming you were readers but was there something during those early years that contributed to the path you've chosen, your decision to become a writer? Was there a specific book or teacher?

S: I have to say that nobody in my family read much. We had some books but they were like the *Readers's Digest Condensed Books* mostly and the *Bible*. Then my grandmother who thought she was so damn cultured had this book of a hundred and one famous poems. So my daddy used to get drunk and recite "The Road to Mandalay." By and large what I heard was stories told out loud, actually, and ballads, songs—mountain songs being sung. Then because I was an only child and I was sort of sickly I was always reading and reading and reading. Nobody really told me what to read until pretty much I got away to school. I was just voracious. I would read all night long. I read everything I could get my hands on.

M: I think for a kid what's more important than what you're reading is that you're reading, that you're learning to sort of take yourself away from the present.

S: You've got to be able to do that to be a writer.

M: I would have to say my earliest big influence would have to be fairy tales, which I just loved, and of course not the Disney version. I liked the dark, scary kind. I liked ghost stories and for years all I read were books where the protagonist was not human. All the dog books, all the horse books.

S: Oh, the horse books. I really read the horse books.

M: I sort of identified closer with these animals. I think it was not until I was in late junior high and read *To Kill a Mockingbird* that I really had found a book other than biographies. I loved biographies.

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S: That is so funny, Jill. I love it.

G: Sounds like the beginning of *Creatures of Habit*.

M: I just loved *Big Red* and *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

S: I must have read *The Secret Garden* thirty times. There were just a lot of books. Nobody watched what I read because nobody really read. I would just go to the library and get these books. I remember reading this book named *Raintree County* which gave me just a complete nervous breakdown when I was in about the sixth grade. I had to stay in bed for three days and recover from *Raintree County*. I just read whatever was there. I loved Heidi. I loved *Jane Eyre*—loved *Jane Eyre*. There were just all kinds of books like that. I loved books where girls would go to a foreign place.

G: Was there ever a teacher or a role model that kind of said, “You have a talent here, you should write.”

M: For me the first time it happened—and it really did sort of spark something—is in the third grade. I had a teacher and she was very much of the old school, I mean she wouldn’t even let us play kickball. We would do breathing exercises and art during recess, which was a drag. Otherwise, she was really into painting and poetry and every week we did a creative writing assignment. I remember going into the elementary school one morning when I was in the third grade. She had taken this poem that I had written and it was mounted up on the front bulletin board of the school with my name on it. I sort of never got over that. It was like the highlight and I think I was always trying to feel that same way again because I really was so proud.

S: Well, that’s true. I had that same thing. There was this magazine named *Jack and Jill* and you could write little stories.

M: I remember that magazine!

S: You could write little stories and send them to *Jack and Jill* and you’d get a free year or something, and man I had like nine years. It was so thrilling to have these little things come out in *Jack and Jill*. I also had this handwritten little newspaper that I wrote for all the neighbors. I wrote it and I made my cousins copy it. I paid them cheap. We would all go door to door and sell this newspaper. It was named *The Small Review*. It was hysterical. I got in so much trouble because I would write editorials. I remember one was named “George McGuire Is Too Grumpy.” I had to go apologize to Mr. George McGuire. I was always writing because I liked to

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read so much. I started writing because I couldn't stand for the books to be over. I would read them a whole lot of times and then finally, I would write another chapter on to the end and then another and another and another. Then I would write my own little book with those characters. My stuff was more connected to just my own weird little compulsive self, I think, than to school.

M: My early memories as a writer were learning that I could make myself laugh or cry. I loved to make myself cry. I loved all those poems, like Eugene Field.

S: Oh, "The little toy dog covered with dust."

M: Oh, yes.

S: "But sturdy and staunch he stands." I loved it.

M: I would read that sort of thing and just weep. Then I would make up my own.

G: I'm impressed you remember the poem.

S: Yes, because there's a power in that. Children are really powerless and to be able to make yourself laugh or cry or somebody else laugh or cry, I mean, that would certainly make you feel good.

M: We did plays in the neighborhood.

S: Oh, we did too.

M: And I told everybody who they were and what they were saying.

S: I got in a whole lot of trouble because one year I wrote one play called "The Drunken Saloon" and everybody is primitive Baptist in my neighborhood and we were all falling on the floor and our parents were having a fit.

G: Are you ever afraid of going too far? When you're writing are you ever afraid, I guess, of getting lost in that fictional world, of saying too much or losing yourself in your art, so to speak?

S: Well, sure but you have to not be afraid. If you're afraid of it you got no business doing it.

M: And there's too much happening in life that's always going to interrupt you.

S: I think you might think that Jill, or I might think it, because we're writing in the middle of families that are always demanding our attention and classes that we have to run off and teach or whatever. I do think that it can be for somebody who goes off to a mountaintop to write for a year. I can see how that could happen for sure.

M: I have never, of course I'd like to try it sometime to go somewhere for a month, but I've never known how I would function because I'm sort of so used to how I do it.

S: Me too.

G: How do you both do it? You both have children, you teach, you're married.

M: The way I describe it is, it's not a faucet that turns on and off it's a good steady drip. I'm just constantly taking notes. I just have notebooks everywhere. I finally just sold my car that was a complete wreck but right before I did I pulled in to get gas and the guy giving me gas said, "You better stop writing on your steering wheel you're going to make your air bag pop out." You know, I'd get an idea and I'd write. Sometimes all you need are like three words. I'd write down just enough. It's kind of like recording dreams—to remind me—though sometimes these days I don't remember what it meant.

G: Do you see fiction going in any particular direction? I realize it might be hard to say but if you had to guess where do you think it's going? How do you think these years will be remembered or remarked upon?

S: I don't know. I really couldn't answer that, I guess, because I've been working so hard lately that it's really hard for me to pull back and think about. I do think, obviously, there is a tendency toward enormously long books that is happening right now which I do think has something to do with the fact of people writing on the computer. My editor was saying that so many really long books are coming in. Agents are always mentioning that and so I think there is some sort of tendency toward verbosity that there was not before. We were having a lot of minimalism at one point in the sixties and there was a definite trend there and I think we're sort of going the other way for whatever reason. So I don't know. Beyond that, that's not very significant.



Kim Dodez

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M: You know, there are all these different fads, whatever you might call them, coming and going which I think goes back to what you were saying about a certain workshop style. You know people get in a certain groove but what has always been true and will remain true is that most people just really want to be told a good story. That's what I want above anything else. I want to disappear. I want you to write something for me that makes me forget everything else.

S: Absolutely.

G: So when you're writing you're not necessarily writing with a particular theme or idea in mind? So much of your writing does deal with certain issues of life—women, relationships, etc—but is all that coming out of just trying to tell a good story?

S: If you think in terms of theme, the characters are just going to be sort of mouthpieces for varying points of view. It's going to be the kind of thing that's hitting the reader over the head. For my mind, what I try to do is just think of a story until it's completely taking me away, until I'm just in the world of the story and I don't think about what's it's about. Thematically, that's that other side of the brain I would use if I were teaching. Now I look at somebody else's story and I say well, this is the theme, what is the meaning, and that kind of thing. When I'm writing I have to not think about that at all.

G: What about you, Jill? Are you just trying to tell a good story?

M: Yeah, I mean, when I have looked at my work in hindsight I feel like I write the same stories over and over and over. Thematically, I am always writing the same story.

G: What do you think that story is?

M: Well, it's a story all about people not coming out completely ahead in life or happily ever after in life. My stories are all about people finding a moment of acceptance and then it's over. To me that's the life raft. The other thing that I do over and over again, which kind of ties to that, is the whole notion of second chances in life.

G: What about you, Lee? Do you think you have themes that you keep revisiting?

S: Well, I do. I think a lot of them have been stories about women, people I guess in general, but maybe particularly women who are trying to find

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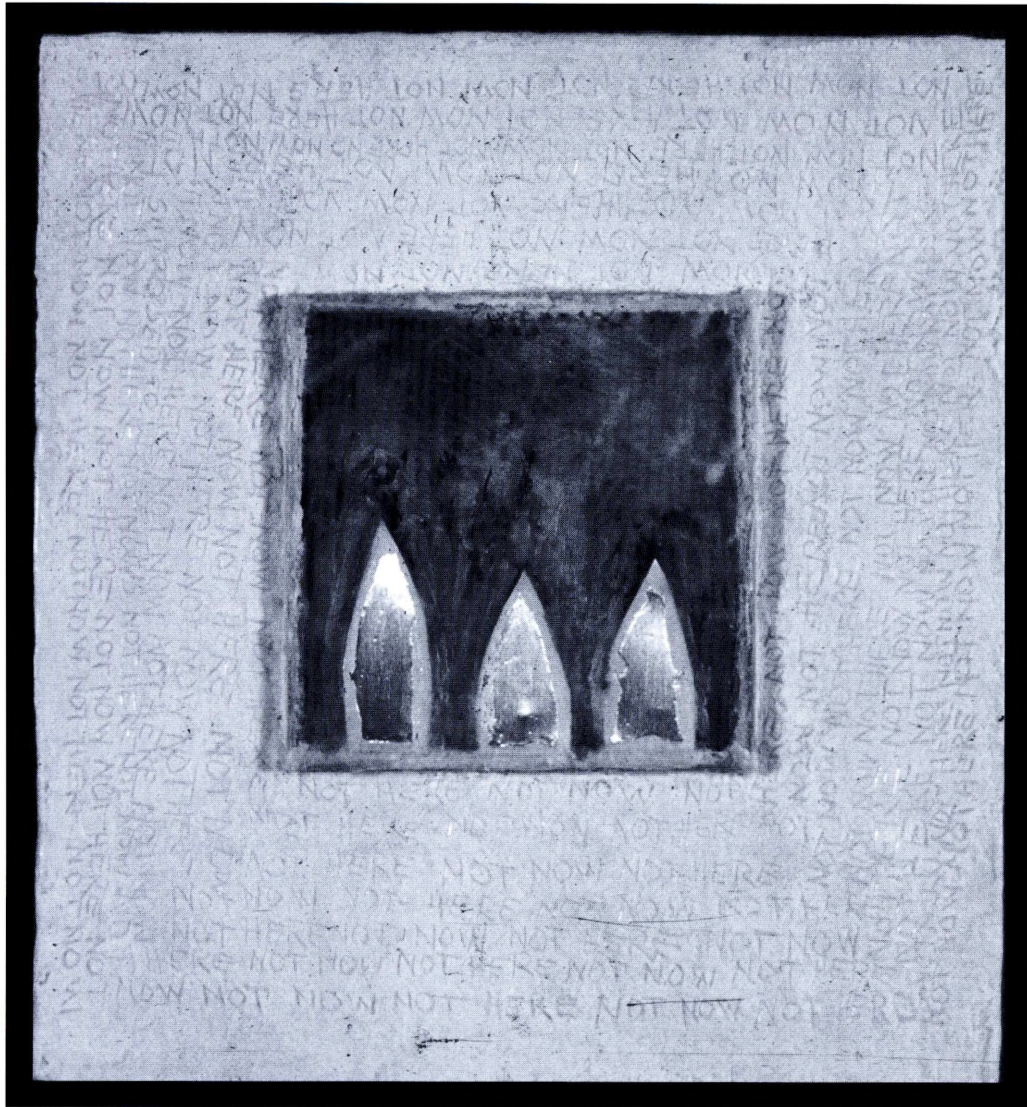
some meaning, trying to find something real in their lives. A lot of times it'll be people who feel that they should fit certain expectations. They're people who are failing to fit expectations that other people have for their lives and they're trying to figure who they are themselves. I guess some sort of search for identity. It's hard. It's a search for authenticity and for what would feel authentic—which has not been the life my mother would have envisioned for me. A lot of times the search for authenticity would be the major theme maybe and then of course your first book is always kind of a coming of age. I've had several students whose first books seemed to be beyond that. Maybe it's your first unpublished book. Sometimes there are certain fields you have to walk through.

G: Are you working on anything now? Is there a book or novel that you haven't written that you would like to?

M: There are many. I'll never live long enough. As soon as I write one there are two more. That's how I feel.

S: The more you do it, the more ideas you have. It's like I always tell my students. I like for them to keep a writing notebook during the semester we'll all be together. Once you start just jotting down images or ideas or anything, the more you do it the more you have. What good lines did you hear this week or did you think of? It's sort of self-engendering in a funny way.

M: Well it is. Like how you're playing *Scrabble* or any kind of game like that. Your brain sort of gets on a certain track where your whole matter of thought is geared toward getting that "Q" on the double letter score. I think for me fiction ideas come that way. I agree. I always tell my students, "The more I write, the more I write."



Preston Gilchrist

Amy Fleury

Mama, Ruby and Me

Anybody could see that it would come to no good end. But Mama said what would unravel between Ruby and Gus was to be left in the hands of God, and it wasn't our place to be butting in. Courting between old folks like that is tricky business, especially when it involves the likes of my aunt, Ruby, who has lived in this house for seventy-three years, and for every breath of that time has remained untethered to any man other than her dear, sweet daddy (God bless his soul) and the likes of Gus Rosenbaum, that nasty pipe-smoking German, who is a drunken peddler of lies and poison to women, namely those four, Ida, Anna, Corrinne, and Bliss, who took him for a husband and found him to be their death.

