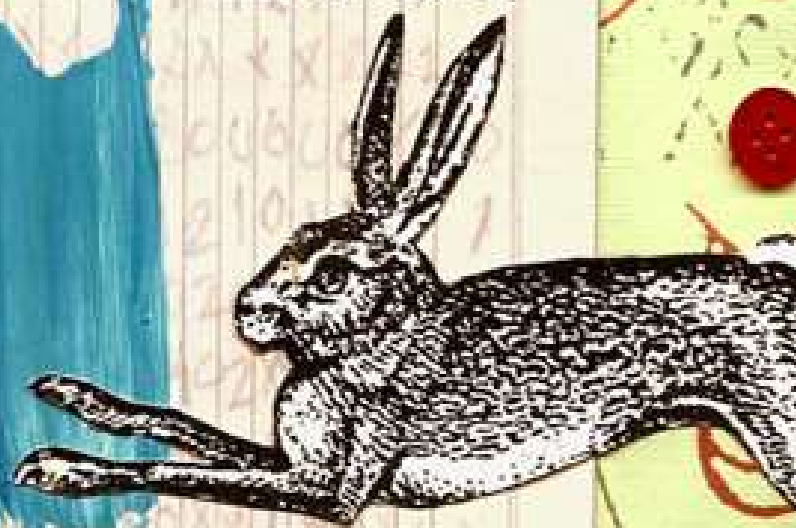


**The  
Homestead  
Review  
2009**



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## What We Have Seen Waiting for the War to End

By

**Robert M. Detman**

The Americans know what they are doing, even if we confuse them a little. They are the first to offer you money before you tell them the fare, and if you look at them a certain way they hesitate—they are almost reluctant to give you the money. They say, *Salaam Aleikum*, and I smile. Does my smile bother the Americans?

I believe they try to read faces.

I know that, if I do not respond, the Americans will look at me strangely. This must be their custom—they are used to taxi drivers talking back to them. But I say in my best English—I am also here for money.

I have learned to smile in the American's faces, but when I drive past the burning armor plated trucks, blackened and on their sides, I feel some justice is being done. Yet I'm ambivalent. I wonder how I didn't become one to take up the religious cause. At home, *Nashima*, as if reading my thoughts, corners me and asks, "Is that the example you want for the boys?"

It is still not safe—in the outskirts of Baghdad—and the reporters rarely want to risk their lives for the familiar story. Sometimes I take the same route to avoid the known dangers, and arrive slow to the checkpoints as is advised by the guards there.

I once saw, from behind my wheel, my Shia neighbor getting harassed by the Americans. I feel safer than he must, as the soldiers I have passed in my taxi for months now wave me through.

Of course I am a suspect, as much as I am a target. After a few months, the guards come to recognize

me; in the meantime, I must acquaint myself to the replacements at the checkpoints all over again. Many of the soldiers want to be my friend. They say, you remind me of my neighbor back home. It must be that way in America: they take possession without thinking.

Once, when my car broke down, I had to wait for twenty minutes with my arms in the air. Dozens of Americans put their guns on me—I called out to them, “If I was going to fight, I would have done it already, Praise Allah!” They laughed at me.

Now I walk to the car with my head down. It is a habit. I do not look around as I get into the car and get it moving.

The fighting is now between brothers, and I am neutral, or try to be; if they know that you are working here, they may respect that you have a family to support, and they will leave you alone. This is not always the case, of course. The truly desperate, the outsiders, who are the most dangerous, involve everyone. They are not wanted here.

I will admit I do not want to live in a country of people who I do not recognize. At least here, even my so-called enemy looks like me, my Shia brothers. But the Americans in Iraq are not my enemies, they are an infestation. Their time will pass. If I am too accepting, it is only because I choose to not see them.

I have stayed in Baghdad because of my wife, also because of my brother. Should I be grateful he left me the car? It made the decision an easy one, but one that I considered temporary.

It is years since my first arrival in Baghdad, on a bus, at night, the first time I left home. I went away from Al-Qa'im to attend University. The trip took forever as the lights appeared before us, the domes of the Khadimain mosque glowing like pearl eggs. For months I anticipat-

ed an exciting new life. Within a year at University I met Nashima, who was studying to be a court scribe. We were married the following summer.

After graduating with my baccalaureate degree, I was on track to become a lawyer, and eventually, if all worked out, a judge. It was slow going. I decided to defer the remaining apprenticeship of my lawyer training when the war began. We were endangered. I knew that my wife, as a Shiite, and I, as a Sunni, with an uncertain position in the courts, would become targets. Thus, so would my family. The pressure was too great for me. I have since neglected my education and have taken up my more anonymous, yet perhaps no less dangerous, job. Those who know me from my life before the war sometimes call me judge. I cringe a bit to still hear it—as if I have betrayed myself.

In all this time, Nashima kept to her work. Which of us could know that in a few years she would sit in the same room while Sadaam was brought down before the world?

I was proud then and feared for her as that dog's eyes, and those of his betrayers, breathing the same air in the courtroom, saw her every day. The sentence was certain, it was only a question of when it would be delivered. And there was my daily fear as Nashima was driven under security to and from the courts. The dog's own lawyer was threatened with death into quitting. A week later a judge was assassinated in the light of day. What would anyone have to gain by being so openly opposed to him who still had his faithful ready to die for their arrogant leader? How could I know if they were not marking my wife? Returning home each night she would tell me the details that all the world was finally learning. Maybe this will end soon, I said. But Nashima held her urgent rage in check, determined to see justice served.



From our second floor apartment, we cannot see directly outside, only the light that enters the interior courtyard surrounded by concrete on three sides that rises up five floors. I try to discern what the day will be like from the sounds echoing up from the street, the brave vendors, the frequent cries of grief, the muezzin call. I hear dogs that wander into the courtyard and square off prepared to tear each other to pieces. When I sleep late the bustle out there overtakes me. Then, the play of light on the curtain is often enough to rouse me. At times it is like a shadow play, Plato's cave, where what goes on is merely an illusory suggestion.

I feel an urgency then to leave the darkened room and go into the world. But as soon, the reality of the country's disarray comes back to me.

I used to go to the roof and mark out my route. This was folly of course, but wherever I saw smoke plumes I planned to avoid. It wasn't always a guarantee that my route would not encounter roadside bombs or sniper fire, but in the early days it gave me a sense that I could work around the war. Then came the road blocks, the all out street battles, and the suicide bombers who have now shaken every corner of the city.

One day recently, Nashima received an e-mail from her brother which she would not sit down to read.

Opening the file took a long time as the picture of a cityscape on a white beach with blue water and sky unrolled across the screen. The picture was partially cut off below my relative's heads, a troubling image.

But a phrase stood out for me.

"We have extra room for the entire family," Jadir wrote.

I could see my wife's eyes when I considered this. Perhaps my interactions with the Western reporters

and their optimistic rationalism has conditioned me. I made arguments to my wife. I said, as a way of compromise, "What of going across the border?" Nashima coldly replies to me, "So we can never return?" She will not abandon our homeland to become an immigrant in Syria or Egypt. So we stay on here.

Staying is Nashima's pride. She is angered by her brother. She looks to the future so as to forget what she knows. She believes, above all else, that a better life will return, making her brother and his family fools. All to have to return with their false self-congratulations for not having suffered under it, if they return at all.

They have made a life in Miami, they may never look back. They consider themselves pioneers. They tell me, "You must leave, Nabil. Just look. We now live in the land of the free." They are hypocrites. They have turned away from their own country. Who will remain? Besides, I have a duty to my family.

I have stopped thinking of our old life. I let dreams be for my children, who may see peace here, one day. And, at the very least, I will do all that I can to see that they still dream, as my dreams have fled and died a dog's death on the sandy lots of Basra.

I realize that once I leave I will not come back.

I too tell everyone a calmer day will return. But if you ask me about the beginnings, what we have seen of the Americans, I do not hope. I am doubtful of an Iraq I will still recognize. Now in my churning gut, I only want to return to life under Sadaam. It can seem far preferable to the horizon—or the lack of a horizon, as we now cannot remember it. Even as my dear brother had to go into hiding for critical words about the Baathist regime, the threats against him were preferable to seeing him cower under the American flag.

On an uneventful day, though rare, I may forget the

siege that holds my country hostage.

There is a shame and pride that comes with our daily small victories; we have little else to gauge our position. When the bombs go off, despite myself, I invoke Allah. I have seen the innocent die horribly, the road craters left behind, the pools of blood and oil. It could all be avoided. My countrymen raise their fists and tear out their hearts for the freedom lost to us, and yet they are killing each other to get it.

But it wasn't better under Sadaam. He would kill your entire family before your eyes. He would rape the youngest girls first, and prolong their torture. His soldiers would step on the stomachs of babies, slice the throats of the children, behead the fathers. Everyone knows this, even if they have not witnessed it with their own eyes. But do they forget now that the American president has created this war for them? They are lost people. The Sunnis are no longer my brothers. The Iraqi soldiers act no better than they did under Sadaam. No one asks anymore why this is so. We saw Uday and Qusay, we cheered. We saw Sadaam, like the snake he was, curled up in his snake hole. Still, with their heads on pikes we deceive ourselves.

I can tell you this. It's almost as if we want an excuse to fight. We fought the Iranians for eight years, and we need a fight. This war is returning us to our origin. In time, this war will make no sense to my children, or to their children, but we will find just cause and fight it all the same.

My mechanic is a Shiite. We have known each other for twenty years. We are much like brothers; he was the one to first identify my brother's battered body.

When work is required on the car I feel I must stay there and watch. We have a running joke with each other. "Nabil, are you waiting for me to rig the car?" he

asks. “What I don’t know won’t hurt me,” I say. It is our way of making light of a situation that we are both terrified to acknowledge. He smiles to my face but in fact, I know his loyalty to me could be questionable.

He suggests I let him come with me, as he will allow us easy passage in Shia areas. I think that this will only make us a target on the routes I usually take, but worry that I will offend him. I tell him, “I will make less fare.” He seems to accept this justification.

I will often hear bombs in the distance, but the war does not linger in the immediate neighborhood, at least not like in the early days. I tell the children the noise is construction for the rebuilding. They probably have no idea what I am talking about but when they look back at this time I don’t want them to think *suicide bombs*. The oldest will know soon enough, or does already.

Of our boys, the younger, Sadiq, has an active disposition. He seems little bothered by what life presents to him—most of his life all he has known is this war. It is the older boy, Zafir, whom I worry about. Knowing full well that I take responsibility for allowing him to witness the war first hand.

I had picked him up from school early because of a special delegation that was to arrive one afternoon. I knew there would be numerous foreign journalists looking for transportation—it was one of those occasions where I might risk my neck but could name my price to take someone on the treacherous road to Karbala. So I picked Zafir up after lunch recess, and as we returned past the al-Ghazl market, a bomb was detonated. We were a block away and for several seconds, after the first shock wave, debris rained upon us. Sand and larger chunks that would knock one out if they were hit by them, and a thump as of a dog running into the passenger door. The road was then blocked and I stopped the

car. Stunned, my ears were ringing. For a confusing moment I thought, *I must gather the pieces and put them back in place*. I checked to see if Zafir was okay—he was as white as a priest's robe. The smell of gasoline filled the air around us. Or it was blood. What could I do in the commotion? I needed to attend to the injured. What had hit the car I later realized was one of the victims. Zafir had noticed right away.

Before the war, we let Zafir play in the park with his balsa airplane; now he will not leave the apartment, let alone to go to the courtyard where we consider it somewhat safe.

To this day Nashima blames me for the boy's terrific sensitivity, his never playing in the courtyard with his brother, his hiding away in his room at the slightest distant rumble.

He awakes often in the night, screaming that I can hear through the courtyard window. The neighbors do not speak of this to me. His younger brother tries to comfort him. This should convince Nashima that we will be better off resettling. But in the dark, with Zafir's torment, I can see Nashima's judging face, pinning to me my negligence.

After dealing with this for a year, I find my wife's nightly unease with me now nearly unbearable.

In the days of our courtship I sensed Nashima was the stronger willed of us both. She sees only that her former lawyer husband has turned patsy to the Americans and lost his will.

For a long time Nashima spoke of wanting more children. The idea naturally troubled me as the war continued on. And yet if I suggest we wait she reminds me that she is not young anymore. I use Zafir as an example, which she does not like. "How dare you use the children in this," she says. Yet, then she points to Sadiq.

I push her too far at times, yet I am miserable by

the situation. We have to relearn everything for a new world we do not know the shape of. Nashima does not regard the additional strain she puts upon me; yet were I to complain, my capitulation would be my shame. I will not pretend to be a Shiite. She does not accept that for a Sunni like me, I live doubly in fear. I have felt the despair for four years and often imagine getting caught in the blast of a bomb. But for my bad conscience, the misery I would leave in my wake for my wife and children, they say it is over fast.

Yet what of the Americans, and their ways? I doubt that I could live there.

Many years before the war, I had gone to America. We had no children then, and the possibility of going to live there was much more justifiable than now. I had gone for the interview through the efforts of a young reporter I had met in Baghdad; his family are lawyers and he vouched for my credentials.

In the Kennedy airport I felt the people there were all looking at each other with such indifference and hostility. You begin to realize this is how the American soldiers look at you as they search your house: smiling while they clutch their weapons. In New York City I felt even more alone, isolated, knowing my wife was praying to her dead brother-in-law for the last of my good sense.

I was offered a sponsorship, but I had to withdraw my application. It was a menial position for someone of my stature, although there was a real possibility of securing a future for us in America. The process seemed unduly complicated. The choice was mine. Nashima said finally that she would not leave Iraq.

We are not yet immune from trouble. The initial Marine raid occurred just one morning as I was trying to sleep off a long and difficult night (I had passed by two sepa-

rate roadside attacks in one twenty-four hour period, though I cannot say who struck whom); thankfully the children were in school.

In that half sleep, my room's curtain was bathed in a celestial light—I'd thought I was dreaming or that I had passed to the other side but for the voices and shouts that as soon shook me from my soft torpor. The Marine's Bradley lights poured a corona's beam into the courtyard. I heard them pounding doors; the wall of the bedroom rattled, as the windows did, from the diesel roar of the vehicles. From between the cracks of my curtains I saw my neighbors gathering in the courtyard floor. Some were pushed around by the Marines, unnecessarily so, I thought—my anger was rising.

They struck hard at my door with their gun butts until I ran to it so they would not break it down. I showed them my identification papers and mentioned Williamson—one of the Marine sergeants whom I'd become familiar with in my travels to the green zone. This just as easily might have also made trouble for me, but eventually they took my word.

As a saving gesture for the building inhabitants, I vouched for one and all.

Although I really had no idea of everyone who lived there presently; I simply wanted the Marines to leave. To discover that they were wasting their time.

I believe it is true. We have made our own peace here, Sunni and Shiite, in the building, perhaps in the neighborhood; I do not know.

I later learned that they were looking for an insurgency stronghold that had just been formed in a neighborhood south of us.

We have grown accustomed to listening only for survival. To hearing the warning signs. The fast moving convoy of Bradley's. The errant gun fire.

Still, I lately hear birds.

And yet again, I hear children, too, playing in the courtyard. The innocence that I insist can never be taken away. A child becomes aware eventually, then innocence leaves of its own accord. Where I drive, in some neighborhoods the children play ball as if the last few years have not happened. Some of them may have been shielded from the war. And the soldiers leave them alone. Believe me that it never fails to bring me some solace, a smile. You might say it is that smile that has languished too long as we have waited for the end of the war.

People will begin again to bring their children up with the future in mind. For so long it has all been about survival. Children were not allowed to be children anymore. Yet I still hear the words parents use with them, and a pain goes through me. I hope that I have not become this insensitive to my children, but know out of fear and necessity, the justification I make in this time of uncertainty, that I possibly do.

It does not matter, really, for we have all seen these things now. The damage, the scars. The wonder, after so long, that it could be any different. What I hope for will change nothing.



**Author**

You ask me why I write—  
ironically, the words are lost.  
It is the feeling of not wanting—  
to be elsewhere  
to be younger  
to be taller  
to be richer  
to be prettier  
to be hipper  
more savvy  
more winning  
more charming  
just myself, and my unshackled spirit  
for a time.

*Eileen Kennedy*

## **Soul Mates**

Odd that I should come to the beach  
with neither pen nor paper  
for it is here that I meet with my muse.  
She dictates, I steno  
and later, at home, these notes become a poem  
that will, in time, be published over my name.  
I'm not sure that is fair  
but the ocean is generous with her inspiration  
and takes satisfaction, I believe, in watching  
how I have taken her lessons to heart;  
how I have become able,  
over the course of our many meetings,  
to read her thoughts,  
capture her moods,  
draw insight from her calm and crescendo.  
We are no longer teacher and pupil,  
but full partners in this crime I call poetry.

*Brian C. Felder*

## **The Burning Bush**

Gazing entranced, into the fire,  
see the great poets  
from Dante to Dickey,  
whose mysterious fires refine the soul.  
With my bare feet on the sacred ground  
I stand before them, with my naked mind  
exposed to their lines.

*Dorothea Kewley*

## **Poetic Play**

It's a fake fight all right.  
Guy swings a punch,  
smacks his own palm

while the other grabs  
at his jaw,  
takes a dramatic dive.

Later, a gun full of blanks is fired  
and the villain  
pulls the plug

and out pours the phony blood  
all down his shirt.  
It looks real, you whisper.

But what's it matter  
how genuine it looks  
if you know it's not.

Guy kisses the girl in the end,  
less passionate than it appears

of course  
but still, those were real lips at least  
and they did touch  
for at least five seconds.

But, I don't leave the theater  
all dreamy like you do.  
Her husband was in the audience.

I know the hero doesn't  
get her in the end.  
Besides, he's not even a hero.