Death comes upon us all, it is true, but it seems to come lickety split for any wife of Gus Rosenbaum. Every woman with any sense knows to stay clear of that old coot. Far be it from me though to tell Ruby that her senses have left her.

Gus came around one afternoon while we three were podding peas. He loped up to the porch with his trousers sagging on his old man body and his pipe fixed between his teeth. I have never seen him without his pipe, so it seems to be a part of his face, like a moustache or a scar or some such other thing that might be found on a face. Just sitting there we were, spilling peas from between our thumbs, and never again were our lives to be the same.

"Kind ladies," he said while clenching the pipe that sent sweet tobacco messages up to heaven, up to his dear wives, Ida, Anna, Corrinne and Bliss, "is there anything I can fetch for you from town?"

"Lord yes," said Ruby in the first moment of her madness, "we are needing some pickling lime and a spool of red thread."

Maybe it is a spell that Gus puts on them, or more likely a curse, but whatever it is, it is as strong and sweet as the whiskey on his breath. None of us, Mama, Ruby or me, had ever put up with the notion of romance. Only Mama had been married, which is how she got me, but her husband, my daddy, had wandered off somewhere when I was just a pip. Perhaps it was me, and not Mama, who drove him away with my tight-fisted hollering and carrying on all day. Quite a bundle of thunder, me. Ruby has been with us always, and never have I known it another way. She has sat beside me these fifty-five years at our kitchen table, on the porch and in the parlor, and never

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have I seen her act so foolish as to fall full belly-buster in love with Gus Rosenbaum.

That day he brought us back our thread and lime and a bag of peppermint candies, and from then on he began to work his slow, smoky magic on poor Ruby. Unsuspecting as she was, my aunt was coaxed into performing the ridiculous, doting tasks of those in love—embroidering silly handkerchiefs, baking elaborate pies, and all the while humming or warbling some ninny song. Very much like Ida, Anna, Corrinne and Bliss.

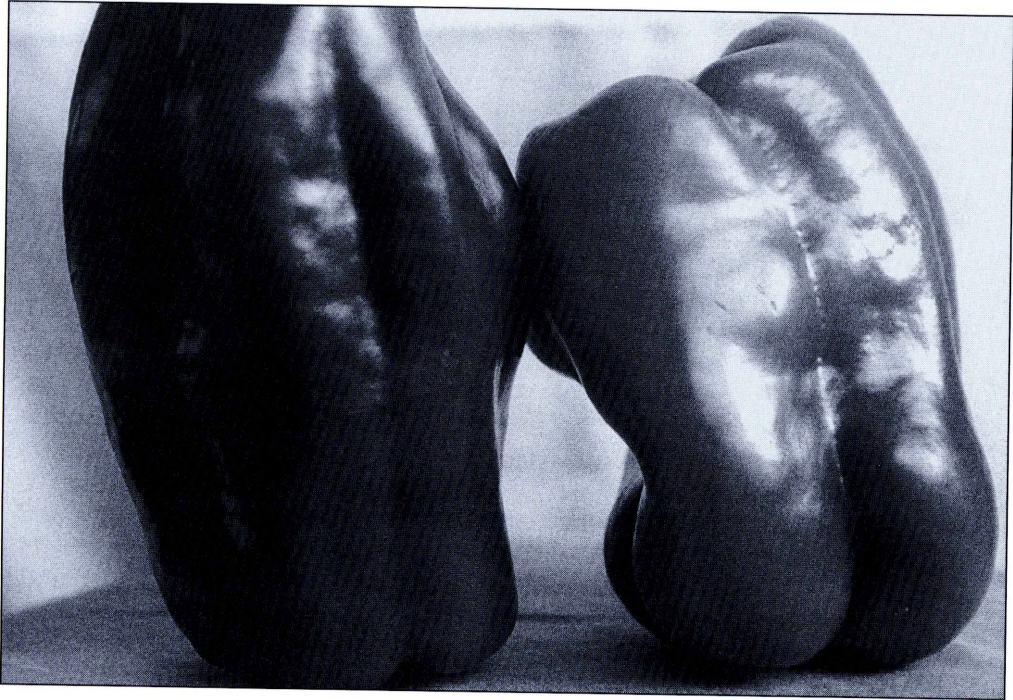
When Gus came to call the day before last, the two of them sat on the porch swing, cuddling and cooing like a couple of kids, and he gave her a letter he'd composed about Ruby being his sun and his moon. *X's and O's*, *Gus*, he'd signed it. Yesterday Ruby came to me and Mama and said that she was leaving us to marry Gus, that she wanted to be at his side, to darn his socks, to hoe his garden, to put up his beans, to sleep in his bed and to hold his hand for the rest of her days. Zeal can kill you, I say.

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Katherine Fields

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Martha Castle

Alfred López and Alex Fuentes

Excerpt from *El Hombre, La Hembra, Y El Hambre* by Diana Chaviano

Of course it was pure folly. But then everything in her country was. Whose brilliant idea was it to move the carnivals to July? Since their inception, two or perhaps three centuries ago now, blacks had taken to the streets on the feast of the Three Kings, January 6, when the island's climate is in its most gentle phase; they also did it on February 2, the feast of the Virgen de la Candelaria, not because they were devout Catholics, but because upon seeing the procession of candles with which the church celebrated the saint's purification, they supposed their masters were worshipping their orisha Oyá, the African deity who reigns over lightning, and simply calling her by another name. Claudia suspected that due to the combination of both events, the carnivals ended up being celebrated in the middle of February... until, as the old guaracha used to go, "The commander came, and ordered it to stop." In keeping with the systematic effort to erase the past, the carnivals moved under edict to July, when the dog days are so hot the even the air melts. It was all done under the pretext of commemorating the failed attack at a military base that had taken place during the same month more than forty years ago, in which many ingenuous people died, except for the ones now running the country. Very typical of them, Claudia thought, celebrating so many deaths with a carnival. Black magic of the worst kind, to keep blackening the island's karma.

As she hurried home after a long night's work, Claudia thought how stupid the processions looked, trudging through scalding streets in the 93-degree heat, when they could have done it in temperatures twenty or thirty degrees lower.

Two hours before, she, Sissi, and two Germans had watched the floats go by from their balcony at the hotel Nacional. Maybe her memory was failing, but she would have sworn that the parades were much more colorful in the days when her father used to sit her up on his shoulders. Now she thought it a poor, unadorned caravan, with hardly any lights and without even a queen to wave from the top of her carriage, throwing streamers and confetti at the crowd. As with so many other things, the appearance of a carnival queen was eventually forbidden for what the public thought were incomprehensibly esoteric reasons. After watching six or seven caravans, with their flaccid dancers balancing themselves dangerously on the weak platforms,

Claudia confessed she was bored. The Germans, who weren't having much fun either, withdrew from the balcony and proposed that they all go downstairs for a few drinks. So they did and, after a few *mojitos* and daiquiris, Claudia announced she was leaving; but she reassured her date, Franz, that she would see him the following evening. The German was a nice guy, the complete opposite of what most people think of Germans, and much more considerate and gentlemanly than the several Latinos she'd already been with.

–Citizen.

She tried to pretend that the voice was not addressing her.

–Citizen.

A bad omen: If you weren't called "comrade," that meant you were a dissident, a traitor, a worm.

–Not citizen. Comrade! –she said, trying to seem offended.

–Show me your ID.

She handed over her identification card, without which no Cuban dared venture outdoors. Leaving home without it could mean jail time.

–What are you doing here?

–I came to see some friends.

–Come with me.

–Where?

–To the station.

She'd rather die. She would make a scene for all the foreigners in the lobby to hear, and security wouldn't dare to take her away. Sissi had told her earlier about how they took poor Tamy in last week, and how two policemen had raped her at the station. And who can a *jinetera* turn to for justice? The poor thing got out only after her "agent" came and paid who knows how many dollars to the cops.

–You're making a mistake with me, comrade.

–You can tell me your story when we get there.

–I'm not going anywhere!

–What's going on?

They both turned upon hearing the question asked in a foreign accent. Franz was standing next to them.

–They want to take me to the station.

–The station?

–To the police.

–This lady is with me. We studied together in the University Lavana.

–Oh, I see. –The official didn't look like he was buying it, but there was nothing he could do.

She was lucky Franz had come down to bring her the purse that she had left in the room by mistake.

–How did you come up with that thing about the university? –she asked with admiration as they walked her to the taxi.

-It happen last year, with another friend. I remembered what she say.
-Thanks for bringing me the purse -she kissed him goodbye. -See you.
He slipped a twenty into her hand as she stepped into the taxi. Five blocks away, after making sure nobody was following her, she ordered the driver to stop and headed down to La Rampa. By doing this she would save some money she could use later for something better than a *turistaxi* at two in the morning. The bus took her by a somewhat erratic route, as was usual during carnival due to the number of streets that were closed off. Finally the vehicle turned towards the Muelle de Luz.

Claudia was astonished at the rumble of bodies at the Plaza de San Francisco. She was hardly able to move through the masses of people moving along the avenue, which was steeped in an uncanny darkness. There were masks everywhere, as if the ban had been lifted; and it was the presence of those masks that put her senses on alert, or rather in a state of nuclearalarm, because anything was possible except that the government would stop fearing a political uprising: the principal reason why all maskedparades were forbidden.

She saw the lines of *comparseros* dancing to and fro, the African “devils” drawing out their skirmishes surrounded by a ring of half-naked *negros*, of *negras* whose skirts were volatile as helium, of *mestizos* leaping like blasts of steam, and of mulattas displaying their shimmering breasts within the low necks of their dresses as they danced in the mud like vestals driven mad by the cigars’ smoky incense. Only then didshe notice the cupola now standing in the rear of the church of San Francisco...Yet the movement of the multitude did not allow her to position herself at a more avorable angle for getting a better look at the dome-like structure towering over what should have been only an empty ruin.

She tried to retrace her steps and cross the street in the direction of the Muelle de Luz, but now the sea licked the foundations of the church that a moment before had been separated from the bay by an enormous avenue.

The cupola. That was the only thing she could manage to see; time and again that impossible dome, standing at the same spot at which the church building was supposed to abruptly end. She had also failed to make out the fountain with the lions, which usually occupied the center of the plaza...But it didn’t matter anymore, she knew it was happening again.

She just let herself go, carried away by the multitude, to exult in festivities of which she’d only seen a sad imitation. She felt much safer this time around, certain she would be able to get back. Muba had told her so the last time, and that’s how it happened. And when had her black *madrina* ever let her down?

She was fascinated above all by the orgy of the drums; a rhythm much

closer to Africa, or perhaps less influenced by those that came after. But you could hear the seeds of her music there; more than the seed, the very heart, the budding soul of the Cuban. And despite the freshness of that January morning—because there was no doubt left in her mind she was reliving a Three Kings’ Day from the century that Carpentier had so longed for—she felt the bacchanalian spirit awakening within her; she saw the couples sneaking off behind the church, near where the waves licked the buttresses, and they were leaning up against the walls of the sacred site to transpire and cry out in other cadences.

That’s how it had always been, Claudia thought. Hunger for lust and hunger for sex: it was the brand, the indelible mark of that condemned and magical city. That’s how it was born and that’s how it survived all its social reincarnations. Because her city was like a phoenix: despite all the ashes, despite the disasters, it always rose again in the end. It is impossible to quench one fire with another, and that was the elemental makeup of its people’s blood: an inextinguishable passion. Vehemence. Fire. The restlessness of ardent phalluses and inflamed vulvas.... A tropical Walpurgis was being celebrated that night, and the demons were dancing everywhere: the slaves in their jute suits and their devil-like horned hoods, incited the crowd even further with their St. Vitus’s dance. The free blacks and mulattos disguised as gentlemen and beggars, now the military man and now the nobleman, wearing feathered and sequined masks, unknowingly parodied the remote carnivals of a European city; a city much like their own, indissolubly connected to the water, but sadly beginning to sink, unlike Havana, which emerged today like a Venus from the sea, as if the universe’s entropy demanded that one miracle disappear in order to give way to another.

Someone handed her an earthenware bottle. Some kind of *aguardiente*, with a hint of corn and cinnamon... or so Claudia thought as she drank it, having already abandoned her last scruples. She felt more secure here than in her own time. “After all”—she thought—“these people don’t even have AIDS.” And as if he had guessed what her thoughts were, her masked gentleman lifted her off the ground, despite her protests, until they reached the walls of the church where the sea wet their feet. Without saying a word, he lifted her skirt and penetrated her alongside the other couples that were giving themselves shoulder to shoulder to the same game of possessions. She didn’t offer any resistance. “The only thing I can catch here is gonorrhea or syphilis. And I can take care of that with two shots of penicillin.” But that wasn’t the reason for her docility. The smell of the mulattos excited her, a smell of sugar and of oranges, of jungle and of mud, of pure saltpeter and of mango, of honey and of saturnalia. It was the smell of sex in its purest state, as if a gigantic cloud of pheromones had fallen like an unannounced plague over the creatures of that century. She allowed herself to be taken without fear, only a little surprised at her own

submissiveness. She felt the breath of the woman next to her as she repeated the words “maco, maco,” unable to guess whether it was her lover’s name or some African expression. Her kidnapper unmasked himself and opened her dress, but she couldn’t see his face in the darkness. Nor did she much care. She was enjoying the sting of the rough sea wall on her buttocks each time the man thrust against her. Fruity juices running between her thighs. Her island was a blessing; and the males of her island a wonder. She opened herself wider, imprisoning the man’s hips with her legs, giving up the pulp of her own fresh flesh like a votive offering. So many nights she’d prayed for a moment of real freedom, and now she was enjoying this surrender in which the only requisite was the very act of surrendering. No verbal duels, no tricky exchanges, no surmises or pretensions...Now she was satiating her hunger, all her built-up hunger, because her attentive rapist, having thrown himself on the ground with her in a Herculean maneuver, was drawing out of his pockets—or perhaps from under his cape—mandarins and bananas and anons and mangoes and all kinds of fruits which he would peel before biting into them and handing them to Claudia, who received them from his mouth while the citrus juices ran down her neck, and the white pulp of the anon coated her breasts and she was choking on the banana he was thrusting into her mouth, forcing her to devour it all, taking pleasure in this as if he were watching her enjoy a sweet and gigantic prick by the light of a distant torch. And only then would he start to stir again inside her, to ride her frantically and lasciviously, until she was screaming right along with the *negras* and mulattas who were still being brought over to those sandy rocks, some being raped and some willing, and Claudia was coming as hard as any of them for the pleasure of the voyeurs who preferred to watch. She cried and laughed and screamed like a crazy woman, more from the feeling of freedom than from her own orgasms. For her misery and sex existed in unison. To suffer from one augmented the need for the other. Or maybe it wasn’t like that? She was too exhausted and satisfied to bother herself with such trifles.

Someone passed by with a torch—the same one that had lingered near the water, spying or waiting—but no one paid attention. And Claudia wouldn’t have cared either... if it weren’t because that fleeting moment of clarity allowed her to see Onolorio’s face as he stared at her, his body still impaled against hers.

Georg Trakl

Abendlied

Am Abend, wenn wir auf dunklen Pfaden gehn,
Erscheinen unsere bleichen Gestalten vor uns.

Wenn uns dürstet,
Trinken wir die weißen Wasser des Teichs,
Die Süße unserer traurigen Kindheit.

Erstorbene ruhen wir unterm Hollundergebüsch,
Schaun den grauen Möven zu.

Frühlingsgewölke steigen über die finstere Stadt,
Die der Mönche edlere Zeiten schweigt.

Da ich deine schmalen Hände nahm
Schlugst du leise die runden Augen auf.
Dieses ist lange her.

Doch wenn dunkler Wohllaut die Seele heimsucht,
Erscheinst du Weiße in des Freundes herbstlicher
Landschaft.

Carroll Hightower

Evening Song

In the evening, when we walk on dark paths,
Our own pale forms rise before us.

When we're thirsty,
We drink the white waters of the pond,
The sweetness of our sad childhood.

Like the dead we rest under elder bushes,
Watch the gray gulls.

Spring clouds rise over the dark town,
Silencing the nobler time of the monks.

When I grasped your slender hands
You opened your round eyes. Softly.
This was a long time ago.

But when the dark harmony haunts my soul,
You rise in your friend's autumn landscape, pale one.



Kevin Bain

Robert Bense

The Yazoo

Past catfish farms. The marsh
plain. For two weeks, rain,
and a bridge out. Sluice gates
opened. Behind the opaque
curtain, the river of the Choctaws.
Long burden of human sacrifice.
River of defeats. Sounded by
Spanish, French, Anglos.
The muddied mouth
of the Yazoo will not be seen
today discharging its shame.
Another yellow dog
snaking through the white
soil of Mississippi.
Carting off what belongs to night.
The low branch of a sorgum
tipped under, strained
by weight that goes straight
to the bottom. Below which
there is no farther.
Genitals severed. Stuffed
in the mouth.
A length of rope, the stain
aged brown. Excited flagelants'
whips. Noose of rusty chain
tossed over a tire afterwards.
Unsuspected for how many years.
Cargo
long ago sent down
by water.

Robert Bense

The Arkansas

arriving at the old river
De Soto crossed,
another river enters,
a crooked road out of the deep west.
The gaping mouth of the Arkansas
vengeful, disrobing blood red
in last light. The traveler
shocked into the palpable.
The story of gold, the story of fur.
No two stories are the same.
De Soto tramping into
the warm and drowsy air.
Jolliet turned back
from the western, Spanish shore.
La Salle stopping nearby
in mist too heavy to see.
Claiming everywhere for France.
We never got this far.
The Seven Cities of Cibola
out of sight. Night rhyme
of locusts, jamming on the trail.
You once said sinister clouds
were cornering us. The sky
on its side, ready to pounce.
I see your meaning.
Black trees in the gloom ahead.
Time unaccounted for
in your childhood's darkened rooms.
Ground fog shrouding the groves.
Crows in the walnut trees chanting
over receivables, uncovered debts.

A calculus of cotton futures,
Brahman cattle. The dead
weathered in cemeteries of worn churches.
The gain substantial.
Loss, everything.
I try to forget. I try to forget.
Hawks wheeling in a clearing
sky, blinded by the sunset.
Mice and Gypsy children in their
wandering caravans, safe.
A marker explains how far
the lost tribes of Israel reached
into this fleeced paradise.
Prophets and apostles preach
in the local churches.
A couple in their seventies
walk on the levee holding hands,
beat a dog. The white miasma
ahead is river mist, river heat.
The road too flat for hell—as far
as one can see.
God's second nature writing straight
again in crooked lines.

Yalobusha Review



Vivian Neill

Claude Wilkinson

Nocturne

Between huge volunteer
catalpa trees,
before I'd heard
my father's death rattle,
his spirit scaling
a cage of bones,
stumbling back
to his chest
for another
rough breath,

I stood listening
in the dusky
throng of peepers,
and to owls hooked high above,
swiveling incantations
over their realm of food.

What were powdery blows
of candleflies
in the face of all
the moon unveiled?
What was death then
but the twitching
crease of fur
draped in an owl's
crooked beak, or news
from some other hill?

And now, whatever voice
from the orchard grass,
whatever sparks
aligning themselves,
all the suffocating odors

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of flowers summon
those last dark hours
I spent bedside
squeezing my father's
nearly translated hand.

“What bird is that singing?”
and “Things okay,
between you and me?”
he'd return through
a haze of Ativan to ask.

I gritted and bore
every memory
I'd tried to forget,
how much of a burden
I'd often felt
unless something was to be done,
a fence repaired,
or a stray tracked
and brought home.

I'd remember only
how on a summer's night
under our canvas of stars,
I clambered onto his lap
and touched his unshaven face
while he croaked
my favorite refrain
into the shadows
of flame-red cannas
and mimosas lit pink
by moonlight:
*Just over in the glory land,
I'll join the happy angel band,
Just over in the glory land;
Just over in the glory land,
There with the mighty host I'll stand,
Just over in the glory land.*
“No bird,” I'd whisper.
“Between us, you and me,
yes, things are okay.”

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In the times
he lingered quietly
between ether and earth,
possibly in that heaven
of his past
with a carousel
of fair-skinned
young women, cool
in organdy dresses
on warm Sunday afternoons,

I stared at some charity's
floral calendar
tacked to his wall,
noticed once more
his penchant
for circling, along
with family birthdays,
what seemed
such funny dates:
Greek Orthodox Easter,
Yom Kippur, Professional
Secretaries' Day.

A widower for years,
and still
he'd starred Valentine's
under February's floribunda.
Month after petaled month,
the one brightness left,
except for our last
shimmering glances
when we were almost
father and son.



Josh Dean

Marilyn Kallet

Old Teacher

Japanese Meditation Garden, Hilo

The banyan rains down on Buddha,
long trails of moss cascade
like the mane of a mystical horse.
Crows sound off like roosters,
waking the braid of garden and sky.
Long ago, French 101, Madame taught us
about *correspondances*, how heaven and earth

Mirror each other, every material thing
a cup for the spiritual.
So much in love with her,
I copied out her *Saisons*, each poem
by hand. I was her best student
until I left to study with another teacher.
Then she pronounced me dead.

Madame had opened the world for me
like a book of lyrics,
offered me Baudelaire, music
of the cosmos, revealed
its poetical keyboard.
I'm told she's sick now.
What could I say after thirty years?

"I have a daughter, too," I'd write.
"She's sixteen. How's your Eve?"
I wouldn't add, "You
didn't let her breathe."
I would only have to start again.
Isn't it hard enough to find
a few tender words for an old love?



Paula Temple

K.E. Duffin

Three Views of Siberia

Birds of Novosibirsk

Ordinarily I would be obsessed with learning their Latin names, poring over books to pin down even their subspecies. But here the making of lists feels wrong, a temptation to mastery. And nothing can master such vastness.

At Novosibirsk, our plane stands on the airfield like a huge metal goose, Los Angeles written in script on its fuselage. My first Siberian bird. Other birds I see on the runway fit the forms of plover and swallow, even as they withhold their true identities. They are strange beneath the deceptive gestalt of ordinary. They shoot up from grass that is not the grass I know, from among flowers that are not the flowers I know. Yet on the surface, how similar this distant world seems, all the categories in place as if for a children's book.

Just beyond the airport, a bubbling cry makes me look up at the bare branches of a nearby tree, and there I see my first Magpie in its brilliant blue, black, and white silks, a most implausible bird to find in a landscape fit for sparrows and starlings. I am struck by its size as well as its elegance, an eighteenth-century gentleman oddly misplaced from court with his plumes, or a strutting jockey, horseless, unless the muddy back of the earth itself is a horse.

The Pied Wagtail as common is a concept that takes getting used to. This black, white, and gray bird, with long, constantly-flicking tail, visits the puddles in Novosibirsk after rain and loops from tree to tree looking like the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher's gigantic older sibling who ran away to the circus. Harlequin, frail and dapper all at the same time, often nesting under airconditioners (one is doing so at the orange-yellow military headquarters), it allows you to approach quite closely. In my photographs that seem to be of curbs and mysterious expanses of nondescript street, it puzzles me with its disappearing act. So slim, as if it lived on grayness and sky alone, each arrival is an announcement of imperiled delicacy, like the boy dancers in a Tchaikovsky ballet whose thinness borders upon the fantastic.

The two-tone Hooded Crows—black and tan—have cries that seem a cross between crow and raven. Wearing sackcloth jackets and burlap vests, they are the shy, medieval hoodlums of winter who scare up from the pines, or drift

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past crumbling corners of tenements. Gangs of them spread their own rumors in the distance, reminding the city that it is surrounded by enormous anonymity. Their ancestors fed on someone's bones. And yet they are a friendly presence, wary as ravens, proximate as crows.

High up in the white birches of the taiga, barely discernible flittings and tumblings in lace that holds back the clouds. Little victory birds with tiny, bibbed throats from which a northern music is squeezed, barely audible.

As an old train, brightly colored like a toy, clacks along the shore outside Akademgorodok, a bell-like note keeps wafting from a nearby stand of windswept pines, like someone testing a tuning fork. Our burly driver suddenly turns and says, "It is a small blue bird making that sound," his own eyes glinting like fragments of sky.

Stolovaya

After days of giddy warmth in May defying all the stereotypes of snow and desolation, the weather suddenly leaned back toward Siberian winter. The wind was abruptly arctic again, a chill that made the body feel transparent under a stern blue sky. Any notion that earth accommodated human life—the forgivable illusion of spring—was ripped away like a flimsy poster. This cold had traveled far, meeting no obstacles. It had moved in overnight from the unimaginable east, and it shut down your breath. Buildings reeled in the blast, and helpless sunlight played along their facades. At noon, I sought shelter and warmth, and the old century offered up one of its lairs, a canteen or *stolovaya* for the people, straight out of the Soviet era. These drab, comradely places used to be found on every block, so even the poorest could be assured of a meal and temporary respite from the cold.