He's just written that way.  
You go to sleep beaming.  
I stay up and write . . .

so many punches to pull,  
blanks to fire, kisses to fabricate.  
My dumb audience awaits.

*John Grey*

## **Paradise Lost**

If I die today after writing  
this poem—God will have

fulfilled his promise to show  
me Paradise—then rip it away.

I want my poems cremated,  
to vanish in the falling snow,

dented words and phrases  
to melt in the spring thaw;

or better yet, load them onto  
a boy's sailboat and set me

adrift, at last, in the fountain  
of the *Jardin du Luxembourg*.

*John Kay*

Central Coast Writers (CCW) 2009 Writing Contest

Winner, Poetry

**Wisteria**

It has lost everything.  
Last leaves fallen  
on teak table, chair  
and wooden deck.

But what is it that draws me  
to it even more, now  
that it has given itself away?

In silence  
gray branches arch prayerfully,  
as I have seen morning hands  
gracefully lift and give offerings.

It is as if finally the pressure  
of showing beauty,  
providing leafy shelter  
and shade has ended.

. . . and I remember her telling us  
of that night in the hospital  
when it didn't matter anymore.  
When the will to live for her children  
and husband changed  
because the pain was too much.

. . . and she saw at that moment  
something about herself,  
that one moment when she knew  
she could give it all up.

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She knew she was more  
than all she held onto.

So I am called to these branches  
every winter trying to tell me  
how much more there is to me.

This is not to say I don't notice  
the first pale buds awakening  
in early spring.

And I am transformed in the days  
when fragile lavender clusters open,  
hang in scented beauty  
and bring big black bees  
to their steady chanting.

But now I am called to sit  
under these bare branches  
and like the wisteria,  
let the sky in.

*Susan Florence*

**CCW Finalist, Poetry**

**The Coyotes' Story**

They are talking about the time  
of the burning of the boy  
and their howls fill the night  
all along the empty fields  
near where the river has stopped.

It is the air  
that descends from the sky  
and floats down with the pine needles  
onto the flames of the boy  
as he crosses over.

It is a sacrifice  
that no one else remembers.

The coyotes and the crows were there.  
Most of them gone now  
but they were with him.

Tonight, the coyotes were telling  
the pain even as it had occurred  
and they knew why.  
Then it was quiet.

*Lisa Minacci*



**CCW Finalist, Poetry**

**Dragging Dusk Behind Them**

Three girls  
made time wait for them  
today  
as they walked along  
dragging the dusk slowly behind them  
like a toy dog on a string.  
They walked oblivious to everything  
but the now,  
stopping casually  
to crush sprigs of lavender in their hands  
so as to smell them all the better in the air.  
They stopped to chat and giggle over some boy,  
over their blossoming bosoms,  
over their legs shaved smooth for the first time.  
They stretched the dusk  
and kept the night at bay.

*Maria Ercilla*

**CCW Finalist, Poetry**

**Permission**

As  
the sun  
forgives  
the  
firmament  
its  
hidden  
nebula

so  
do I  
allow  
you  
private  
places  
where  
you may  
wander off  
and shake  
yourself  
free  
from  
my sky.

*Mary Anne Anderson*

## **Cataract**

I plunge cold thunder  
fighting blind,  
for air,  
for footing,  
fighting all in,  
every muscle,  
every cell  
into the cataract of grief,  
sanity a glancing, bruising touch.

Lying now broken on the rocks,  
past knowledge of life and death,  
I am collapsed into a point of  
no past, no future,  
surrounded still by the roar  
of the water.

*Patricia Merrifield*

## **The Origin of Sorrow**

He liked to begin things in February  
reflections of an urban world  
on the backs of letters.

He wanted happiness without the hole in it  
without an overuse of apologies without  
a road to some place else.

He lost himself before he lost her  
when the weather started to shift  
lingering at the cusp of September.

Approaching life like he was  
carrying a carton of kimonos  
his hands turn to stone

spurious and sacrificial  
his mouth an orchard of lead  
words are burning

ashes taste like oblivion  
ampoules of dusk  
burned down to thorns.

*Laura LeHew*

## 8th Grade Blues

Bullet wounds,  
shots in your head,  
drug powder,  
scars engraved  
in your skin.

skin hidden  
in infested tombs,  
crime's home.

home with tattooed  
walls, voluntary moats,  
solitary confinement.

confinement from which  
dark view of the world  
is birthed too soon.

too soon  
the belief that  
*no one cares,*  
*no one cares about*  
you.

You with the attitude,  
baggy clothes,  
bloodshot eyes,  
plummeting grades,  
death warrant:  
gang signs.

signs that shepherd you  
through ash-ridden times.

times in which  
your clothes  
are stolen, your  
nights are mugged  
and your little brother  
is murdered.

murdered by parent  
surrogate of red or blue  
gang signs—X, I and V,  
norte or sur, a 1 and 3—  
numbers and names that  
don't speak, think, or feel.

feel the pain  
of coming home,  
no parents to talk  
to because they've  
never been there,  
are dead, or each  
have two jobs.

jobs that can't even  
pay the rent;  
skin no longer hides,  
but glides through  
the death-smell fog,  
gets high, drops out,  
kills.

kills the neighborhood  
you will soon call home.

*J. Javier Zamora*

CCW 2009 Writing Contest

Winner, Fiction

**Magic 8-Eyeball**

By

**Michael Nassberg**

I lost my left eye in a fishing accident. My dad swung back his fishing rod a little half-assed and the hook popped through the cornea. He made a nice cast though, dunking my eyeball into Lake Munson where it attracted the trout.

I didn't really blame my dad for the accident, since an accident is just that: a whoop-shit. Plus, by that point I was already so bored from the fishing I was ready to poke an eye out or something like that myself. And it meant we got to go home, after a trip to the hospital so they could insert a conformer, which would help heal the socket and keep the eyelid from caving in and looking sickening.

The insurance paid out good, and I could still see well enough to drive, according to the state, so my only worries afterward were that I couldn't do my trick where I move my eyes independently of one another, and that wearing an eye patch didn't fit my style, even though it did look a bit cool. The insurance company would've paid for a glass eye but, hating to follow expectations, I declined.

Still, an empty socket would freak people out, probably scare little kids, which wouldn't help with my substitute teaching. Kids always stare at things, especially an eye patch. I couldn't have them staring instead of concentrating on my last-minute lesson plan, or

worse, asking me to lift it up and getting the willies when I reluctantly complied.

I was doing a long stint at Fancher Elementary during flu season, which is not something I would do given the choice. I like to move around between schools, not become well-known or remembered at any one in particular. In some places I've become known as Mr. Patch, a nickname I'm trying to avoid, but the worst part about a streak at one particular school is that it becomes abundantly clear to the children and the other teachers, even the other subs, that I know very little about teaching. I'm not particularly good at math, nor am I well read; I have a working knowledge of grammar and history but don't ask me to explain what a gerund is or why the electoral college was invented.

It was one of those days that an overly-freckled ginger kid, the kind who for no inherent reason reminds you of all those grade-school assholes you knew growing up, was distracting the other students with a small magic 8-ball. The handout I'd sent around the room, with only a meager fifteen arithmetic problems, sat untouched on his desk. He didn't even bother to put his name on it. By this time, most of his classmates had turned theirs in; they were chatting quietly to each other, enjoying the rest of the period, which is fine by me. If only he'd take a few minutes to finish, we could all go on with our lives.

"Put it away and do your work," I said in the commanding tone a sub has to use. The kid pretended he didn't hear, but he glanced quickly in my direction. "Put it away or I'm going to take it away," I added, trying to assert dominance.

The kid, he deserves some credit, because he just kept shaking the thing, mouthing questions I wasn't privy to. "This is your last warning," I said, walking over.



“Go away,” he said. “I’m doing it.”

Lying little shit. “Listen, I’m either going to take the toy, and you can have it back at the end of class, or I’m taking your work, and you get a zero for the day.”

Now he took me seriously, looking at my patch. He put the 8-ball on the desk and picked up his pencil. I figured the kid sufficiently cowed, so I started to return to the teacher’s desk, but as soon as my back was turned, the kid shook the ball and asked, “What’s the answer to question 1?”

I’d had enough. I gracefully pivoted on my foot mid-stride, depth perception be damned, and held my hand out, palm up, and curtly said, “Give it.”

Instead, he put it down and took up his pencil again but I stood still, waiting for him to put it in my hand. If I tried reaching for it and missed I wouldn’t look very smart. “Give it,” I repeated. He gave me a look, the kind a jewel thief gives a copper right before he jumps onto the roof of a moving train, his score in tow.

The hell with this. I reached to grab the 8-ball, and I would’ve had it if the kid hadn’t tried to take it too. Our hands brushed past each other as the ball spun away from us both. For a protracted second we watched it fall and then it smashed, thin black plastic shearing under the weight of the blue liquid. The twelve-sided die with the answers clattered away, under another student’s desk. The kid looked at me like it was my fault.

“That was mine!” he said. “You have to get me another!”

I picked up the die and showed him a side. “Don’t count on it,” it read.

“Give me that!” he said.

I turned the piece to the side that read, “Ask again later,” and verbally added, “Now do your work.” The kid fumed, but he started the assignment.

Pocketing the piece, I buzzed the office intercom and called for a janitor.

The period ended and the children flew out as soon as the bell rang, none of them giving me a second look, the kid not even stopping to retrieve his dodecahedron of destiny. I forgot about it too, and didn't see it again until I was home, emptying my pockets' contents onto the kitchen table.

I held it up to my eye, turning it around, looking at the twelve responses in their blue triangles. Most likely. Without a doubt. My sources say no. Reply unclear, try again. The piece wasn't as big as one would expect because the kid's 8-ball was child-sized, about as big as a billiard ball, smaller than the real toy.

I had an idea. It was strange, but feasible. I found the paperwork from my fishing accident and dialed my insurance agent with a special request.

\* \* \*

I couldn't believe it, but they covered it, my new glass eye. I guess to them a prosthetic is a prosthetic is a prosthetic if it costs about the same.

"I haven't had this job long, but this is as unorthodox a thing as I could imagine," my agent told me. He was a young guy, not yet burnt out on sob stories and claim denials, and it was clear I'd made his week; he gave me the number of an ophthalmologist. She was distressed by my idea, never having fulfilled a request like it before, but even she joked, "Ocularists don't put this in their brochures, that's for sure." She referred me to one she knew in Pittsburgh who dabbled in specialty prostheses.

It didn't take much of a pitch to convince the ocularist. He'd grown tired making yellow Data and violet Elizabeth Taylor imitations and was ready for something new.

He took the magic 8-ball piece and molded acrylic

around it, shaping it to the size of my right eye from a mold made of the socket. He put me under for surgery to attach the eye muscles to the implanted replacement. Normally an ophthalmologist would have to make a convincing replica, duplicating the iris from the other eye, making it all look realistic, but I saved him the trouble. After a month, my magic 8-eyeball was ready.

“I have to warn you,” he said to me, showing me his work in a mirror. “Sometimes patients regret getting an abnormal prosthetic; others react adversely when they see something this weird, and it might wear on you after a while. Really getting used to it won’t be that easy. Take my card in case you reconsider and decide to have a regular eye made. In my experience, people start wanting one long before they know it.”

Of course, when I was subbing, I’d hide it under the patch. The kids would want me to lift it up and I always refused—who knew what kind of trouble I could get in? The school boards frowned on visible tattoos; two dozen kids screaming about my eye wouldn’t help me any. Whenever they were persistent I would make some ludicrous challenge, like a logarithm; I figure if they’re intelligent and mature enough to solve one of those, well, they’re mature enough to see my eye.

Every once in a while I’d be riding a bus or browsing in a store and somebody would ask me about how I lost the eye.

If they asked, “You have some kind of accident or something?” or “Can you see outta that thing?” I couldn’t help but be sarcastic.

“No, I was born this way,” or, “Would you believe it sees the future?”

If they were polite, “I don’t mean to pry, but I can’t help but be curious about . . . you know,” I’d tell them the truth.

“Fishing accident.”

If they asked, “Why didn’t you get a glass eye?” I’d tell them that actually, I did.

“It just isn’t in quite right, it always rolls up like I’m having a seizure.” This isn’t really true—the rectus muscles of my left eye were surgically attached to the implant, allowing it to move in sync with the right. My ability to move my eyes independently was hurt by the surgery, but with practice I got good at it again. I could pick what response my magic 8-eyeball would give.

Pleasantries and polite inquiry aside, if people ask to see it, I say:

“You have to ask me a question first.”

“What do you mean?” they say.

“A yes or no question. Can be about anything.”

They’d come up with one. “Is it going to rain this weekend?” “Am I going to get that promotion?” “Are the Yankees going to win the Series?”

I give my head a good shake, feeling the thing jostle around in there a bit, look left or right or up or down, face the person and lift up the patch. “Cannot predict now.”

One in ten respond, “Hey, wow! That’s so cool!” One in ten, tops. The rest grimace or shout or take a step back. “What the fuck is that, dude?” “Oh, my!” “Whoa, holy shit!” “Ugh! What the hell is wrong with you?”

Once I got drunk at a bar. For my money an eye-patch is better than a cool scar or tattoo; the women I meet are way more impressed.

“Oh, come on, don’t be a sis—sissy,” said a tipsy girl I was talking up one time.

“You know, I really shouldn’t.” I whispered in her ear, “It might scare you.”

“Scare me? Nuh-uh. Come on, show me. Don’t you want to get lucky tonight?”

Well, that was a yes or no question. I shook my

head good and thorough, like a baseball bobblehead. I lifted up the patch and plain as day it said, "Without a doubt."

She shrieked, really loud. Somebody dropped a beer, the shattering mug the sound of a shot in the sudden silence. In moments the girl ran away and I was surrounded by husky white-knight-wannabes. I tried to explain I didn't touch her, that my eye had freaked her out is all. They tossed me out, literally and unceremoniously.

I sat on the curb a moment and put the patch back in place. My head was swimming and my butt hurt from landing on it. Two legs walked up in front of me; I looked up and saw they belonged to a cop. Maybe somebody called him, maybe he heard the commotion, I don't know. "Evening, officer," I said, trying to not to slur.

"Care to explain what that was all about?" he replied.

"I tried, but they wouldn't listen. I just have a weird eye, scared some drunk girl."

"Let me see." I lifted up the patch. Outlook good. "That's bizarre," he said. "Why the hell'dya do that?"

"I don't know—just thought it would be neat. Unique. Far as I know, I'm the first person ever to do this. Plus, my insurance covered it."

"Really?" he asked. "Who's your provider?"

\* \* \*

After a few weeks, another call came from Fancher Elementary. On the phone they said it was allergies, a bad case. But, since allergies can't be contagious, the teacher probably took a personal day instead of a sick day, if I had to guess. It was a Friday.

"Hey, Mr. Patch is back!" said a boy. That's fantastic: the nickname started in a district where I don't work anymore but it made its way to Fancher.

"All right, all right. I've got your worksheet for

the day, then you can have fun.” I looked around while I passed the assignment to the kids. The ginger kid was there, not looking at me. He didn’t have out a pencil. I gave him his sheet without a word.

The class was quiet for ten minutes; thirty-five to go. The ginger kid had borrowed a pencil and was doing his work, which gave me a little satisfied sigh. It took him a bit longer than the rest, but eventually he came up to my desk and handed it in.

“Where’s my 8-ball?” he asked.

“It broke, don’t you remember?”

“The triangle piece. I want it back now. Mrs. Miller says she doesn’t have it.”

“You forgot to get it after class. You can’t have it now,” I said, keeping my voice level, hoping he wouldn’t throw a tantrum.

“Did you throw it away?”

“No.”

“So you still have it?” he asked excitedly.

“I suppose I do.” I didn’t want to lie. They get enough of that from their real teachers.

“Then can I have it back?” He wasn’t getting red in the face or yelling.

“Well, no, I’m sorry, you can’t.”

“What? Why not?”

I wish he would get angry and mouth off so I could tell him to be quiet, force him back to his seat. “I’m... using it right now,” I said. Even if I wanted to give it to him I couldn’t just pop it out of the socket right there. “I’m sorry, I just can’t give it back. You shouldn’t have brought a toy to class in the first place.”

His eyes were starting to bat away a few tears but he didn’t say anything. He sat down. I wondered what Mrs. Miller said to him—the same thing, perhaps?

“I’m sorry,” I said to him. I meant it, though not out of sympathy. It was because I didn’t want to give it

back. Those one in ten that get a kick out of my eye, almost all of them end up asking, “So why’d you do that?” like the cop did that night. The answer I gave him—that I thought it would be cool—I know how weak that sounds, but it’s the only answer I could ever give. That’s why my new eye is so great: I get asked questions I can’t answer all the time, as a sub or otherwise; my eye lets me always have an answer. If anything good came from the fishing accident, it was this: I don’t have to feel intimidated by guys who have thirteen different piercings or crazies on the busses and trains; one glance at my eye shuts them up. And it was unique, I was sure of it. I’d searched the web and skimmed issues of *The Journal of Ophthalmic Prosthetics* and nowhere could I find anybody with a magic 8-eyeball. I had something all the anti-conformists would envy. I was a pioneer: anybody else who got one was imitating.

The period ended and the kids left; I put the completed and graded worksheets in a folder for Mrs. Miller, paper-clipped to a note that read “Seventh period.” The last group of kids, period eight, would be along in a few minutes. I had time to make a quick run to the bathroom.

\* \* \*

Access to the teachers’ facilities at Fancher was off-limits to substitutes; maybe the teachers would warm up to some subs and slip them a key, but not Mr. Patch.

The boy’s room was empty. I never got used to the sinks and urinals at Fancher Elementary, which were so low to the floor. The stall doors were all open; inside each there is no writing. No numbers of loose women or hate slogans or tags of any kind—only in an elementary school.