No awning or banner announced its presence. I could have been slipping into someone's shabby apartment building by the side door. What I found was a dramatic contrast to the trendy little cafes with purple umbrellas that seemed to have blown in suddenly from the West like capitalist pollen settling on vast, gray street corners. A few steps up, and I was in a large rectangular space filled with beautiful wintry light that seemed dusted with flour. The first thought was old elementary school cafeteria, with universal smells of unidentifiable soup and overcooked vegetables. There were long communal tables under the windows. The décor was brown and disinfectant green; steam was rising from steel vats that held nameless umber stews with carrots floating in them like fluorescent logs. Some disheveled old people as well as neatly attired businessmen with scuffed briefcases were pushing trays along a line, choosing items on display. Burly women in aprons and white caps were ladling hot tea into an array of glasses, each containing a brown blob that might have been a preserved fruit. Behind the counter, other women were hacking at pink chunks of cooked meat to make more stew. I

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got on line and surveyed the offerings with alarm and curiosity. I took one of the ceramic bowls of soup and had a tentative spoonful. It was tasty and greasy, filled with a grain like kasha and gristly meat. For my main course I chose a hot bun with poppy seeds—it seemed safest—and a bottle of lemonade. There was much shouting by the kitchen staff which made me feel like a recruit at culinary boot camp, always on the verge of making some egregious error in progressing from point to point. But mostly the workers were talking to one another, oblivious to the customers. After all, these were probably old-style jobs, held for life. Men were hefting huge, battered silver vats, seemingly left over from a war between giants, creating a hubbub as if they were angry, then disappearing meekly beyond a green wall, liked chastened adolescents.

After eating my modest meal, I wandered downstairs to explore, finding a dark basement labyrinth straight out of the Bolshevik years. There was a dirty—though not filthy—windowless toilet, also with green walls. I glanced into another room that had white tiles and meat hooks, a green table, and a window covered with lurid, red organdy curtains. There a muscular woman with rolled-up shirt sleeves was wielding a cleaver, chopping up the ribby, splayed carcass of an unidentifiable animal, and filling steel bowls to the brim with salvageable meat. I took some photos from the doorway—it was like a Vermeer filtered through Soutine—and when the woman heard the noisy slatch of the Nikon shutter, she turned, quite agitated, and chased me upstairs. But I was only an ignorant guest, a foreigner. Not the health inspector, as she thought.

The sacrificial carcass I glimpsed was a blotch of reds and whites helplessly embracing the air, its headless form presiding over the stolovaya where legislated kindness—with the instinct of a sullen, cornered street dog—fought the impersonal forces of cold and hunger. The light streaming through those tall glasses of murky tea was loveless and spiritual, a paradox. Perhaps this place was swept away with the century. Yet I know I will always struggle toward it in those dreams of destitution so common in paradise, knowing where soup and warmth can be found.

The Glass House

Along the broad roadway that paralleled the gray Ob River and led to the heart of Novosibirsk, where trucks thundered by apartment buildings and clusters of sheds and shacks, it glittered like a fragment of a shattered side-view mirror. So strange, the eye leapt to it instantly, something shaken out of a library book about the Bauhaus. Squeezed between two dull sheds, like the pearlescent fan of an accordion, was a tiny faceted house of glass. On staggered levels, with one triangular corner of roof pointed up toward the sky. A little church of modernism, all window, reflecting clouds and tree

branches as if they were cracks in its surface. It seemed to be silently photographing whatever passed. Who lived there? An architect? A professor of art? When had this little eccentricity appeared? In an enormous, lumbering city, heavy with conformity and necessity, a vest-pocket grace note of fancy and freedom. Something whose purpose was reflection. Something in which you could see yourself.

I remember a day when trees near the glass house were shaken like lifeless dolls by wind that smeared a red stoplight across swirling leaves. Deluge. People walking along the road looked as if they had had buckets suddenly dumped on them. A lone, wet Kamikaze dog headed into heavy traffic. (What ever became of it?) Hulking trucks kept barreling toward the city center, past the penitentiary-like Hotel Ob, cavernous, abandoned and empty. In rain, its dull concrete was duller. But the glass house became a natural part of this universe that brought puddles and reflections. It sent the light ricocheting in all directions, refusing to absorb and conceal, instead throwing back whatever came its way. It showed things as they are, not as they were supposed to be. A paradox, it was the center of attention because of its own disappearance. Look at me, it declared, and you will see everything around me. I decided it was a writer's house, even if no writer lived there.

One day on Krasny Prospekt, after another rainstorm, the clouds thinned and grew nacreous, touched with lemon, and the thinnest wash of blue appeared. Even in the ensuing sunshowers, arrows of rain still pelted us, leaving mercuric pools everywhere. We sheltered in doorways, watching the rain-slicked street for any sign of let-up. And I thought of the glass house in its element, an endless video of street, river and traffic playing across its surface, streaming with tears. Perhaps it was an embodied metaphor, a *jeux d'esprit* in a land where levity was rarely seen in public: "People who live in glass houses. . ."

Another way of looking at it: through some quirk in the Russian system of supply and hoarding, someone once had a windfall of glass. What seems an indulgence and a witticism may also have been a necessity: build from whatever is at hand. Make do and let others see in it what they will.

Jacqueline Marcus

Grey November Morning

Crows paddling across the mist.

It feels like a James Wright poem—
as you drop an unreadable book in the sand.

The whole sky shines twice across the ocean,
turning its wing inside the bay.

Maybe it *can* briefly change you—

no matter how lonely the trees appear
from the other side of the shore.

What was I looking for—
way out there past the seagulls?

(lightning flashing a small boat).

Jacqueline Marcus

Thus the Forms...

i. Thus the Forms Are Poorly Reflected in the Transitory World

A boat's ribs left undone.
Fog, pulling its nets across the waters.
The sun flares one last time with a few herons.
Luminous loss against the pines.
The sea-salt air and tiny shorebirds,
amused with the lapping sunfall,
amused at our own flaws.

ii. Happiness is an Activity of the Soul

You should let it go.
So indifferent to the leaves casually brushed aside.
It would be better to keep them as they are:
chaotic flames, in love with the music of suspense,
the universal themes,
pursuing their moral imperatives:
Antigone's prayer for a proper burial,
stones piled upon her dead brother's chest
so that the soul's passage into the underworld
was not in vain.
The women chained to their consolations,
the sun, pressing its scarlet **A** against the rocks.

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iii. Being vs. Becoming

Maybe Pythagoras is right—
that you can invoke *Being*, mathematically,
like Buddhists chanting the sacred *Om*,
recollecting the Holy Numbers.

(There are exceptions, of course.)

iv. Via Affirmativa

What more can I give to this windy autumn—
this immense darkness that loves us

(and then betrays us.)

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Paula Temple

Charles Wright

Saturday Afternoon

The sadness of sunlight lies like fine dust on the evergreens.
Even the wind can't move it,
The wind that settles across the afternoon like a luck-hungry bird,
Reshuffling its feathers from time to time,
and cricking its claws.
The slow sleep and sad shine of sunlight.

Shadows are clumsy and crude, their eggs few,
And dragonflies, like luminescent Ohio Bluetip match sticks,
Puzzle the part-opened iris stalks,
hovering and stiff.
New flies frenetic against the glass,
Woodpeckers at their clocks,
the horses ablaze in the grained light.

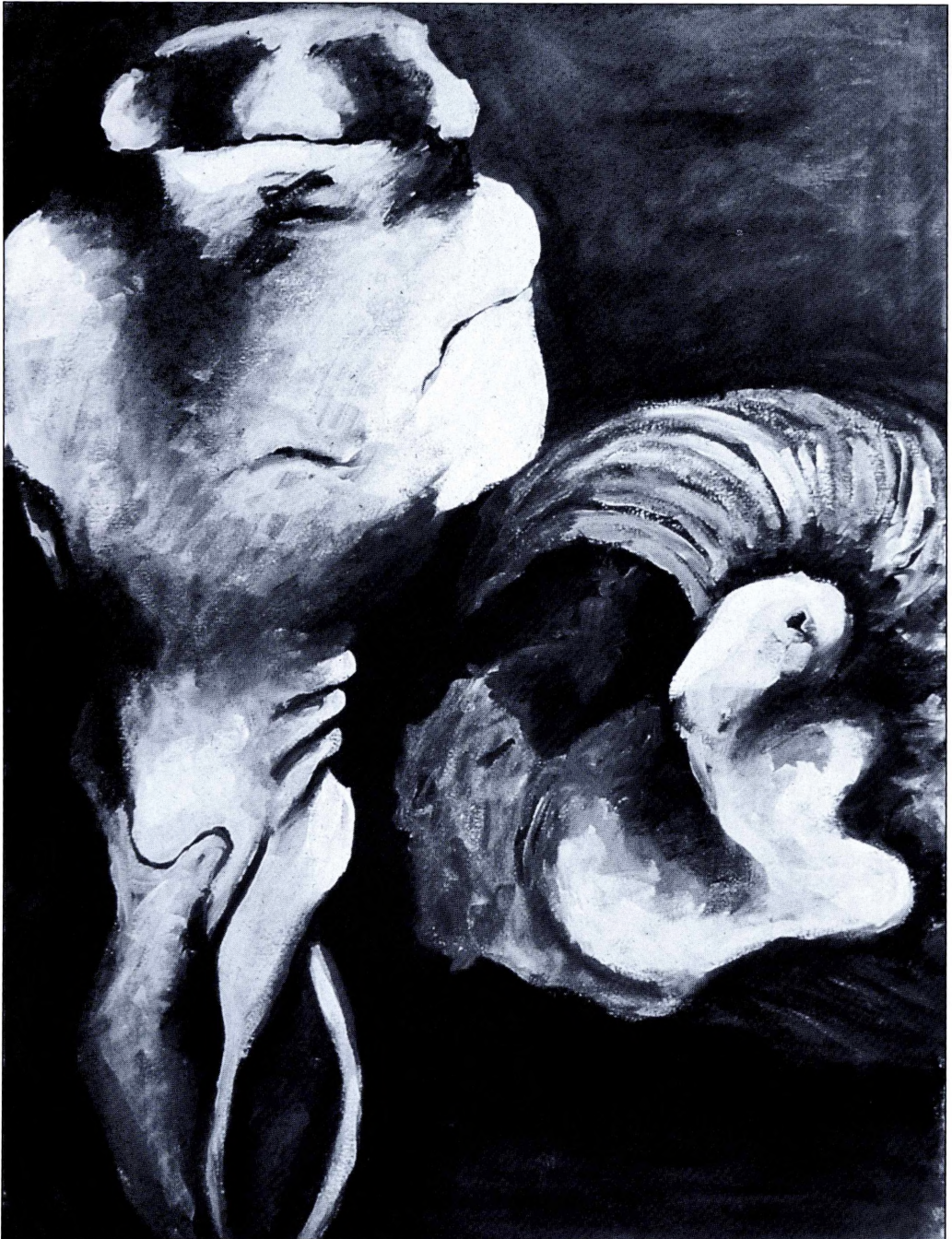
Although the lilac is long dead, the bees still seek its entrance.
In vain, the chilled and resurgent bees.
It's not so much the lilac they want
As subtraction of lilac,
some sumptuous, idyllic door
Unlatching to them its inner and sumptuous rooms.

The season, however, outlegs them,
Unanswerable in its instruments
and its empty cells.
And bees must follow it willy-nilly, and lock-step,
Right down the air, where the world reloads
and offers up
Its lesser mansions, its smaller rooms.

This is no metaphor, this is the way it just is,
Creaking of wheels endemic under the earth,
Pulleys raising the platforms up, and pulling them down, slick pistil and piston,
We walk on the roofs of great houses,
All of them turning like a river, all of them ours. some of them quick, some not,



Eden Rosen



Kim Dodez

Jamie Cavanagh

Broken Shells

Chapel bells
in the distance
ring no pleasure
even in remembrance.
Vows are such slippery things.

A proximate star
stands for drinks.
More than drunks
tell lies of gratitude.
And the drinks are brewed
from the tears
of the thinly faithful
tested.

Arms around each other's back,
lovers stagger zigzag paths
among the jagged razor rocks
raised upright and poised to strike
from every sanguine mind's eroded shore.

Thick in vertigo whorl,
eyes turned back bring shivers.
Blue sun spirals through yellow wind.
Diamonds spill from a jeweler's hand,
shatter a sea worn and sore.

Through the rain
a young girl steps from the gated house
high atop the turret dune,
bends in sincere gratitude,
makes a promise to the sea,
a promise to remember
the gift of talismans.

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She digs with urgent finger claws
half-buried shells as charms
to bring one day a love
fierce as the sun's faithful arc
parting the mists of time,
half-buried shells for her flower pail
discarded soon for a purse of gold,
soon for a veil of stone.
Quickly the sun
slips through the wind.
quickly the promise broken dies.

Jeri Edwards

Beauty Queen Waves

Sipping a whiskey sour at Capistrano's on Buena Ventura Street, I glance over at the guy who bought me this drink and wonder how long I should let him hang around before I tell him I'm waiting for some other guy to arrive. Capistrano's sits at the end of the oceanfront block and is often enveloped in cool, damp fog by the time the after-happy-hour crowd of gray stubbled surfers and processing plant workers fills up the place. I'm at the end of the bar with the surfers who drink shots of tequila and talk about finding that perfect wave like it was a religion and I don't really give a shit because I don't think that wave exists. Me and my girlfriend, Evonne, come here often, mostly because there's nothing much else to do after we've spent all day packing lemons in the Saticoy Packinghouse. And the bartenders at this place sort of look out for us and they're in on our little game of counting how many offers for drinks we get each night.