I listened for a moment; the din from the halls was decreasing; the bell would ring soon. I pulled a tis-

sue from my pocket and lifted up my eye patch. I could see in the mirror “Outlook good,” though it was in reverse. I dabbed the implant a little, then the sweat from the skin covered by the patch.

He came in so quietly; there must have been nobody left in the halls. The ginger kid stood behind me. He surprised me, and I turned around without putting the patch back in place. He stared at the eye; for a moment he was shocked but then fascinated.

“Pretty neat, huh?” I said, smiling, hoping he wouldn’t scream.

“Wow, that is neat! I guess you can keep it.”

“Thanks. Here.” I pulled ten dollars out of my wallet and gave it to him. “Go to the store and get a new magic 8-ball. They make them bigger than the one you had.”

“Thanks, Mr. Patch!”

“Could you call me Mr. Horowitz?” I asked him. “That’s my name.”

“Okay, I guess. Hey, if you have that, can I have your old eye?”

I laughed. “If you can find it, it’s yours. It’s in the belly of a fish in Lake Munson.”

“Cooooooool,” he said. “I’ll let you know if I find it.”

The bell rang. “Better get to your next class,” I said.

“Okay, Mr. Horowitz.”

“Hey, sorry I gave you a hard time . . . Jason, right? Have a nice weekend.”

“Yup! You too!” he replied, already trotting out the door and into a brisk walk. There’s no running in the halls.

I replaced my patch thinking that that kid isn’t so bad. He, by far, had the best reaction to my eye. It made my day on a day I never expected to get made.



Monday I arrived at Fancher Elementary again; students and faculty were both staring at me, far more than normal. Inside Mrs. Miller's room, at her desk sat Fancher's principal, Dominic Snyder. He was tall and old and completely bald. He had big teeth and very red lips. His bones cracked as he stood up and I could see his black suit's creases were all perfectly straight. I addressed him, "Principal Snyder," in a voice so sparse I don't know if he heard. The children turned to me and started asking questions.

"Am I getting an A?" "Did a fish really eat your eye?" "Will Mrs. Miller be back soon?" "Can I go to the bathroom?" "Can we take a field trip to Lake Munson?" "Does your eye always tell the truth?" "Can we talk outside, Mr. Horowitz?" Those were the ones I could discern. The last came from the principal.

I was tempted to lift my patch and show him "Yes," but instead said, "All right."

Snyder admonished the kids to stay seated and to be quiet, then shut the door. "Let me see it," he said.

I did. He looked at it for a moment, a small grin breaking. "Well?" I asked.

"There were a lot of weird rumors, but it's what I expected," he replied.

"I didn't mean for the kids to know about it."

"It doesn't matter. You can't work here. The parents won't stand for it. We've been taking calls from them all morning. You'll scare some of the kids. You're going to have to find a new district."

Son of a bitch, I thought. "What am I supposed to do? Move?"

"If you want to teach, yes. Why don't you join the circus? They move a lot."

"Fuck you, Snyder."

"Nice, Horowitz. Now get out."

"Fine. By the way, the kids all think you're a

vampire.”

I unbuttoned the collar of my shirt as I walked back to my car. My keys grated across the forest green door, missing the lock. I moved my wrist slowly, lining up the key correctly, and inserted it. I balled up a fist and slammed it down, aiming for the rim of the steering wheel, but hitting the horn instead. The honk startled me, but then I pounded the horn again, screaming “Fuck!” until I ran out of steam. Then I seethed, looking at my oh-so splendiferous magic 8-eyeball in the rear-view mirror. I tried reading the backward words, but I had to concentrate to keep my left eye still to keep the words steady while looking right with my good eye, and with all my attention devoted to that, I couldn’t really read. I tried harder, getting my eyes to cross for seconds at a time, getting glimpses of a few of the words at a time while the rest were hidden by the curvature of the acrylic. After a few minutes, aggravated beyond my breaking point, I gave up.

I got out of the car and slammed the door. I marched back into the school and directly to the cafeteria. I weaved around the kids waiting on line for mac and cheese with a side of green beans and grabbed a spork from the utensil bin. I tore away the plastic around it while I stalked the halls back to Mrs. Miller’s class. I barged in; Snyder stood at the blackboard, filling out a multiplication table while the bored kids languidly copied it into their notebooks.

“You can’t stop me from working at the other schools in the district, can you?”

Snyder frowned and put down his chalk. “With that abomination of yours, I can.”

“Fine then,” I replied. “I’ll get a normal glass eye.” I took off the patch and stuffed it in my pocket. Then I jammed the spork into the socket sideways and levered out the magic 8-eyeball; with a small twinge of

pain it separated from the muscles, as I'd been told it could, and dropped to the floor with hardly a trace of viscera upon it. The kids shrieked and even Snyder looked a little green as I put the patch back on. I picked it up off the floor, wiped it off on my shirt, and put it on the ginger kid's desk, "Outlook Good" facing up.

"Thanks for letting me borrow this, Jason."

"You're welcome, Mr. Horowitz."

## Three Poems by Christine Hamm

### The Wedding Night

My husband walks in, his hand  
on the back of a fox, kicking

the door shut behind him with his heel,  
and he says. Staring at my neck

with the eyes of Mary after she found  
the lamb. As he fingers his long braid,  
smelling of jasmine and bone dust.

My husband says.

My husband with the crooked crown,  
with the half-seeing eye.  
With the thumb that wanders while he sleeps.

My husband limps to the fireplace,  
trailed by the bespectacled dog and bear;

my husband lifts the lid. To the murmuring,  
bubbling, black-bellied pot. The pot says,

*get your filthy feet off my new red carpet,*  
before my husband. Tips

the bitter soup into the fire. As the fire dies,  
cursing and spitting.

He says, *Don't*. My husband says, *Don't let  
your fairytales get in the way of my mouth.*

## **Lucky Dog**

my brother, who once threw a glass  
of Pepsi in my face after smoking

two joints at a party where he didn't  
feel especially welcome, who once

ran our mother's Datsun over a row  
of ancient begonias, who was an invisible

fingernail rip in a condom, as our mother  
announced one Christmas over the cheese

plate, who lives alone in a small room  
with a sink and a bird, and who calls

me once a year, always on the wrong  
day, and sings, *I just wanted  
to wish you a Happy New Year*

## **The Fireman's Wife**

### 1. The Dance of the Pink Elephant

Tell me about the bucket,  
I asked him, as he stared  
at the bucket.

It was a battered, ugly  
bucket, stained and reeking  
of pus.

He kicked the bucket  
into the corner and it tangled  
around his ankle, making  
a terrible racket. I don't know  
what you're talking about, he said,  
his hands busy, I don't see  
any bucket.

### 2. The Big House

I always planned  
to have a big house,  
he said. A big house  
and a big black car. No,  
two big cars. And you  
were always in that house,  
waiting for me.

### 3. His Business Card

I don't understand  
why you're leaving me,  
he said as I pulled down

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the charred curtains and  
stuffed them into a garbage bag.

Underneath  
the burning dining room table,  
mice with singed tails  
stampeded across our cats.

I love you, he said,  
and things are  
going so well.

*Christine Hamm*

## Good Fight

Apache arrowed to a porcupine,  
But chiefly in the heart.  
Hope faded in the flaxen weeds,  
The summer sun was high.  
It oddly fired her hair  
As she mourned me by sway  
Well before my good night.  
    Yet, wasn't it a good fight?

How it lasted until I fired  
My last cap. I shot well, each  
Taking at least two down.  
There were times I was Custer,  
Times Hickock or Cody,  
But under a storm spree  
Of missiles, it was me.

Death, then, all prelude,  
A scene made bright and warm  
As she hovered in angel form  
Waiting my best end breath  
Cast as an ode to self,  
And always hoping for that bliss  
Of her farewell kiss.

Now, the books are shut,  
Movies unreeled, TV shows unrun,  
And she's long past mourning.  
Now, out of the sun's spotlight,  
It is a big not. My breath comes  
Unshaped by words, the arrows  
Are stuck in flight. Yet,  
    Wasn't it a good fight?

*James Duke*



**Two Poems by Gerald Zipper**

**Night of the Sahara**

Blood of Sun declines over scorched desert  
hoisted onto the braying camel  
she gripped tapestried reins  
pitching and swaying  
shuttling into the night  
this was her dream  
aeons away from hard asphalt streets  
concrete towers  
slid off the beast  
wading through dissolving sands  
tides of Africa  
ocean of grainy bits turning to hard rock  
camels groaned  
Berber tribesmen smirked  
these crazy women  
who pay to suffer  
straggling up to mudhouse Inn  
camels tethered  
cold drinks ordered  
for sneering Berber tribesmen  
crazy exhausted Western women.

## Hear My Story

The room heaved under the weight of people and words  
grainy smiles sharpened by old knives  
voices too large  
laughter too pungent  
ice cubes sounding like tiny bells  
insects performing their rituals  
sharp face poking through haze of gin  
eyes of an almost dead man  
searching the room for some missing piece  
“Listen to my story”  
pinning me in his cell of narrow space  
“My wife ran away with our best friend’s husband”  
waiting for an answer that would never come  
the same story played out endlessly in many guises  
I struggled to move away  
refusing the pain  
she slipped into the same space  
“My child drowned”  
sighing rapidly  
should she go on living?  
travel around the world?  
do shocking things?  
impersonate another life?  
I again refused the pain  
refusing the pain everywhere  
to grapple with the pain everywhere.

*Gerald Zipper*

**Mal suerte**

Like a bottle rolling  
Just beneath the image of my power,  
Her hair flowing deep sleep  
And some relief . . .  
My footsteps, her secrets  
And deep breaths.

*David Velazquez*

**Un beso movido**

Mid-October of 1929  
My lips evaporated in a defining moment  
Lifetime overcoming gravity.

*Randy Chavez*

**Alcoholic's Bucolic**

I wish to disappear so far into my drink  
That I would actually disappear.  
I wish to be drunk as much as  
My wine wishes to be drunk.  
Together we will prove the pleasures  
Of a thousand fermented roses.  
Purple pool, darkest deep end,  
Pupils more rich than any woman's,  
I shall dive and dive and dive,  
And may I never hit the bottom.

*Andy Jones*

## Depth

From the porch roof  
the sky is everything.  
Sunset tints the clouds orange  
and violent pink until they seem to burn  
too close to the sun  
but I'm looking east,  
at lavenders and pale blues,  
the glowing lining of a leaden sky.  
I'm watching the weather leave  
instead of approach, the darkness  
instead of the light.  
Out here it gets dark and stays so;  
no house lights, no cars, no lamps  
to break the beauty of the sky.  
The tarry shingles, still warm  
under my hands, bind me to earth  
keep me firmly grounded.  
Far off I hear a siren—probably  
the county sheriff catching a speeder,  
(damn pilgrims, rushing through my promised land)  
but my stomach clenches anyway, sends  
a silent prayer into the dusk:  
*Please don't let that be  
someone I love.*  
The storm clouds are gathering  
over the lake, massing slowly.  
It will rain somewhere else tonight.

*Laura Buermann*

## Responsible Adults

She is still asleep. Yet her bed lies next to our grandfather's clock, which chimes loudly every fifteen minutes and booms for more than a minute every hour. Cows low and sway under her open window, and one young man (he looks like the young Fred Astaire, overwhelmed by longing) is duking it out with her uncle out back by the well while frightened chickens run back and forth.

The rain stops very slowly, and a wretched moon keeps silence as it shines down on the blue hoods of SUVs sleeping in driveways. Cupid's arrow just hit me again, but I refused to hold hands with my guardian angel, despite the holes remaining in his heart. Yet the cold night air fills with the sense of our having been exempted from some terrible tax or other kind of great reckoning. *They know all about you*, the air seems to say, *but they're letting you live anyway*.

December comes twice a year now, once as a plant, once as an earthworm. This time, people were trying a modified solar-myth approach to financial and workplace issues. You liked summer best, so you acquiesced. Earth ground up the struggle to act elegant and you tried not to laugh out loud at the air. I kept my nose clean and figured out ways to cut back through the old neighborhood into the snowy part of someone's woods.

Dazed young engineering students walked slowly past displays of fine crystal goblets and polished silver dishes, blinking at the wattage. Angels of rerun and farewell flew high above the stars, waves took whole neighborhoods into the sea, and everyone seemed to

have that monitored look – and oh, that ring around the moon . . .

Let's not sentimentalize primitivism, though – I looked up authority in a number of books, got shocked by the prices, checked my rights at The Law Store and voted. Boy, what a surprise! My candidate glimpsed a man napping on a laptop and took cheer from that, so what the hey. He was driving a jazz guy's Cutlass and his money was clearing up, like a nose. And the wallpaper: each Tenniel *Alice in Wonderland* illustration was given its own little space.

She is still asleep. A warm light seems to hang a few feet above her—is it an illusion, suggested by the lateness of the hour? Prickly, ripe, shaky, complex, full of cracks, Mother Earth opens herself, but not for our comfort. We lie in our red sheets and look at the glare from the street and cannot ask each other a single question. I'm a responsible adult now, with a pair of tin cans tied to the end of my name! The vast warm darkness . . .

And then I deliver my notes to the neighbors and everything looks peachy again.

*James Cushing*

## **The Mercenary**

I made a living killing men like you;  
A hired gun, my services were bought  
With money, yes, but each and every shot  
Was fired with love for what it is I do;  
To snipe a marshal and his retinue  
Was just the type of glory that I sought,  
And up until the day that I was caught,  
My name was one my targets never knew.  
Don't lecture me on punishment and crime—  
I've seen my fill of both, and in my time  
I've never felt a smidgen of regret;  
So look me in my eyes, and don't forget  
That though my execution date is set,  
I'll be a threat until the final chime.

*E. Shaun Russell*

## Read Your Obituary

I thought you dead long since,  
as you most likely thought me,  
lost to words and ill-humor,  
winters in the North,  
endless bowel movements.  
*Amour?* What else?  
Sitting on oak chairs composing  
serious nonsense, philosophies  
expounded into airiness,  
obscure despairs, dum de dum dum . . . dum.  
Here's something else not in the paper:  
your reaching for your wife's neck  
with the deceitful tenderness of hate  
rising in your brain like an epic.  
You tempered your mean enduring passion  
with all those wan adulteries.  
Women cooing in the so-called  
glamorous aura of your genius.  
Time makes us more weary than healed.  
We become hyphenated dates on stone,  
the Latin epitaph in weeds.  
Fame fleeting into the gentle nowhere.  
Just a breath of words from your rival  
you can't hear, envying you  
your new freedom where nothing  
meets nothing.

*JW Major*



## **A Matter of Geography**

After I returned from the war  
I thought I'd seen everything.  
But then, Erie County Jail and a con down from Attica,  
An ex-biker called Running Bear,  
Is talking, strutting,  
Scraggily-assed hair,  
Deep black eyes no one dares look into.  
He'd take a contract out on anybody  
For Five G's.  
Everybody in the block is nodding,  
Black, white,  
Yeah, damn straight,  
Close in,  
Close enough to smell each other's stink,  
To suck in each other's breath.  
And Running Bear turns to me,  
Laughs a killer laugh,  
Eyeteeth filed to Devil's points,  
Says killing's all a matter of Geography, man,  
All a matter of Geography.

*Rick Christman*

**Two Poems by A.D. Winans**

**Winter Poem**

Chill of winter in the air  
Misty fog giving way  
To a light rain  
Cars spewing deadly exhaust fumes  
Windshield wipers flapping like the  
Wings of birds in migration  
Stone faces hidden behind steering wheels  
Give no quarter yield only to the  
Red traffic stoplights  
Pedestrians looking like mannequins  
Turn into penguins scurrying  
Across the street  
On their way to work  
Boarding the morning bus  
Pressed together like preserved butterflies  
Between the pages of an old  
And frayed book

**Mission Street Woman**

Brown skinned young woman  
from the Mission via  
Nicaragua  
struts her stuff down the  
street  
ignoring the young boys  
strolling macho like  
dreaming the cha-cha-cha

teen gum chewing whites  
out where they don't belong  
looking sounding like the  
lyrics to a bad song  
half-breed dog snaps  
at my heels  
doesn't know that  
I was born here  
ghostly jazz sounds from  
the past  
no Irish faces left  
gone the way of the Indian  
south of market street

Easter Sunday blues  
here in the Mission  
Christ would have liked  
it here

*A.D. Winans*

## Hard Love

Where are words of natural affection?  
In tremble of windows?  
In tumble of flesh and bone  
across wood and stone?  
Where?  
On paper  
words appear thin as smoke,  
lost as a lover's hand drawn away:  
cold comfort.  
The heart demands comfort hard,  
truth hard as fist upon face,  
as bruise upon heart.  
The heart demands  
your palms will open to hold my face,  
your hand will no longer bruise my heart,  
and your heart will never break mine, again.  
These are my words.  
Are they enough?

*John T. Hitchner*

## **Along the Susquehanna**

These headwaters that spring from Otsego Lake  
deep in old Leatherstocking country  
then joined by rivers with native names:  
Chemung, Chenango, the Unadilla  
at the Pennsylvania line, then south  
at Scranton they link up with the Lackawanna.

Towns once connected by canals where folks  
staked their lives and bet against the railroads,  
never fully realizing that the fix was in.  
Now all that remains so many clumps  
of buildings, rented, rotting, or just left empty  
to fend for themselves. Houses sharing

the same sparse frames as the used up old men  
who live inside. These houses that struggle  
to hold up the world with their spent eaves  
and sagging backs They list to the brown and slow  
river, the water dark with late shadows that wait  
for the next packet ship headed downstream.

*Richard Luftig*

**Two Poems by Louis Daniel Brodsky**

**Pharaonic Curse: Megalopolis**

Traveling into the city, by car,  
I pass through a zone  
Shrouded by mist lifting, hysterically,  
In low-swirling whirlpools,  
As though a lonely apotheosis of the Apocalypse  
Had chosen to waylay me  
Or, somehow, a necromancer had distracted me,  
Caused my ship to veer off course,  
Orbit primordial Jupiter,  
Trapped in the interstices between two of its moons—  
Stygian visions rising from morning's miasma.

For miles, I drive lightheaded,  
Blind as an owl minus its dormant wisdom,  
In fact, frightened by the persistent mist  
Refusing to dissipate despite an insistent sun  
Shredding Earth's flesh, with its claw-tipped rays.  
Whether omen, oracle, or vagary  
Is sifting up from the wellsprings of paranoia,  
I know only that no overcast  
Has ever lasted seventy-five miles  
Nor polluted haze, like an extended plague of locusts,  
Swarmed my imagination, so far away.

**Biblical Cliffs**

The granite strata through which I pass,  
This too-warm Wednesday morning  
Midway into February,  
Expose their shattered patterns.  
In them, I see my own anfractuosity,  
Envision irregular designs  
Beneath my well-seamed flesh.

As I meander up the highway,  
Unreleased from sleep's keeping,  
Drowsy as a drugged streetwalker,  
And repeatedly smooth through jagged ravines—  
Debris left by blasting crews,  
Scars inflicted, viciously, by humans,  
On nature's supplely muscled belly and chest—

My senses detect uneasy queasiness  
Welling from the depths  
Below the psyche's bastion,  
Almost as though an unknown volcano  
Were set to explode.  
Whatever precipitousness  
Is closing in on me, I don't know,

Lest it be fate's Red Sea,  
Paralleling the highway I navigate,  
Previously held back  
By these chiseled cliffs,

Within whose shadowy banks I flee.  
Suddenly, the sky is opaque, arterial.  
My heartbeat drowns beneath its closing waters.

*Louis Daniel Brodsky*

## Reading Jack Gilbert on a Rainy Day

We that have lost someone  
find each other

A little companionship with a book  
takes an edge off of  
the emptiness

Death enters  
in muddy boots  
tracks footprints in every room  
Tomorrow will be the same

His wife was young  
my husband old—  
he too sometimes left a rose  
on an ordinary day  
a small reminder

It is nearly time for the roses  
to bloom again  
I will pick them now  
take a few to the *Liquidambar* tree  
where I left his ashes  
Maybe the cold spring will ease by then

*Bernice Rendrick*



## **Blackout**

Can't recall the exact time  
I half-assed awoke  
from the dungeons of amnesia,  
chapped lips, parched  
sand-papery throat. Hell—  
don't recall how I safely  
made it home without  
running off the road slamming  
head on into a willow tree  
or telephone pole.

Don't remember which shot  
Bacardi/Crown Royal  
got me so over the top-tipsy  
forgot I wasn't a divine prophet  
brandishing enough faith to levitate on water &  
crashed like a missile into the koi pond.

Wish I could remember  
our phantom phone conversation  
other-side of midnight, slurring  
*spanglish* vulgarities  
in a distilled dialect of demonic malice,  
calling you everything but  
a child of  
God.

*Ariono `jovan Labu`*

## Her Last Bipolar Attack

I stood behind the screen door  
watching her pace around the patio table  
as she knocked down the chairs  
one by one—chanting to herself  
a mumble of words I didn't understand.

It was mid Spring—tulips stiff  
along the chain-link fence—fresh cut  
grass soaked from the sprinkler's waving hand.  
The air played catch with the crickets'  
buzz, bouncing it off the trees.

I kept on yelling, *please Mom, come in,*  
but she proceeded to the gate, opening her  
raid on the neighbor's telephone wire  
tugging at it with a scream, *I crossed the line.*  
Amazed at her strength as if to pull down  
the moon itself, she was determined  
to break the line.

I ran out after calling for help, remembering  
the reflection of my face in hers.  
Cold drifted through me as she stared.  
A stranger I had confronted, forgetting who I was  
when she'd locked her eyes onto mine.

*Lisa M. Cronkhite*

**Cinquains (Quick Rain)**

Softly,  
summer, leaving,  
scatters silver starlight  
on days night will fill with starshine,  
softly

Quick rain  
falls from thunder  
clouds fixed in a stormy  
sky that fills with dancing lightning  
flashes

Soon snow  
softly falling  
covers autumn flowers,  
piles of leaves the wind was blowing  
away

*Jane Stuart*

**Two Poems by Richard Dinges, Jr.**

**Driving Home**

A quiet beat against  
brake drums, sleet  
slimed windshields  
wiped clean  
with one thrust,  
blinded by headlights  
flashing on and off  
when I pass, lips  
mouthing obscenities  
or prayers, white  
knuckles on wheels  
with single fingers  
pointing toward heaven.  
I cannot see where  
one lane ends and  
another begins, this  
long road home,  
a boring selection  
of songs and blaring  
horns. I turn onto  
a quiet dark street  
where everyone hides  
behind drawn drapes,  
until I pull into  
my garage, close  
the door and hold  
my breath in silence.

**Electronic Cherubs**

Clocks and counters and digital  
timers line shelves and desks  
and kitchen counters,  
our love of time and alarms,  
addiction to clocks with thin  
hands rubbing fat bellies  
on walls erected to stop us  
from going too far too fast,  
to face what moves despite  
our idle feet, our hands  
at our sides at 6:32.

We linger briefly to synchronize  
our place on this flat plain,  
until another scream launches  
toward another deadline,  
as if our lives depended on it,  
another set of handcuffs  
laced lovingly in gold  
around our wrists, ever tightening,  
until pulse and time match,  
our hearts content, riding  
the pendulum to its dizzying  
end, falling from the sky  
with wings too small to fly.

*Richard Dinges, Jr.*

## **The Serpent's Head**

Rises in the black velvety sky,  
Behind the black smokers rising  
Like fingers enveloping the  
    new born  
Stars coming from the serpent's  
    mouth.  
Shiny hot blue stars glow,  
Shaft of light beams from the

    New born stars.

    Billowing clouds of vaporous  
    Gases, flow through the  
Serpent's throat;  
Stars entangled pass through it.

*Joanne Tolson*

## **The Memory Game**

Said Nurse:

“Find your secret, happy place,”  
when Doctor yanked  
at polyps unearthed  
during a routine search  
of the poor girl’s insides.

In such undignified a pose  
as she was gently told to hold  
happy places were beyond her mileage.

We once played a mnemonic game,  
its goal to memorize a series  
of at least a hundred random objects.

Here’s the trick:  
You choose in your imagination  
a beloved, sweet location,  
the one place in the world that makes you smile.  
From there you make a path  
much like a baseball run  
and then at special pleasant sites  
you set the names of things in piles.

On a mossy rock lay Jewel,  
Lion crouched under the willow tree,  
a television floated on the lake  
and silk scarf fluttered at your feet.

Around again, a Tooth on Jewel, a Fortress on the Li-  
on’s back,  
a Bracelet draped on the TV set, a toad squatting on  
silk.

Where was her happy place? Where did it go?

Maybe a park, a park—probably.  
But where in your park are nasturtiums she asked for,  
asked for nasturtiums, you give her flashers,  
flashers with smirks and a few grim joggers  
yelling into cell phones.

The park is desolate. Brambles and weeds.  
A hot-dog man glowers, nips at a pint.  
Ferns turned brown. The park yearns for fiesta.  
Its sidewalks weep all the way to the street.

Nurse, nurse, tell this poor lady  
splayed on the medical table,  
why did you plan her city  
around such a desolate park?

*Jean Esteve*



## **A Thin Covering of Rust**

With tears' wash, Love's enlacing bonds corrode,  
all flowered with a broad embracing rust.  
Impossible to smooth, stains cling to steel  
and stick determined in its patterned crust.

Love celebrates its lengthy stay and steals  
metallic screws that fill worn welder's pails,  
repairing fallen structures fixed with lead  
but rotting with the virgin blood it yields.

Night falls and covers naked bodies found  
in wisps of clouds that shroud these peeling walls  
where love is whispered, then is wrapped around  
bound, grasping, strangling fingers from above.

*Jonathan Greenhouse*

## **From Everywhere On Earth**

Every night I have a dream of a child gazing  
    upwards . . .  
from every city in the world, from vast valleys and  
    countrysides . . .  
From everywhere in space these reflections are seen  
    inwards as  
billions of eyes beneath, occasionally flickering up-  
    wards, noting  
something, like a mystery, bestirs them; though now,  
    tantalized  
by the ticking of the modern clock, enthralled by a  
    range of electrical  
channels where, once, the myth-tales of the  
    constellations reigned:  
Now, the jealous gods are walking into our homes,  
    influencing  
and corrupting, enlightening and confusing: every  
    conceivable tale  
walking into our minds porous as a border fence;  
    viewers staring  
through an invisible wall, as if there he lies or she lies,  
    sleepless  
as the child

These stars experienced from everywhere on the planet  
these billions of eyes underneath, occasionally flickering  
    upwards  
in ascent, meeting, I suppose, at the moon, the crescent  
    nail Leda,  
or in Apollo's  
glowing lantern-chariot rising over the vast oceanic  
    galaxy of modern  
telecommunications; cameras panning into each other's  
    bedrooms;

verities on parents, siblings, blacksheep friends, blood-  
spangled  
wars between religious extremes

These are the stars that are divined from anywhere on  
the sphere  
by those billions of prismatic, kaleidoscopic eyes and  
ears  
like tides pulled to sea to contemplate the shores'  
cacophony

Every night I dream of a child gazing upwards, a glow-  
ing coal  
from every city in the world pulling a warm box over  
his shoulders: filling her empty belly—in the vast  
rebirth

*Michael S. Morris*

## Scissors Cut Paper

A point bird in wild geese  
formation, I flew sallies  
over his logistics, blistering  
his asides with practiced élan.

I never said I was sorry for  
poking holes in his argument.  
The brilliance of his paper-  
wrapping stone analogy

proved too great to ignore.  
We floated words like crystals  
catching flashes of light. The  
group facetiously treated us like

bundling colonials. Eventually,  
he pricked my linguistics with  
silken phrases, and I responded  
in whispered nuance. No

longer a saber slicing paper, but  
a woman dueling with a glossary  
of emotions, I wondered, would he  
catch the many pieces of my fall?

*Cleo Fellers Kocol*

## **Memory Loss**

Familiar words  
morph into brown moths,  
flutter away, too fleet to catch.

Words that once blazed  
like neon lights  
across the black sky of my brain

begin to lose letters.  
I'm still alert enough  
to fill in gaps,

but it takes time,  
and conversation slows  
while I connect the dots.

Some day, will the letters  
all burn out?  
My mind would be

blank as a starless sky,  
as dark, as if, a giant moth  
spread wings across my eyes.

*Catherine McCraw*

## The Straight-Up Vodka Man

He wasn't annoying  
just oddly insistent for someone of 60  
that she go to college  
and even she  
who would never want anyone  
to think her naïve  
suspected it wasn't a convoluted way  
to see the bottom half  
of her wraith tattoo  
that writhed every time she bent over the cooler.  
Yes, there were worse ways to waste an afternoon  
than trading shots with the round, unsexed face  
piping on  
how he'd met his wife in college as a donut-shop  
waitress  
(she'd come home smelling like powdered sugar)  
recounting the sins of dead mayors interred in marble  
memory downtown  
how Zabar's olives hit him like Proust  
or like a Southern family pig roast would be for her  
and she grinned and pretended to get it  
though her dad was only in photos  
and her mother brought home Schlitz by the case  
and she had bulimia through high school anyway  
and Proust who?  
plus he'd never been to Arkansas  
just Amsterdam  
but still he strove to connect  
and didn't seem to know he was old  
which slightly peevd her  
because even when slamming beer cans 'cross her  
noggin  
she felt that way  
He'd bring back diamonds and Delft

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and little trinkets for her  
and one time a girl about her age  
and the vodka kept coming  
every day  
and when his stomach suddenly bloated  
he'd arrive 30 years older  
shuffling in minute steps to his bar stool  
in a rictus of relaxation  
face filed down with the shame of a sickness  
any barfly could spot  
but no one would speak of  
because even she didn't know him that well  
and one sweltering weekend he sold the china  
and overseas junk  
off his brownstone stoop  
and legally nullified, packed himself  
into a quiet box of a nursing home  
out of the neon bar light  
with no one's girlfriend around to advise  
not even a son to kiss him awkwardly  
fate catching him in the liver  
after too many years of playing young  
stranded amid stale-bread lunchroom smells of  
the grudgingly looked after  
forgotten  
until months later  
the bartender  
told a straight-up vodka kid  
"Don't be like this one guy that used to come in here."

Joe.

*Clay Waters*





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makes waves

that will sway me

at last I advance

and the gentler I go

the more perfect

the dance

*Brad Buchanan*

**Two Poems by Raul Martinez**

**The Form of Your Body is Meat to Me**

There is danger while you walk you say.  
Out on the streets  
There is broken glass like shark's teeth.  
It is in your blood,  
No worse,  
It is in your thoughts of strewn razor blades.  
And no lover  
Can subdue it  
With words that descend  
Like falling petals—  
They are the remains  
Of dead and dying flowers  
You say.

When you talk like this,  
I hate that I will weaken,  
Grow old and die into some ditch.  
I hate myself for being a man.

Were I a beast  
I would rip the bowels  
Of your enemies  
And present to you  
Their carcasses  
To feed on.

But I am not a beast.

Were I a god  
I would sacrifice myself  
And from my burning smoke  
Reform as surging clouds

To rain immortality  
And the pleasure of muddy feet  
Upon you.

But I am not a god.  
I am only an aegis of shadow and flesh and deteriora-  
tion  
And always, only, your reverberation  
Of broken glass—scattered sparks on the earth.

### **Quemasiyes**

She crawls,  
Crouches at the door.  
Her nose reels at the waft of polished gold inside.  
Tongue drools and spittles, forms dots  
In the brown earth.  
Brown earth caresses her with silky silt;  
Digs rocks into her red palms.  
She hears heartbeats or drumbeats  
Building outside.  
Within,

Brassy flutes and horns.  
Doorway cracked open.  
Edges lined with nimbus of light.  
Bright face, chest, arms, and hands.  
Light surrounds her  
With the scent of an orange field.  
Lillith reborn, Eden restored.  
Inside the horns and flutes collapse walls.  
Collapse precedes expansion.

Flayed skin taut around a building drum.  
Hija de la chingada.  
Legitimate bastard of rape.

The hummingbird that kills,  
Boring out eyes,  
Seeing inside.  
Every tree touched  
Becomes ogre or avatar.  
Who is she that dares,  
Who is she that scares?  
QUE-MA, SÍ, YES.

She who will challenge the old ways.  
The conscientious destroyer,  
Gifting the world to the world.  
Que-ma, Sí, Yes,  
Quemasíyes.  
And the skies will part the way,  
And the trees will part the way,  
And the rocks will part the way,  
And the waters will part the way,  
For my twin sister.

*Raul Martinez*

## **Civil Wars Are the Cruellest Kind**

Too weak to concede defeat  
or secede from this union,  
we smile and stick to our guns  
like good soldiers, shedding  
blood quicker than clothes,  
giving up only over our dead bodies.

We are prisoners of a war  
in which no one lays down and dies,  
making our points stick  
like bayonettes in the enemy's belly.

Suspecting no one who winds up  
winner will be any the wiser,  
we sometimes wave white flags  
of flesh in rare surrenders,  
spiking our cannons with liquor,  
talking truce and making up  
lies to soothe sore losers.

Still, stiff as sentries, we guard  
our cease fires with battle lines  
drawn up at severe lips.

The ground we give serves merely  
to bury our dead grievances  
in mournful postmortem.

But in this house divided against  
itself, permanent peace seems impossible.  
Negotiations over the breakfast table  
only work to erect wrecked mortifications  
built between us like Maginot bunkers.

Yet, we must secretly believe:  
holding hands tight as tourniquets  
may one day keep bleeding hearts  
from breaking.

*Arthur Gottlieb*

## Two Poems by Joan Colby

### In Merida

Scum crusts the hotel swimming pool.  
Businessmen drink coffee in the square.  
Red flowers mass in the atrium.  
A woman weeps at the shrine  
Of Christ of the Blisters. Every night  
Bats fly in through open shutters.

Businessmen drink coffee in the square.  
The sun draws patterns on the stones  
Of the shrine of Christ of the Blisters.  
Red flowers mass in terra cotta pots  
In the atrium where every night  
Bats fly in through open shutters.

A woman weeps at the shrine  
Holding a child in her thin arms.  
Businessmen drink coffee in the square.  
In the atrium, red flowers mass  
Like exploded blisters. In Merida  
Scum crusts the hotel swimming pool.

At the shrine of Christ of the Blisters  
Petitioners arrive bearing red flowers.  
The sun draws patterns on the stones.  
Businessmen drink coffee in the square  
Scum crusts the hotel swimming pool.  
Every night bats fly in through open shutters.

**On Art**

If you want art  
Nail that tree to the wall  
Insist its skeleton

Redefine the ways a tree might extend itself.  
Art is not sprawl.  
Not trees anywhichway

Mauling a floating blue woman  
Who will never consent. Not trees  
In greedy subterranean

And serpentine excesses.  
Nail it  
To the garden wall the way a poet

Hammers the words  
Espaliering language  
To the page.

Nail it  
Until it shrieks  
Silently in your eyes

Making you feel  
How it feels.