But tonight Evonne isn't with me and the guy I'm waiting for is our friend Rhonda's idea of a blind date. She said, *You gotta meet him, Nikki, he's your type*, and even though I told her I've had a string of bad luck with guys and I don't know what my type is, here I am waiting for what she described as a *tall guy who used to be a surfer*, and that just about describes all the guys around here, and who knows, he might not even show up. So I play our little game and see how long it takes for a guy to offer to buy me a drink and almost as soon as I sit down at the bar, this guy sits down beside me and says to Miguel, the bartender, while pointing at me, "I'd like to buy her a whiskey sour." I'm trying to be nice by drinking this whiskey sour, but I wish I had insisted on ordering a frozen margarita, extra salt, instead of allowing him to order this concoction. He is trying to start a conversation with me, but we keep getting interrupted with *Hey, Nikki, where's that Hot Tamale?* That's Evonne's nickname and all the guys think she's drop-dead gorgeous. She's got this California look, like she just walked off Rincon Beach with every strand of her long brown hair in place. Her skin is dark because her mom is Hispanic and her eyes, when you can see them peeking out behind her Gucci knockoff sunglasses, they're almost as dark as those little black stones you see along the beach. My Midwestern pale skin and mousy brown hair can't come close to Evonne's beauty, but when my mom and stepdad moved to Payson, Arizona, I discovered that a slight tilt of the head, a big flashy smile and a

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beauty queen wave, like the ones you see on the Miss America Pageant, will get a girl almost anything she wants. And I was the one who taught that to Evonne.

I let the back screen door ease shut when I get home from school, and Elijah, my pit bull, is at my side, his nails clipping crisply across the blue and white linoleum kitchen floor. The TV blares from the other room. "The school called again today, Nikki." My mother's voice, slow and bored, rises above the TV. "They don't want that pit bull hangin' around." I yell from the kitchen, "I don't care what they say, Elijah isn't goin' nowhere." I grab a soda from the refrigerator and run out the back, letting the screen door slap against the frame, and I catch a few words of "Wait until Hank . . ." and as I run past the window where she's sitting, slouched on the couch, her thick legs splayed open, sipping a vodka tonic, a floor fan blowing up her skirt, I know my stepdad won't do nothing about it because he likes to sit next to me and put his hands on my thighs and say "Angelbaby, the whole valley lights up when you smile." And when I look up at him he says, "You should be an actress, 'cause your eyes are so blue," and then he removes his sweaty palms when I wiggle to get up.

I keep sipping on my whiskey sour until it's almost done, and the guy wants to buy me another, and I look towards the door, and think, *This is part of the game*, so I tell Miguel, "Make it a *curacao* martini, please." And the guy, I've forgotten his name already, sits up and raises his eyebrows and says, "Where'd you get that sophisticated taste?" And I want to call him Freckles because his whole face and arms are smothered in freckles, and I say, "Jesus, all you have to do is spend some time hanging out in bars," and he pulls his stool closer to me and leans over and asks, "Oh, so you do this often?"

On one of our nights out last month, Evonne pulls me aside and tells me she missed her period and she's sure she's gonna have a baby. She says her man wants her to get rid of it but she wants to keep it. She's not showing yet and she says, "Lenny's got some crazy streak in him," and she's scared he's gonna do something, so she tells me she's thinking about going away to have her baby. And I worry about her, especially since the other night I saw Lenny at Riley's down the street and he didn't see me, and I heard him talking to a few of his friends, they were laughing pretty loud, and he called Evonne a "Mother Cunt."

And I know he thinks I'm gonna go home with him, I can tell by the way he's smirking, that he's thinking I'm his catch for tonight and I don't want to answer his question, so I ask one instead. "Do you have as many freckles on your legs as you do your arms?" And he looks down at his whiskey sour, I see a grin come across his face, and he says, "Yeah, wouldn't you like to know?" And I stick my finger in my blue martini to stir it and he opens his mouth and I lick my finger.

On Friday nights Parker comes home from being on the road all week, pulls a beer out of the refrigerator, changes the channel on the TV no matter what channel I'm watching, and announces, "I don't want no one to bother me now, okay?" Each week he asks, "How're you and Elijah doing, Pet?" and then reaches for the remote and turns the TV up a bit louder. I don't bother telling him that I've met another guy at a bar who wants to take me out of the desert to a beach town called Ventura, California, a place I've never heard of, but he says it's real cool and nice there and I can take Elijah too. And the night I have my bag packed and am ready to leave, Parker wakes up from his six-pack slumber and I can see Elijah's eyes just inches from Parker's drunken face. I swear Elijah hates him more than I do and is thinking Parker is gonna keep me from going and that's why he bites into Parker's cheek and won't let go. I run into the other room screaming and yelling, "Elijah, Elijah," then I hear a loud crack of a gun and Parker shouts, "That goddam dog turned on me." I can't stop screaming, but Parker, all he does is fall back asleep, and I get the hell out of there.

And Freckles's hand brushes the back of my neck and he puts his head back and laughs and I know he's laughing because he thinks he's found a good fuck for tonight but I'm laughing harder because I know as soon as this other guy walks in the door, if he ever does, I'll blow him off. Then he tells Miguel he wants to try some tequila because this is his lucky night, and Miguel looks at me, I know he's watching out for me, and I look at Freckles and ask, "Whatcha feel so lucky about?" And I glance at my watch and wonder if this guy is gonna show up.

Evonne is holding her hands like they're gonna fall off and I notice they're shaking when she pushes her sunglasses up on her nose. That's when I see she's trying to hide a big bruise on her face. "What's this?" I ask, but she pulls her face away and says, "I'm gonna name my boy Oxnard." And I say, "Did Lenny do this?" and I put my hand gently on the side of her face and feel a big lump. She says, "No, my mother-in-law threw a lamp at me while I was sleeping. She drinks too much." Her lips are quivering and she's whispering, "I got to get out of that place, Nikki, I got to get out of that place." I put my arm on her shoulder and say, "Where you gonna go?" Then some guys walk up to us and we make our beauty queen waves and smile with our lips and they offer us a drink.

And Freckles is now giggling and trying to drape his arm across my shoulder, but I scoot my stool just out of his reach so that his arm drops into dead space, and I see a guy walk into the bar and he looks like he just came off a ranch up in Ojai, and he's trying to stuff his oversized hands into his jeans pockets and he looks around before he walks towards me and I notice he's got cowboy boots on and I wonder if a former surfer would wear cowboy boots and I let him walk past me without saying anything and watch him out of the corner of my eye.

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Jarrold comes home one night from the warehouse, smelling like the plastic containers he moves onto freight trucks all day long and tells me he's got to pack up and go, says Ventura isn't the place for him, the job sucks and he just doesn't want to be in a relationship no more. I look at Denzel, the pit bull he gave me, and try to ask questions, but none come. He says he's got a hundred dollars, maybe two, he can give me and says I should call a friend of his who lives in Oxnard, maybe she can help me. The next morning I watch him leave in his white Chevy pickup, his belongings in black plastic bags thrown in the back. I don't stop holding onto Denzel for hours.

I notice Freckles has this silly expression on his face when Miguel hands him the shot of tequila, and offers me another drink, but I decide against it. I'm thinking any minute my blind date, Mr. Rancher Dude, is gonna tap me on the shoulder. I can see Mr. Rancher Dude throw back a shot of whiskey and Freckles asks, "Where do you work?" but I'm not listening because I hear my blind date's cowboy boots scuff against the hardwood floors and I hold my breath when they stop near me.

"Hi, it's me." I think I recognize Evonne's voice but it's so low that at first I think it's one of the guys we met at the bar last week, but I never give out my phone number. "Where are you?" I ask and she says, "I'm at home, but I got into a big fight with Lenny and he says if I don't get rid of this baby, he's gonna take care of it himself." I hear the quick little breaths she always takes when she's nervous and I tell her she should call the police but she's scared, says what can they do, and maybe she's right, I think, what can they do. I ask her what time he gets home from work and she tells me he's delivering something up north and won't be back for at least two more days.

And I'm waiting for Mr. Rancher Dude to figure out that I'm his blind date and watch Freckles down another shot of tequila like it was a glass of water and he presses his leg up against mine and his hands fidget when he licks his lips. And I decide to lie to him and tell him that I don't have to work because I spent time in Vegas where I made lots of money, and he looks at me like he believes me, and gets close enough so I can see a tiny raised scar on his smile line at the corner of his mouth.

The night after Jarrold walks out I'm still thinking he might change his mind and return but I'm fingering the piece of paper scribbled with a girl's name, Evonne, and her phone number and I dial the number because I don't know anyone else I can call. I hear this girl's voice and I tell her that Jarrold gave me the number and she tells me that she knows Jarrold because he and Lenny work together. And it's news to her that Jarrold has packed up and left, and I tell her I've got two more weeks at this month-to-month place and I have to get a job,

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somewhere I can take Denzel, and she says, "I can check at work to see if they need someone, but they don't have no daycare." And I say, "Oh, Denzel, he's not my kid, he's my dog," and she laughs a throaty laugh and says that maybe they can hire me at the packinghouse and I can tie Denzel up in the citrus groves out back. And I don't tell her I've never worked in a packinghouse before, but I figure I can tilt my head and smile the way I always do, and I think I'm gonna like this girl Evonne.

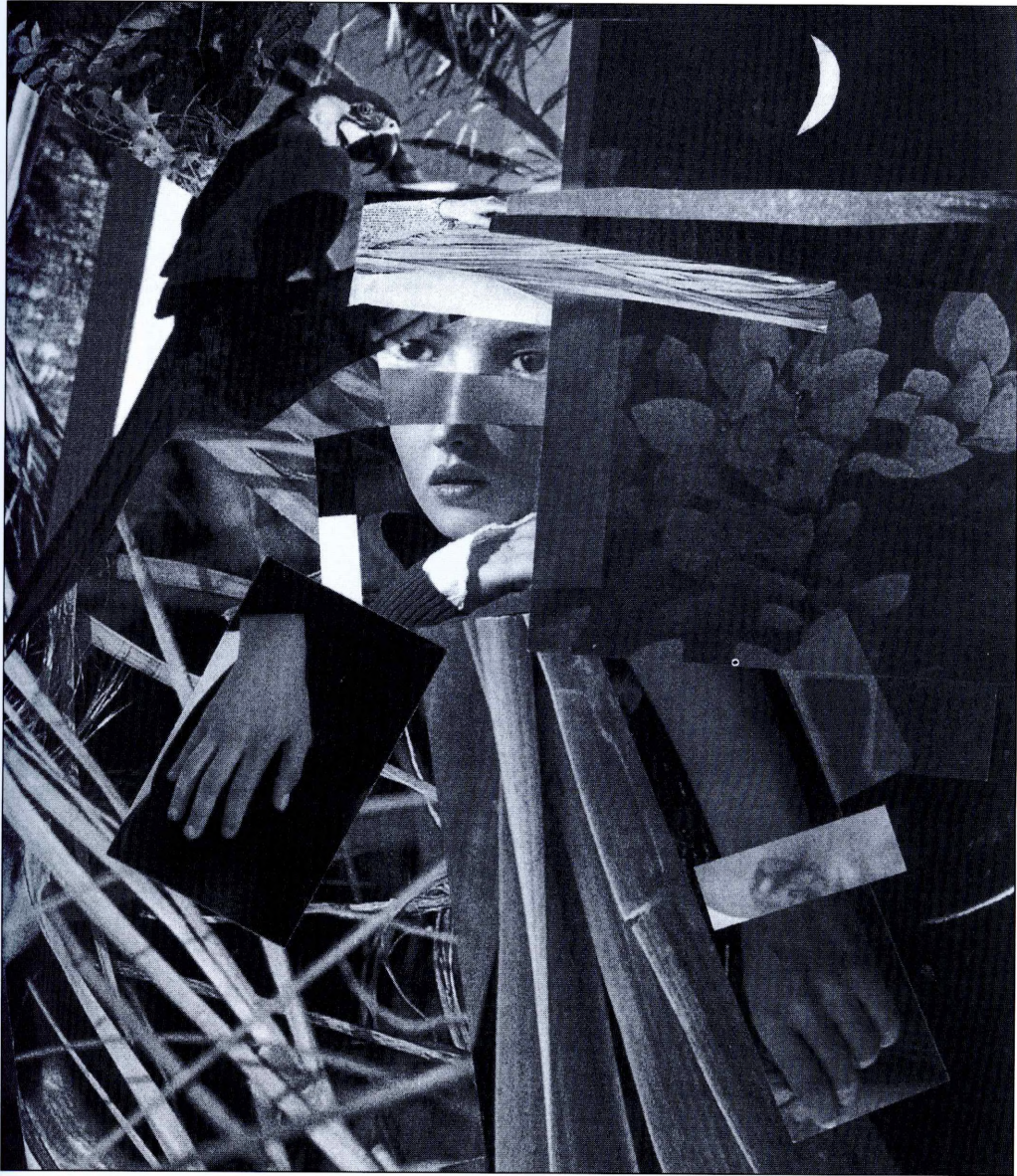
And I can almost feel Mr. Rancher Dude standing near me because I don't hear his boots scuff anymore and I start to get up off the stool and Freckles says, "Hey where you going?" and the next thing I know he's got his slippery mouth on my lips and I feel his sweaty palms pushing my skirt up and in my mind I hear my stepdad whispering, *Angelbaby, if you just relax it'll feel real good.* And I try to push Freckles away and the next thing I know Miguel jumps over the counter and pins Freckles to the counter and Freckles is so drunk he doesn't know what to do except laugh. And I pull down my skirt when I stand up and look over my shoulder and see that Mr. Rancher Dude is sitting at a booth next to a woman and they're smiling and holding hands and they don't even look up at the commotion Freckles just caused. And I say, "Thanks, Miguel," and then I point to the door and say to Freckles, "Denzel, my dog, he's a pit bull, by the way, he's waiting for me outside and he don't like strangers to follow us."