*Joan Colby*

## To the Unexamined Life

“The only wisdom . . .  
Is the wisdom of humility . . .”  
--T. S. Eliot

How the French mason brags of his bricks,  
the cook of his bread-stuffed soup.  
How he on the lake boasts of the rich friends,  
she of the daughter's daily, hourly calls,  
and in these things seems wisdom to me,  
a self-satisfied sigh misting over  
all the horizons. But I am sadly wise,  
know I know nothing, and even the cloying scent  
of the autumn sweet clematis cannot  
shut out the drift of smoke from the city dump.  
The steep edges on the map turn soil  
abruptly into sea—fathomless  
and filled with squid practicing  
an intelligence I'll never have.  
What a tumid truth we own,  
and how useful to our means and ends.

*Carol Hamilton*



## **Guerilla Grrrl**

Her cell phone's nestled like a hand grenade  
she warily positions with a leer.  
It puts her militancy on parade  
and lets her unarmed adversary fear  
prolonged maneuvers from her sonic base  
of operations. He's enjoined to heed  
her animated efforts to displace  
him from a post he'll ultimately cede  
before the uncontested inroads made  
by her linguistic onslaught on his ear.  
Advancing vocal forces soon invade  
his sensibilities. But all he'll hear  
is unremarkable guerrilla chat  
conveying where she's been and where she's at.

*Frank De Canio*

## **Simply to Be**

In motion, I do not move alone.  
All responds, shifting position  
As I shift mine. A step  
Changes the room, the house.

Nothing's as it was before. Angles  
Alter, doors relocate. Unsuspected,  
I am a force. All vectors  
Meet in me. Earth's center feels

My footsoles. Hand on knob,  
I'm born again, opening  
To undiscovered kingdoms,  
Each instant an act of wizardry.

Eternity sidles up to me. Oceans  
Send waves in my direction, stars  
Their light, their sparkles. I move,  
The floor follows, pictures on a wall.

Walking in streets, skyscrapers  
Sway dizzily above—thousands  
Of windows moving as I go.  
I stir and the stars stir. Creation

Cannot elude me. Simply to be  
Reaches far as reach itself.

*Jack Crawford*

**Poem From *The Vandalized Blackboard Age of Western Civilization (Dumpster)***

A night in the life  
of a dumpster  
behind a housing project  
in Hartford:

a leg made out of titanium  
and cocaine fingerprints  
around empty cans  
of baby formula

Jehovah on dozens  
of pamphlets  
soy-sauced together  
with menus  
from the neighborhood  
Chinese take-out

Surgical dressings  
almost like new  
and several indigent  
hospital bracelets

The petrified cud  
of what used to be  
burgers fries gizzards  
& thighs

Several spoons dozens  
of matches & a syringe

And the rump of a rat  
that soon disappears

for what is still breathing  
down below

*Kenneth DiMaggio*

Paul Gauguin's *The Siesta*

Who could sleep in such heat?  
For the women who arrange  
themselves under the shade  
of the veranda, that is  
the question. Each one poses  
in a different direction.  
They could be sisters,  
except one, back-turned, refuses  
to doff her hat, as if the shade, too,  
is too much for her head.  
She somehow knows that to look  
at them is to view tropical  
fish swimming in a large aquarium.  
Even down to the way they dress—  
magenta, vermilion, plum—frilly gems  
plucked from the coral reef.  
Their thoughts swim in circles  
even now. One lies on the floor  
boards, elbows planted in a pillow  
on which she cannot rest her head.  
She can hear the soft gurgle  
of the aerator, breathing  
like a sleeper deep in the waters  
of sleep. Two others lean over their  
own crossed legs, pressing open  
the pages of a book, dreaming of oceans  
rolling out the carpet of undulating  
blue, thick as air and as sweet  
as the fruit ripening within  
the basket by their feet.

*Deborah H. Doolittle*

## **In That Country**

there is nothing but statues. The statues crowded out the people. The statues filled the intersections. The cars tucked their exhaust fumes between their tires and crawled away. The traffic lights burnt out, starting with the green.

Maybe I was too young when I lived in that country. If I poured out milk, there were streams of white marble at my feet. If I cracked my knuckles, to this day the sound still turns slowly in the air like a mobile.

There was an ancient goddess I thought I would bring to life. I kissed the statue on the lips, I ran my hands over her breasts. The country had no museum guards to stop me. The statue only grew colder, looked away.

I was one of the last to leave that country before its borders were sealed. You can't get in now or out. But there is a velvet rope around the country. You can stand at the barrier and look in.

I go there whenever I am traveling in that part of the world. The country is small but seamless. If I walk around it enough times, I can convince myself infinity is not an illusion and feel nostalgia for the inhabitants.

*James Doyle*

## **The Book of Simon**

### I. He called it Crackberry

At the corner of Hackberry and Nevada you'll find his  
church.

The preacher with the strong, chalky, dry hands.  
Africa is there carved in wood,  
Proud lips protruding to the sky.

He told me of the man of god who got him a new girl-  
friend and a new car at the same time  
And when somebody asked him where she was  
He said he left her on the curb down the road a couple  
of blocks.

The other story of the preacher with the speech  
impediment I didn't get all of because of the  
noise.

Something about an underground railroad he said  
would get me in trouble if I wrote about.

Tomorrow I go to church for the first time.

### II.

I went at 9am.

There was not the service I expected.

I saw an apparition of the man of god on the way there.

I parked and decided to walk down the road til I found  
him.

How do you lose a preacher in a bright orange suit?

III. "Jesus must be six feet tall."

"It was by this fence that he appeared.  
I told you of the man that wanted me to carve a picture  
of the lord?"

Simon's fingertips felt out the faces of his ancestors in  
Africa.

"Without a model I can carve them, they are my people."

"And I was afraid. 'Thou shall carve no graven images.'"  
But he begged and I tried and I just couldn't get it right  
So I asked the lord to show himself to me  
So I could carve his face in wood. And he answered.  
And there he stood.  
"Jesus is a tall man."

*Jason Van Blaricom*

## **Flawless Measure**

Summer's running for cover and we're sitting watching  
the sun explode.

Mysteriously, or magically, or sadly enough, we'll walk  
our city streets where the meager and the eager  
coincide.

Light blue balloons of dust and everlasting innocence  
crowd above our heads, but don't look up.

Never look up, in fear of spotting your potential.

Winter's climbing the water fountains and the ocean  
only acts as if it chills.

No hopes rise in the dead of spirit and forgotten lovers.

Hearts break in hopeless wanderers and slow  
messengers.

And still, with this in mind, the weepers smile and the  
grinners beam brightens for no  
specific reason.

None we have come across, that is.

So we'll hope to catch our tears on our tongues and our  
slightest whims in our infant hands to blow into  
the setting wind.

*Valerie Guardiola*



## **The Distance**

In finite space  
the curvature of forever  
out of grasp  
wraps into itself  
and nourishes the transient present

that slides in  
to the past  
and glides  
with an endless immediacy.

Is *Now* a marker,  
or like a star,  
energy traveling through time's space?  
Or illusion,  
an elusive dream  
tucked in the crease  
of a shadow?

Do we journey  
in time's space, or  
does it radiate through  
us  
to finally exist  
as a layer  
of the past  
we just became?

I want to become  
an illusion in the present;  
a memory of myself,  
if for only  
fleeting moments

found in future creases  
tucked inside pasts.

But the distance  
keeps curving  
further away.

*David Scheler*

### **Black Panther**

Leaping, searching through the jungle  
Searching for answers  
It wonders . . . Why . . . How  
Why was I created?  
How was I created?  
It makes me think . . .  
I'm not alone  
Searching

*Baker Scott*

## **Searching**

I am looking for that ultimate  
which is  
beyond form  
beyond the world of appearances  
beyond sound  
beyond our personifications,  
this intangible dynamic  
abstraction above everything  
yet it is everything.

I want to root my ethics in  
this metaphysics not in  
some boring culturally  
limited personification;  
so, I will accept myself  
as an ephemeral maybe  
accidental individual  
incarnation of  
this universal essence  
this non-personal substance  
and source of all,  
I must know that I am  
an insignificant part of  
this unifying essence,  
maybe humility is  
the first of all ethics.

*Rod Farmer*

**M a u r i t i u s O w l**  
(Extinct 1859)

Especially when you're deep in your soundest sleep,  
I try not to wake you.

It would be a shock too much to comprehend,  
my swiveling head over your head, my yellow eyes:

blank mutilated moons, our crossing, an intersecting  
highway stopped at a blinking red light.

If I whispered into your dreaming ear,  
I'd narrow the whole world down to a thrust of breath,  
a hot prediction to hypnotize your brain.

But some words are better unsaid. Some words,  
left untold, are mysteries that warm at their own pace.

It's the lack of movement while dreaming that worries  
me.

My wings never flew. If there was somewhere to fly to,

I was too consumed by my own importance, fringing up  
my feathers,  
perched on a tree branch wide-eyed and naive.

And here you dream in the free world, not knowing  
soon you will meet me in the dark, in the moonless sky,  
on the dry highways of your losses. I will be your head.

I am your eyes. I will be your pet, the owl that holds you  
captive at the desolate intersection of extinction.

*Christina Matthews*

## **Worm Flingers**

I saw him—a less than mediocre salesman  
grey suit, briefcase,  
waiting by suburban bus stop in light rain.  
He paunched, breathed miasma  
of last night's scotch poured into Bud cans  
by TV light.  
Tinny cheers for the losing team.

I was out of view.  
The skies hung low, water puddled  
at our feet after two days' rain.  
Having ditched school,  
I sucked at damp coat-pocket roaches,  
inhaled ash of e-z wider.

My salesman looked down, then fastened  
his attention on something small  
He fixed on it, started forward,  
paused, looked round cunningly.  
Thinking himself unviewed, he paddled to the street  
and scooped it up. What was it?  
Five dollar bill? Scratch ticket? Wedding ring?  
He rolled the cuff of his jacket back and reached  
then turned and flung an arc towards safe fields.  
The treasure writhed like a thick shoelace.  
He repeated the action and I saw  
he was saving worms.

Worm flinger, I should have taken your hand:  
we should have ridden the number 45,  
then boarded a Greyhound West and South.  
I was just old enough not to get you arrested—  
in most states, anyway. We should have ridden  
through three days and three nights

across the border to where beer is very cheap  
and sand warm. We might have forgotten how birds  
devour worms and good salesmen devour suckers.

Surely there's still a place beyond their reach  
where we might fling stingless jellyfish into waves,  
liberate lobsters, get a little high below the stars?

*Oonagh C. Doherty*

## **Intimacy**

You learned early to ration affection,  
as it was rationed to you,

your mother's need  
so much greater than your own

with your father out nights,  
drinking away the rent,

giving all of himself to the kitsch  
of smoky barroom queens.

You recall the soundtrack,  
those years after the divorce,

tintinnabulation of the jukebox  
at the Pecan Lounge,

drunken gargles of your father  
in a filthy dive, and your mother

tracking down his six-pack whores  
through tarnished trailer parks.

This is why you cannot kiss me  
the way I would like

to be kissed, love me in the whole  
the way I need to be loved.

It's the rattle, crush of your head  
on my chest as we sleep,

that old lover fear  
wedged firmly between us both.

*Brian Brown*

### **Friends Meeting Wherever We Are**

Today, I have heard too much  
of my own voice.  
May I sit in stillness  
and listen for the light  
within me.

If no light comes,  
silence will calm me.  
When light appears,  
may I hear it  
and speak its truth.

May others sit  
until light comes.  
May I hear theirs  
and they hear mine.

Then no one's voice  
will be too much.  
Each will speak  
inner truth  
and each will hear.

*David Michael Nixon*



**Refracting blue absorbing black**

occasionally

this skylight becomes an aviary  
with one glance upward  
as no window opens on birds passing  
having rather a view of an alley below  
apartment bricks and mortar  
and neighbors who stare into same  
or at these walls

plaster white as casing stones  
a bed a desk its chair turned round  
you sit barefoot and short-sleeved  
beneath the glass partition directly  
in front of the floor fan that merely forces  
hot air from one wall to its opposite.

And those pitched panes above  
through which if idly gazing  
yellow tendrils wend turquoise  
ghost skiffs glide or dusk's pink sugar  
is drawn out miles those clouds

the backdrop often for wings' knifing  
an altitude greater than recognition  
these birds  
their species  
unknown. Enough

this captured glimpse  
movement a product of muscles  
not yours you imagine legs tucked firmly  
buckling currents captured  
a ripple's stretched blade  
beyond eyes' momentary ocean  
then island or new star

imaged fallen into an empty-handed curl  
closing upon its unknown volume  
a wave of air bounding one wall's heat  
passes through you  
approaching your contrary.

*Lance Calabrese*

**Four Poems by Jennifer Lagier Fellguth**

**The Haunting**

*For my father*

*Dec. 3, 1922 – Jan. 3, 2009*

For an entire month,  
morning ices what was living,  
blasts the last flowers into black wraiths.

It comes in waves,  
realization and sadness,  
the constant fatigue.

I drag myself between gray hours,  
required obligations,  
see your closed eyes again.

Mourners touch your chilled skin,  
visit loudly with one another  
as if it is a party, not a wake.

You asked to have your ashes  
scattered in a field by the spray rig.  
Instead, we filed you in a marble mausoleum.

Every day since, I exorcise misery,  
hike miles beyond city limits, past granite boulders  
where crashing surf pounds.

If I weren't so exhausted,  
I'd wonder how long it will take  
before scar tissue forms.

## **Ghosts**

Last year, I drove you through orchard rows so we could  
assess snowy blossoms, watch the rented bees swarm.

Square hives spilled a buzzing frenzy.  
Almonds exploded into white popcorn blooms.

Today, ragged clouds swell above bruised horizons.  
Ghostly tumbleweeds fly across sodden roads.

Your new John Deere tractor sits,  
wet and abandoned.

Cold winds rise and make me shiver.  
Your assaulted trees moan.

## **Presence**

You visit us frequently, drop in nightly  
to explain special gardening secrets,  
how to drape tender plants to protect them from frost.

When my sister and I compare notes,  
we discover you look as if you are in your forties,  
muscular, with callused hands, effortlessly walking  
again.

You come, wearing tan farmer's pants,  
a faded work shirt, and ratty boots,  
stomp across ancient levees and into our dreams.

Each morning, she and I  
hike familiar trails, debate  
whether you are trying to warn or reassure.

Your constant presence brings a strange peace.

## **Precipitation**

Quietly, night hauls smudged rain clouds ashore  
from unsettled skies north of Monterey Bay.

Parched foothills unclench; cracked adobe  
receives wet benediction, our first autumn storm.

Crisp rags of shedding sycamores crunch underfoot,  
break apart like brittle wafers, exude a cinnamon reek.

Exhausted geraniums revive; roses reanimate.  
Bruised calendulas spill golden shards.

The syncopation escalates. Tiny frogs chorus,  
jewel-colored troubadours that cling to wet walls.

*Jennifer Lagier Fellguth*

## **Ars Poetica**

Embrace the opaque phrases  
That may spiral downward  
To certain death, or take wing  
In the famished hearts of the alienated,  
Combing the earth for golden song.  
A pulse beats in complex patterns,  
Then covers blank pages with literary  
Blight or illuminations sure to be ignored  
In the babble of the Data Revolution,  
A cavalcade of fragments studied, then  
Forgotten as priorities alter, and form  
New kingdoms of provisional verities.  
Is it folly to strum the human chords  
Of infinite desire, or a noble deed  
To dig deeply into our pasts and hidden  
Secrets?

Petition no outside force  
Of horrific agenda, and merely gauge  
The percussion from within a storm  
Of rising ires, infernos that eventually  
Ebb as dawn connects with a precise  
Right hook to a mind that felt it needed  
No rest from the daily chaos of cross-  
Purposes. Declaim, educate, but do not  
Propagandize to the weary bodies,  
Who've heard a thousand promises,  
And lost a million dreams down the chute  
Of possibility, crumpling into a ball of dejection  
Beside a river of ostensible serenity in bars  
Of failing livers, and musical tastes that  
Conflict with the glossy bubblegum of  
Stale provocations.

May it suffice  
That one feels as a billion others might

In their exotic hamlets and curious lexicons,  
Battling local dragons to a standstill before  
The walls cave in, and reduce a humble edifice  
To ashes in the mania of conflict? Will the lyrical  
Ballad save us from our worst shades, and cause  
A soul to transcend its limits within the stanzas  
Of unabashed joys, Elysian counties that may  
Prove fatal to the wandering disposition  
Of psychic ailments and visions that may prove  
Tyrannical once history documents  
The rebel's smoldering thesis?

*Hagan Pedersen*



## **To Listen Once Again**

It may have been the blue uncertain stumbling Buzz  
when light left, and he could not see to see;  
it may have been the rhythm of the pump,  
pulse of the machines,  
whisper in the room around his bed,  
or rattle of the noisy final breath  
that took him to the black around us all  
(just close our eyes).

How is he to go? What arms? What legs?  
What eyes to search the promontory  
where now he casts his filament  
for anchor in this ocean of new space?  
What hand to fling the gossamer  
to find a place to catch and hold  
and listen once again?  
O, my soul.

*John P. Kristofco*

**the sacrament of the poet**

many bemused even doleful people  
say that poet is priest or poet  
is caretaker of some self-chosen  
intrepid transparency such as  
green, green seaweed beds; something  
blown fully with startlingly exploited gas—  
calling attention to themselves—  
the real poet's sacrament is not holy  
holy, holy or a contention aimed at holiness  
but a struggle of manuscripts through  
the mail or over the web—it's a struggle  
of self-belief despite all the belts  
the snaps and the trammel hooks  
it's a struggle of maintaining  
the will to figure out how much  
can be done daily to ensnare  
future successes; the poet's blood's  
not found in the leaves' widening spell  
or those woods or this river—  
it's a long struggle kept long  
all angular and tainted with lingering bitterness

*David Spiering*

## Wyoming highway

This morning, the rain came down thick and viscous  
like whiskey sloshed from heaven. Tonight, the high-  
way  
will stagger in the dark, will swerve like the trucker  
who wakes at the wheel five seconds too late  
and always blames himself, even years later. But now  
the highway rises toward a distant fence of mountains.  
The clouds have blown away and the land spreads  
before me,  
enormous wings feathered with grasses that flutter and  
preen.  
Through the afternoon glare I can barely see the moun-  
tains ahead:  
staircase to a sky notched by silhouettes of telephone  
poles.  
A river, slim and bony as a dying cowpoke, toils at its  
work,  
patiently carries its burden to the sea, and I drive on,  
step on the accelerator: the land soars and turns like a  
raptor.  
At the next store I find a handwritten sign "LAST GAS  
FIFTY MILES" and I call you from the pay phone out  
front,  
tell you I am glad I made this detour,  
that to be driving towards you is enough.

*Calvin W. Johnson*

## The New Mythmakers

Equations are made consistent and provable so they can  
tell us  
this is what we are. This is time, this is space.

They say the universe is clogged with strings thrum-  
ming  
along expanses of cold and black, or it is braided from  
particles

and moments, matter and minutes, no difference. They  
say  
another universe will come, beating like a twin heart  
next to ours.

Or we are fabrics billowing and crashing into each oth-  
er, or  
we are one bubble of an infinity of bubbles. We are an  
acceleration,

or we are a slowing-down, and this is what we are. They  
hold the  
mathematics and the models, and they spin and we  
listen.

I invent the language, and then I place the words here,  
and here,  
and I tell you, this is a poem.

*Miriam Jones*

## Splendor Hour

*Nothing can bring back the hour  
Of splendour in the grass . . .*

--Wordsworth

Where did you go?  
I lost you like that grape jawbreaker  
I'd saved for last. I ate  
the Raisinets, I ate the Junior Mints  
and every night I sat late at the kitchen table  
not eating the canned lima beans  
or just-thawed peas, until sneaking them  
into a napkin or—once—my shoe.  
So it wasn't all splendor, my parents  
wandering offstage to deliver soliloquies  
while my older brother chased the kids with knives  
or smacked me with the butt-end of a bottle,  
inventing synonyms for *stupid* and *ugly*  
to apply to the noun of his sister.  
It wasn't all cocoons in the apple boughs  
and flashing minnows in the creek-trickle  
of my self-esteem. But there was something  
in the air of you, O hour, if only  
because you were fugitive, barely there  
even then, glimpsed and soon gone.  
Now I think I see you, gleam  
of a Diet Mountain Dew can crushed in the weeds.  
Cellophane. Pop-top. Glass shard  
shaped like lightning. The god  
hiding, disguised, so the one  
he would love can bear  
to open her eyes.

*Kim Addonizio*

**CCW Finalist, Fiction**

**Yellow Brick Road**

By

**Monica Woelfel**

Dad and Dawn get the idea that a road trip would be fun. Dawn likes to travel. Dad likes Dawn. It's perfect, they tell me.

Only one problem: if Dawn goes, Mona needs to go. Mona's fourteen. She can spend a few days alone but even Dawn's independent spirit doesn't allow for leaving her daughter unattended for three weeks. So, if Dawn goes, Mona goes. And Mona will be poisonously bored unless she has company. Possibly even if she does. That's the way Mona is.

Dad buys a long white Oldsmobile 98 for the occasion, a sort of rich-old-lady-in-Pomona-Beach car. The kind of car you expect to see a coiffed toy poodle in, riding along on the shelf behind the back seat or poking its pink-ribboned top-knot up to peer out of the passenger-side window.

Dad loves buying new toys—cameras, shavers, even kitchen appliances if they have a lot of chrome on them. Once he bought a miniature vacuum cleaner that was supposed to clean the fleas off of his cat. The cat clawed him bloody trying to escape and the contraption ended up at the Salvation Army drop-off bin. Now he raves about “the Olds”—how much room it has inside, side to side. “You'll be able to stretch out full length,” he says, nudging me for a response.

“Great, Dad.” I'm fifteen. I enjoy the game of knocking down his volleys of over-wrought enthusiasm.

“The suspension is so good, it's like floating down

the highway.” He demonstrates an air-mattress-like ride with one hand in the air.

“That’s nice,” I say, flatly.

“Come on,” he nudges me again. “It’ll be fun. Will you come?”

I agree to come. In spite of my non-plussed demeanor, I think it sounds like fun. Dad says we’ll go past the Great Salt Lake then veer north to Yellowstone and into Canada. I’ve never been to Canada. I imagine dense forests full of bears and moose. Finally we’ll end up in Massachusetts where Dawn’s sister lives.

\* \* \*

The first three days are flat. The San Joaquin Valley is flat. Nevada is flat. Utah is flat. The unbroken level goes on and on in all directions. The inside of the car is tongue red. Outside, everything is a muted shade of khaki, dry and still.

We stop to float in the Great Salt Lake. A row of telephone poles along the road stick up out of what looks like snow and lean at odd angles. Dad says the salt corrodes their bases, gnawing them off at the ankle. Heat shimmers on the horizon. We get out of the car and put on our bathing suits.

The water is lukewarm and thick, like spit, against my calves. Mona says, “Gross!” which she says a lot on this trip, with great vehemence. Unlike the rest of us, Mona hates new things in general, preferring the expected, the known. She likes her own ratty bedroom best, her splayed toothbrush, her Count Chocula for breakfast; national chains like Howard Johnson’s or Denny’s come a close second.

Dawn laughs at Mona’s sourness but it’s not a real laugh. She wades in. I wade in behind her. Even Mona gives it a try. I sit back to float like the people in the postcards that say the salt content is so high you can’t sink. I sink. I have to tread to stay afloat. The peo-

ple in the postcards smile. I can't figure out what makes them so happy, except probably that they're getting paid for modeling.

The air smells swampy, of rotting things. The heat makes my face sweat and the water's not cool enough to appease it, even if I did consider putting my head under, which I definitely don't.

A lot of pale people in ill-fitting shorts and t-shirts mill about on the shore. They, like us, have come to see this phenomenon—the Great Salt Lake—and seem to, like us, find themselves at a loss, waiting for the revelation, for some great joy that doesn't show up for its appointment.

Mona grumbles as she drags herself out of the water and stands, dripping, shoulders sagging, on the shore. "I don't see what's so fucking *great* about it."

\* \* \*

Yellowstone is better. We pass buffalo, grazing like cattle by the sides of the road in.

Dad books us into the old lodge as a treat. It's a strange cavernous building, a log cabin with serious delusions of grandeur. A Lincoln Log palace. I stand in the middle of the main lobby and look up—three? four?—stories overhead. The ceiling is an inverted basket of criss-crossing logs. The beams look too heavy and rudimentary to hold up a ceiling. They look patched together by some pioneer who had seen a picture of a cathedral but had no engineering training. It strikes me as likely that it will come clattering down on my head. I avoid the main lobby after that, skirting it at the edges when I have to go through.

Mona and I get our own room. That's the way it works at all the motels on this trip. We prefer it that way and our parents sure as hell do.

Mona has brought along a baggie of pot her friend Lisa gave her as a going-away present. Lisa is



mad at me for going. She thinks that, if I'd refused, Dad and Dawn would have paid for her to come. It's probably true—anything to keep Mona occupied. Lisa isn't so much miffed to miss the cultural adventure of a drive across the country as she is convinced that I'm "stealing" Mona from her. I'm not sure what to think of this. It sounds as if Mona and I are going out. I'm also not sure I *want* Mona, at least as her sole proprietor. She's a pain in the ass. I can usually only take her in limited doses. I don't tell Mona or Lisa this, though. I enjoy having what someone else wants.

I write to my boyfriend Don every day. It's not that I miss him so passionately but I have a lot of time on my hands. Plus I like to write and I'm hoping that I can get a copy of my letters from him when I get home so I can make a trip journal.

I do miss him too. Kind of. Before we left I was spending all of my free time with him. I've been telling him daily that I love him, because he tells me he loves me and I have to say something. So I think of him a lot. I keep poking into my feelings, testing what I do feel. *Do* I miss him? I decide that I sort of do, especially when Mona is in a mood and won't speak to me. Am I, as my friend Nadja likes to say, "horny"? I want to be. I know it's cool to be horny if you're a girl. It means you're liberated and tough and adventurous. The strongest desire I can work up, though, is a fondness for the way it feels when Don lies on top of me, that pressure down on my body. I like the way it's hard to breathe in all the way and the sense of being held, of belonging firmly in one place.

Mona and I get stoned in our room in the lodge. The room smells of wood and clean sheets. I like that about it. It's dark in there, with the walls and floors all made of unpainted wood.

"Now what should we do?" I ask. I sit cross-legged

on my single bed. Mona's over on hers.

"I dunno," she says in her pretend dumb voice, "What you wanta do?" It's a routine we do when she's in a good mood. It's from the two vultures in a movie who sit on a dead branch in the swamp and go back and forth: What you want to do? I dunno, what you want to do? We saw the movie together a while ago.

"I know," she says. "Let's take a bath."

We saw the tub earlier while exploring the lodge, looking for cute boys. It's in a separate room down the hall. There's no toilet in there, just a big claw-foot tub. Everyone on the hall shares it.

A bath sounds good to me. The air outside has a sharp edge to it. Its chill even seeps through our bedroom window.

We gather bleached lodge towels, small bars of soap wrapped in paper, our razors, shampoo, and slippers. When she's stoned, Mona gets much more agreeable, like now. Her sharp edges go fuzzy. As I open the door a crack, she presses into me from behind. We both peer out. It seems very important that we not see anyone on our way to the tub room. We look left. No one. Right. No one. We look at each other and dissolve into laughter.

We make it to the tub room undetected. We bolt the door and settle in. There's one chair, a wooden, straight-backed one that Mona claims. I pile my things on the floor.

We turn the taps on full. Hot water pounds into the deep enamel tub. Steam rises. Mona pours in some of her shampoo which makes great dollops of bubbles. We both undress and stand, naked, waiting. When we look at each other, we double over, laughing.

After what seems like a long time, standing there naked, the tub fills. We climb in.

It's a vast tub or maybe being stoned makes it

seem so. Mona's head lies acres away, past many white frothy hills. My legs stretch out and never brush her skin. We dodge side-to-side to see each other around the bubbles. I show Mona how my hands turn into brontosaurus, craning above the foam hills. Her hands take shape—two more inquisitive heads, turning one way then the other. Eventually the four of them get into a battle for territory.

Someone knocks. Mona calls out, "Occupied." She says it in three distinct syllables—ock-you-pied—and then cracks up.

I don't know how long we're in there. The bubbles go flat. My fingers wrinkle into little old lady apple-doll faces. Another knock sounds. Mona is delighted. She shouts out again, "Occ-u-pied!" Footsteps go away down the hall.

It could be hours. Puddles cover the floor. The water in the tub goes lukewarm. We add more water to heat it up, even let some drain out to give room for more but we're losing ground.

"Brr," Mona says.

"Let's get out."

There are other knocks. No one says anything. They just go away again and it's difficult, in the steamy warmth of the tub room, to really believe anyone else exists. Other people are an unlikely theory that no one has yet proven.

Mona and I wrap our towels around our bodies. We bunch our belongings in bundles; mine are wet. Again we peer out a crack in the door. The hall is as empty as it was when we came. Did we imagine the knocks? We rush out and down the hall, laughing and tripping on each other's feet. We leave behind us the dripping tub room, a quarter of an inch deep in cooling water.

\* \* \*

The next morning, we all wake early. Dad and Dawn ask us into their room. I expect them to lecture us about hogging the tub but they don't.

"Come with us to the geysers," Dawn says. "You want to?"

I want to. Mona says she's seen geysers. They're boring. And they stink.

Dawn laughs. She wraps her arms around Mona. They're both standing up. Dawn rocks. She rocks Mona back and forth like a metronome. "Come on," she chides. "Come out and play, little Mona."

Mona fights back a smile. When Dawn tries to kiss her cheek, Mona leans away but she relaxes into the circle of her mother's arms, going so soft she looks as if she'll melt onto the floor. "Okay, okay," Mona says, feigning distaste. "I'll come with you. Now let me go."

It's Mona's idea. We're all in Dad's and Dawn's room, getting ready to go outside, and Mona says, "Can we get stoned?" She means together, before we go to the geysers.

I'm stunned. Mona and I have worked so hard on this trip and before to sneak around when we get high. We hide our matches, our butts. We chew mint gum afterward.

Dawn's eyebrows arch up. "Mona-pie!" she says. "My goodness." As usual, Dawn's tone is ironic. She's joking and serious at the same time about being shocked. It's hard to tell where one stops and the other starts. She looks over at my dad for his reaction.

He blusters. "Well, I don't know."

"Come on." Mona's tone is scathing. "We know you guys do it. You know we do."

Dawn shakes a finger at Mona. "Is that where all my weed has been going? You little hamster, you." Again, it's a game. I think Dawn must have known all along. Or, if she didn't, she doesn't seem too worried.

Mona flushes. "Mom!" she says.

Dawn draws in a breath and sits straighter. "Well," she says. She looks to Dad again. "I guess it would be all right. A family outing, as it were. What do you think?"

Dad says, "Sure," but he doesn't sound sure.

Dawn pulls a stone pipe out of her hand bag. She lights a bowl of pot, tokes, passes the bowl to Mona.

\* \* \*

The four of us take the little geyser nature walk through the fields that surround the lodge. It's a mile, two at the most, all of it on a boardwalk with slats silvered by the elements. It's the sort of trail that old people who can't walk well take or people in wheelchairs or parents with toddlers. It's tame and usually crowded but this morning, with our early start, we've gotten out of the lodge by eight. The air is chill and the other tourists must still be in the dining hall, having their coffee and hot chocolate.

The trail leads behind small stands of pines until we can no longer see the lodge. There are signs giving the names of trees in Latin and the history of the buffalo herd.

"Hey, look!" Mona points to one side of the trail. There's a bubbling puddle of mud. Further on is another one, in livid yellow, and farther on a red one.

"Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble," Dawn says. She makes witchy fingers at Mona.

Mona pushes her away. "Mom, stop. You're scaring me."

Dad chuckles.

One of the cauldrons burps. Dad says, "Oh, pardon me." Dawn laughs. Suddenly hot mud explodes upward. Mona stumbles into me. Dawn whoops. We all grab onto each other as the air fills with sulfurous steam. Another geyser erupts and another. Each time

Dawn whoops.

Steam obscures the meadows, nearby trees, even the boardwalk itself everywhere but directly underfoot. The four of us are enveloped in a white cave. It's like being in the tub room again, the air wet around us and no other people in all the world.

Dawn links arms with me and with Mona. She says, "Follow the Yellow Brick Road."

Mona laughs, a genuine laugh with no bitter undertones for once.

I grab Dad's arm on the other side and pull him to me. Together Mona and Dawn sing, "Follow, follow, follow, follow . . . follow the Yellow Brick Road." They start to skip down the boardwalk, jerking me and Dad along. We fall into step, synchronizing our skips so the four of us zig-zag down the rickety wood path through the clouds of steam. Back and forth, back and forth, we go enthusiastically as if we have no idea which way we're headed but at least we belong together.

**Just a Day**

By

**Dominique Maldonado**

I hate this. I hate this. I hate this.

My head hurts and my stomach aches and all I want to do is sleep and never wake up. And I would if it wasn't for this poor little waif walking at my side. Our bare feet have become chilled from the dark dirt floor of these woods, and with an inward sigh I pick up my daughter and continue on this hard trek forward. We only have on our simple brown dresses with pockets on the front which reach to our knees and short sleeves that leave no protection from sharp tree branches that snag and tear at tender flesh.

On my right hip clings my little one as she keeps her thin arms clutched around my neck. Ducking under another low brown branch the only sound in this vast forest is our chattering teeth against the dawning frigid cold. Bo keeps her right thumb lodged between three-year-old baby teeth. Her eyes are dark and huge like Vincent's but she has my long faded blonde hair. Okay, keep walking ahead. Right foot then left foot then right again. Keep repeating.

"Mama," a little voice whispers in my right ear.  
"Am scared."

"It's okay. Am here, Bo."

"Okay, but am still scared."

She lays her head back down on my shoulder and my grip tightens as a new burst of urgent energy warms my stone feet and takes us further away from danger. Behind us is the fear that answers to the name of Vin-

cent. It towers 6'4" in bare feet, has serious brown eyes and strong hands that haunt my body. I pause next to a fallen log covered in moss and crawling bugs. Bugs I remember bugs and how my older brother liked to hide them in my doll's hair. His name was. He had freckles I think.

Go! my mind suddenly screams, don't think don't remember just walk faster. I listen. Climb over the rotting log and feet land in muddy water filled with crumpled leaves. Keep moving through the massive tree giants away from danger. Before long my hip is in terrible pain and I have to shift Bo to my other hip despite her wails of protests. We have been walking so long our feet are caked in dried dirt and covered in thorn scars.

That latest memory repeats in my mind and quickens my already frantic pace.

\* \* \*

"It's so dark!"

Vincent laughs at Bo's reaction to wearing sunglasses for the first time. They are Minnie Mouse shades with bright red on the side and he says that he bought them while at Disneyland in California. We are lucky because he loves us so much and waited until Elisa and the kids were asleep before he was able to sneak out and shop at a corner 24-hour tourist shop near the hotel.

"Don't you like them?" he growls.

Eyes on the cement floor, I nod.

"I even bought your favorite," he says, "Daisy Duck. You used to say Disneyland would be one of your favorite places to go. I thought even if the sunglasses are for the outside that you two might enjoy them in here." Bo giggles and hugs his long legs. "Thank you, Daddy," she says.