And I look at my watch and I know Evonne is still up and I figure it won't take her but a few minutes to pack her things and come with me.

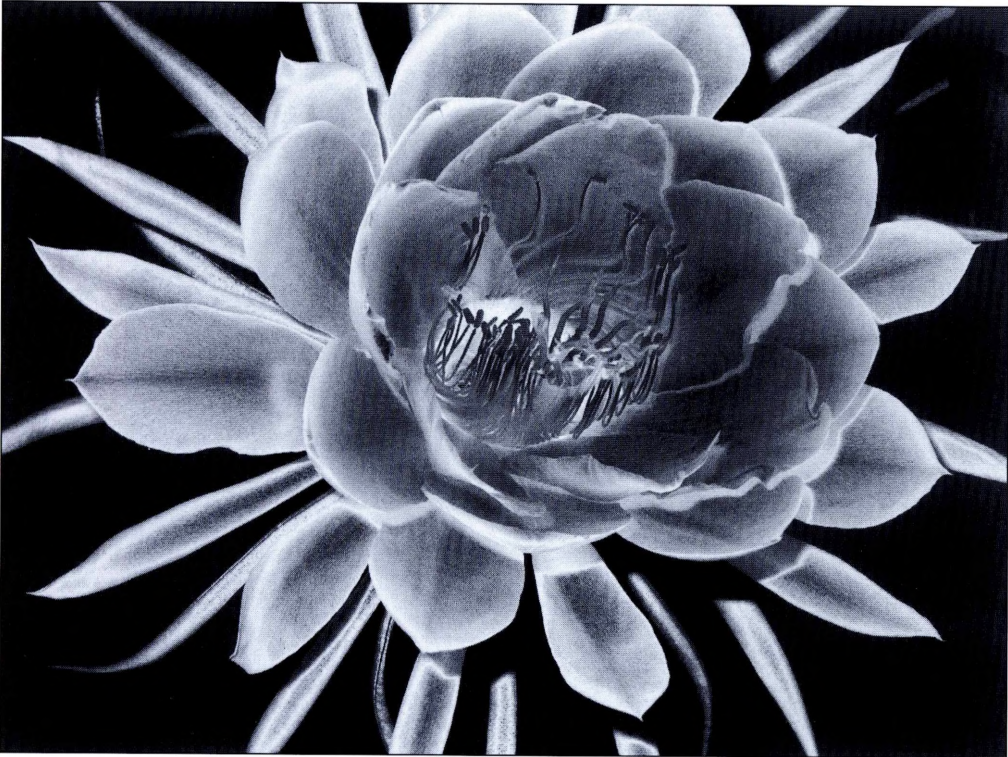
Louis Bourgeois

What the Grass Said

Although you eat us
down to the roots,
little goat,
we will grow stronger,
from drinking your blood,
after the sacrifice.



Jan Murray



Roger Pfingston

Louis Bourgeois

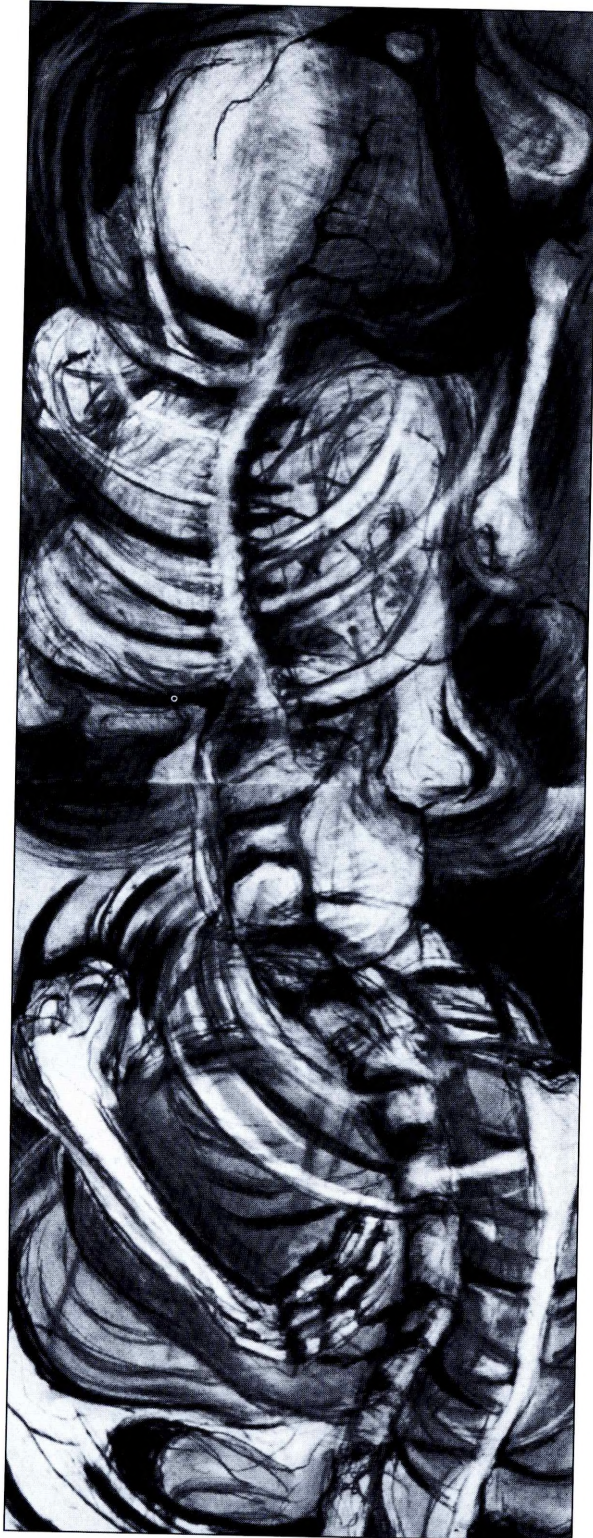
White Night

The sky is consumed with stars and moon.
A white cardinal explodes from a bush,
and his brown wife follows.

Crows fly in pairs over the cemetery,
into a group of willows, and fall asleep without sound.

Near midnight, a bareback boy draws
circles in dust under the heavy moonlight.
His mother calls for him through an open
window, but he does not move.

At the edge of town, a dead angel
lies face up in a ditch.
Blue flies pour from its ivory mouth.



V. Neill

Sid Miller

Set in Motion

I. *With Every New Day*

With every strand of daylight
comes a harder pounding in the head
and a vague sense
of the different avenues
one could take to reach such a morning.
Here the day comes staggering,
finding our eyes
through a crack in the curtains
as we lie on an old mattress.
There are no excuses or reasons,
only the feeling of circular movement.

One afternoon leads us to Fenway,
ten dollar seats on the low level—
an obstructed view, but only
of the players, the green grass—
for it is summer and girls are tan,
the men covered in hair.
They have stout frames
from knowing one's place in history.
We eat sausages and nap between innings.

But there are those days not meant
for companions,
when the Common
is not only a place to find
dialogue and imagery,
but a place to wait for the ghost
of a former self
to sit down next to you
on a park bench—
to fill your mind with ease

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by filling you with a fury
that you thought had died.
But after sitting for hours
with only squirrels and madmen
I realized that my ghost
had either jumped ship to Europe
or had never left me,
leaving me with only a sense of dread,
a faded pair of jeans, bad breath
and the vague sense of yesterday.

II. *In the Small Hours*

We enter the night by intuition
like blind dogs stumbling along
until they feel themselves at home.
The street lights burn,
we travel in a pack
and because I am the outsider,
the skinny one from the West—
I fall to the rear.

Every bar full of faces
recognizes our arrival—
then turns back to their drinks.
And in the back of every dirty bar
is a dirty bathroom
and in every one
we cut lines of cocaine
with the scum on the back of toilets,
mixing the white
with yellow and grey
turning it the color of our faces.
We stand in line
feigning stomach aches and confidence.
And the girls are attracted
to this confidence, but wary
of the unnatural shine of our eyes
that takes in too much of their bodies
and reveals too much of ourselves.

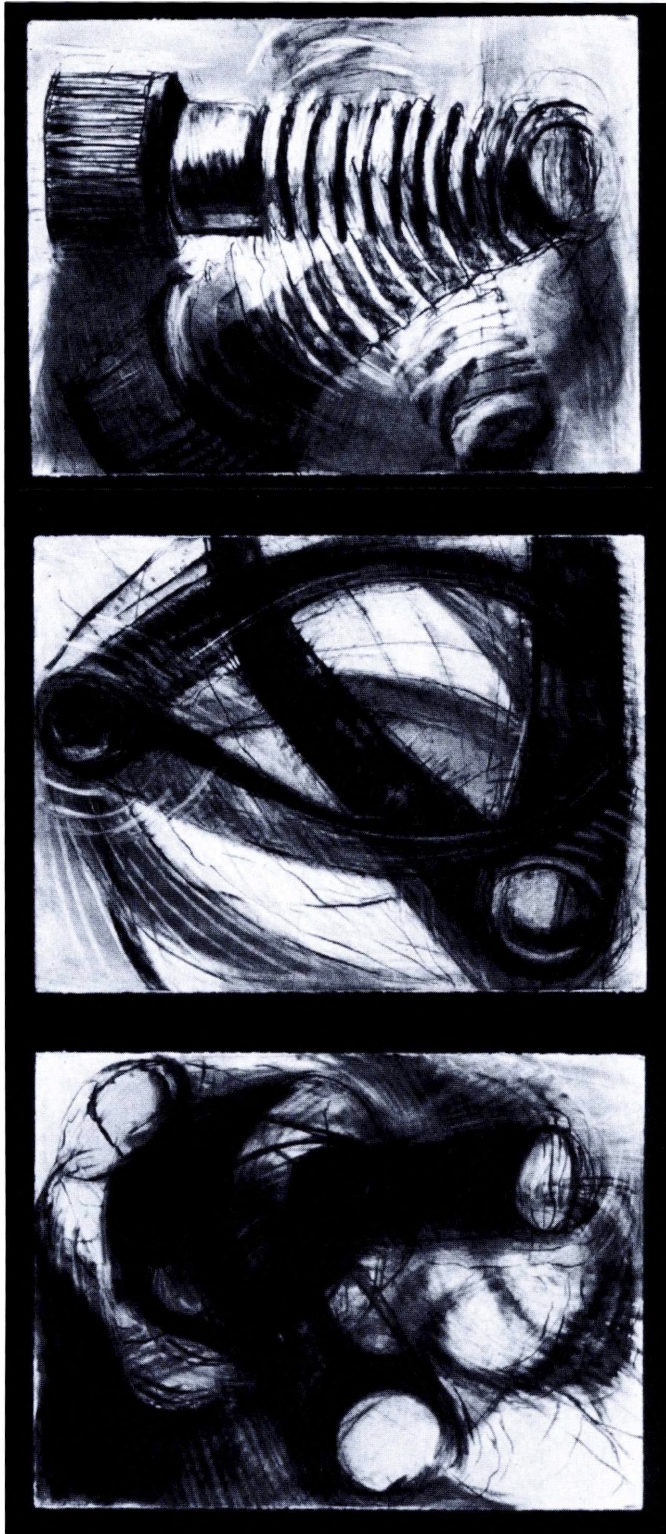
No place can hold interest long enough
and on the sidewalk there's trouble—

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the front of the line fighting
with limo drivers and dark men—
a punch, an overturned trash can,
it keeps us warm and ready.

We walk into a loud Chinese bar—
slurp strong drinks from soup bowls
and eat meat from sticks.
In the middle of the dance floor
a girl rips off her shirt,
then falls unconscious.
The paramedics come
and one drops to his knees
to breath life into her still
half-naked body.
She moans loudly and asks,
Do you have a condom?
The bar laughs
and she is taken away.

Back outside I find myself
staring between metal gates
into a cemetery—
the gravestones crooked and faded,
piled on top of each other—
the grass overgrown and wild,
gently swaying in the summer's breeze.
By the time I look up
the pack has forgotten me.
Relieved, I hop the gate
and walk gently on the bodies
until I find a place where I can sit
and see the moon from between trees.
I lean back on the gravestone
of a forgotten man,
ready for sleep
and something new.



V. Neill

Jay Carson

Peep Show: An Addict's Song

Well-hung neon wall tubes
embarrassed red, withered yellow,
call out, "Live nude models,"
as if we wouldn't look at a dead one.

In childhood, I hoped for kitchen sweetness,
expecting always, even alone,
the peach pie, despite these dirty hands
surety: a filthy biscuit bite.

I have cooked up and spit out tales
of the sweetness of tasted peaches,
telling of the grab and circumference
of bouncing, cheesy rounds

bought, watched, and held down
below me, but that I could no more have
than the ineffable crumbling crust,
infinity of a loving baker's touch

that I search for in every shop.
In this salmon light I run out of time.
"Models changed five times daily"
to scour off my pressure-cooking gaze.

Alan Michael Parker

Two Questions

The lunch shift finished, she leans against a dumpster,
catches her breath, smokes a cigarette.
The god arrives: What have you brought?

Only a brush, a book, and this, she says,
holding up the cigarettes and lighter.
What is important? She thinks the answer

must be the book, but it's not a very good book.
The book? But the god is no longer there.
She looks up. That's how a god should disappear,

she thinks. In a narrowing shaft
between tall buildings the light becomes shadows,
the dumpsters become monsters,

and the fire escapes drip with moss.
A few yards down the alley, a cat scratches
into a garbage bag, the plastic smacking, a sound

like applause. What is important?
Back inside the restaurant,
she checks the setups, restocks, tips the busboys.

If she speaks to anyone, she can't remember.
How like a god not to let me remember, she thinks.
At home there's still an hour before

picking up the kids from daycare.
On the table, the brush, the book, the cigarettes.
She'll need to get groceries for dinner;

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she'll bring the kids to the store.
The brush, the book, the cigarettes:
something is important.

She considers how one of the objects
speaks to vanity, one to vice, one to learning,
although the book is not a very good one.

She flicks a bit of fluff across the table.
Of course, the questions might be symbolic,
since the god's a god: What have you brought?

She sips her tea, strong tea, China Black,
kicks off her work shoes, a relief.
What have you brought? What is important?

Good questions for a god to ask,
better than her own. She writes them down
on the back of a takeout menu,

rummages around, finds magnets in a drawer,
and sticks the menu to the fridge.
She checks her watch: time to get the kids.

Steve Almond

Straight Drop

This was many years ago. I was twenty and living in Steamboat, Colorado, where I had come to hide from college; or, more precisely, from the expectation that I would learn anything beyond what I knew already, and thereby redeem myself along the lines dictated by my family. My plan was to take a winter off to ski, to clear my head for the brisk mandates of adulthood. Then winter thawed and the mountains melted into steep puddles and everyone responsible left, while I dropped my folks a brief letter noting that I had found gainful employment and decided to stay on until summer. This was not entirely true.

Zeke and Bone, my roommates, were from Colorado. Both had been gifted athletes once, which helped explain the grace with which they glided through their own exuberant failures. I met them on Cloud Park, hunched behind a ski patrol shack doing hits. Within a couple of weeks both had been kicked off the mountain, Bone for getting a lift operator stoned to the point of incoherence, Zeke for decking a surgeon from Aspen who had accused him, rightly, of theiving his highball; this in the lodge at the base of the mountain.

There must have been a reason we moved in together, though that reason, like a number of others, is lost to me now. I only knew that something bad was going to happen, something very bad eventually, and I was biding my time, hoping this bad thing would make my next move clear. I soon stopped skiing.

Zeke and Bone spent their days plotting how to obtain liquor, or other substances capable of putting the world into proper perspective. These plans rarely involved the exchange of currency. Zeke was the first to suggest armed robbery, or perhaps it was Bone. I remember only that one of them muttered something about heading over to Rocklin to do some business. I was heading out to my part-time job as an orderly at the local convalescent home.

“We’ll be by later,” Zeke said.

“I’m not off till midnight,” I said.

“Take these,” Bone said. “These will make everything much better.” He handed me two pills the color of pollen.

By the time I walked into the Steamboat Senior Commons, I was rhapsodic, dazzled, in full narcotic bloom.

“Bernice wants to see you,” Kim told me. Kim was the receptionist, a high-school graduate with a great head of black hair and a tiny fluted mouth. She looked like every girl who had never slept with me.

“Bernice?”

“Your girlfriend. Mrs. Schulsky. Remember?”

“I thought you were my girlfriend,” I said.

“No,” Kim said. “That is just a terrible nightmare I keep having.” She sat fingering her engagement ring. The floor around her shimmered. Down the hall I could hear one of the private nurses trying to coax Mr. Carlton into his bath. “Don’t you want to get clean?” she asked. Mr. Carlton made a sound like he was going to spit.

Most of the residents on my wing were not, technically, cognizant, which meant I could spend most of my shift hiding from the nurses in the smoking lounge. Bernice Schulsky was the exception. As the elderly are wont, she had decided upon meeting me that I looked like, and might in fact be, a dear young cousin of hers named Benjamin. I had tried to disabuse her of this notion many times, even going so far as to grow a beard. (“Shave that ridiculous thing off your face,” she said.)

So now, whenever I showed up to work I would pay her a visit first thing, to avoid the disquieting possibility of having her page me. She couldn’t feed herself, and had trouble distinguishing between where her body ended and the rest of the world began, but she knew my schedule cold.

“Hello, Mrs. Schulsky,” I said.

“Benjamin?”

“Yeah, it’s me.”

Mrs. Schulsky turned to face me. She had this old lady makeup splotted all over her face. It looked like someone had smacked her in the head with a bag of flour. “Where were you Thursday night, Benjamin?”

“Sick.”

Mrs. Schulsky raised her chin skeptically.

Her room smelled of camphor and baby wipes. I could see pill bottles and gauze on the night stand. There was also a framed photo of Mrs. Schulsky with a baby propped in her lap, a grandson I supposed. Even in profile he was hideously ugly, squinty-eyed, with a dark red rash across his scalp. I always felt terrible for the kid.

“You missed a special day, Benjamin. Do you realize that?”

My tongue had assumed the consistency of chalk. The lights were blinking now, and shadows were being thrown—violently, it seemed to me—against the walls outside the door. I lowered myself into the folding chair beside her bed and waited for my high to subside a little before answering, “No.”

“Thursday was my birthday, Benjamin. I’m 89 years old.”

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“Great.”

“Not great,” she said. “Please shut the door.”

Mrs. Schulsky waited for me to sit again and fixed me with a look. “Do you suppose anyone visits me anymore, Benjamin?”

The question was a complicated one. I closed my eyes, in a dubious gesture toward concentration. When I opened my eyes, the walls looked terribly flimsy, as if they would blow down with the slightest breeze. “I bet you get a few visitors,” I said finally.

“And who do you suppose those visitors are?”

“Family and stuff.”

“You know very well that I don’t have any family here, other than you, Benjamin. The others live in California. Sunny California.”

“Friends.”

“My friends are dead, dear.”

“I visit you. Me. Benjamin.”

“You don’t count,” she said. “You are a cousin. A very distant one, I’m afraid.”

From somewhere in my periphery, I heard a phone ringing. Mrs. Schulsky began clawing at the air. Her deep perception was lousy. “See,” I said. “There’s a call right there. Someone’s calling you.” I went over and picked up the phone.

“Your degenerate friend on line one,” Kim said.

There was a beep.

“Hey dumbshit, we’re coming by to pick you up.” It was Bone.

I glanced up at Mrs. Schulsky. “My shift just started.”

“Important business, bud. Gonna have to leave the geezers hanging.”

“I’ll get fired.”

“They won’t even know you’re gone. That’s the beauty of working with vegetables. We’ll be by in a few.”

“I can’t—”

“What rhymes with dick?” Bone said. Then he hung up.

Click.

“That was my friend,” I told Mrs. Schulsky. “I’m going to have to go.”

I watched her outstretched arm go slack.

“They cut off my toes yesterday, Benjamin.”

“What?”

“My toes, Benjamin. They amputated.”

I looked down toward the foot of the bed.

“You didn’t notice the bandages,” Mrs. Schulsky said helpfully. “Because my feet were under a quilt.”

“Jesus,” I said. “I mean, that must be, you know, rough.”

Mrs. Schulsky inhaled significantly. “Not especially. Diabetes froze all the nerves down there ten years ago. Toes are the least of my problems, kiddo.”

My kidneys are ruined. I can't keep food down. Tubes run in and out of me. My bones are dry as driftwood. Do you understand what I'm telling you, Benjamin?"

I regarded her more carefully. I knew from seeing her carted off to the hospital that Mrs. Schulsky was bald as a balloon. But today she was wearing a crumpled brown wig, which made her face look drawn and terribly narrow.

"I need you to help me," she said. Her tiny body twisted and she pulled something from behind her pillow. For a second, I thought it was a brownie or something wrapped in a napkin. Then I saw the trigger.

"That's a gun."

"Twenty-five caliber, Rohn. German, ironically. I fashioned the silencer out of a disposable diaper. Adversity being the mother, as you know. My husband—my late husband—was of the belief that a beautiful lady should always be armed."

I nodded carefully.

"What I need you to do," Mrs. Schulsky said, "is shoot me." She pointed at the papery skin between her eyes. "*Here.*"

Things were getting confusing. I understood the stuff about how miserable her life was, because that was a guilt trip and I was used to those. But this request was something else. It occurred to me that she expected me to convince her not to commit suicide, a situation I had encountered a number of times on television. "You don't want to do this," I said. This sounded good to me—the short of thing someone would yell to a distraught character on a wind-swept ledge. I stood, as if to assume some unrealized authority.

Mrs. Schulsky pointed her little gun at me, holding it with both hands. I sat down.

"In my top drawer is a piece of paper, Benjamin." I heard the safety click off. "I need you to remove this paper and place it on the bedstand."

The note was nearly illegible, the scrawl angled downward, like a child's. *After much thought*, she wrote, *I have taken my own life. Please forgive me. I could not go on. Bernice Schulsky.* Mrs. Schulsky shook the gun. "I'd do it myself, Benjamin, believe me. But I'm afraid my hands are too weak. I'm not sure I can work the trigger. Guns are awful heavy."

I directed a look at her meant to convey how truly unreasonable she was being. "Can't you just take some sleeping pills?" I myself was suddenly exhausted. I considered curling up to sleep, in the hopes that when I awokethis would all be over.

Mrs. Schulsky squinted crossly. "They don't give sleeping pills to the inmates."

"But they give you guns?"

"The gun is mine."

"I've never shot anyone. I'm not qualified."

"All you've got to do is hold tight," she said. "And pull."

My head dipped between my knees. There was a long silence, during which I felt certain I could hear the blood in my brain pan swirling. Then Mrs. Schulsky touched me. Her fingertips felt like twigs against my whiskers. I got real sorrowful for a minute, because I realized she was right: there was no one who wanted anything to do with her anymore except me, and I was just paid to come by and make sure she ate.

“I don’t want to be alive, Benjamin. My husband is dead. My family has moved on. Help me.”

From the next room came the sounds of a radio, the buttery voice of an announcer, then automatic roars of laughter that rose and fell abruptly. A car horn honked.

“It’s wrong to kill,” I said.

“Oh please. You’re not killing. You’re doing me a favor.”

She handed me the note, which I rather obediently set on her nightstand. Then she handed me the gun.

“You shouldn’t even have this,” I told her. “I’m going to turn this in.”

Another honk sounded.

Mrs. Schulsky began to weep. “Do you know what your name means? It means ‘He who is on the right side of God.’ Did you know that, Benjamin? Do you suppose it would be fair of you to wear that name around if you were to leave me here to suffer? To end pain is not a sin, Benjamin.”

“Benjamin?” Bone stood in the doorway.

He was wearing an oversized sweater, one of mine, and his eyes were those of a fawn, inky, with a delicate rim of blue. Whatever he’d given me, he’d saved the rest for himself. “What’s with the Derringer?” he said.

Mrs. Schulsky propped herself up a bit and said, without the slightest hesitation, “My name is Bernice Schulsky. I am 89 years old and in a great deal of pain. I have asked your friend to shoot me.”

Bone felt around in his froth of hair. “Right now?” he said.

I could tell you that the next few minutes felt like a movie, or a dream—I have used both lines in the past—or that my actions were guided by some romantic brand of inner torment. The truth is I was simply young and hingeless. I had skied long enough to know that the faintest cornice sometimes gives way to a straight drop. But I had not made the connection, not lived long enough to distinguish a small mistake from a large one, a single errant deed from a fulcrum.

I looked at Bone and he looked down at Mrs. Schulsky. Her limbs, what you could see of them under all the bedding, were delicate, pale, strangely elongated. She might have been made of taffy. Her proximity to death gave her an unbearable power. And her tears, after all, were quite real.

Bone looked deeply moved. “She says to dust her, man.”

My arm lifted the gun, tested its heft. It was cool to the touch, gnarled with rust. There were bullets inside the delicately knicked chamber, and the

barrel was full of dank, expectant air. Staring at this carefully conceived hunk of metal, I stumbled against an odd clarity: the device was waiting to be used. God knows how the old lady had gotten it, but there it was, in my hand, with a job to do. And why was I here on earth anyway? I was here to help. It did not feel complicated. I held the gun to her temple.