He leans down and kisses her pale cheek with kind affection. She smiles, then retreats to her small



corner of the room with her two dolls and big Angel Baby. My own eyes have taken flight around our home. I am standing next to the queen-size bed that sits in the middle of the room covered in pillows and various colored blankets. To the right is a closet that contains my dresses and outgrown dresses that I pass down to my little girl, and white nightgowns. To the left is the built-in bathroom with pink sink and old-fashioned iron-clawed tub. Bo, like me, enjoys bubble baths.

My silence has been too long. I haven't thanked him quickly enough for the sunglasses and with a deep growl, Vincent slaps me across the face. The strength of his anger sends me sprawled on the cement floor and before I can blink, he yanks me up by the hair and delivers another slap and another. Fingers dig into my cheeks and draw blood. Bo whimpers in her corner.

"YOU said you wanted to go to Disneyland when you were nine, right? I take time out and buy you something special and all I get is SHIT!"

I attempt to thank him but my voice is a low whisper and not good enough. He backhands me against the head and before I can stumble, throws me into the cement wall. I slide down with a quiet thud. My eyes are screaming as I chew on another split lower lip flowing with dark water. Through blurred eyes I see Vincent tower above me and with a sharp quick kick to my stomach I curl into a ball. My arms are torn upward as Vincent jerks me onto the big bed and covers his large frame against my tiny one. My ribs are punched for the thousandth time and Vincent's eyes change from anger to wild lust...

Dress and panties torn off, large hands clutch breasts, he is in frenzy. His own clothes tossed aside and with one quick sharp thrust he is once again inside me. The bed frame makes a loud continuous whack! He pounds into me. Calling me those other women's names

again. I know my place and lay still. No crying or screaming. Always hollow. With a loud grunt Vincent shudders, comes, and lies still above me. His eyes are closed and his face holds a peaceful look.

I feel a light touch and turn my head right.

Bo looks down at me with sad eyes.

But when her father suddenly rolls off me and sits up, she takes flight into the bathroom. Grumbling, Vincent yanks on his clothes and without a backward glance unlocks the iron door at the end of the room. I hear him mumble, "Ungrateful bitch." Then the door shuts silently and locks.

My hands shake as I pick out a different dress from the closet and button the front. My breath hisses as I slip into new underwear. Sore, aching, cold, and slightly shaking I run a hand through my long blonde hair to fix it. Take a deep breath and walk into the bathroom. Bo is curled into a ball in the empty bathtub with her thumb in her mouth. I slowly kneel and gently rub her back and hum a forgotten childhood tune. Maybe five minutes later she opens her eyes, which are red from crying. Seeing my newly bruised face Bo sits up and new tears fall.

"Poor Mama," she says. I climb into the tub and hold her in my lap with tired arms. She looks up and gently touches my swelling face. "Poor Mama," she says over and over as my own tears fail to fall.

\* \* \*

"Mama!"

I pull out of my remembrance trance in time to avoid hitting a dark tree. Pause and realize the sky has gotten a bit brighter than I remember and glance backwards... Soldiers of tall mass and low branches are all I see. Maybe a roaming deer or dog howls to the left. In front of the tree is a large dirt slope. My ears pick up a different sound below us and I venture a few steps for-

ward. "It's a car," I say.

Bo pulls her thumb out enough to reply, "What's a car?"

Instead of answering I set her down on a nearby tree stump and tell her to wait. She pouts, thumb out of mouth, and crosses her little arms. "Wanna be with you, Mama."

"It may not be safe."

"Wanna be with you."

"What if it's Daddy?"

Her eyes go wide and she stops talking and instead pulls her thin pale legs under her brown dress and hides her head. I tell her to stay still and silent and will be right back. She doesn't make a peep. A few hurried steps and I see the car is at the bottom of the slope blaring music. The car looks safe but I take a sharp breath in realizing that it could be like before and be Vincent. Please, don't be Vincent, I pray silently, please don't be him.

The front door is wide open as is the passenger side door and the paint is yellow not grey. A woman with pink spiky hair is leaning over the open hood and singing along to the music. In her nose is an earring. How weird. She reaches for a book and drops it. Picking it up she sees me and yelps. "What the fuck? Are you crazy just standing there and saying nothing? Good lord, you could have given me a heart attack or something. I thought you were Bigfoot."

She is yelling but her face is kind and a smile resides on her lips. I find myself whispering and she takes a step forward. I flinch and step back.

"Hey, I was only kidding about Bigfoot, honey. I hear he's up more north than this and—where are your shoes and jacket?"

Before I can reply she takes off her own large jacket and wraps me in it. It's so warm and she has

such a kind face that I struggle to find my voice. She says her name is Ana and her dumb car was giving her trouble again but it's okay now. She wants to know my name.

"I bet it's a pretty name for a pretty girl."

My hands are starting to shake so much that she wraps them into her soft gloves and rubs them fast.

"You're half frozen!"

"Name."

She grins, "Yes, your name, honey. I am Ana and you are?"

My name. My name is. I know the name of Vincent and Bo and Vincent's wife Elisa and their four kids but my own name is . . . my name is. I am called.

"Mama!"

Bo is running down the dirt slope at top speed and throws herself at me. My arms encircle her and pick her up inside the large jacket. The kind woman called Ana has taken a step back and her mouth forms a big O. "She just called you Mama," she manages to say. I nod. Kiss Bo's cold cheek.

"But you can't be no older than twelve. My kid's sister is twelve."

I finally find my voice and say, "Am fifteen. She's mine and she's three."

Ana nods and gives a nice smile.

"Okay, then. Well. Hello, aren't you a little cutie?"

Bo hides her face in my neck.

"That's okay. My sister Heather was the same at that age. But I bet you have a real nice name with those pretty doe eyes."

My little one shakes her head and says, "Ain't 'pose to tell."

I rub her back and tell her it's okay. This is Ana and she is nice. It's okay to tell. But she shakes her head again so I take a deep breath and tell this Ana la-

dy that her name is Bo and my name is— Sharp fingers dig into my neck and my eyes are suddenly watering as Bo shrieks into my ear, “Don’t tell, Mama. Daddy says NOT TO TELL!”

I am stumbling backwards, past the yellow car and Ana’s shocked face, and land in a heap on the hard dirt forest floor. I can’t breathe I can’t breathe I can’t— Air! Groaning. New air fills my lungs as Ana is holding Bo despite her fierce kicking and hands attempting to claw the lady’s face. Bo’s high-pitched screams add to my faded bruised ribs and my face is wet with fresh tears. I can’t remember the last time I cried. Now tears are flowing and hiccups are escaping as I watch Ana hold Bo closely and whisper kind words into her ear. Ignoring the wildcat that slowly subsides to a crying little girl. Minutes pass and then Ana joins me on the side of the road and places Bo back into my shaking arms. I am so ashamed.

“It’s okay,” says Ana, as if reading my mind. “Not only do I have a kid sister, but I have two little terrible brothers. Twins who are five.” I nod, holding Bo so close she might be back inside me safe and sound. “Am sorry, Mama.”

“I know.”

“Am really sorry, Mama.”

I kiss her cheeks and hug her tightly to me.” I know.”

Ana glances around the empty forest road and without a word herds us into the backseat of the car where she lets me dress Bo in a huge sweater with the letters UCLA on the front, socks for us both, and covers us in two heavy blankets after buckling us in. She says her car is good to go and that she is going to turn around and head back to her older brother’s house. He’s a policeman and really nice. He has a wife and four kids. My heart starts to beat a little faster—

“His name?”

She starts the car and looks back at us in the rearview mirror. Her blue eyes cloud for a moment, then clear up.

“It’s Lincoln. He wouldn’t harm a fly, honey.”

She pulls out a wallet and shows me a family photograph of smiling faces. All the people have blonde hair and blue eyes. I nod, filled with shame and guilt. “Oh, honey. Someone’s hurt you really bad, huh? For a long time too I bet. But don’t worry, I am here and I won’t let anyone or thing hurt either of you again.”

Her kindness and honesty makes new tears form and before I know it she has turned the car engine off and is like Bo holding me close as my heart breaks and lets lose all those hidden tears and pains. When I am done grieving I glance down at my small daughter. She is slumped against my back, fast asleep with her thumb as always in her mouth. Ana starts to stand up, but I grab her glove-free hand to her surprise. In a shaky yet strong voice I speak clearly for the first time in years.

“I don’t remember my name. I only remember where Vincent kept me.”

**CCW Finalist, Fiction**

**First Last Time**

By

**Natalie K. Wendt**

Jess had bought Noemi a two-scooped cone of bubblegum ice cream solely as a prop, but Noemi devoured it passionately. He watched it smear across her mouth, leaving a pink streak on her left cheek. He considered reaching over with a paper napkin and wiping it away but didn't.

"Dis is sooo good," she mumbled, mouth full.

"You'll get an ice cream headache," he warned.

"Worf it." She closed her eyes rapturously. There was ice cream on her chin too.

Jess smiled because her eyes were closed. If she'd been looking he would have frowned disapprovingly. He coughed into his hand, a signal for her attention. Her strange purple-gray eyes finally looked in his direction.

"I'm getting married," he announced, somber, just like he'd practiced.

"Congratulations," she said happily, between bites.

Another twist, he thought. He'd known Noemi for twenty years and maybe she was aging in reverse. At ten, when they'd met, she'd been overly serious, hugging books to her skinny chest all the time, curtains of stringy brown hair shielding her from the world. She hadn't wanted to swing on tire swings, or blow spit bubbles, or throw snowballs in the winter. Way before he thought anyone should think about dating, she'd wanted him to be her boyfriend. She'd eyed him seriously, written tragic romantic poetry in silver ink and left it in

his locker. When he responded in an appropriately fifth-grader manner (teased her and pretended to be disgusted), she cried for months, especially around him.

They lived on the same block and their parents liked to barbeque together, so geography forced an eventual peace accord. In ninth grade, their friendship bloomed just enough for Jess to realize that Noemi had breasts, slight outcroppings on her bony figure, and that her lips were pink and kissable. His sudden hormonal attraction to her parts offended Noemi more than his playful rejection years earlier. “You don’t really want to be my friend,” she shouted when he attempted a wet kiss. “You just want my body and you’re *pretending* to care about me.” He argued unsuccessfully and dishonestly for his genuine interest in her mind and stuff, and she slapped him.

They’d gone back and forth in affection ever since. Their mating dance was a ballet of bad timing. Near senior prom, she fixated on the idea that they should go together, but only after he’d asked someone else. In college, they’d alternated summers of desperate pining, he taking even years and she taking odd. He actually went to her college once to declare his love and arrived to find her making out with a mohawked senior. Adulthood put them in different cities and more or less out of each other’s lives. Still, there were occasional late-night drunken phone calls professing feelings the speaker rarely remembered in the morning.

Once before Jess had moved in with a serious girlfriend, and as soon as he’d unpacked, Noemi appeared. His mother had mentioned it to her mother, prompting her dramatic arrival at his doorstep in a skimpy dress and high heels. He sent Noemi away quickly, calling her a happiness saboteur. As soon as she was gone, he wished he’d said yes.

On the ice cream day, they didn’t talk about the



time a year earlier when he begged her to give him a try. "If nothing else, just to see after so many years of flirting with the idea." Noemi had a boyfriend then, a long-term man who rubbed her in steps. She coldly told Jess to grow up, and accused him of only wanting her when he couldn't have her, which of course was true for both of them. Jess started to say, "I love you," until she hung up mid-"love." They hadn't spoken since.

The love was a lie but the curiosity was real. Years of back and forth had created something like an itch, an irritating need to know for both of them. But if Noemi was directly offered Jess's interest, she'd shove him away. Jess understood this because he was the same way about her. However, if she thought it was her own idea, if she begged and pleaded and he resisted, he could feign giving in. Jess was counting on that.

"When's the wedding?" Noemi asked, still focused on her ice cream. As fast as she was eating, it was melting in the sun. It began to dribble down the sides of the cone. A sticky glob dropped into her cleavage.

And there they were, her breasts, as she snorted a laugh and took the napkin he handed her. He watched unselfconsciously as she shoved the rumpled paper between her boobs, cleaning herself up without any seductiveness. They were bigger than he remembered, but of course, she'd gained at least twenty pounds since he'd last seen her. Noemi had always been a waif, childlike in her body, and Jess had believed that her physical vulnerability was the only attractive thing about her besides her exotic eyes. Now, her hair was hennaed auburn and hung in loose curls, and with her newly curvaceous figure, she was actually beautiful. Content, he thought, a happy, beautiful woman.

"You look fantastic," he said hopefully.

"Thank you," she answered, tossing the napkin away. "I feel fantastic."

“Most women are worried about losing weight, but you look much better with a few extra pounds.” A calculated compliment, because though he sincerely meant it, he also hoped it would strike Noemi in a tender spot. She’d always worried about her looks and reached for a man’s approval when feeling insecure.

“I went to Italy last winter,” she replied. “Like that book, *Eat Pray Love*? Except I skipped the loving and praying and went straight for the food. I feel healthier and I actually need to wear a bra now,” she laughed. He studied her familiar crooked teeth, something that hadn’t changed.

Jess seized on the cast-off reference to her personal life. “So, you didn’t find a guy in a foreign country? What happened to your boyfriend?”

“We spilt up,” she answered casually.

“Are you with somebody?”

She shrugged. “Not lately. Well, I’m with myself. I’ve been busy. My job is going really well. I just bought a condo. I haven’t had a lot of time for dating.”

“I couldn’t handle that. I get lonely without a girl in my life.”

“I was like that for a long time. I’ve worked really hard to be comfortable with myself.” Noemi bit into her cone and looked at him thoughtfully. “You must be happy, then, getting married. You’ll always have somebody.”

“I’m a little nervous, though,” he admitted.

“Why?”

“One person for the rest of my life? It’s unnerving. There are so many other people in the world, you know?”

She chewed on her waffle cone. “Oh, I get that. You don’t see me getting married right now. I don’t want to commit to anything that big yet.”

Jess had come to this meeting with a scene in his

head, one that had years of history supporting it. In it, Noemi ordered a cup of the smallest serving of sherbet possible, then pushed it around with a spoon, lips trembling and eyes welling up as he declared his love for Rita and beamed martial confidence. Noemi threw herself at him, begged him for one night together. After much debate, they went to a hotel room, or her place, and finally had the sex he'd always wondered about. He'd watched it in his mind's eye a dozen times since texting her, "I'm coming to Santa Fe. Wanna meet up?" It was bizarre to him that it wasn't happening. Stranger still, a genuine desire for Noemi pulsed in him. No, it wasn't just desire. He *liked* the new Noemi. It made it difficult to know how to play it.

As much as he'd been interested in sleeping with her before, it was not exactly lust and certainly not affection. It was a sexual hangnail, an unexplainable bridge from adolescence to adulthood that he had to cross to release the years of tension and grow up. He figured that when they did it, it would be anticlimactic and unsatisfying, an act that in no way justified all the years of waiting and wanting. He was looking for reassurance that Noemi and by extension all intriguing women other than Rita were, in fact, disappointing and worth giving up. Jess wanted sex that would send him running into Rita's bridal arms with relief. He wanted to fuck Noemi to get it over with.

"You never told me when the wedding is."

"End of June."

"Long engagement."

"It's going to be a big wedding. Rita needs a lot of time to get things ready. She and her mom want everything to be perfect."

"Is that what you want?"

Jess squirmed. "I don't care about that stuff. I just want her to be happy."

“That’s sweet. It’s nice that her being happy makes you happy.”

“The only thing I’m insisting on is the bachelor party,” he chuckled.

“I’ve never understood that. I mean, I understand wanting to have one, but I don’t get being okay with your almost-husband getting lap dances and groping strippers the day before the wedding. It seems weird to me.”

“Rita’s having a bachelorette party,” Jess shrugged. “There’ll be male strippers.”

“That doesn’t bother you?”

“I trust her. I don’t care who she looks at.”

“And she feels the same way about you?”

“Yeah,” he said without conviction.

“I wonder, though, how looking at naked strangers will help your anxiety about only being with one person for the rest of your life. Wouldn’t it make it worse?”

“No, no. One last hurrah. The point of a bachelor party is a farewell to single life, a goodbye to other women’s naked bodies. It’s what you girls like to call ‘closure.’” He grinned devilishly.

“But I don’t understand why that helps. If you’re breaking up with someone, do you say, ‘Let’s have one more wonderful night together and remember everything we like about each other and then never share that again’? Or do you have a big fight and throw their stuff out your window and want them to go away?”

“Getting married is the opposite of a breakup, Noemi.”

“You’re breaking up with single life. You’re giving that up forever. So why do we go and relish everything fun and sexy about being single before we say goodbye to it? It’d make more sense to do all the crappy things about being single, like going to Thanksgiving alone and

having all your family worry about you, or going on a horrible blind date, or sitting at home feeling lonely and sorry for yourself. Then you'd be eager to get to that altar."

He laughed, even though she looked serious. "Is that how you're feeling these days? All the crappiness of being single? Maybe I should skip the bachelor party and the bad blind date and just listen to your sob stories." He thought their meeting might be turning into something he could work with.

"No," she shook her head, her hair shining in the sunlight. "I like my life right now. There's no feeling sorry for myself, I don't do blind dates anymore, and my family doesn't bother me about being single since my brother's divorce battle started. I'm having the fun part. Which is probably why I don't feel any urge to get married. When I was unhappy being single, I was really obsessed with the idea of 'the one.' All I wanted was to find someone to settle down with so I wouldn't have to make dinner for just me and go to everything alone. But now I'm comfortable. I don't mind being alone, and I have a lot of friends and things I like to do. Guys come and go, and I'm fine with that. In fact, I can't imagine giving it up."