“Are you crazy,” Bone said. He looked at me like I actually was. “You gotta put a pillow up against her or shit’s gonna get all over you.”

He stepped toward the bed and leaned over Mrs. Schulsky. His giant hand clamped onto one of the pillows behind her and gently tugged. She lifted herself willingly. They looked like old lovers engaged in a ballet of bedtime compromise. He smiled. Then she.

I watched her lips make a few silent words. Then I raised the gun.

There were scenes later. I know that. We drove to Rocklin, meaning to hold up a liquor store and robbed, instead, a gas station. We got smashed, even more smashed I should say, and told some people about what we’d done, and later the cops came. I may have tried to hit them. My folks wrote me a letter in prison that began: “We are not angry.”

I can say these things now because it has been a long time and my mind has been gracious enough to bury the worst of it. The crimes themselves remain a little blurry to me, a situation I am sometimes gladdened by, and urged toward by those who insist, through their relentless actions, that they are the positive people in my life.

But most of my days now are full of everything I have never done, and will never do, and something about this arrangement still insists on details. I remember only a few.

I remember the warm solid curve of that trigger, and Mrs. Schulsky’s steady final breath, which smelled of burnt walnuts. I remember narrowing my eyes, turning my head away, the movement of my finger a few degrees. I curled that finger as I would in asking a lover to come hither, to step through the darkness toward me.

And even now, years later, I can remember how I felt in that tiny holy moment afterwards: a sense of relief, a sense of having done right, as if the rest of my life lay like a bright promise before me, having just begun.

Contributors' Notes

Steve Almond's collection of stories, *My Life in Heavy Metal*, was published by Grove Press last year. His stories have won the Pushcart Prize and been a finalist for the National Magazine Award. Despite these honors, he remains deeply insecure.

Todd Balazic lives and works in Bigfork, MT. His poetry has appeared in *Chelsea*, *The Hollins Critic*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review* and elsewhere.

Steven Bellin's work has previously appeared in *William and Mary Review*, *Willow Springs*, and *Mississippi Review*, among others. He teaches at the University of Mississippi.

Robert Bense's poems are part of a Mississippiad and have appeared recently in *New Republic*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest* and *Salmagundi*.

Louis Bourgeois is currently an instructor of composition at the University of Mississippi and has published over 50 poems. His chapbook, *Through the Cemetery Gates* will be available through Q.Q. Press in the summer of 2003.

Amanda Jean Briggs graduated from Duke University in 1998 with degrees in English and history. Before coming to New York City to work as a journalist, she spent a year in Brussels teaching for an international school. She's currently working on a collection of linked short stories set in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Jay Carson teaches literature and communications at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh. He has been writing poetry for several years and regularly gives readings. His work is forthcoming in *Confluence* and *The Distillery*.

K.E. Duffin's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Partisan Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Rattapallax*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Verse*, and many other journals. In 2001, she was a finalist for the National Poetry Series, the Walt Whitman Award and the Colorado Prize. In recent years she has had residencies at The Millay Colony and Yaddo.

Jeri Edwards lives and works in Southern California. Her poems and short stories have appeared in several publications, including *Poet Lore*, *Rivendell*, *Lumina*, *Eclipse*, *Phantasmagoria*.

Amy Fleury lives in Topeka, Kansas, where she is an assistant professor of English at Washburn University. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in

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Southern Poetry Review, *The Laurel Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *South Dakota Review*, *21st*, and other journals and anthologies. She is the recipient of the 2000-2001 Nadya Aisenberg Fellowship from the MacDowell Colony.

Janet Flora holds an MFA in writing from The New School University. Her short fiction "It's Not What You Think" was solicited by *The Hawaii Pacific Review*. Other work has appeared in *New Orleans Review*, and *The Portland Review*. Currently she is in charge of the makeup department at Court TV.

Alex Gil Fuentes is a doctoral student in the Department of English at The University of Virginia. López's and Gil Fuentes' translation of Chaviano's novel is forthcoming from Bilingual Review Press (Arizona State University) in 2004.

Carroll Hightower was educated at Duke University, the Free University of Berlin, and Yale University, among other places. Her translations of medieval German poetry have appeared in The German Library series, published by the Continuum Press. "Evening Song:" is her first translation of modern poetry to be published. Currently she is the director of the Language Resource Center at the University of Mississippi.

Marilyn Kallet is Professor of English at the University of Tennessee, where she directs the Creative Writing Program. Kallet is the author of eight books, and recent poems have been published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Sport Literate*, and *The Ledge*. With Kathryn Stripling Byer, she is working on the anthology *Leaving the Nest: Mothers and Daughters on the Art of Saying Goodbye*.

Sean Aden Lovelace has endured a life of achievement, and so on.

Alfred J. López is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at The University of Mississippi. López is the author of *Posts and Pasts: A Theory of Postcolonialism*, and editor of the forthcoming collection *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader*.

Jacqueline Marcus' debut collection of poems, *Close to the Shore*, was published by Michigan State University Press. Her poems have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Journal*, *The Ohio Review*, *Poetry International*, *Faultline* and other publications. She teaches philosophy at Cuesta College, San Luis Obispo, California. She is the editor of the online poetry journal, ForPoetry.com.

Kristi Maxwell recently attended Squaw Valley Community of Writers Poetry Workshop and the Slovenian PEN Conference. Her other publications include poems in *Poetry Motel*, *Curbside Poetry Review*, *EM*, and *Heliotrope*.

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Sid Miller currently lives in Portland, Oregon, where he tends bar at a Japanese Restaurant. While staring at drops of rain he often dreams of the sun, the desert and its long thin line of horizon. Sid has had poems appear in *Rattle*, *Runes*, *Inkwell* and *The Manzanita Quarterly*.

Ed Orr fears he is virtually without qualities. His present concerns are several lifelong works of poetry; and has had the good fortune, to be published in *Denver Quarterly*, *California Quarterly*, *Los*, and *American Poetry Review*.

Alan Michael Parker is the author of three books of poems, *Days Like Prose*, *The Vandals*, and *Love Song with Motor Vehicles*. He teaches at Davidson College, where he directs the program in creative writing, and at Queens University, where he is a Core Faculty member in the low-residency M.F.A. program.

Emily Rosko was awarded a 2002 Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship. Her poems have found a home in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Cimarron Review*, *Quarterly West*, and a few others journals equally notable, but listing them would consume the fifty word limit. She plans on being happy for a long time.

Colleen Webster lives at the juncture of the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay where she writes and teaches at Harford Community College. Her poetry and essays have been or will be published by the *Maryland Poetry Review*, *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, *Tacenda*, *Milkweed Editions*, *Poetry Midwest*, and the *DMQ Review*.

Claude Wilkinson is a poet and artist who lives in Nesbit, Mississippi. His book of poems, *Reading the Earth* (Michigan State University Press), won the Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Prize.

Charles Wright lives in Charlottesville, VA and teaches at the University of Virginia. He drives past the last home of William Faulkner almost everyday. His latest book is *A Short History of Shadow*.

Shay Youngblood is author of the novels *Black Girl in Paris* and *Soul Kiss* and a collection of short fiction, *The Big Mama Stories*. Her published plays have been widely produced. She is the 2002-03 John and Renee Grisham Writer-in-Residence at the University of Mississippi.



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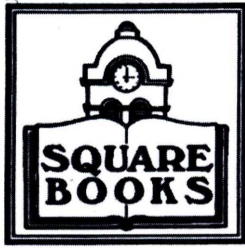
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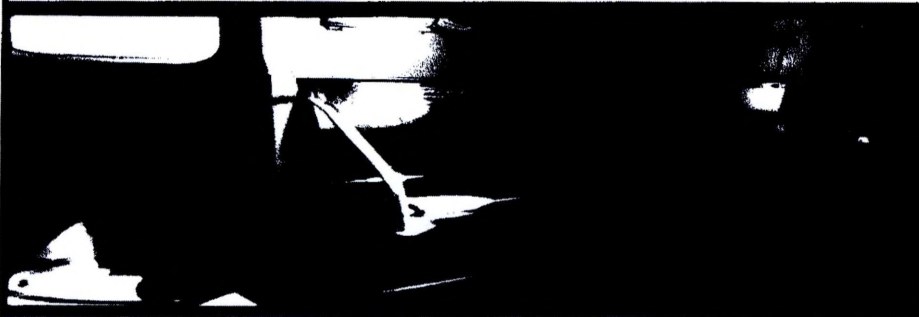
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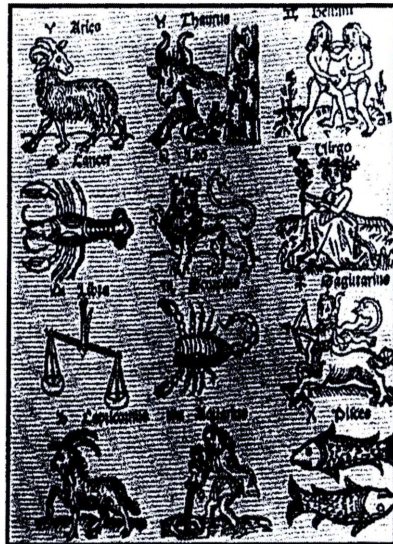


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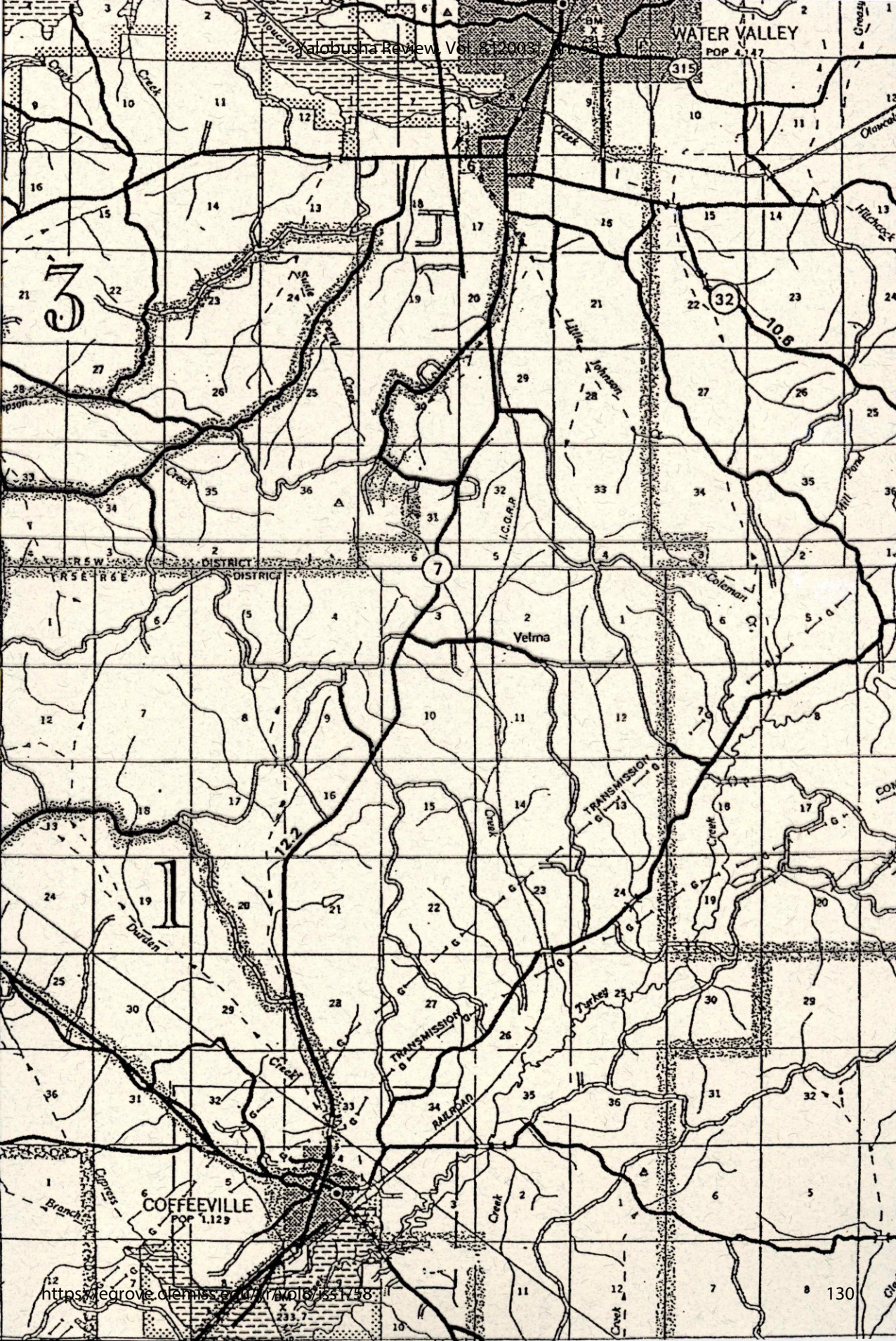
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