He couldn't see an entrance. She was happy, which was new. She was new. He wanted her, but the way he might want any woman. He felt a standard-issue lust, the kind he could talk himself out of with thoughts of how Rita was all that and more, but not the painful ache he usually felt with Noemi. All his maneuvering and scheming dropped, slipped out of his control and shattered on the sidewalk. Familiar, impossible Noemi was gone, unreachable, unfuckable, gone into some abyss without ever satisfying the desire they'd passed back and forth all those years. All that was left was happy, new, beautiful Noemi, who was somewhat baf-

fled by his romantic life but not particularly interested in him. His shoulders relaxed. Jess smiled a little, gently, genuinely, something he hadn't done in front of Noemi for a long time. He gave up.

"Sometimes I can't imagine it either," he admitted. "But I love her, and she wants to get married, so I'm doing it."

"But the bachelor party first."

"I just want one more night doing the fun single things. I didn't think I'd marry Rita when I met her. For a long time, I didn't know if it would last, so I didn't ever appreciate that single life might not be a possibility again until it already wasn't."

"A lot of things work that way," Noemi nodded sadly.

"Like us, I think."

"There never *was* an us."

"That's what I mean. There could have been, but there wasn't. I always figured that one day there would be, at least once, and before I knew it, the option was off the table."

"When you got engaged?"

"No, when you changed. The weird teenaged girl who didn't smile and wrote purple poems is all gone."

She laughed. "She's been gone a long time! What about you? The skinny, goofy soccer star and class clown is now a grown-up."

He patted his slight belly. "True. But I think I'm still me."

She cocked her head. "I used to think of you as Peter Pan. Your hair, it's the color of peanut butter, like the Disney Peter Pan, and you always used to look like you'd conned someone out of giving you a detention that you deserved. You even looked like that when you were twenty-one! So I thought, Peter Pan, never going to grow up."

“Peanut butter?” he snorted.

“It is. I never knew another name for that color.”

“It’s just brown.”

“And you don’t look like you’re dodging trouble anymore, either.”

“But you still wanted to give it a try with me for a long time.”

“I don’t know if it was desire as much as loyalty to an old dream, you know what I mean?”

“Sure.”

Noemi looked him up and down and shook her head. “You came here because you were hoping to have that first last time that we never did. You only ask to see me when you want to sleep with me. I knew that’s what you wanted the second I heard from you.”

“But you said I’d changed.”

“Not about that.”

He blushed and grinned, half-sorry and half “What do you expect?” Just then he looked the same, like a naughty kid who was having a good time, a boy who’d swing out of his tree fort hollering wildly and offering insincere apologies to appease grown-ups. There was a light in his eyes, an innocent sort of trouble, that she hadn’t seen since he hit puberty. She smiled.

“So why’d you agree to meet me?” he asked.

“Just to try out a different answer,” she said. “I wondered what would happen if I didn’t yell at you for hitting on me or cry for your attention. I’m glad I did, actually. I like you this way, Jess. I like talking to you when you’re honest and neither of us are trying to get anything from each other.”

They’d never had a moment like that. He beamed at her and patted her free hand. “I’m glad too. I thought I had to sleep with you to grow up, like it was compulsory. But I don’t feel that way now.”

Noemi studied him as she finished the last of her

ice cream cone. She felt a rush of wanting. He looked nice, she thought. "What if we did?"

"What?"

"Fuck."

He glanced around, embarrassed and shushing her. "We're outside an ice cream parlor, not a bar, Noemi. There are kids here."

"Kids hear worse things on TV," she said, waving her hand around dismissively. Her silver rings glittered.

Old Noemi never swore, let alone in public. But new Noemi was sexy, fun and willing, and she was all that was left of the girl next door. It would be like sleeping with a ghost. It would barely count.

Jess hesitated. "It doesn't bother you that I'm getting married?"

"Normally, it would, but not in this case," she said evenly. Noemi was eyeing the inside of the ice cream parlor. From where they sat they could see through the glass door into the freezer case and its rainbow of ice cream flavors.

"Why not?"

She looked straight into his eyes. "Honestly? Mostly because I'm enjoying you today, and you look cute. I want you and I'm being selfish. But some of it is that you sound ambivalent about getting married. Your reasons don't make sense to me. I don't think anyone can really be happy with a partner until they aren't afraid of being alone. Maybe if we have sex, you'll come to your senses, or she'll kick you to the curb, or something like that. And then you can get married when you're ready, when it's right."

"Ouch," he grimaced. "Couldn't you have sugar-coated that a little?"

"I'm sorry, but I try not to lie anymore."

He glared at her. She was not Noemi. She should



have a new name. Suddenly he wanted to be home with Rita, away from this stranger and the possibilities she offered and all of it. Jess looked down at his cup of mint chocolate chip. It had melted completely and was a puddle. Ice cream soup. An ice cream sea. Disgusting and inedible. He stirred it with his spoon.

“How was that flavor?” Noemi asked.

Jess didn't answer because he didn't know. He wished he'd eaten it when he'd had the chance.

## Notes on Contributors

**Kim Addonizio** is the author of four poetry collections, including *Tell Me*, A National Book Award Finalist. Her fifth collection, *Lucifer at the Starlite*, will be published in October 2009. Ms. Addonizio has also authored two instructional books on writing poetry: *The Poet's Companion* (with Dorianne Laux) and *Ordinary Genius: A Guide for the Poet Within*. Her first novel, *Little Beauties*, was published in 2005 and was chosen as "Best Book of the Month" by the Book of the Month Club. *My Dreams Out in the Street*, her second novel, was released in 2007.

**Mary Anne Anderson** is published in the Monterey Bay's "Plenitude of Poets" and participated in Monterey Peninsula College's "Women and Food" Poetry reading. *Letters to a Love Un-sung/Cronicas de Un Amor Eternal*—by Ana Luca, her *nom de plume*—a bilingual novel with a musical soundtrack, has won her international acclaim. Mary Anne also enjoys playing music professionally with husband Ames as the duo "Simple Pleasures."

**Louis Daniel Brodsky** has written sixty-one volumes of poetry, including the five-volume *Shadow War: A Poetic Chronicle of September 11 and Beyond*. In 2004, Mr. Brodsky won the Center for Great Lakes Culture's Best Book of Poetry Award. He has also written thirteen volumes of fiction and coauthored eight books on William Faulkner.

**Brian Brown** is a cultural historian and photographer in Fitzgerald, GA. He is a recipient of the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize. His illustrated history, *Georgia in the Great Depression*, is due this fall. His blog is at [vanishingsouthgeorgia.wordpress.com](http://vanishingsouthgeorgia.wordpress.com).

**Brad Buchanan** is Associate Professor of English at CSU Sacramento. His poetry has appeared in more than 140 journals worldwide. He has published two books of poetry and is the co-founder of Roan Press ([www.roanpress.com](http://www.roanpress.com)).

**Laura Buermann** has most recently been published in *Sidelines*, the Simmons College literary magazine. She lives and works in Burlington, VT.

**Lance Calabrese** lives in San Diego, CA. His work has appeared in literary journals throughout the country.

**Randy Chavez** was a student of Peter Vetrano at Benjamin Franklin High School in Los Angeles, CA when he wrote “Un beso movido.”

**Rick Christman** is the author of *Falling in Love at the End of the World*, a collection of stories and prose poems. His work has appeared in more than fifty journals. He is professor of English at Des Moines Area Community College.

**Joan Colby** has seven books published, including *The Lonely Hearts Killers*. She has won two Illinois Arts Council Literary Awards and an IAC Literary Fellowship.

**Jack Crawford** has been published widely in poetry and academic magazines. His latest book is *I Explode and Other Poems*.

**Lisa M. Cronkhite** has published work in *Bible Advocate*, *Combat Magazine*, and *Clark Street Review*. She suffers from bipolar disorder and writes as a coping skill and for better understanding.

**James Cushing** is the 2009 Poet Laureate of San Luis Obispo, CA. He teaches literature and creative writing at Cal Poly and hosts a weekly jazz program on the college radio station, KCPR.

**Frank De Canio** has written more than 1,000 poems. Born in New Jersey, his cultural home is New York City. He loves Bach and Zap Mamma, Shakespeare and Sylvia Plath.

**Robert M. Detman** has contributed to the *Santa Monica Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Evergreen Review* and other publications. In 2007, he was the recipient of a fellowship to attend the Abroad Writers Conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand. In 2007 and 2008, his short fiction was selected as a finalist for the New Letters Literary Awards. He lives in San Francisco.

**Kenneth DiMaggio** teaches basic composition and literature at Capital Community College, in Hartford, CT. Recently, some of his poems have been published in *Quercus Review*, *Plainsongs* and *Art:Mag*.

**Richard Dinges** has an MA in literary studies from the University of Iowa and manages business systems at an insurance company. *The Evansville Review*, *Hidden Oak*, and *Foliate Oak*, among others, have most recently accepted his poems for their publications.

**Oonagh Cathleen Doherty** was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, and raised in England and the United States. She lives in Northampton, MA, and works as a legal services attorney.

**Deborah H. Doolittle's** last two chapbooks, *No Crazy Notion* and *That Echo*, won the Mary Belle Campbell Award and the Longleaf Press Award, respectively. Ms. Doolittle teaches at Coastal Carolina Community College in Jacksonville, NC.

**James Doyle's** latest book is *Bending Under the Yellow Police Tapes*. He has poems coming out in *The Briar Cliff Review*, *Poems and Plays*, and *Rattle*. He lives in Fort Collins, CO.

**James Duke** resumed writing poetry upon retiring from his long career as a journalist. He has had poems published in various journals, including *Prairie Schooner*, *Winston Review* (Canada) and *Pulsar* (U.K.)

**Maria Ercilla** has been teaching Creative Writing and English Literature to high school students for the past twenty years. She presently teaches Special Education. Her awards include The International Hemingway Poetry Award and the Allan Tate Memorial Award. Her work recently appeared in *Chicken Soup for the Latino Soul*. She is at work on her novel, *Year of the Bad Boy*.

**Jean Esteve** is from Waldport, OR.

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**Brian C. Felder's** publishing credits to date include *Black Book Press*, *Clark Street Review* and *Out of Line*. From the Midwest originally, Mr. Felder now resides in Delaware.

**Jennifer Lagier Fellguth** is a member of the Italian American Writers Association and California Writers Club. Her work has appeared in *Voices in Italian Americana* and anthologies such as *The Dream Book* and *Unsettling America*. She has also published five

books: *Coyote Dream Cantos*, *Where We Grew Up*, *Second-Class Citizen*, *The Mangia Syndrome* and *Fishing for Portents*. Dr. Fellguth is also the webmaster for the online *Homestead Review* ([www.hartnell.edu/homestead\\_review](http://www.hartnell.edu/homestead_review)).

**Susan Florence's** career as an artist and writer has been creating gift products. "Poetry has been for me a personal way of passage through the years," she says. About the CCW Writing Contest, Susan says, "This prize gives me tremendous joy and tells my 'inner poetry judge' to stand back. Thank you."

**Arthur Gottlieb** is an Oregon poet whose work has appeared in *The Ledge*, *Chiron Review*, and *The Alembic*, among others.

When not sending out poetry submissions, **Jonathan Greenhouse** can be found dancing tango and helping old ladies cross the street. His poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *The Bitter Oleander*, *Going Down Swinging*, and *Rattle*.

**John Grey** is an Australian-born poet and has been a U.S. resident since the late seventies. He works as a financial systems analyst. Mr. Grey has work upcoming in *Poetry East*, *Cape Rock* and *The Pinch*.

In high school, **Valerie Guardiola** won a contest sponsored by the Carl Cherry Center for the Arts two years in a row. Currently a freshman at Monterey Peninsula College, Valerie's passion for the arts extends to theatre, painting, and music.

**Carol Hamilton** is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma. Her most recent book is *Shots On*. Another chapbook, *Contrapuntal*, is forthcoming.

**Christine Hamm** is a Ph.D. candidate in English Literature at Drew University. She won the MiPoesias First Annual Chapbook Competition with her manuscript *Children Having Trouble with Meat*. She has been nominated twice for a Pushcart Prize. Her new book, *Saints & Cannibals*, was just accepted for publication. Christine is also a poetry editor for *Ping Pong*. Her website is <http://chamm.blogspot.com>.

**John T. Hitchner** teaches at Keene State College, in Keene, NH. His poetry and short fiction have appeared in *Anthology of New England Writers*, *the Aurorean*, *First Class*, and *SNReview*.

**Calvin W. Johnson's** poetry has appeared in the *Chiron Review* and the *New Delta Review*; his science fiction in *Analog*; and his research articles in *Physical Review C*. He lives in San Diego.

**Andy Jones** teaches writing at the University of California, Davis. Author of the poetry book *Split Stock*, Andy hosts "Dr. Andy's Poetry and Technology Hour" on radio station KDVS, and the twice-monthly poetry series "Poetry Night at Bistro 33."

**Miriam Jones** has been published in *Phoebe: Journal of Gender and Cultural Critiques*, *Sanskrit Literary Arts Magazine*, and *Touchstone*, among others.

**John Kay's** poetry has appeared in countless magazines through the years. His fourth chapbook, *Phantom of the Apple*, is forthcoming. He is also a photographer whose work can be viewed at [www.pbase.com/jakay](http://www.pbase.com/jakay).

**Eileen Kennedy** has published a variety of poetry, fiction and non-fiction. She is on the faculty of Kingsborough/City University of New York. She has a doctorate in language and literacy and an undergraduate degree in journalism.

**Dorothea Kewley** has a BA in English from the University of Washington. She has a book forthcoming in April 2009 titled *Stars and Other Poems*. Ms. Kewley lives in Des Moines, WA.

**Cleo Fellers Kocol's** novel, *Fitzhugh's Woman*, will be published this spring, and her short story "My Cousin Olivia" will be included in the anthology *Of A Certain Age* this summer.

**John P. Kristofco**, is professor of English and dean of Wayne College in Orrville, OH. His poetry and short stories have appeared in over a hundred different publications. His collection of poetry, *Apparitions*, is forthcoming.

**Arionó-jovan Labu'** is an Afro-Cubano freelance writer and artist. His writing credits include poetry in *The African American Review*, *Drumvoices* and *Xavier Review*. He is currently working on a documentary of his family's diaspora from Africa to Cuba to America.

**Laura LeHew** is an award-winning poet whose poems have appeared or are forthcoming in such journals as *Alehouse Press*, *Eat-*

ing *Her Wedding Dress: A Collection of Clothing Poems* and *Untamed Ink*. Her chapbook, *Beauty*, is due out in May '09. She is also spinning up a new press, Uttered Chaos ([www.utteredchaos.org](http://www.utteredchaos.org)).

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**Dominique Maldonado** was raised in Southern CA and the Central Coast. Now 28, she resides in Salinas and attends Hartnell College. She co-taught preschool for the Monterey Recreation Department at Hilltop Park Center from 2000-2006. "Just a Day" is Dominique's first publication credit. Her favorite novel is *Flowers in the Attic* by V.C. Andrews.

**Raul Martinez** is a first-year graduate student at CSU Dominguez Hills, studying English Literature with an emphasis in Rhetoric and Composition. He has two children.

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**Patricia Merrifield** has had a career as a mother, a social worker and hospice nurse. She now says, "I'm now drawn to writing in a way I haven't been since high school. I'm really hoping to find my voice and an outlet to bring that voice to an audience."

**Lisa Minacci** has two degrees in literature, but, as she says, "poetry is everything." She lives in California and attends two different writing groups, which have provided her with significant inspiration and encouragement.

**Michael S. Morris** has published approximately 100 poems in over 40 journals, including *Writers' Notes*, *Big Hammer*, *Edgz*, and *freefall*. His chapbook *A Wink Centuries Old* will be featured in Issue 51 of *Minotaur Magazine*.

**Michael Nassberg** works as the assistant editor and film critic for a local nonprofit newspaper group. He earned his BA and MA in English and Creative Writing at Binghamton University. His fiction has appeared in *Green Mountains Review*, and he is working on a collection of short stories about the apocalypse.

**David Michael Nixon's** poems have appeared in many journals, including *Yankee*, *HazMat Review* and *Blueline*. His most recent poetry chapbook is *Venus In Retirement*.

**Hagan Pedersen** grew up in the Bay Area and now lives in Portland. He has been writing poetry for about twenty years. He has contributed work to *Now What?* and has published a book of poems called *The Debris of Dysfunctionalia*. He is currently working on his second book of poetry.

**Bernice Rendrick** is a senior writer living in Scotts Valley. She has published in *Passages North*, *Quarry West* and *Kansas Quarterly*. She is the recipient of the 2009 In Celebration of the Muse Award for her chapbook *Trainsong*.

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**David Scheler**, a graduate of UW–Madison in philosophy, is a marketing researcher. Publications in which his poems have appeared or are forthcoming include *Aurorean*, *Avocet* and *Comstock Review*. He has reacquainted himself with the French language and has translated over 100 of his poems into French.

**Baker Scott** wrote “Black Panther” as a nine-year-old in Joyce Koff's fourth grade class at Coeur d'Alene Elementary School in Southern California.

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**Jane Stuart's** poems have appeared recently in *Quantum Leap*, *The Mystic Rose*, *Brevities* and others. She is beginning work on her fourth chapbook.

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**A.D. Winans'** poetry, prose and photography have appeared internationally in numerous literary magazines and anthologies. In 2006 he was awarded a PEN Josephine Miles Award for literary excellence.

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**Gerald Zipper** lives in New York City.

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California Writers Club  
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# Spring 2010 Writing Contest

### **POETRY AND SHORT STORY WINNERS WILL BE PUBLISHED AND RECEIVE \$500!**

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*All contest entries will be considered for publication in the Spring 2010 Homestead Review.*

Finalist judges will be Maria Garcia Teutsch and Dr. Jessica Breheny (published authors in their respective genres of poetry and fiction).

**Submission period:** Postmarked from September 15, 2009 through January 15, 2010.

**Maximum length:** Short story: 4000 words. Poems: no restriction.

**Entry fee:** Short story: \$15 per story. Poems: \$5 per poem.

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